Gardening Matters

Yates County Master Gardener Newsletter

Fall 2020, Issue 3



Chrysanthemums



Cedar Waxwing



Sweetgum Leaves

Inside this Issue

* What to do in the Fall
* Six Reasons to **NOT** Clean Up Your Garden
* Planting Spring Bulbs
* Battling Winter Injury
* Overwintering Geraniums

Executive Director's Note

Harvest Season Has Arrived!



Pictured: Produce from the Penn Yan Community Garden

As we bid farewell to another summer in Upstate New York, we take the time to reflect on the changes in our weather, and our world.

There is a tag line I saw several years ago, that I have adopted as one of my personal gardening mantras: *gardening is my super power.* This year has put this to the test. COVID-19 has challenged Cooperative Extension to find new ways to provide education and gardening outreach.

As a plethora of new people flock to the world of gardening, we need to be a welcoming, non-judgmental community. The first year of gardening is an emotional rollercoaster—the excitement of planting, the disappointment of seedlings dying and the frustration of weeding, watering on hot days and 'critters' enjoying your harvest before you do! Master Gardeners role is to encourage and provide ongoing information and education on all so those new to gardening can find comfort, affirmation and encouragement.

Through the process of doing, we learn. As we reflect, apply what we have learned and continue gardening, we develop mastery. We learn weeding is cardio, watering is meditation and harvesting is your personal reward for perseverance.

Gardening is your superpower!

Arlene A. Wilson

Executive Director & Master Gardener
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Yates County

As of September 15th, 2020, the Yates County Office Building is open to the general public from 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. However, as part of the effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, appointments are preferred and some departments and services will be subject to continued limitations as described on their website (yatescounty.org)

Should you need to reach any of our staff members, visit http://yates.cce.cornell.edu/staff. You can also send us a message via our Facebook page, or call the office at 315-536-5123 to make an appointment.

Garden Chat:

Catching up w/ the Yates County Master Gardeners!



What are your favorite fall-planted bulbs?

Jan Barret



One of my favorite early spring combinations are clumps of Tete-aTete Miniature Daffodil mixed with Iris Reticulata. The bright yellow of the daffodil and deep blue of the tiny iris are eye popping and bring a true brightness to any spring day. I have them in several locations and they look best when planted under and around the base of small, ornamental trees, tucked into a rock garden or along a walkway. Both of these bloomers are diminutive so can get lost in a big garden - best to plant in a mass for the best show. Wherever you put them they are bound to bring cheer.



Marian Walrath

My favorite Spring blooming bulb is the Giant Allium. It has so many excellent features. Number 1 is how showy and dramatic it is. Standing on a stalk that's easily 3 foot tall is this 6-10" sphere of deep purple flowers. And the flowers last for quite a long time - easily a couple weeks vs. many other bulb flowers that might last only a couple days. Next is that it's easy. It is not a fussy bulb that has to be dug up or re-planted every few years. It multiples without being invasive. Start with one bulb, one stalk, one flower and the next year there will be two or three stalks! And finally it has life after death. When the stalk and flower begin to dry it can be left in the garden as a counterpoint against the new plants coming to life around it. Later you can cut the dried flower and stalk off and use it in flower arrangements. I've even seen some dried allium flowers spray-painted silver or gold for more bling. How cool is that!

Cheryl Flynn



I like daffodils (trumpet flowered cultivars), also know at Trumpet Flowered Narcisssus. They are one of the first perennials to bloom after winter frost and I know it is the beginning of spring. They are easy to grow, deer resistant and great for naturalizing. The flowers come in a wide variety of shades including orange, yellow, green, white and pink.



Caroline Boutard-Hunt

My current favorite bulb to brighten things up in spring are *Erythroniums* or cultivated trout lilies. Technically these are corms, not bulbs but they're too cool not to share. These are your standard trout lily on steroids, growing to about a foot tall. A clump of them will really shine in a spring border. I particularly love 'Pagoda' with its clear yellow blooms but you can also get Erythronium in lavender ('Purple King') and creamy white ('White Beauty'). Although the corms are unappealing to voles and supposedly are deer and rodent-resistant I have found the leaves tend to be nibbled when I plant them out in our woody border. I like to plant them closer to the house where they're less likely to be chewed on.

