



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

JANUARY 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I find the Asian-looking leaves of the ginkgo tree very attractive and would like to plant one in Nisswa. Will it grow here and is there anything I should know before I plant one?

Though we don't see many *Ginkgo biloba* trees here, there should be no problem in getting them to grow. They are hardy through zone 3, so hardy that they survived the atom bombing of Hiroshima when almost all other plants were destroyed. They are tolerant of drought, air pollution and salt, and are resistant to most insects, animal predation, and diseases. They grow up to 40 ft. tall and have a roughly pyramidal shape. They are prized for their lovely 3-inch, fan-shaped leaves and their rich yellow fall color. In Asia the leaves have both culinary and medicinal use. They are considered the world's oldest living tree species and can live for a thousand years. They originated as wild trees during the Mesozoic era 200 million years ago in China, where they were domesticated and propagated. Of course there is always a fly in the ointment. For the ginkgo it is the very distasteful odor (some compare it to vomit) emitted by rotting fruit of the female ginkgo in the fall. Ginkgos are dioecious, meaning that male and female parts are on separate trees. They are pollinated by wind and only the females produce fruit. The odor remedy is to plant only male ginkgos. Most commercially available trees are male but check carefully to make sure. They are sometimes called the "maidenhair tree", perhaps because of their similarities in foliage to the maidenhair fern, or the "fossil tree" because of their history.

Dear Master Gardener:

I would like to add some plants with silver-colored foliage to my gardens. What plants do you suggest?

In a garden, silver and gray colored plants can soften the transition from one plant to the next. They are great additions to a moon garden as they pick up and reflect the light of the moon. A "deer resistant" annual with silver foliage you could add to your garden is Dusty Miller. Perennials with silver or gray foliage include:

- *Athyrium niponicum* (Japanese painted fern); *Athyrium* (hybrid) 'Ghost'
- *Artemisia*
- *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost', and 'Looking Glass'
- *Heuchera* (Coral Bells) 'Jade Gloss', 'Pewter Veil', and 'Silver Scrolls'
- *Lamium maculatum* (Spotted Dead Nettle) 'Beacon Silver', 'Orchid Frost', and 'White Nancy'
- *Perovskia* (Russian Sage) 'Little Spire' (dwarf)

- *Pulmonaria* (Lungwort) 'Berries and Cream', 'E.B. Anderson', 'Little Star', 'Majeste', 'Margery Fish', 'Raspberry Splash', 'Silverado', 'Silver Bouquet', 'Silver Shimmers', 'Sissinghurst White', and 'Smokey Blue'
- *Stachys* (Lamb's Ears or Big Ears) 'Helene von Stein'

Dear Master Gardener:

How do I go about creating a miniature moss dish garden?

First, decide on a container other than metal because mosses are sensitive to metals and chemicals. Drill a drainage hole if your container doesn't have one and line the bottom of the container with landscape fabric, so the drainage hole doesn't clog. An unbleached coffee filter also works well. Add a thin layer of pea gravel or similar drainage material; then fill the dish with well-draining potting mix to just below the brim. Lay moss and lichen on top of the potting mix and firmly press down. Cut the moss to fill the dish by adding a larger piece of moss than the space allows and trimming it to a size a little larger than needed so the edges can be tucked in. Tuck the moss into the dish. Harvest moss from your own property or check your local garden center or floral shops. Always collect responsibly and remove only what you need from a colony. It is illegal to remove moss from protected areas, such as state and national parks or public land. When your dish garden is complete, water it thoroughly and press the moss down. Water it well every week, misting between waterings or adjust the frequency depending upon rainfall if your dish garden is outside. If kept outside, keep your dish garden in a shady spot. You may add accents to your dish garden; anything other than moss is considered an accent. Accents can be other plants, such as hostas, Christmas fern, miniature ebony spleenwort, dwarf mondograss, and other species that thrive in conditions similar to those of moss. You may also add stones, pieces of driftwood or other accents for visual interest.

JANUARY GARDEN TIPS

- The average annual minimum temperature in January in Crow Wing County is minus 30 to minus 35 degrees F.
- In January houseplants often suffer from the very low humidity in most homes. Watering from the bottom, soaking the entire rootball, can help. Fill your sink with water deep enough to come to within an inch or two of the top of the pot. Making sure that the pot has bottom drainage holes, submerge it and let it sit in water for about 20 minutes or until the soil on top feels damp. Return the plant to a sunny window.
- Poinsettias can be kept attractive for several months by placing them in your sunniest window and checking the soil surface every day or two. As soon as the surface no longer feels moist, water it. Do not let the plant (or any plant) sit in water. In February start fertilizing at half strength every four to six weeks
- Avoid using commercially prepared ice-melting chemicals. They can kill or damage grass, perennials and shrubs. Use sand instead. Dampened sand adheres better than dry on icy walks.

- If you received amaryllis bulbs for Christmas, start them now and keep them green and watered until planting them outdoors after the last frost. Planted now they should bloom in 4-6 weeks.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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Ask the Master Gardener

FEBRUARY 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I just learned recently that oranges and lemons can be grown indoors in Minnesota. I would love to grow my own citrus fruit! How do I do it?

Yes, certain oranges and lemons can be grown as houseplants, but you will be disappointed if you expect to harvest large quantities of fruit such as you would find in a supermarket. Commercial fruit trees are too large to grow indoors and could not survive our Minnesota winters. The most commonly found indoor citrus trees are Calamondin oranges (*Citronfortunella mitis*) and Meyer lemons (*Citrus x meyeri*). Less popular but often available are tangerines (*Citrus reticulata*) and Satsuma oranges (*Citrus reticulata* Blanco), which are really very sweet tangerines whose blossoms are especially abundant and fragrant.

Calamondin oranges are small and sour so are not particularly good for eating out of hand. They do, however, make good marmalade, and are colorful and fragrant plants. Meyer lemons are milder and sweeter than commercial lemons, are not abundant producers, and need annual pruning to keep their size manageable.

All citrus trees grown indoors have similar growth requirements. Indoor temperatures should be around 65 degrees, up to 10 degrees lower at night. They prefer a south-facing window with several hours of direct sunlight. They benefit from being set outdoors from about May-September, transitioning to a couple of weeks in the shade both going out and coming in. They are acid-loving plants so their soil requirements include plenty of peat moss. A mixture of 1/3 sterile potting soil, 1/3 peat moss and 1/3 perlite or vermiculite would be ideal. Fertilize plants at half-strength once or twice a month when they are actively growing (about April through September) with a fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants. They need regular watering and wilt easily. Make sure they do not sit in water.

Indoor citrus make attractive houseplants and have the added benefit of fragrant blossoms and colorful and interesting, though not abundant, fruit. Sometimes a plant will have blossoms and fruit at the same time. Just don't plan to send boxes of Minnesota fruit to friends in Florida and California.

Dear Master Gardener:

My grandmother had some bleeding hearts growing in her garden. Do they grow up here and if so, should I plant them in the sun or shade?

