



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

JUNE 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I have a plot in a community garden and it has been suggested that I try square foot gardening. What is that?

Square foot gardening is a method of planning and planting a garden, usually practiced where space is a consideration, such as with raised beds. It is an intensive system in which the garden space is divided into one-foot squares, usually marked off by string and or stakes for planting. Typically square foot gardens consist of one or more 4x8 foot plots, often in raised beds. Research and experience develop understanding of how intensively to plant. For example, one 12-inch square can hold 4 leaf-lettuce or Swiss chard plants or 16 carrots, beets or onions. It could hold 1 broccoli or cauliflower or eggplant or pepper plant. A large plant like zucchini needs three squares and a tomato plant needs about four. Some plants, especially vining ones, can be trained vertically to stakes or poles or fencing: pole beans, cucumbers, even tomatoes. Those who practice square-foot gardening claim that its main advantage is that there are fewer weeds. With good planning the space can very efficiently produce more than one crop; when radishes go to seed, bush beans can go into that space. Basic gardening practices apply to square foot gardening as much as they do to ordinary gardening: good soil, full sun, plentiful water and faithful attention.

Dear Master Gardener:

Last fall I planted crocus, hyacinth, Siberian squill and daffodil bulbs. I planted the crocus and daffodil bulbs in the same area and none of them came up this spring. The Siberian squill and hyacinth were planted in a different area and only the Siberian squill came up. Why don't I have any crocus, hyacinth or daffodils?

Rodents such as mice, voles, gophers, and squirrels will eat crocus corms, and they may be the cause for your plants' disappearance. If you have clay soil that will generally cause the corms to rot and die, but most people have sandy soil up here, so most likely some rodents had a feast.

Daffodil bulbs are poisonous, so they usually aren't bothered by rodents. There are several possible explanations for daffodils not coming up. Daffodils need at least a half day of sun to produce flowers, so the area could be too shaded. If the bulbs were planted in an area with poor drainage the bulbs could rot. Bulbs can get stressed from shipping. Retail bulbs sometimes stay in closed crates for long periods of time during shipping and these humid

conditions could cause fungal infections. Never buy or plant soft bulbs; and destroy any that feel soft before planting. The other question to ask is when did you plant your daffodil bulbs? They need at least a month before the ground freezes in order to grow roots before the soil completely freezes.

Hyacinth are not hardy in our zone. They are hardy to zone 5. Siberian squill is a member of the lily family and one of the first spring flowering bulbs to bloom. It is hardy to zone 2, so it is very hardy and cold tolerant. Both the bulbs and flowers are left untouched by critters (voles to deer). Siberian squill are quite foolproof and in fact can be invasive.

Dear Master Gardener:

Are ornamental kale and cabbage edible?

Ornamental cabbage and kale, also known as flowering cabbage and kale, are in the same species (*Brassica oleracea*) as edible cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Although ornamental cabbage and kale are edible, they are typically grown as foliage plants for their rich colored leaves rather than vegetables. They typically have a bitter taste, but are often used as culinary garnishes. In this area they are grown as annuals and their large rosettes of white, pink, purple or red leaves make colorful additions to gardens. They need the cool weather of spring or fall to develop their best foliage color, and will usually start failing when temperatures are above 80°F. According to the University of Wisconsin Extension, technically, ornamental cabbage and kale are all kales (kales produce leaves in tight rosettes; cabbages produce heads). But in the horticultural trade, ornamental kale is the term used for types with deeply-cut, curly, frilly or ruffled leaves. Ornamental cabbage is the term used for types with broad, flat leaves that are edged in a contrasting color. Ornamental cabbage and kale grow approximately one foot wide and 15 inches tall. There are many cultivars that are commercially available.

Dear Master Gardener:

I think I have some poison ivy in my yard and have forgotten how to identify it. If it is poison ivy what is the best way to get rid of it?

Poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) is a plant that is important to identify, so it can be avoided. It can be distinguished from other plants by its leaves, which are always divided into three leaflets. As the old saying goes, "Leaves of three, let it be." The leaves each consist of three leaflets, which alternate on the stem. Each leaflet is oval-shaped, pointed at the tip and tapered at the base. The middle leaflet has a longer leaf stem than the two side ones. Leaflets may be slightly lobed or coarsely toothed. The leaves' surfaces may be smooth or hairy, glossy or dull, and can vary in color from yellowish-green and green to reddish-green. In the spring young poison ivy plants often start out with reddish leaves. Poison-ivy fruits, which develop in fall, are small white berries with sunken ribs. It is not always easy to identify poison ivy because it looks similar to several common backyard plants including Engelmann Ivy (Virginia creeper) and boxelder.

Poison ivy is very widespread thanks to the birds and deer that eat the berries and deposit them throughout the area via their intestinal tracts. The best way to control poison ivy is with an herbicide containing triclopyr, a woody brush-killer. It should be applied directly to the

leaves of the poison-ivy, not soaked into the ground. When used according to directions, this herbicide should not injure established grasses, only broad-leafed plants. Apply the herbicide in the spring when the new leaves are fully expanded and the plant is growing actively. Temperatures should be in the 60° to 85°F range. Avoid windy days when droplets might drift onto the foliage of nearby trees, shrubbery or garden plants. This is a tough plant to kill, so you may have to spray more than once. Wait two weeks or more between applications, and repeat only if weather permits. Some resprouting might occur several months later. Watch the area for at least a year and repeat the treatment as needed. As with any garden chemical, read and follow label directions carefully each and every time you use it. Be very careful cutting down poison-ivy because all parts of the plant are poisonous; even dead plants are poisonous. Never burn poison ivy as the smoke contains the oil from the plant and can carry toxins causing irritation to the lungs, nasal passages, skin and eyes.

JUNE GARDEN TIPS

- Prune spring-flowering shrubs soon after blooming to allow next year's flower buds to form.
- Leave the foliage of spring bulbs intact until it turns brown. As long as it is green it nourishes the bulbs for strong bloom next year.
- Warm season vegetables such as tomatoes, beans, peppers and summer squash can be planted safely now.
- For worm-free apples start and maintain a spraying program late this month or in early July. As with any garden product you use, follow package instructions carefully.
- Give tomatoes plenty of space so that air can circulate freely and help prevent fungal diseases.
- New asparagus and rhubarb plantings should grow un-harvested for two full years, allowing roots to grow and establish.
- Clematis vines take several years to fully fill a trellis. Pinch the central growing point early in June to double the number of shoots. Pinch chrysanthemums, also, to double their size.
- Garlic planted in spring tends to be small. Fall planting produces larger heads.
- Fertilization of trees and shrubs can be done in early summer but should be stopped by July 4. New growth that begins after that is unlikely to harden off well enough to survive the rigors of winter

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension. All information given in this column is based on research and information provided by the University. To ask a question, call the Master Gardener Help Line at 218-824-1000, extension 4040 and leave a message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

UMN Extension Crow Wing County Master Gardeners' Website

<http://crowwingmastergardeners.org/>



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