Peg Thompson



My most favorite of the spring bulbs are snow drops. It's always a lift to see them bloom no matter what the weather. I love watching the bees covering the blossoms to get the first pollen of the season. Also, although they are small I think they are one of the most beautiful among the spring flowers and they spread nicely.

What to do in the Fall

October

* This is the last call for fall transplanting! To be on the safe side, try to finish-up plant dividing and transplanting by mid-October at the latest.
* If you haven't yet, start to bring your houseplants indoors. Check them over for pests like scale and treat accordingly (Call the CCE Yates office at 315-536-5123 for management suggestions). Repot anything that looks like it's cramp and prune as needed. Some plants like geraniums can be overwintered to re-use next year- learn more about how to overwinter geraniums successfully later in this issue!
* Once we've had a hard frost, heavily mulch any semi hardy perennials to protect them from the winter ahead. Dig your tender summer bulbs such as canna lilies and dahlias and bring them inside.
* Plant your garlic- any time after mid-October is ideal! If you don't get to it right away, don't despair- you can plant it anytime in the fall until the soil is frozen.

November

* Continue to water your shrubs and perennials as needed until the ground freezes. We've had a really dry year and your plants will appreciate the extra water as they are continuing to grow their roots and prepare for dormancy.
* Put out your bird feeders. It's a great time of year to bring some movement and color into your yard!
* If you've had issues with winter damage, now is the time to install burlap windbreaks and protection around your boxwood and other broad-leaved evergreens.



December

* Be careful about salt damage from paths and sidewalks. Salt burns plants and kills root systems. Instead of sodium chloride (salt), try de-icing products that contain calcium chloride or magnesium and potassium chloride (from NY Botanic Garden)
* Mulch newly-planted hardy perennials, trees and shrubs after the ground has frozen. Apply about 2 to 2 1/2 inches of mulch evenly around the dripline. Avoid making a mulch volcano around the trunk with can encourage rodent damage in the winter. This will help retain soil moisture and help prevent soil from frost heaving.
* Stop fertilizing your houseplants in December to give them a little rest until March when lengthening days will encourage plant growth.
* Begin to plan and research new varieties for next years' vegetable garden. I usually grow about 80% "tried and true" varieties and about 20% new varieties to keep things interesting every year.





Six Reasons to NOT Clean Up the Garden this Fall

1.. The Native Bees:

Many of North America's 3500-plus species of native bees need a place to spend the winter that's protected from cold and predators. They may hunker down under a piece of peeling tree bark, or they may stay tucked away in the hollow stem of a bee balm plant or an ornamental grass. Some spend the winter as an egg or larvae in a burrow in the ground.



Pictured: Carpenter bee in a hollow stem
Photo Credit: Jessica Walliser

All native bees are important pollinators, and when we remove every last overwintering site by cutting everything down and completely cleaning up the garden, we're doing ourselves no favor. We need these bees, and our gardens can provide them with much-needed winter habitat.

2.. The Butterflies:

While the monarch flies south to overwinter in Mexico, most other butterflies stay put and take shelter somewhere dry and safe until spring. Some butterflies, like the mourning cloak, comma, question mark, and Milbert's tortoise shell, overwinter as adults. They nestle into rock fissures, under tree bark, or in leaf litter until the days grow longer again and spring arrives. Butterflies that overwinter in a chrysalis include the swallowtail family, the cabbage whites and the sulphurs. Many of these chrysalises can be found either hanging from dead plant stems or tucked into the soil or leaf litter. You can guess what a fall gardening clean up does to them.

And still other butterfly species, such as the red-spotted purple, the viceroy, and the meadow fritillary, spend the winter as a caterpillar rolled into a fallen leaf or inside the seed pod of a host plant. If we cut down and clean up the garden, we are quite possibly eliminating overwintering sites for many of these beautiful pollinators (and perhaps even eliminating the insects themselves!). Declining butterfly populations are one of the best reasons not to clean up the garden.