Bleeding Hearts (*Dicentra*) are hardy to zone 3 (-40° F.) and are a wonderful addition to the shady garden. They are easy to grow and have lovely blue-green foliage with distinctively shaped flowers that dangle from arching stems. Plant them in light to full shade, ideally in a woodland garden. They grow best in loose, organic soil that has been amended with compost, rotted manure, leaf mold, or peat moss and is kept evenly moist.

Dicentra cucullaria, also known as Dutchman's breeches, has lacy foliage and small white flowers tipped yellow. It goes dormant after blooming in spring. *Dicentra formosa* 'Langtrees' ('Pearl Drops') and 'Luxuriant', which is also known as Western Bleeding Heart, bloom in spring and often reblooms throughout the summer if deadheaded. 'Luxuriant' is vigorous and flowers freely. *Dicentra* – Hearts Series was bred in Japan. A variety that does well here is 'Burning Hearts', which has deep rose red flowers and striking blue-gray foliage. The Hearts Series, like other fringe-leaved Bleeding Hearts, bloom profusely during late spring and early summer and may bloom off and on throughout the rest of the season. *Dicentra spectabilis* is the Common Bleeding Heart with pink flowers. 'Alba' is the pure white variety, which isn't as vigorous as the pink varieties. In our climate, the Common Bleeding Heart blooms from late spring into early summer.

Dear Master Gardener:

Our daughter is getting married at our home next summer and the grass in the area where we would like to have the reception looks quite bad. We would like to start a new lawn from scratch and have sandy soil. Do you recommend seeding or laying sod to have a wedding-worthy lawn?

That is a common question for those who want to establish a new lawn and there are advantages and disadvantages to both. The main difference between seeding and sodding is the time necessary for developing a mature or durable turf. Basically, sodding is transplanting a mature turf that has been cared for by a professional. There are many variables when it comes to seeding, which makes it difficult and often unsuccessful for a homeowner.

The advantages to seeding rather than sodding are: more grass types and varieties from which to choose, stronger root system initially, and less expensive. Disadvantages include: takes longer to establish and moisture is critical, and for best results seeding should be done in late summer and early fall.

The advantages to sodding are: rapid establishment, relatively weed-free, good for slopes or areas prone to erosion, and it can be laid any time during the growing season. The disadvantages are: less selection of grass types, which could be an issue if you have shade (most sod grown in Minnesota is a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass) and it is more expensive.

Whether you seed or sod, preparation of the soil is extremely important and will simplify future maintenance. You may want to get your soil tested first to find out if the soil needs amending. Sandy loam, which is mostly sand with some silt and clay, is the best type of soil for growing turf. If you add "black dirt", which is usually made up of silt and clay, carefully incorporate it into the native soil. If you need a large amount of fill to raise up an area, you may use good quality

topsoil as long as it is less than 20% clay and free of herbicides. If your soil test suggests adding amendments, till them into the soil, then grade the area. You can use a roller to firm the soil slightly and now your site is ready for seed or sod.

If you decide to seed, the best time to seed is mid-August to mid-September as the conditions are more favorable for germination and growth and fewer weed seeds germinate at that time. You can seed in the spring, but the weeds that compete with grass germinate at this time, the root system doesn't have time to develop before the summer heat stresses it, and high summer temperatures often reduce the chance for success. If you decide to sod, buy it as fresh as possible and lay it as soon as possible, ideally within one day after delivery. Lay sod on slightly moistened soil, staggering the joints.

If you are interested in getting more ideas on how to get your landscape ready for the wedding you may want to attend the 2015 Garden Expo sponsored by the Crow Wing County Master Gardeners being held at Central Lakes College on Saturday, April 11th. One of the 26 seminars being offered is "An Invitation to the Garden: How to Create the Perfect Setting for Entertaining". This seminar should appeal to anyone who wants to get information and ideas about getting their gardens and lawn ready for outdoor entertaining in general, but especially those hosting a big event, as the presenter will share photos and ideas about preparing for an outdoor wedding at their home. There will be 26 seminars offered at the Expo where you may get additional landscaping ideas and information that would be beneficial for hosting your big event.

FEBRUARY GARDEN TIPS

- Spend some time this wintery month perusing seed catalogs and seed racks in stores and garden centers. Order seeds now to be sure you get what you want.
- Washing dust off houseplants will allow maximum light for photosynthesis. Either wipe leaves off with a damp cloth or set entire plants in the sink or shower and spray them.
- Pansy, impatiens, wax begonia, viola and snapdragon seeds should be started this month because they need extra time to mature to transplant size. It is too early to start most other seeds because they will tend to get leggy and weak.
- If you plant to start seeds indoors this year, start assembling supplies now. You will need pots, trays, fluorescent lights that can be raised and lowered, a timer and good potting soil.
- Check houseplants frequently for destructive insects. Cottony fuzz indicates mealy bugs; sticky, shiny honeydew suggests aphids or scale; pinprick discoloration means spider mites. See houseplant insect control on the University of Minnesota extension site on the internet.
- Roses are by far the most popular Valentine flowers. Consider other blooming plants as well, such as orchids, anthuriums, birds-of-paradise, or baskets of blooming bulbs.

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MARCH 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener,

I'm getting antsy to start some vegetables. I know that most vegetables do best when their seeds are planted directly into the garden, but aren't there some that can be started earlier under lights? What is the process for doing so?

You are correct that most vegetables should be planted directly into the garden, but some can, and perhaps should, be started earlier because they need longer to mature or do best in cool spring soils. Among those vegetables most amenable to starting indoors are broccoli, cauliflower, early cabbage, peppers and tomatoes. All should be planted in mid-March except tomatoes, which should be planted in early April.

To begin, assemble your equipment: planting trays, seeds, sterile potting soil, adjustable shop lights, and a light timer. Moisten but do not saturate enough of your potting soil to fill the cells of the planting trays. With your finger or a pencil end, make a small depression in each cell. Place 2-3 seeds in each depression and cover with about ¼ inch of dry soil. When the tray is full, mist the surface and cover the tray with the rigid plastic dome that came with the tray or cover the top surface tightly with plastic wrap. Lower the shop light to about 3 inches above the trays and set the timer to provide 14-16 hours of light each day. Check the trays every day to keep them just barely moist.

The seeds will germinate in 1-2 weeks, at which time the plastic should be removed. Not all seeds will germinate, and those that do may do so at differing rates. As they get taller, snip off the weakest seedlings until each cell contains only one plant. Raise the lights as the seedlings grow, keeping them consistently three inches above the tops of the plants. The trickiest part thereafter is watering enough but not too much. "Damping off", in which a seedling will keel over, its thin stem collapsed and blackened, results from too much moisture. If the seedlings become too large for their cells, transplant them into larger containers.

When the last frost date arrives, begin the process called "hardening off", the transition from the warm, protected conditions indoors to harsher, more challenging conditions outdoors. Place the tray(s) outside in a spot sheltered from the sun and critters during the day. Over about a week gradually increase the time in the sun until full days are spent there. Then the

seedlings can be transplanted into the ground, and before you know it, you will be eating tasty fresh vegetables.

