



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

SEPTEMBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I just bought some beautiful blue Endless Summer hydrangeas at a store and a friend told me I can make them turn pink or blue. How do I do that?

The flower color of *Hydrangea macrophylla* Endless Summer® is affected by the availability of aluminum in the soil, which in turn depends on soil acidity. In acidic soils with a pH lower than 5.5 the flowers are usually blue and on less acidic soils with pH in the 6-6.5 range the flowers are usually pink. The bad news is that these hydrangeas are not hardy here in the Brainerd Lakes area. Their hardiness rating is -25° F., so they most likely won't survive our brutal winters. If you have them in a protected area, cover them well over the winter and if we get lots of snow there's a chance they could survive. In the future you may want to consider buying plants at a local nursery because they usually only sell plants hardy in our area.

Dear Master Gardener:

When I've been out picking my raspberries I've seen bees in the raspberries and they've sucked all the juice out of them. Is there anything I can do about the bees?

What you are seeing in your raspberries are Yellowjackets, which are wasps. Yellowjackets are common in all parts of Minnesota and they tend to be a problem in raspberries in late summer and fall. Yellowjackets are attracted to ripe fruit and can be found on pears, apples and raspberries. They are a huge pest in raspberries, especially in the fall-bearing varieties. Yellowjackets are a danger to raspberry pickers because they sting. One way to keep them from feeding on your raspberries is to be sure to harvest them as soon as they begin to ripen. Once yellowjackets have found your berries, it is difficult to discourage them from coming back. Insecticide sprays for controlling yellowjackets are not recommended or effective. Picking your raspberries as soon as they begin to ripen and removing overripe fruit and fruit debris is about all you can do.

The spotted-wing Drosophila (SWD) is another insect that attacks raspberries and sucks the juice out of them, but so far they have not been found in Crow Wing County. Monitoring for SWD is occurring around Minnesota and will continue into the fall ending with the harvest of fall raspberries in mid-October. SWD is a small (2-3 mm long) vinegar fly that infests ripening, ripe, or overripe soft fruits. Males are identified by spots on the upper corner of the wing and by two small bands on the lower front legs. Females lack these markings, however, and are positively identified by their saw-like ovipositor. This feature requires at least a hand lens to verify, making females more difficult to tell apart from other vinegar flies.

If you suspect that you have captured adult SWD, or encounter an abundance of small, white maggots in otherwise healthy fruit, please contact the MDA's Arrest the Pest e-mail service at arrest.the.pest@state.mn.us and do one or more of the following (as appropriate): (1) attach a digital

picture of a suspected adult, (2) save an adult for ID (freezing will better preserve dead specimens), or (3) save potentially infested berries to verify SWD presence by rearing out adults.

Dear Master Gardener:

Are there any grapes that can be grown in the Brainerd Lakes area that are good for making wine and where can I find them?

There are four grape varieties, developed by the University of Minnesota, that are producing award winning wines: Frontenac, Fronenac gris, La Crescent and Marquette. All four can be grown without protection throughout the southern two-thirds of the state; whereas the upper northern one-third requires protection. When properly cared for, Frontenac has proven to be hardy to -33° and is very disease resistant. Its deep garnet color complements its distinctive cherry aroma and inviting palate of blackberry, black currant and plum. Frontenac gris is the white version of Frontenac. Wines made with Frontenac gris grapes present aromas of peach and apricot with hints of enticing citrus and tropical fruit. A brilliant balance of fruit and acidity creates lively, refreshing wines. La Crescent has proven to be hardy to -34°F and is moderately disease-resistant. It has an intense nose of apricot, peach and citrus and lends itself to superior quality off-dry or sweet white wines. Marquette is a cousin of Frontenac and grandson of Pinot noir. Marquette is outstanding and its resistance to downy mildew, powdery mildew and black rot has been very good. Its high sugar and moderate acidity make it very manageable for wine-making. Finished wines are complex, with attractive ruby color, pronounced tannins, and desirable notes of cherry, berry, black pepper, and spice on both nose and palate. As a red wine, Marquette represents a new standard in cold hardy viticulture and enology. Check with local nurseries for availability or check on the U of M's website for a list of licensed nurseries that carry them. If you want to asexually propagate the grape vine, then you need a license from the University of Minnesota.

Dear Master Gardener:

We have just finished our new house and would like to put in a lawn before winter so we will have an established yard next spring. For financial reasons we want to seed rather than sod. How should we do this?

September is perhaps the best month to seed grass, so your timing is excellent. The cooler weather of early fall provides ideal conditions for germination and growth, and fewer weed seeds germinate then. The first step to take is proper soil preparation. A construction site is often inhospitable to grass, because it is likely to be compacted, full of debris and have little or poor soil. Basic to lawn success is good soil, which is where all the beneficial microbes dwell, so send in a soil sample, which will tell you what your current soil lacks. The ideal soil is a sandy loam. Very likely you will need to add topsoil, which should be 4-6 inches deep and contain less than 20% clay. Soil advertised as "black dirt" is often an inhospitable mixture of silt and clay, so it will behoove you to buy soil from a reputable dealer. When your topsoil is spread, fine grade it and add nutrients according to the needs shown in the soil test, then go over the lawn with a roller to firm the soil and break up lumps.

Seeding is the next step. University of Minnesota research shows that the best seeds for most Minnesota lawns are Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescues and perennial rye grass. For shade use a mixture of fine fescues and shade-tolerant Kentucky bluegrass. For sunny lawns and lawns with heavy use, apply 50% improved Kentucky bluegrass and 50% perennial ryegrass. For general low-maintenance lawns, use a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescues. Garden centers often have their own mixes similar to the ones mentioned and geared to local conditions. Grasses to avoid are zoysia, annual ryegrass, bentgrass and tall fescue.

Next comes the actual seeding. Here you might want to buy or rent a seed spreader to ensure a relatively even application. Spread the seed in two perpendicular seedings, ½ of the seed in each direction. Then rake lightly, allowing 10-15% to show. Use the roller again for good seed to soil contact. Another method is to use a slit seeder, a machine that makes vertical cuts in the soil into which it drops seeds in parallel rows.

Last comes the watering, a very important step. For the best germination, the soil should be moist to a 4-6 inch depth. After the seeding, water only as needed to keep the soil moist, ceasing each application when puddles appear. Six to twelve weeks are needed for a lawn to be established, but it takes a whole year before it is fully mature.

SEPTEMBER GARDENING TIPS

- September is a good month to plant container-grown or balled-and-burlapped shrubs and trees. When leaves fall it is also a good time to transplant in-ground shrubs and trees.
- Apples are ripe when the color changes and when the fruit twists easily off the branch.
- Prune off the stem tips of tomato, squash and melon plants. This will allow the plant to ripen existing fruit instead of producing new fruit that will not have time to mature.
- Stop fertilizing perennials and shrubs. Fertilizing now will encourage tender new growth that will be susceptible to frost damage.
- Peonies can be transplanted and divided from now until frost. Be sure to leave 3-5 eyes on each division. Replant so that eyes are no more than 1-2 inches below the soil surface.
- Purchase mums and ornamental cabbage to add fall color to flower beds and containers.
- Mower-shredded leaves are valuable!
 - Leave them on the lawn to decompose and fertilize the grass.
 - Rake them up and dig them into vegetable and flower gardens.
 - Bag them and place the bags over tender perennials for extra winter insulation.
 - Next summer use them again as mulch.
 - Add them to your compost bin/pile.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for 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 recorded message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