Pictured: Fritillary butterfly chrysalis
Photo Credit: Jessica Walliser

3. The Ladybugs:

North America is home to over 400 different ladybug species, many of which are not red with black polka-dots. While the introduced Asian multicolored ladybug comes into our homes for the winter and becomes quite a nuisance, none of our native ladybug species have any interest in spending the winter inside of your house. Most of them enter the insect world's version of hibernation soon after the temperatures drop and spend the colder months tucked under a pile of leaves, nestled at the base of a plant, or hidden under a rock. Most overwinter in groups of anywhere from a few individuals to thousands of adults. Ladybugs are notorious pest eaters, each one consuming dozens of soft-bodied pest insects and insect eggs every day. Leaving the garden intact for the winter means you'll get a jump start on controlling pests in the spring. Skipping a fall gardening clean up is one important way to help these beneficial insects.



Pictured: Ladybug larvae

Photo Credit: Jessica Walliser

Six Reasons to NOT Clean Up the Garden this Fall

4. The Birds:

Insect-eating birds, like chickadees, wrens, titmice, nuthatches, pheobes, and bluebirds, are very welcome in the garden because they consume thousands of caterpillars and other pest insects as they raise their young every gardening season. Not cleaning up the garden means there will be more protein-rich insects available to them during the coldest part of the year. These birds are quite good at gleaning "hibernating" insects off of dead plant stems and branches, and out of leaf litter. The more insect-nurturing habitat you have, the greater the bird population will be. Your feathered friends will also appreciate feasting on the seeds and berries they can collect from intact perennial, annual, and shrub stems. Song birds are one of the best reasons skip the garden clean up!

5. The Predatory Insects:

Ladybugs aren't the only predatory insects who spend the winter in an intact garden. Assassin bugs, lacewings, big-eyed bugs, minute pirate bugs, damsel bugs, ground beetles, and scores of other pest-munching predatory insects spend the winter "sleeping" in your garden as either adults, eggs, or pupae. They're one of the best reasons not to clean up the garden in the fall because they help you control pests. To have a balanced population of these predatory insects, you have to have winter habitat; when spring arrives, they'll be better able to keep early-emerging pests in check if they've spent the winter on-site, instead of over in the neighbor's yard.



Pictured: Green lacewing
Photo Credit: Jessica Walliser

6. The People:

If the previous five reasons aren't enough to inspire you to hold off on cleaning up the garden, I'll add one final reason to the list: You. There is so much beauty to be found in a winter garden. Snow resting on dried seed pods, berries clinging to bare branches, goldfinches flitting around spent sunflowers, juncos hopping beneath old goldenrod fronds, frost kissing the autumn leaves collected at the base of a plant, and ice collected on blades of ornamental grasses. At first, you might not consider yourself to be one of the reasons not to clean up the garden, but winter is a lovely time out there, if you let it be so.

Delaying your garden's clean up until the spring is a boon for all the creatures living there. Instead of heading out to the garden with a pair of pruning shears and a rake this fall, wait until the spring temperatures are in the 50s for at least 7 consecutive days. By then, all the critters living there will be emerging from their long winter nap. And even if they haven't managed to get out of bed by the time you head out to the garden, most of them will still manage to find their way out of a loosely layered compost pile before it begins to decompose. Do Mother Nature a big favor and save your garden clean up until the spring.



Photo Credit: Jessica Walliser

This is excerpted from "Six Reasons to NOT Clean Up the Garden this Fall" written by Jessica Walliser

Source: https://bit.ly/3d264TT

Now Is the Time for Planting Spring Bulbs- Jan Barrett (Yates County Master Gardener)

Are you longing for a colorful spring? Now is the time to plan for spring bulb planting and there are lots of options ranging from tall to small and every color on the spectrum that are suitable for our area. Don't have a garden? You can plant them in containers, too.