Dear Master Gardener:

My wife and I were shopping for cabinetry and doors for our remodeling project and noticed that knotty alder is a very attractive and popular wood right now for cabinets and doors. Do alder trees grow in Minnesota?

Alder trees are in the birch family Betulaceae, and the genus *Alnus*. Alders tend to grow in wet, slightly acidic soils especially along the edges of wetlands. The speckled alder grows in Minnesota and has gray bark that is interrupted with pale warty lenticels.

Alders form a symbiotic relationship with a nitrogen fixing fungus in their roots and convert nitrogen from the air to a usable form in the soils. This not only allows the tree to grow well in very poor soils, but also makes nitrogen available to other plants growing nearby. Just like adding legumes can improve the life of our gardens, alders perform the same function in the forest, often benefiting the trees, shrubs and understory plants around them. Because they have aggressive growth potential and improve soils, they are useful for land reclamation after disturbances. The alder can actually be beautiful and functional and can be trained to a tree-like form by removing lower branches.

The alder that is most commonly used in woodworking is the red alder, which is a North American hardwood typically found in the Pacific Northwest. It can range from rustic with heartwood, streaks, pin holes and open knots to clear and unmarked. It is a softer wood than maple or cherry, has consistent color, stability and accepts stains and finishes very well, so it has proved to be an excellent species for furniture and cabinetry.

Dear Master Gardener:

I've heard that Blue False Indigo is a deer and rabbit resistant plant. Does it grow in this area?

Baptisia, false indigo, is an easy to grow, low-maintenance, long-lived perennial that is hardy to zone 3. At maturity a Baptisia gets about 3-4 feet in height with a spread of 3-4 feet, but it can take three years to become an established, flowering plant. They develop an extensive, deep root system and should not be disturbed once established. Baptisia are members of the legume, or pea family and have the capability of fixing nitrogen in the soil. Plant them in deep, rich soil that drains well and add lots of organic material to the soil.

A Baptisia blooms for several weeks in May to June and grows best in full sun, but can tolerate part shade. Their black seedpods are valued additions to dried flower arrangements. These plants have no serious insect or disease problems. They are a non-preferred plant for rabbits and deer and attract butterflies.

Baptisia australis, blue false indigo, forms a mound of bluish green foliage and blooms with spikes of one-inch blue flowers, maturing to 48 inches. There is also a dwarf variety, Baptisia australis var. minor, that matures to half the size at 24 inches. 'Purple Smoke' has gray-green stems with purple blue flowers that look gorgeous at peak bloom. 'Carolina Moonlight' has spires of soft, butter yellow pea-like blooms with blue-green foliage. Baptisia can act as a shrub, or make an excellent addition to a perennial border, cottage garden or native plant garden.

MARCH GARDEN TIPS

- Finish pruning oaks this month. Pruning them in April through June will attract sap-loving beetles carrying spores that cause oak wilt.
- Cut pussy willow and forsythia shoots and put them in water for an early taste of spring.
- Often March snowfalls are heavy and wet, bending evergreen branches. Resist the urge to shake the snow off and let Mother Nature do it. Even seemingly gentle shaking can break branches.
- March is the ideal time to prune apple trees. Thin the center for good air and light penetration. Remove all water sprouts (shoots growing straight up). For large trees hire a trained arborist.
- Check chokecherries for black knot cankers. Prune them out, cutting back to healthy wood.
- Resume fertilizing houseplants, using fertilizer at half strength while plants are actively growing. Repot crowded plants in pots just one size larger.
- If you have overwintered any bulbs such as cannas, dahlias, and begonias, check them over, discarding any that are rotted or desiccated.
- Repot stored geraniums and begonias this month in order to have blooms before midsummer. Use good, fresh soil and water them regularly to initiate new growth. Give them plenty of sun.

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APRIL 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener,

Several years ago a large white pine in my yard was struck by lightning, leaving a shallow crack about three inches wide and 80 feet tall. Since then birds and insects have enlarged the crack greatly, making us wonder if the tree will fall on our house — or on the neighbors'. My brother-in-law just bought a chain saw and said he will cut it down, but I worry that he might injure himself or our property. What should I do?

Hire a certified arborist. An arborist is one who is knowledgeable about trees, and a certified arborist is not only knowledgeable about trees but has also been certified as such by training and testing by a recognized professional organization such as the American Society of Certified Arborists. Such persons can assess tree damage, prune, and diagnose tree diseases and insects. They will be able to tell you how healthy or hazardous your tree is and, if necessary, take your tree down in a safe and insured manner.

Certified arborists will treat you professionally, showing you credentials, offering proof of liability insurance, and giving references and estimates of cost. They will not ask for full payment in advance (half before starting and half when the job is completed is usual).

Trees are valuable assets, providing shade, beauty and increased property value. Pruning and removing them is dangerous—and expensive--when incorrectly done.

Dear Master Gardener,

I live near the Paul Bunyan Trail and often walk or bike on it. I am intrigued by the wildflowers I see along the wayside and would like to learn the names of some of them. What flowers am I likely to see in April?

After long months without green and growing plants, we Minnesotans are eager to see them again. Although only a small number of wildflowers bloom as early as April, we appreciate them happily because of their long absence. The Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden staff in Minneapolis has put out a list of only five flowers that reliably bloom in April. Because snow cover, temperature and other circumstances vary, even these flowers may appear earlier or later than expected.

The five are: skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetida*), snow trillium (*Trillium nobilis*), hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), and false rue anemone (*Enemion bileratum*). For some reason they did not include the one we usually see first at the Northland Arboretum in Brainerd, the pasque flower, *Anemone patens*, also called *Pulsatilla patens*.

Next month we will print a list of what wildflowers flowers to look for in May.

Dear Master Gardener:

I have a tendency to go to the garden center when the new annuals arrive and want to buy every new plant that catches my eye and I end up with a hodgepodge of flowers in my containers. This year I'd like to go with a plan and was wondering how to design beautiful containers?

First, you want to make sure you are growing your plants in the best possible growing medium. For most containers, a soilless potting mix is a good choice. It is lightweight with room for moisture and air and will be void of soil-borne diseases because it doesn't have topsoil in it.

Good potting mix crumbles when you squeeze it. Some mixes have fertilizer and perlite added and some are specially formulated for outdoor containers; these are excellent options too. If you have a container that has all succulents and/or cacti you will want to purchase a medium specifically for succulents or make your own mix with equal parts compost, turkey grit and sand.

Second, you will want to choose plants that have similar growing requirements (sun vs. shade, dry vs. moist). The classic design formula for containers is "Thriller, Fillers, and Spillers". Choose one plant to be your thriller or focal point plant and place it in the center or back of your container, depending on how your container will be viewed. Plants that make great "thrillers" are Persian Shield, New Zealand flax, *Dracaena* spikes, purple fountain grass, tall snapdragons, angelonia, and 'Golden Sword' yucca. *Sansevieria* (snake plant), which is a houseplant, makes a beautiful thriller for a summer container, then can be brought back in as a houseplant. Another fun way to add drama and height to a container is to add curly willow branches to a container.