Pictured: Tulip Ballerina
Photo Credit: White Flower Farm

Here are some simple guidelines:

WHAT: The choices are almost limitless. Spring bulbs come in all varieties of size, color, shape, and bloom time. The options are endless and now is the time to design a plan for your spring garden. (Note: Deer are especially fond of tulips so they may not be the best choice if you experience a deer problem in your yard.)

- Think about planting your bulbs in clusters. A concentration of color gives a pleasing impact and even if you don't have enough bulbs for a big bed, small clusters can make a spectacular show.
- A good general rule for bulbs that bloom at the same time is to plant low in front of high. Of course, there are times to break this rule. For example, if the low growing bulbs bloom early and the tall bulbs bloom late, plant the tall in front. Their display will camouflage the dying foliage of the smaller bulbs!
- Try staggering bloom time by planting mid- and late-season bloomers together, creating a spring display that blooms in succession, for a whole season of color!



Photo Credit: Longfield Gardens

WHEN: Fall bulbs should be planted when the ground is cool and nighttime temperatures average between 40°- 50° F and usually 6-8 weeks before the ground freezes. However, as long as you can dig and the ground is workable, you can still plant! You can, if necessary, store bulbs for a month or longer if you keep them in a cool, dry place.

WHERE: You can plant bulbs just about anywhere in your garden, as long as the soil drains well. Bulbs like the sun, and the spring garden can be very sunny since many of the trees in our area have yet to leaf out. Most bulbs do not like "wet feet" so avoid consistently damp areas such as the bottom of hills or low areas in the garden. Growing bulbs in containers is also easy. You can grow virtually any bulb in containers, and mix different types of bulbs together, too.

HOW: To prepare the planting bed, dig the soil so it is loose and workable. If you are starting in a place that is not an established garden, chances are the soil could use the addition of some organic matter such as compost, other organic matter or slow releasing fertilizer if your soil lacks nutrients.
Loosen soil in the planting bed to a depth of at least 8". Remove any weeds, rocks or other debris.

Depending on the bulb, follow the recommendation on the label for planting depth. As a general rule, plant large bulbs about 8" deep and small bulbs about 5" deep. Set the bulb in the hole with the pointy side up or the roots down. If you can't figure out the top from the bottom, plant the bulb on its side. In most cases, even if you don't get it right, the flower will still find its way topside.

Continued on Page

Now Is the Time for Planting Spring Bulbs- Jan Barrett (Yates County Master Gardener)

Once the bulb is in the ground, backfill with soil over the hole and pat the soil to snug the bulbs in. Water once to stimulate root growth and settle soil into any air pockets.



Pictured: Frythronium

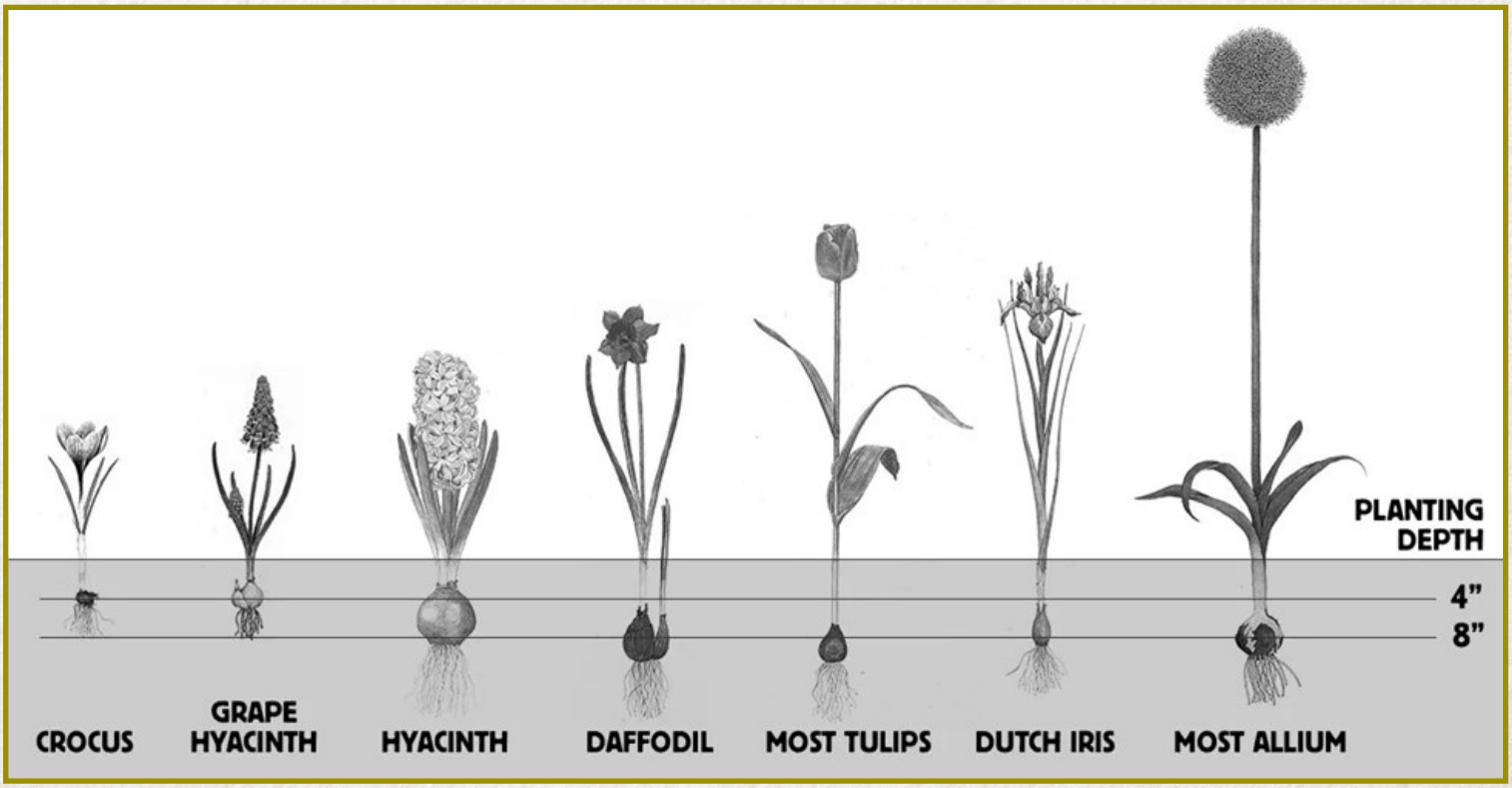
Photo Credit: White Flower Farm

Growing bulbs in containers is not hard and you can grow virtually any bulb in containers either a single variety or mix and match.

Start with a container with drainage holes and plant in the fall just as you would outside. Remember most bulbs prefer well-drained soil and will rot if kept too wet. If you want to leave your bulbs outside all winter, choose a large container that will hold enough soil to insulate the bulbs. In zone 5 this should be at least 24 inches in diameter.

Fill your container with a high quality potting mix. Don't use garden soil. Follow the planting guidelines on the labels and water well. If you choose a smaller container or one made from material such as terra-cotta that needs protection from winter freezing, keep it someplace cold like the garage or shed. Don't keep it in the basement as it is most are likely to be too warm.