When you choose your fillers look for plants with colors, forms or textures that contrast or call attention to your thriller. Lantana, wax begonias, geraniums, coleus, calibrachoa, Pentas, petunias, and coleus are just a few of many options.

The "spillers" are your trailing plants, which soften the edges of your pot and wind among the bases of your other plants. Some plants that make good spillers are verbena, sweet potato vine, bacopa, lobelia, sweet alyssum, vinca vine, creeping Jenny and ivy.

You don't have to do a "Thriller, Filler, Spiller" design to have a beautiful container. A container with one large, bold plant such as a small tree, flowering shrub, large houseplant, or perennial (such as a hosta) can make a statement. You can add Scotch moss to soften the container's edges and act as a living mulch. Another option is to choose any plant that has at least one

bold and interesting feature on its own, which can be used as a single specimen designed container; for example, a container filled with plumbago, petunias, geraniums or tuberous begonias. For single specimen containers choose plants that are in scale with the container.

Last, you may want to add a layer of mulch to the top of your containers to help your plants maintain the amount of moisture needed, as pots tend to dry out easily, especially in very hot weather.

Dear Master Gardener:

I am confused about the different types of begonias. Please explain.

It's no wonder you are confused as there are over 1500 known species of begonia, ranging from rhizomatous perennials a few inches high to 10 foot shrubs. Many are grown indoors and prized for their beautifully colored and textured foliage or showy flowers. They are native to moist tropical and subtropical regions of all continents, except Australia, and are most diverse in South America.

Although begonias are actually perennial in areas that don't freeze, in Minnesota they are grown as annuals. Cane-like begonia have been popular for many years and are known as Angel Wing begonias. They have high branching stems that produce pendulous panicles of light salmon-pink flowers. Dragon Wings begonia grows two to three feet tall, with tall arching canes, glossy deep green leaves and most commonly pink or red flowers. They are great in hanging baskets, window boxes, containers, or garden beds.

Semperflorens is probably the most widely grown begonia and is known as the wax begonia due to its waxy looking leaves. These begonias can't be beat for continuous flowering throughout the summer. They can be grown in partial shade or full sun and withstand drought better than other begonias; however, they definitely prefer moist, well-drained soil. The varieties with bronze foliage do better in the sun than the green varieties.

Tuberous begonias are also popular annuals. They grow best in partial shade and need frequent watering. They produce two to four inch wide flowers in white, yellow, pink, orange and red. There is a trailing type that looks nice in a hanging basket. You can dig up the tubers in the fall and replant them the following spring. If you decide to do this, cut the tops back to within a few inches of the tubers, dry them, then pack them in cardboard boxes between layers of vermiculite, peat moss, or wood shavings and store them at 45-55° F.

The real beauty of the begonia world is the Rex Begonia, a type of rhizomatous begonia that is grown for its lovely, multicolored leaves. Although Rex Begonia do bloom, they are not grown for their flowers but for their spectacular leaves, which can be green, gray, silver, pink, red, lavender, or a very deep maroon. They are often grown as houseplants, but if you decide to put them outside during the summer they need to be kept in part shade.

APRIL GARDEN TIPS

- If you used rose cones and tree wrap over the winter, remove them now.
- Gradually remove mulch from bulbs, perennials and roses. However, recover them if evening temperatures fall below freezing.
- Pansies, violas and snapdragons can safely be planted now.
- Cold-hardy vegetables that can now be planted are spinach, kale, chard, onions, lettuce and radishes.
- Check your watering system to insure that it is in working order.
- If you are starting new beds or have ones that aren't doing well, have your soil tested. Download <http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu> for instructions.
- To get the most out of lawn fertilizer wait until after one or two mowings. Water in well.
- Crabgrass pre-emergent herbicides applied this month in our area are likely to be ineffective. Wait until mid-May.
- Plant tomato seeds indoors early this month. They need only 6-8 weeks under lights to reach planting size. Putting out large plants or getting them early sets them back and reduces their potential yield.
- Corn gluten meal helps prevent weed germination in lawns and is best applied late in April. Like all pre-emergent herbicides, it needs to be watered in well and won't become fully active for about two weeks
- Don't be fooled by ads for "miracle plants" such as Zoysia grass plugs, tree tomatoes and MN-hardy peaches.

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MAY 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I've been trying to grow lupine for the past few years with no luck. Are they hardy here?

Lupine (*Lupinus*) are cool climate perennials native to North America. The Russell hybrids are hardy in zones 3-7 and were developed by George Russell around 1937. Lupines bloom in late spring and early summer and have striking, bold upright spikes that are dense with pea-like flowers. The stately lupines have a wide range of strong colored flowers in shades of cream, pink, yellow, blue, violet and some varieties that are bicolored. They should be planted in full sun and in well-drained, moderately fertile, slightly acidic, sandy soil. Lupines require plenty of water and should be kept evenly moist throughout the growing season. Lupine flowers attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Dear Master Gardener:

Will lavender grow in the Brainerd Lakes area?

Most lavenders (*Lavandula*) are hardy in zones 5-9, so unfortunately they are not hardy here in the Brainerd Lakes area, which is zone 3.

Dear Master Gardener:

I love watching hummingbirds and was wondering what I can plant in my flower gardens to attract them.

Try to keep something in bloom continuously throughout the summer to keep the hummingbirds visiting your gardens. Plant flowers that have nectar-rich, tubular blooms such as fuchsia, salvia and petunias. Hummingbirds can easily access the nectar with their long, narrow bills and tongues. Hummingbirds usually feed while hovering, so flowers that either dangle or protrude out will provide enough air space for the birds' beating wings. They can see the color red from afar, so flowers in red shades always get their attention; however, they will happily sip nectar from flowers in almost any color. Plants with multiple flowers in open clusters are appealing to hummingbirds. Other annuals they favor are geraniums, flowering tobacco, nasturtiums, lantana and impatiens.

A hardy, showy perennial vine that hummingbirds love is *Lonicera* 'Dropmore Scarlet' (honeysuckle vine). Grow it on a trellis and watch the hummingbirds flock to the gorgeous, tubular orange flowers that bloom off and on throughout the summer. Perennials that hummingbirds are also attracted to include Penstemon, Phlox, Monarda (bee balm), Columbine, Hemerocallis (daylily), Lupine, Liatris and Veronica. Biennials such as foxgloves

and hollyhocks entice hummingbirds. A shrub that invites hummingbirds (and butterflies) to visit is the weigela, which has a spectacular display of bright pink, tubular flowers in early summer with intermittent bloom throughout the rest of the growing season. 'Centennial', 'Minuet', 'Pink Poppet', 'Polka' and 'Rumba' are hardy to -35°F.