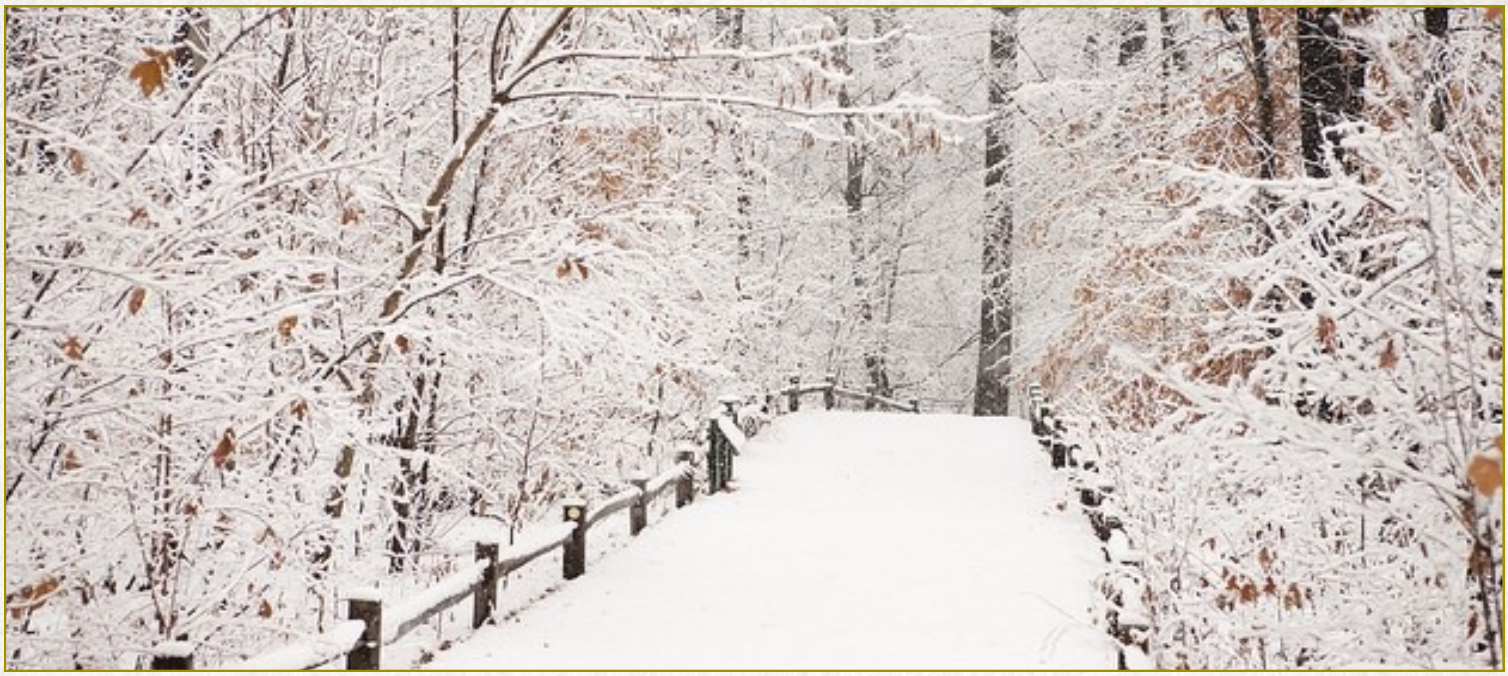
Now, all you have to do is wait for warm spring weather and blooms!



Pictured: Recommended planting depths for Fall-planted bulbs

Photo Credit: American Meadows

Battling Jack Frost: Preventing Winter Injury



Many plants shut down and go dormant for the winter to protect themselves from cold weather. As the days become shorter and the temperature drops in the fall, plants shift their energy from flowering and producing new growth to gradually hardening off their tissues.

The most important influence on the timing of dormancy is shorter daylight hours. For example, even during an Indian summer in autumn, plants continue to go dormant because of the change in light. If temperatures drop too suddenly before a plant has had time to shut down, the plant's tissues can be injured and it won't produce new growth in the spring.

The biggest culprit in winter damage is not the cold, it's the heat. Mid-winter warm spells create a cycle of freezing and thawing. This cycle causes frost heaves, which can expose fragile roots.

Winter burn and sunscald, two other common problems, are also caused by warm, winter sun. Winter burn is common among broadleaf evergreens such as rhododendrons and azaleas. It occurs when sun and wind remove moisture from the leaves faster than these shallow-rooted plants can replace it. Sunscald, similar to sunburn, thaws and then burns bark tissue of young trees, fruit trees, beeches and sycamores.

Other problems that plague the gardener in winter are salt damage from paths and roads, disfiguration and damage to hedges and fragile plants and dieback. The best way to ensure that your plants successfully overwinter is to plant them in the right place, based on growing and drainage requirements, and to make sure that they are healthy and well watered as they enter the winter season.

Tips for Winterizing Your Garden

- Be careful about salt damage from paths and sidewalks. Salt burns plants and kills root systems. Instead of sodium chloride (salt), try de-icing products that contain calcium chloride or magnesium and potassium chloride.
- To prevent damage caused by snow falling from eaves, direct ice and snow away from shrubs with water diverters. Wires on the roof also help to gradually melt snow.
- Mark your driveway with reflectors before the snow starts to pile up. Make sure that you don't plow snow onto valuable trees or shrubs. The force of the plowing often damages branches and you will be piling up harmful salt residues.
- Gently remove heavy snow from hedges and trees. Use a broom or broom handle and slowly push upward. If the snow has iced over, wait until the sun warms it up; don't try to break off ice crystals. Avoid using a shovel; it can damage branches.
- Remember that snow is a great insulator. As long as it is not crushing a plant or placing too much weight on vulnerable branches, let it naturally pile up around your plants.

Photo Credit: Ivo Vermeulen

Continued on Page

Battling Jack Frost: Preventing Winter Injury

Tips for Winterizing Your Garden

- The best way to winterize hydrangeas and other shrubs that are susceptible to winter dieback is to place 4 to 6 stakes around the plant and wrap it with burlap. You don't need to cover the top of the plant; the windbreak created by surrounding the shrub with burlap is generally sufficient protection. Burlap can be attached to the stakes with industrial-sized staples, zip ties, string or nails.
- If you are worried that your arborvitae or other evergreens will be buffeted by snow (particularly columnar or upright forms), stake the trees and secure the trunk with nylon straps or tree savers that you can buy at a garden center. For arborvitae and yew, you can also take twine, attach it at the bottom of the trunk and wind it around the tree in a spiral to prevent the branches from being forced down and broken by the weight of the snow.
- If you have newly planted trees whose roots have not had a chance to get established or are weak, remember to stake them in the fall and remove the stakes first thing in the spring. This is particularly important for newly planted evergreens which can act like a sail in the winter wind.
- To protect from frost heaves and to retain moisture, surround newly planted trees with a 2 to 3 inch layer of mulch. Don't use more than 2 to 3 inches; mulch volcanoes can kill plants by causing cankers and disease on the lower trunk. Never mulch right up to the base of a tree or shrub. Likewise, keep mulch off the crown (the root/stem juncture) of a perennial.
- Winterize containers by wrapping them in bubble wrap. If the contents of the container are not hardy, place the container in an unheated garage so that the plants can go dormant during the winter.
- Make sure that plants and containers are well watered before winter sets in.
- Don't prune or fertilize your plants after mid- to late summer; it will only encourage new growth that risks being killed by frost.
- To prevent sunscald, don't prune in early or mid-winter. The canopy is important for shading out the intense rays of the winter sun. Wait until February to prune young or susceptible trees. You can also wrap the trunks of young trees in highly exposed areas on the south or west side of your property with tree wrap purchased at a garden center. However, it's generally best to let the tree tough it out and get used to its environment. Tree wraps can sometimes be an invitation for pest and disease problems.



Photo Credit: New York Botanical Garden



Photo Credit: Cold Climate Gardening



Photo Credit: Minda Daughtry

This is excerpted from the New York Botanical Garden

Source: https://bit.ly/33CLuqa

Overwintering Geraniums

With the rainbow of flower and leaf colors, it is hard to watch beautiful and costly geraniums die from a hard frost. There are several ways to keep those geraniums through the winter for a head start on blooms next spring and a savings to your garden budget.