WILDFLOWERS TO LOOK FOR IN MAY

wild strawberry
wood anemone
pussytoes
Canada violet
Mayflower
starflower
bunchberry
marsh marigold
bluebead
bird's eye primrose
various violets
Jack-in-the-pulpit
penstemon
lupine

geranium
Canadian wild ginger
Labrador tea
hepatica
columbine
calla lily
bloodroot
Corydalis
trout lily
Virginia waterleaf
Virginia bluebells
wood sorrel
trillium

MAY GARDEN TIPS

- According to DNR records, the last frost-free date in Crow Wing County falls between May 22 and 28. Resist the urge to plant most annual flowers and vegetables before then. If you buy them before those dates, be prepared to cover them when temperatures hover near 32° degrees F. Also be aware that yards may contain pockets of mini-climates that may be warmer or colder than the spot holding your thermometer.
- Vegetables that can be planted in early May because of their cold tolerance are parsley, lettuce, early cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale and onions. Wait until late May or early June to plant beans, sweet corn, tomatoes, melons and squash.
- Start a vigorous and regular weed removal plan. Weeds removed now can't produce seed that would germinate later in the summer.
- Begin deer and rabbit repellent use and install fences and other physical restraints now before those critters put you on their regular meal run.
- Prepare beds by adding organic matter to the top 8-12 inches of soil.
- Fertilize raspberries late this month. Apply ¼ c. of ammonium nitrate (33-0-0) per hill.
- Lawns generally need 1 inch of water per week. Keep grass at 3 – 3 ½ inches in height. Mow frequently, removing no more than 1/3 of blade height at each mowing.
- Perennials need very little fertilizer. Top dress established plantings with several inches of compost every 3-4 years.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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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?

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CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

AUGUST 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

Like so many others we lost many of the trees in our Brainerd neighborhood in the big July storm. The debris has been carried away and stumps are being ground out. My neighbors and I would like some help in choosing replacements. What are some things we should be considering? And would you suggest some specific trees?

Perhaps your top consideration is to strive for diversity. Neighborhoods that planted block after block of American elms were reduced to treelessness when Dutch elm disease struck. A decade later a similar scourge, oak wilt, decimated trees in other neighborhoods. Currently cities south of here are fighting the loss of ash trees to the emerald ash borer. If urban areas had planted a greater diversity of trees, the devastation may have thinned the “urban forest” but not eliminated it. Storm susceptibility is another consideration. In general fast-growing trees (silver maple, red maple, cottonwood, birch) are weaker trees and more susceptible to storm damage than are slower-growing trees. If there are power lines near where you want to plant, choose a tree that will be under 25 ft. tall at maturity or the power company will trim it, often resulting in an odd or unsightly tree. Other considerations are hardiness (here in the Brainerd Lakes area we are in zone 3), the mature height of the tree, the amount of shade on the site (some trees cannot thrive in the shade of other trees) and the tree’s growth rate.

That being said, there are many trees that will thrive in our area, though local availability may be a factor. Some that the DNR recommends are little leaf linden (*Tilia cordata*), Japanese tree lilac (*Syringa reticulata*), Ohio buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*), crabtrees of various sorts (*Malus* species), hackberry (*Celtis occidentalis*), river birch (*Betula nigra*), butternut hickory (*Carya cordiformis*), and American linden (*Tilia americana*). There are now some new elm varieties that have proven resistant to Dutch elm disease. Googling any or all of these will give you information on mature height and spread, growth rate, photographs and much more.

When you have made your tree choice, choose one that is straight, healthy and does not have girdling roots. Balled and burlapped and container-grown trees can be planted any time the ground is not frozen, though it is best to plant early in the fall, giving roots time to acclimatize before winter winds arrive.

Dear Master Gardener:

I planted honeydew melons, cantaloupe and watermelons in my vegetable garden and was wondering how I tell when they are ripe and ready to harvest. Also, is there a difference between muskmelon and cantaloupe?

Cantaloupe requires 35-45 days to mature from flowering, depending on the temperature. If you are using plastic mulch, which warms the soil, conserves water, helps to control weeds, allows earlier planting and maturity, and reduces ground rot of the fruit, harvesting could be 7 to 14 days earlier than if you are growing melons on bare ground. As your cantaloupes ripen reduce your watering amount to improve flavor. Even watering is very important, especially in the last two weeks of growth. When a cantaloupe is almost ripe, too much water will dilute the sugars and dull the flavor of the melons. In addition, excessive watering at this stage can cause the fruits to split.

As the fruit matures the skin surface netting gets coarse and rough, the background color of the fruit turns from green to yellow the surface color becomes dull, and the tendrils near the fruit on the stem dry and turn brown. Harvest the fruits by twisting the fruit to separate them from the vine. Do not wait for the melons to separate from the vine on their own. At full maturity and peak flavor the stem breaks (slips) away from the vine easily. This stage is called "full slip." Pick melons as they ripen because they will not all ripen at the same time. Commercial melons are harvested at "1/2 to 3/4 slip" to reduce shipping damage. This removes the fruit before it has reached maximum sugar content, and sugar content will not increase after harvest. If you find melons for sale at a farmer's market or store that have little stubs of vine sticking out of them, they were harvested too early and probably won't be very sweet. One of the biggest advantages of growing your own melons, is the opportunity to harvest at maximum ripeness.

Determining when watermelon and honeydew melons are ripe is a little more difficult as they typically do not slip from the vine. There are some indicators you can use to determine ripeness: tendrils near the fruit stem have become brown and dry; the fruit surface has become rough to the touch and the fruit color turned dull; the bottom of the watermelon, where it lies on the soil, has changed from a light green to a yellowish color. To make sure a honeydew melon is ripe, place the melon in a bag with ripening apples or tomatoes. The latter will release ethylene gas, which will complete the ripening process. Select melon varieties that will ripen under your conditions. Short season types ripen between 65 and 75 days. Full season types ripen around 85 days.

According to the University of Illinois Extension, there is technically a difference between cantaloupe and muskmelon, but often the names are used interchangeably. The term cantaloupe refers to two varieties of muskmelon. What we typically call a cantaloupe is *Cucumis melo reticulatus*, also called the North American cantaloupe. The variety name *reticulatus* refers to the net-like appearance of the skin, also called reticulated. The other variety, European cantaloupe, *Cucumis melo cantalupensis*, has ribbed light green skin and looks nothing like what we commonly call cantaloupe. While both of these cantaloupe varieties are muskmelons, not all muskmelons are cantaloupes. There are many different types of muskmelons, with a wide variety of shapes, sizes, flesh color and flavor.

Dear Master Gardener:

Miniature hostas are so cute and I would like to have some in my fairy garden. Are they just as hardy as the larger types? Are there certain characteristics miniature hostas have to be called miniatures?

The American Hosta Society has determined that to be classified as a miniature hosta, the leaf blade area can be no more than about six square inches. There is no restriction on clump spread. There are 342 American Hosta Society registered miniature hostas and at least 100 unregistered miniature hostas, so there are many from which to choose. Miniatures are just as hardy as their larger family members.

AUGUST GARDEN TIPS

- Continue to deadhead flowers and they will continue to bloom.
- Some vegetables, such as beans, lettuce and tomatoes, will continue to produce as long as they are regularly picked—until frost, that is.
- Collect cuttings and seeds from your garden to plant next spring.
- A brownish-black splotch on the end of a tomato is called blossom-end-rot and is caused by irregular swings in moisture. Cut off the black part and use the rest of the tomato.
- Mid-August through early September is the best time to plant grass seed here in central Minnesota. Use starter fertilizer or mild organic fertilizer and keep the area moist.
- Regularly pick up and compost overripe fruit and vegetable produce.
- Early this month plant lettuce, radish and spinach seed for delicious fall salads.
- White, powdery growth on cucumbers, squash and pumpkins is probably powdery mildew. Thinning foliage allows for better air circulation. It is unsightly but usually is not fatal. Next year look for seeds of those plants that are labeled “PM” (for powdery mildew resistance).
- Now is a good time to divide and replant bearded iris. Dig them up and brush or gently wash away the soil. Trim the foliage to about 4 inches. Fan-shaped trim is common but not necessary. Discard the oldest, woodiest parts of the rhizomes plus any bacterial soft spots caused by iris borer feeding. Replant rhizomes just beneath the surface with fans of leaves facing outward.
- Watch for sphinx moths early in the evening. They are similar in shape and size to hummingbirds, with which they are often mistaken. Like hummingbirds, they flap their wings extremely fast and can hover in mid-air. They are especially fond of impatiens.

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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, Frontenac 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 ryegrass. 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.

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CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

OCTOBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Readers:

In last month's column it was stated that the Spotted-wing Drosophila (SWD) had not been found in Crow Wing County yet. It has now been reported in Crow Wing County and was confirmed the week of August 2nd.

Dear Master Gardener:

When I lived in St. Paul I had a stately American elm that unfortunately fell victim to Dutch elm disease. Are there any varieties of elm that are not susceptible to Dutch elm disease and are hardy up here?

Dutch elm disease (DED) is a fungal disease that will infect all native Minnesota elm trees; however, the disease does not always kill the tree. All native species of elm are susceptible to DED, including the American elm, red or slippery elm and rock elm. Fortunately, researchers and plant breeders have developed several hybrid Asian elms and American elms that are resistant or tolerant of DED to replace those stately giants we have lost.

Hybrid Asian elms are the result of controlled breeding programs throughout North America. Generally, they are smaller at maturity and may have leaves and mature forms that are distinctly different than an American elm. 'Discovery' elm, also known as Japanese elm, is stress and drought tolerant, hardy to USDA Zone 3 and reaches a mature height of about 40 feet tall and a spread of 30 feet. It is a medium-sized tree with a vase-shaped habit of growth, shapely throughout its life, an excellent shade tree for the home landscape and extremely resistant to DED.

'Prairie Expedition' is a 2004 North Dakota State University selection that was named in honor of the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It is hardy to USDA zone 3 and DED resistant. The original tree was the only survivor among other American elm trees that died from DED. It has that classic umbrella-like form which typifies American elm and reaches a mature height of 60 feet and spread of 40 feet.

Dear Master Gardener:

My family is Irish and according to Gaelic folklore the hawthorn is strongly associated with fairies and is often referred to as the fairy tree. Because of this it is believed to be bad luck to cut one down or remove branches so as not to disturb the little folk. In Ireland you often see them next to holy wells where people decorate them with ribbons, rags or other votive offerings. In honor of my Irish heritage I would like to plant a black hawthorn in my yard if they are hardy in this area. Do black hawthorns grow here?

Crataegus is a very large genus with 11 species found in Minnesota. According to the Minnesota DNR, *Crataegus douglasii*, a North American species of hawthorn known by the common name of black hawthorn, has been found only near Lake Superior in Lake and Cook counties. It was listed as a state threatened species in 1996. Hawthorns are thorny shrubs or small trees with alternate, simple leaves and white flowers. *Crataegus macracantha*, Fleshy Hawthorn, is a Minnesota native common to thickets, pastures and the edge of woods, which reaches 15-20 feet in height and width, has abundant white flowers followed with bright red fruit, has good rust resistance and is hardy to zone 3. *Crataegus mollis*, Downy Hawthorn, grows in bottomlands, hillsides, and the edge of woods throughout Minnesota. It reaches 35-40 feet in height and 35-50 feet in width, has showy white flowers and red fruit in late August, and is hardy to zone 3. You can purchase hawthorns at Minnesota nurseries that specialize in native plants.

Dear Master Gardener:

How do I keep my gladiolus, calla lily, caladiums and canna bulbs over the winter?

Plants with tender bulbs, corms, tubers, and roots (such as cannas, dahlias, caladiums and tuberous begonias) will be killed by the cold Minnesota winters if not brought indoors. Most tender materials should be dug after the foliage dries up or is killed by frost. Dig them up carefully, loosening the roots gently with a fork or spade, digging several inches back from the base of the plants so that the roots are not mistakenly cut off. Avoid nicking or damaging the fleshy structure because diseases enter through cuts and bruises easily and consequently cause rotting in storage. Wash them gently with a hose, except gladiolus corms which are best left unwashed, allowed to dry, then the soil gently brushed off. For most plants (dahlias, cannas, calla, caladium) the curing period should be about 1-3 days, depending on temperature. Cure them in a room or area away from direct sunlight or drying winds. Curing for gladiolus should be about three weeks, then the old corm and cormels removed. Drying and curing temperatures should be 60 - 70° in a dry, well-ventilated area. Before storing corms, inspect them for insects or diseases and dust them with an insecticide-fungicide mixture labeled for the specific plant if needed. Pack them in slightly damp peat moss, vermiculite or sawdust and keep them in a cool place to retain dormancy. Label your stored plant material, so you know what you are planting next spring. Periodically check your bulbs, tubers, and roots while they are in storage and remove any damaged or rotting material. If tuberous roots, such as dahlias, have some rot occurring, just cut back until you reach clean white, fleshy tissue again. Remember that these are living plants and therefore may need attention and care even during their dormant period.

Dear Master Gardener:

This fall a visiting friend gave me some plums from her Twin Cities garden that were absolutely delicious. They were deep purple with juicy, yellow flesh. I would like to grow some plums here in Crow Wing County and am wondering what kind I should buy.

Plums, along with apricots and cherries, are known as stone fruits because of their extremely hard inner seed. All three are in the genus *Prunus*. Plums are a bit unusual in that not only do they require the presence of one or more other plum trees, but at least one of those trees must be of a different cultivar. Plums are indeed delicious and range in color from yellow to red to

purple with most having yellow flesh. There are several varieties that have shown to be hardy in zone 3 in University of Minnesota trials. They are La Crescent, a yellow plum that is very sweet; Pembina, bright red in color; Pipestone, red with large fruit; Toka, deep magenta; Underwood, red, unusually hardy and the oldest cultivar available; and Waneta, red and also very hardy. If you have wild plums within 100 yards of the tree you choose to plant, they will serve as pollinator trees, otherwise Toka seems to be the most highly recommended cultivar for cross-pollination and will by itself need a different pollinator.

All varieties of plum need full sun. They should be spaced from 12 – 20 feet apart. Pot-grown trees can be planted at any time when the ground is frost-free, but bare root plants will survive best when planted in the very early spring. Expect fruit 2-5 years after planting. Depending on the cultivar, plums ripen between late June and mid-August. The biggest problem with plums is that they bloom so early in the spring that sometimes the fragile blossoms freeze and the tree will bear no fruit that year. Most years, however, that does not happen and in the non-freeze years heavy crops are the norm.

Only one prune-type European plum does well here in Crow Wing County, Mount Royal, which has blue skin and ripens in late August. Like all growing things, plums have enemies, both insects and diseases, but their major enemy is birds. Birds love plums and can decimate a crop of fruit unless trees are covered with netting.

OCTOBER GARDEN TIPS

- October is the best time of the whole year to fertilize lawns. Grass is sending nutrients to roots for winter storage and not to above-ground leaf growth. Much of the fertilizer will be root-stored for early spring release. Weed control is also best in the fall for similar reasons.
- Rake, grind and bag leaves and place them in beds for winter mulch. Next spring place a bag next to your compost pile and add from it periodically to aid the composting process.
- To prevent dehydration, water trees, beds and shrubs regularly until the ground freezes.
- Plant tulips, daffodils and other spring bulbs this month. If rodents have been a problem in the past, spread chicken wire or hardware cloth over them as a deterrent.
- Rake up and dispose of rotting fruit and fallen leaves from apple trees so that the disease and insects harboring in them don't remain in the soil.
- Dig up spent annual and vegetable plants and add them to the compost pile.
- Consider leaving some dried plants in the soil over winter. They add vertical and textural interest to an otherwise boring bed as well as capturing snow for extra mulch.

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CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

NOVEMBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

When I think of lilacs I think of huge, fragrant shrubs at my grandparent's farm. My yard is quite small; are there any lilacs for small gardens? Can lilacs be grown in part shade?

Syringa (lilac) is a great shrub for cold climates as they need cold winters to grow well. They grow best in full sun; ideally six hours or more per day. Although they will tolerate part shade, they will bloom less. Many lilacs grow quite large; however, there are some smaller varieties that grow well in our area.

Syringa-Fairytale® Lilac Series bloom mid to late in the season, are upright rounded plants that reach a mature size of 5' h. x 4' w., have good disease resistance, and are hardy to -35°F. Prince Charming® is lavender-pink and Tinkerbelle® is pink.

Syringa x hyacinthiflora (Hyacinth Lilacs) reach approximately 10'x10' at maturity, so they may be too large for your garden, but they are quite lovely, bloom early in the season and are hardy to -45°F.

Syringa meyeri (Meyer or Dwarf Korean Lilac) bloom mid to late season, are hardy to -35°F and reach 7'x 8' at maturity. The variety 'Palibin' is smaller at 5'x 7'. Although they are called "Korean lilacs" they actually originate from China.

Syringa x prestoniae (Preston or Nodding Lilac) is hardy to -40°F and blooms late in the season. 'Donald Wyman' may get too big for your garden at 10'x 8', but 'Coral' gets 7'x 6' and 'Hiawatha' gets 8'x 6' at maturity. 'Hiawatha' has very striking magenta buds and both are resistant to powdery mildew.

Syringa pubescens (Manchurian Lilac) 'Miss Kim' is very popular. It is hardy to -35°F and blooms late in the season. Its mature height and width are 6'x 6'. This species has resistance to powdery mildew and sports small flowers that bloom profusely. 'Miss Kim' is a lavender-blue color.

Syringa vulgaris is the Common Lilac. This species varies greatly in size, is hardy to -40°F, generally blooms midseason and often has a strong fragrance. Some smaller varieties that do well in our area are 'Albert F. Holden' (silvery purple, 8'x7'), 'Avalanche' (white, 8'x6'), 'Lucie Baltet' (pale pink, 5'x5'), 'Marie Frances' (pink, 8'x6'), 'Prairie Petite' (pink-lavender, 3'x3'), 'Sarah Sands' (dark purple, 8'x6'), 'Sensation' (purple-white, 8'x6'), 'Wedgewood Blue' (deep blue, 6'x5'), and 'Wonderblue' ('Little Boy Blue') (lavender-blue, 6'x5').

Dear Master Gardener:

Which perennials should I cut down now and which ones should I leave until spring?

Gardeners have a tendency to want to cut all herbaceous plants back and tidy up the garden before the snow falls; however some perennials should not be cut back at all, others provide food for birds, while others provide winter interest to our bleak Minnesota landscape. Low growing evergreen or semi-evergreen perennials, such as heuchera, tiarella, dianthus, moss phlox and hellebores should not be cut back.

Allow the foliage to remain until spring for added protection to the crown on the following perennials: Aster, Astilbe, Chrysanthemum, Delphinium (cut stalks to basal foliage), Hosta, Lady's Mantle, Penstemon (cut tall foliage to basal growth), Russian Sage, and Salvia (cut back to basal growth). Some perennials, such as Asclepias, Platycodon (balloon flower) and hardy Hibiscus emerge late in spring; so leaving a portion of them will help you keep track of their location.

Some perennials create winter interest in the garden because of seed pods or interesting flower heads. Baptisia, Achillea, Sedum, and Joe Pye weed are all flowers that can be left in place to enliven the garden during late fall and winter. The plumes of some ornamental grasses, especially feather reed grass, also add interest and vertical accents to the winter landscape. Cut back grasses in early spring before growth emerges to avoid damaging new shoots.

Although it may not be attractive, some perennials can be left until spring because their seed heads provide food for birds. They include Coreopsis, Monarda (Bee Balm), Echinacea (Coneflowers), Rudbeckia (black-eyed Susan), and Heliopsis. Some annuals also provide food for birds if not dead-headed and left in place; to include, Cosmos, bachelor's buttons and zinnias.

Perennials that you may go ahead and cut down now are Hemerocallis (daylily), Brunnera, Bearded and Siberian Iris, Phlox (not moss phlox) and Veronica. If you have any plant that is diseased-infected, cut it down and destroy the plant debris. Herbaceous peonies can be cut back to the ground after the foliage turns brown and collapses, being careful not to disturb the reddish buds off to the sides, since they will produce stems the following spring.

Dear Master Gardener:

Last winter something ate my yews almost to skeletons. They made a modest comeback this summer and I would like to protect them this winter. What do you recommend?

Both rabbits and deer are fond of yews and are likely the culprits. A combination of repellants and restrictions is probably your best course of action. Any commercial deer and rabbit repellant can be used, but be sure the product is labeled for those critters and is used according to instructions. Applications throughout the winter will be necessary. Restriction can be accomplished by making circular cages of hardware cloth or other fencing material with no larger than one-inch mesh openings. The cages should be four feet tall and wide enough to allow for use in the future as the plant grows. Secure cage bottoms several inches into the soil. Two or three three-quarter-diameter metal or bamboo rods woven vertically down the

cages and shoved into the soil will protect them further from winter winds and storms. Similar cages can be used to protect other valuable and susceptible shrubs from animals.

NOVEMBER GARDEN TIPS

- Clean hand tools, rakes, hoes, shovels, spades and digging forks. First brush off dried dirt, then wash with water. When tools are dry, wipe them down with an oil-saturated rag to prevent rust. That same rag can be used to hydrate and lubricate wooden tool handles.
- Continue watering outdoor plantings—perennials, bulbs, shrubs and trees—until the ground freezes.
- Trim fall-bearing raspberries to the ground. There will be no early-season crop but a heavier fall crop will ensue.
- Store all liquid garden products where they will not freeze. All garden chemicals should be stored where children cannot reach them.
- Sharpen pruning tools for dormant pruning of shrubs and trees in late winter and early spring.
- Drain and store hoses on a relatively warm day so they will coil more easily, Store them in a flat, lying position rather than a hanging one.
- Place most houseplants where they will get maximum winter light. Stop fertilizing until spring.
- Label perennials so that you will remember what is where in the spring. This is especially important for plants late to emerge.
- Continue cutting grass as long as it keeps growing. The final mowing does not have to be shorter than usual.

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CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

DECEMBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

My grandmother had hollyhocks and I remember as a child being in her garden with the flowers towering over the other flowers and me. Are they perennials and are they easy to grow?

Alcea rosea, hollyhock, are striking, old-fashioned flowers that have graced American and European gardens for hundreds of years. Like foxgloves and sweet Williams, hollyhocks are biennials, which means they require two growing seasons to complete their lifecycle. The first year they usually produce only a rosette of foliage; then bloom, set seed and die the second year. In the garden, they reseed themselves so readily, they seem like perennials, returning year after year. Many gardeners choose to purchase greenhouse-grown biennial plants rather than grow them from seed because the plants are in their second year and will bloom that season. Hollyhocks grow best in full sun and moist, well-drained soil. They grow quickly and their flower stalks may need staking 4-6 weeks into the growing season. They are hardy to USDA Zone 3.

Dear Master Gardener:

I would like to try growing gladioli this year for the first time. When should I plant them and how far apart?

Gladioli are not winter hardy in Minnesota, so they need to be planted in the spring and then dug up in September and stored over the winter, or treated as annuals. They are grown in beds and borders and are especially valued as cut flowers for floral arrangements. Gladioli plants are upright and only spread about 6-8 inches. They grow best in full sun. Plant them in well-drained sandy soil, rich in organic matter, loosening the soil to a depth of 10-12 inches. Gladioli corms can be planted beginning in mid-May, then again every two weeks through mid-June to extend the blooming season from July through August. You could also choose early, mid-season, and late cultivars, plant them all in May, and still enjoy continuous bloom for much of the summer. You could also extend bloom time by planting different sized corms. Larger corms bloom somewhat earlier than smaller corms of the same variety. Corms smaller than 3/4 inch in diameter may not produce flowers, so in order to have large-sized blooms, plant corms that are 1 1/4 inch or larger in diameter. Choose corms that are somewhat tall and plump and shaped like a chocolate kiss. Thick corms produce good quality flowers. Plant corms with the pointed side up, about four times as deep as their diameter. Measure the distance to the bottom of the planting hole, then plant the corm. Space the corms six to eight inches apart. For the best design effect in a border or bed, plant gladioli in groups of seven or more corms of the same cultivar.

Dear Master Gardener:

I moved my Ficus tree to a brighter area of my house and the leaves are dropping. What is causing the leaves to fall off and what should I do?

Some of the most durable, beautiful houseplants belong to the genus *Ficus*. You most likely have a rubber tree or weeping fig, as those are two commonly grown *Ficus*. These plants are notorious for dropping leaves when they are moved from one location to another. In addition, they have a tendency to drop leaves in autumn as the days grow shorter. Don't worry – they are able to develop lots of new foliage fairly quickly, as long as they get adequate light. *Ficus* plants will grow well in full sunlight, or in bright, medium light. Old-fashioned rubber trees can even grow well in a north-facing window that never receives any direct sunlight. One thing to keep in mind is that *Ficus* are quite sensitive to cold temperatures and should not be placed near a drafty doorway or cold window in winter. Another cause of leaf loss with a *Ficus* plant is keeping the soil too wet or allowing it to get too dry. Although leaf loss can be quite a nuisance with a weeping fig, it can be quite disfiguring in large-leaved plants such as fiddle-leaf figs or rubber trees.

Dear Master Gardener:

Last summer I had beautiful tuberous begonias in hanging baskets that I took indoors before a frost. I plan to keep them as houseplants and reuse them next summer. How can I best do that?

You can overwinter tuberous begonias and reuse them next year, but they are unsuitable as houseplants because they require a dormant period. Some begonias, such as Rex Begonias, do make good houseplants because they do not need a dormant period. Left outdoors, Minnesota winters will kill all begonias. To store tuberous begonias for next year, cut their stems down to 5 inches and allow the tubers to dry at room temperature, out of direct sunlight. Pull off leaves, stems and soil when they are dry but do not wash the tubers. Store the dry tubers in a perforated plastic bag filled with vermiculite or peat moss at a temperature between 40 and 50 degrees F. A spare refrigerator would be ideal. Occasionally check tubers and discard any with softening, rot or withering. In order to have June bloom you must restart the tubers in February. In a flat filled with vermiculite or peat moss, place them with the upper side (the side with a depression) up, with the peat or vermiculite just barely covering them. Place the flat where the temperature will be steadily 70 degrees F, and keep them moist, but not wet, because rot forms easily at this point. Roots will develop on bottoms, sides and tops of the tubers. In about a month stems will be about 1 inch high. At this point replant them into 5-6 inch pots or into their permanent containers, and move them to a lighter location. In May pinch the stem ends to encourage plants to be bushy and full of flowers. Two weeks before the last expected frost begin to harden them off. Every day set them outdoors in a shaded, sheltered spot, gradually reducing the shade and shelter and bringing them indoors every night. In early June they should be ready for their summer placement.

DECEMBER GARDEN TIPS

- Drain and cover bird baths.
- Poinsettia sap may irritate but is not toxic. Holly berries and mistletoe, however can be, especially for small children. Ornamental peppers aren't poisonous but are so "hot" that tasting or even handling them can be painful.
- Begin a periodic check of stored bulbs, corms and tubers. Look for shriveling, mold and soft spots. Discard damaged ones.

- Check stored produce such as potatoes, apples and squash and discard damaged ones. Often they were damaged when dug or picked or storage temperatures were too high or air circulation was poor.
- When you bring a poinsettia home, cut the bottom of the decorative covering off to allow excess water to drain out. Do not water until the plant surface feels dry, then water thoroughly. Display away from heating vents. Begin to fertilize after 4-6 weeks.
- Though poinsettias are perhaps the holidays' most popular plants, check your local nursery for other colorful plants such as amaryllis, cyclamen, anthurium and others.
- Some Christmas gifts for gardeners would be garden tools or gloves or a subscription to a gardening magazine such as Northern Gardener.
- Have a handy supply of sand available to spread on icy steps, walkways and driveways. Mix a small amount of granular deicer with the sand. The less deicer allowed to accumulate around lawn and shrubs the healthier they will be come spring.

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