Keep them growing in containers

Geraniums grow easily indoors in containers with proper care and environmental conditions. Before the first frost, cut back plants to half of their original size and inspect them for signs of insects or disease. Then, dig up healthy plants and transplant into containers. Use a potting mix made for containerized plants instead of garden soil. Garden soil is often heavy, compacted, and drains poorly in containers. Place containerized plants in a cool location with plenty of bright, direct sunlight. Water plants well after potting and as needed when the soil begins to dry. Shoot tips may need pinching once or twice during the winter to promote branching and prevent weak growth. Before planting outside in May, fertilize lightly. Plants kept in containers over the winter are typically larger than most geraniums sold in the spring. This allows you to have a head start on growth and blooms for next year's garden.

Taking cuttings from outdoor plants

Geraniums root readily from cuttings. This is also a great way to multiply the number of plants for next year's garden. To take a cutting, remove a 3- to 4-inch section of the plant's stem tip with a sharp knife. Pinch off the leaves from the lower half of the cutting and dip the cut end into a rooting hormone. Rooting hormones are sold in powder or liquid form at your local garden center or discount store. Stick the cuttings in a moist, porous, well-drained rooting media such as coarse sand, perlite, or vermiculite. Cuttings can be rooted in individual pots or several cuttings can be placed per container. Make sure the container has holes for drainage. Ideally, cuttings root best in a moist, humid environment. This is easy to achieve by securing a clear plastic bag over the cuttings and container. This "mini-greenhouse" should be placed in bright, but indirect light. Check the media occasionally to insure it remains evenly moist. Rooting normally occurs in 6 to 8 weeks. After roots are approximately 1-inch long, transplant cuttings into a 3- to 4-inch container with a standard well-drained potting soil. Place in a sunny window and water as needed. Pinch shoot tips back to force branching and prevent spindly growth. New plants produced from cuttings should be vigorous and about the same size as most geraniums sold in spring.

Dormant Storage

Geraniums are unusual and unlike many annual flowers, they have the ability to survive for most of the winter without soil. If properly stored, they can resist extended dry periods due to their thick, succulent-like stems. To overwinter geraniums in dormant storage, dig up the entire plant before frost and gently shake the soil from the roots. Place the plants inside open paper bags or hang them upside-down from the rafters in a cool, dark location for the winter. Ideally the temperature should be between 45-50 F. Two or three times during the winter, take the plants out the bags or down from the rafters and soak the roots in water for 1 or 2 hours. At this time, inspect the stems. While many of the leaves will die and fall off, the stems should remain firm and solid. Discard any geraniums with shriveled stems, since those plants will most likely die. Pot up healthy dormant geraniums in containers in late March or early April. Water plants thoroughly and cut back the dead stem tips. Place potted plants in a sunny window to initiate new growth. It often takes several weeks for plants to initiate growth after dormant storage.

No matter how geraniums have been overwintered, they should be healthy, free-flowering plants for spring. After being indoors all winter, your geraniums may be as anxious as you are for spring planting. Plant them after the danger of frost has passed and enjoy their colorful blooms all summer. You can invest your savings in new geranium varieties to overwinter next year.



Photo Credit: Clemson University



Photo Credit: gardening-enjoyed.com

Source: Cindy Haynes, Department of Horticulture Iowa State University

About Us



The Master Gardener Program is a national program of trained volunteers who work in partnership with their county Cooperative Extension Office to share information throughout the community.

Master Gardeners are neighbors teaching neighbors about landscapes, vegetables, fruits, herbs, houseplants, beneficial and harmful insects, plant diseases, integrated pest management, wildlife management, soils, birds, composting, water conservation, and much much more.

Master Gardeners are considered researchers rather than experts. They participate in 40 hours of training provided by experienced staff from Cornell Cooperative Extension to gain a basic understanding of horticulture and available horticultural information and online resources. Course topics include plant nutrition, soils, vegetable, fruit culture, trees, shrubs, lawns, diseases and insects that affect plants, pruning and more.

You don't need to be an expert to join, if you enjoy gardening as a hobby, this may be perfect for you.

To become a Master Gardener, all you need to do is attend a 10-week training offered by Cornell Cooperative Extension.

For more information, please call us at 315-536-5123!

Cornell Cooperative Extension
Yates County
417 Liberty Street
Penn Yan, NY 14527

"Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities"