

# Gardening Matters

Yates County Master Gardener Newsletter

Fall 2023, Issue 3



## Inside this Issue

- \* What to Do in the Fall
- \* Dreaded Fall Chores
- \* Yates County Master Gardener's Corner
- \* Why Doesn't My Hydrangea Bloom?
- \* How to Tune In to Birds With Your Children
- \* Cover Crops and Green Manures in Home Gardens
- \* Collecting and Storing Seeds
- \* Dividing/Storing Perennials
- \* Storing Guidelines for Home-Preserved Foods

# Educator's Note...

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This has been a wild growing season in the Finger Lakes! We've had to contend with late season freezes, drought, torrential rains and wildfire smoke. For all the ups and downs of this year, I've still managed to enjoy this gardening season. When the world seems in chaos, there's nothing like being grounded in a task like weeding or transplanting.

According to research, Gardening has been shown to lower blood pressure and benefit mental health. Gardening can also be a great way to connect with family and friends. Walking through the garden with a cup of tea (or wine) and an enjoyable companion has led to some of my most memorable conversations.

Plants can allow us to connect with strangers as well. I have happily shared plants from my garden with those who asked about them and have in turn had some shared with me. When I see them, I always think back to the person who I connect them to, whether it be my grandfather who loved filling my car with plant divisions, our neighbor who gave my son a rhizome of the iris he loved so much from their garden or the garlic my husband and I have been growing for nearly 20 years thanks to a friend I met in grad school, who I have lost touch with but have never forgotten.



Gardening connects us to our land, our community and to our earth. As we move from the growing months to a time of rest and reflection, I hope to take some time to appreciate the bounty of joy and fellowship my garden provides to me.

**Caroline Boutard-Hunt**  
**Agricultural/Horticultural Educator**  
**Master Gardener Volunteer**

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## About Cornell Cooperative Extension

CCE connects communities with Cornell research and expertise to enrich and empower New York State neighbors, local businesses, towns, and cities.

In neighborhoods, homes, workplaces, and schools, CCE educators work to empower individuals and families by raising children, saving energy and money, growing, and preparing food, starting, sustaining businesses, and protecting the environment.

Each CCE office relies on county, state, and federal funds to solve local problems and strengthen communities.

For more information, please contact the CCE-Yates County Association at 315-536-5123 or visit us online at <https://yates.cce.cornell.edu/>.

# Garden Chat:

## Catching up w/ the Yates County Master Gardeners!



As much as we love gardening, there are a few things we don't look forward to each year. Here are a few of our Master Gardener's most dreaded fall chores:

Our least favorite fall chore is picking up black walnuts . It's one of those "pay now or pay more later". If you leave them to the Spring., they are partially decomposed and sunk into the lawn/garden.

Another one is digging up and preparing all the Dahlias. Digging, washing, drying, splitting, treating with cinnamon, drying again, wrapping, labeling! In this case it's "pay now and get rewarded later". The glorious flowers each summer are worth the effort!

**Marian**



**Karen**



My least favorite corning is taking out the leaves in the garden beds.

My least favorite fall garden chore would be raking, raking, and more raking.

**Jan**



**Christine**



Watering. Our hose at home is 2-200 ft hoses connected. It gets heavy and cumbersome.

**Caroline**

I have some beautiful swamp milkweed in my garden but every year I need to deadhead all the little seedpods. If I don't, I end up with more beautiful swamp milkweed than my garden can handle, however it's definitely on my list of least-favorite garden chores!



# What to do in...

## October

- \* Enjoy the change of seasons. It's hard to transition, especially for those of us who prefer to live in the garden during the summer but seeing the garden enter into the resting months allows us to appreciate the growth and work that went into the past growing season and see where we'd like to expand next year.
- \* Mulch marginally hardy plants. Mulch not only protects against freezing temperatures, it also helps keep plants dormant during those periods of warm weather we can have during the winter.
- \* Plant your garlic and flower bulbs. Mid-October gives the bulbs plenty of time to settle in before the soil freezes while keeping them cool enough to avoid early sprouting.
- \* Make sure to put away your hoses and any containers with water to prevent freezing and bursting when the weather gets colder.



## November

- \* Get your pruning shears sharpened. It's too early to prune trees and shrubs but you won't regret having your tools sharp and ready-to-go ahead of time!
- \* Clean out your birdhouses. This can prevent mite and disease issues in the next year. Many birds will use bird boxes in the winter to roost in during cold spells so make sure to check them again in the early spring.
- \* If you planted fruit trees in the past couple of years, protect them from chewing rodents with hardware cloth or plastic collars around the base of their trunks



## December

- \* Inventory your vegetable seed from last year and look over any notes you took during the growing season to start planning for spring!
- \* If buying poinsettia or other plants for the holidays, inspect carefully for whiteflies, aphids or other indoor garden pests before introducing them into your home!
- \* December 21<sup>st</sup> is the shortest day of the year and means that the astronomical start of summer is only 6 months away! Cheer in the change to lengthening days with sparkling cider, champagne or other celebratory beverage of your choice!



**Want to be featured in *Gardening Matters*?**

If you have any seasonal tips or photos you would like to share, please submit them to:

Master Gardeners/CCE Yates County  
417 Liberty Street, Suite 1024  
Penn Yan NY 14527

# Yates County Master Gardener's Corner

## Cheryl Flynn (Master Gardener Volunteer Coordinator)

We've had a very busy summer working with the Dream Catchers, weeding, watering, and harvesting produce at the Penn Yan Community Garden. This year, we harvested **600** pounds of produce that was donated to the Pro Action Food Pantry and Milly's pantry.

The Dream Catchers Breakfast Club met Thursday mornings in July through August. The Master Gardeners worked with the youth and adults teaching them how to plant flowers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and herbs. After they planted their beds, they learned proper maintenance, weeding, watering, and harvesting. They also made flower arrangements for the nursing home and seed balls. I looked forward to every Thursday morning and so did the youth and adults. Jessica Cornell (Program Coordinator from the Living Well) would bring delicious breakfast treats, and we even had a guitarist play for us one morning.

On September 10th, we held our annual Penn Yan Community Garden Open House. We served hotdogs, chips, apples and water. The youth had a great time and so did the Master Gardener volunteers. Though it did rain, the weather didn't stop us, and we had a wonderful time.

We also stained the educational shed to preserve the wood (though, some of us got more paint on ourselves than the actual shed).

Finally, we celebrated the end of the summer gardening season with our annual summer picnic. We celebrated three August birthdays with great food and conversation with a carrot cake!



# Why Doesn't My Hydrangea Bloom?

Mary Jo Gibson (Master Gardener, PSU- Extension)

**Many home gardeners have hydrangeas that do not bloom as expected. This article discusses types of hydrangeas and how to best enjoy their blossoms and foliage.**

"Why doesn't my hydrangea bloom?" It wasn't until I became a Master Gardener that I ever thought about this question. I have always been familiar with the four main types of hydrangeas: the peegee (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora') tree that came with my parents' house in 1946; the 'Hills of Snow' variety (*Hydrangea arborescens*) between my parents' and the neighbor's backyard; my Uncle Joseph's gorgeous oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) near State College; and Mrs. Russell's pink and blue hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) in Cape May, New Jersey.

**So, why doesn't my hydrangea bloom? Usually because of poor pruning by humans or by Mother Nature.**

I have learned to ask for more information before I give a complete answer. "Did you receive the hydrangea for Easter or Mother's Day? Did it have pretty foil or plastic around the pot?" If so, the plant may be a "florist's" or "gift" hydrangea. It is simply not winter hardy in our area. Mother Nature freezes the flower buds and/or the stems each year destroying the future flowers. The hydrangea roots may be hardy, but the top of the plant is not. Usually, these plants are a big-leaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*). Most varieties bloom on "old wood," i.e., wood that grew and produced flower buds during the previous year. Therefore, early or late freezes or bitter winters may damage the flower buds. The other reason that hydrangeas don't bloom is pruning at the wrong time. If you cut back a hydrangea between the autumn and early spring and it blooms on old wood, you have trimmed off all the future flowers!

Look for a newer variety of *Hydrangea macrophylla* that blooms on both old and new wood. Read the plant tag and ask for help at a nursery. Try the Endless Summer® or Let's Dance® collection of re-blooming hydrangeas. You get early bloom on old wood and later bloom on new wood (current season's growth).

A bonus with the Endless Summer® series is that the pH of the soil determines the color of the flowers. To produce blue flowers, the plant needs a soil with an acid pH to allow aluminum uptake. Apply aluminum sulfate, one tablespoon per one gallon of water, to

the soil each month of the growing season. Take care to water well before treating, as this chemical can burn the roots. Avoid fertilizer with high phosphorus levels. To encourage pink flowers, add lime and fertilizer with high levels of phosphorus to prevent the aluminum from entering the plant's system. It may take more than a year to see a change in color. Be aware that lime may leach from house foundations and sidewalks. In these areas, blue flowers may be difficult or impossible.

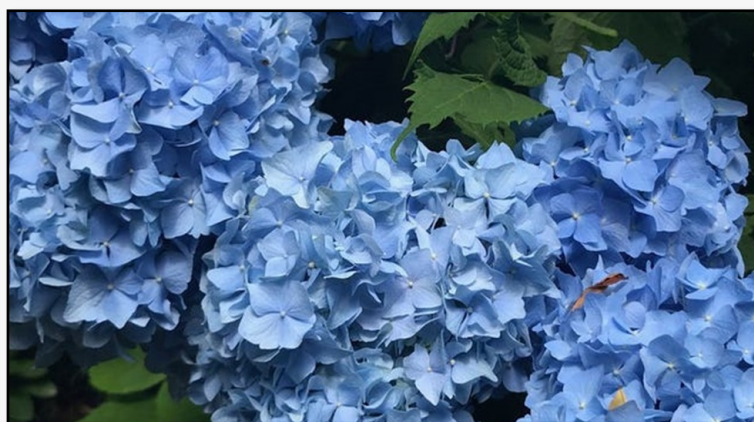
How about taking the easy way? Plant a native, like *Hydrangea arborescens*. 'Hills of Snow' or 'Annabelle' are hardy here, produce beautiful white flowers that green with maturity and can be cut back, if desired, anytime from autumn to spring.

Another great native option is *Hydrangea quercifolia*, the oakleaf hydrangea, with four seasons of interest: huge white flowers that mature to shades of pink, gorgeous red leaves in the autumn, an open shape with brown exfoliating bark during the winter, and green, oak-leaf shaped foliage in the spring. Wow!

Perhaps you don't have room for a bushy hydrangea. Try a tree form of *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora', or peegee. They bloom on new wood so one can trim off the new growth to the standard (trunk) each year, if desired. The huge flowers mature to pink and are easy to dry for winter bouquets.

There is one more thought to consider about non-blooming hydrangeas. Those green mounds are lovely all by themselves! Just love them for what they are.

**Source: Penn State Extension- <https://extension.psu.edu/why-doesnt-my-hydrangea-bloom>**



*Big-leaf hydrangea (Hydrangea macrophylla)*

*Photo courtesy of Penn State Master Gardener Program*

# How to Tune In to Birds With Your Children

**Karen Welch (CCE-Yates County Master Gardener Volunteer)**



Credit: Getty Images

Birds are a very important part of our ecosystem; they disseminate seeds, help with pollination, and eat some common insect pests in the garden. Helping your children tune in to bird activity is just one more way to interest them and increase their joy in the natural world. As adults, we can help children be aware of the threats to birds and what we can do to protect them, such as providing a habitat around our homes they can be safe in and avoid toxic pesticides. They will be more likely to become adults who respect and care about the birds in their environment if they learn about birds as children.

Bird identification can be fun for children. Go for walks specifically to look for birds. Some are quite visible, and some are not. Teach them to listen. Early morning is best. Between listening and looking, they will learn a lot. There is a wonderful app called **Merlin Bird ID** from **The Cornell Lab**, which can be used to record the sounds of birds, help identify the sound, and show a picture of the bird. You can take a picture of the bird in the app and identify a bird. This allows you to learn with your children about local birds. Many birds are still around in the Fall. Children generally like to use binoculars, adding to the birding fun.

Point out to your children what is available around them that birds are still interested in for food. Look for bushes and trees that have berries in the fall and winter that birds enjoy for food, such as Chokeberry, Wahoo, Eastern Red Cedar, Sumac, Winterberry, Viburnum, Nannyberry, and Elderberry.

Consider starting to feed and attract birds into your yard and garden so they can get a close-up look at

the birds in your area. Plant bushes and plants that will bring the birds closer, as suggested above. Please don't take out those garden flowers too soon as they often have seeds the birds are still enjoying: Coneflower, Sunflower, Goldenrod, Coreopsis, Cosmos, Globe thistle, Blanket Flowers, Black-eyed Susan, Marigolds, and Zinnias.

Put up bird feeders in your yard where your family can watch the birds easily. Consider the placement of feeders near a window where the family sits to eat. Fall can bring a wide variety of birds to your bird feeder. They need high-fat, high-calorie foods during their Fall migration. Black oil sunflower seeds, Nyjer seeds, peanuts, peanut butter, and nectar (for hummingbirds) will give them what they need on their long journey. Of course, there is always the fun activity with those backyard pinecones treated with peanut butter and coated with seeds to give the kids a hands-on activity. Just make sure you hang them high enough so cats can't sneak up on them! A branch nearby they can perch on while nibbling is helpful.

Fall is a good time to talk about bird migration. Which birds migrate, and what birds do not? Point out the geese flying overhead. Teach them to listen and hear them and know to look for them. Listening is an important tool for identifying and spotting birds.

Happy Birding!

## References

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**Download Merlin Bird ID by scanning the QR code with your phone, or online at <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>**



# Cover Crops and Green Manures in Home Gardens

## Jill MacKenzie (University of Minnesota Extension)

### Quick Facts

- \* **Cover crops form a living mulch in gardens because they grow thickly among each other.**
- \* **They help reduce soil splash and erosion, and keep weeds in check.**



*Pictured: White Clover*

Cover crops are “green manures” when a gardener turns them into the soil to provide organic matter and nutrients. Green manures include legumes such as vetch, clover, beans and peas; grasses such as annual ryegrass, oats, rapeseed, winter wheat and winter rye; and buckwheat.

### Planting cover crops

Some gardeners sow cover crop plants in spring, especially in new garden plots to improve the soil and choke out weeds. In established vegetable or flower gardens, plant a green manure early in the season to improve the soil. After you turn it under, plant warm-season vegetables, bedding plants or container-grown perennials.

If you dig a new garden bed in spring or early summer, grow one or two crops of heat-loving buckwheat or beans. If you start a new garden in late summer, plant ryegrass, rapeseed or oats, which grow quickly in cool weather.

In late fall or the following spring, turn in the dead plant material and plant flowers or vegetables in the new, improved bed. The soil will contain more organic matter and beneficial microorganisms. There will be fewer weeds than before.

Use green manures in established vegetable gardens after you harvest early-maturing vegetables. You can plant green manure where these vegetables were growing to keep the garden weed-free, prevent soil erosion and add organic matter to the soil. Turn in the dead plant material after a killing frost in late fall.

Sow the seed thickly to create a cover that will not allow weeds to compete. Mow the plants down if they flower, to prevent them from self-seeding and becoming weeds themselves. In spring, turn dead plant material from green manures into the soil before sowing seeds or transplanting seedlings. This is also the time to add fertilizer to the soil. If the green manure does not die over winter, wait about two weeks after you turn in the living plant material before seeding or transplanting.

### Nitrogen fixation

Many plants in the legume family, such as peas, beans, vetch and clover, grow in cooperation with soil-dwelling bacteria. These bacteria live in nodules on the roots of legumes. They take nitrogen gas from the air and convert it to a form plants can use. This process is “fixing nitrogen.”

When the legume dies and its roots begin to decompose, residual nitrogen in the nodules becomes available to other plants. Minnesota farmers take advantage of nitrogen fixation when they plant soybeans in rotation with corn. The soybeans fix nitrogen in the soil. The following year, the corn plants use the nitrogen.

Most soils in Minnesota have adequate populations of the bacteria needed to form the association with legumes. You may choose to buy a powdered inoculum containing the bacteria when you buy the legume seed, to ensure that fixation occurs. In order to create enough fixed nitrogen in the soil to nourish future plants, you must grow leguminous cover crops for an entire season.



# Cover Crops and Green Manures in Home Gardens

## Most commonly grown green manures in Minnesota

### Annual Ryegrass

- \* A thick mat of oats or ryegrass prevents erosion and keeps weeds out.
- \* Although they will grow in cool weather, both die over winter.
- \* Chemicals released as ryegrass decomposes may keep small seeds from germinating, such as those of carrot and lettuce.

### Buckwheat and rapeseed

- \* These broadleaf plants grow quickly in warm weather and effectively smother weeds.
- \* Buckwheat flowers are a favorite nectar source for bees.
- \* If you allow either of these species to flower and set seed, hundreds of plants will come up the next year.
- \* Buckwheat has no frost tolerance.
- \* Rapeseed may survive mild winters.

### Clover

- \* Clovers fix nitrogen.
- \* Many are somewhat winter-hardy and may begin growth again in spring.
- \* The giant variety of white clover known as 'Ladino' makes a particularly good cover crop.
- \* Hairy vetch and alfalfa
- \* Like clover, vetch and alfalfa fix nitrogen.
- \* They will survive winter and grow again in spring.

### Peas, beans and soybeans

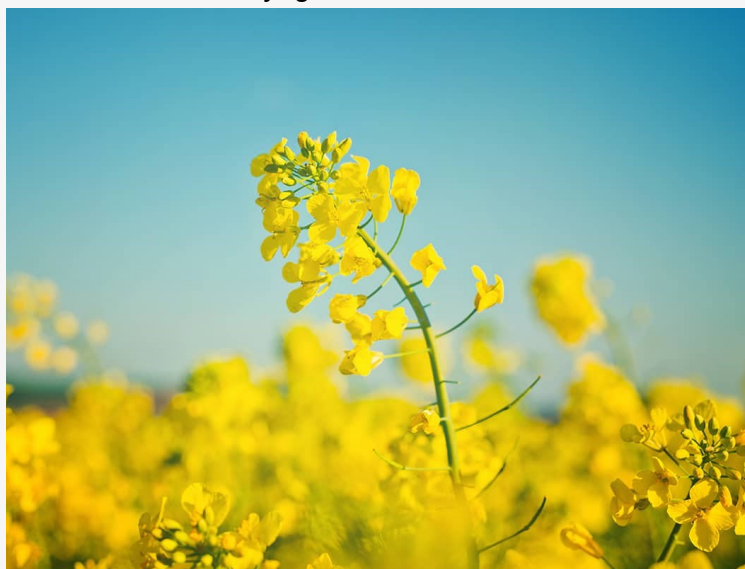
- \* These are legumes and fix nitrogen.
- \* You can grow them as both green manures and edible crops.
- \* Harvest the pods, and then turn the plants under.
- \* If sown in fall or late summer, they will die over winter.

### Winter wheat and winter rye

- \* These grains are cold hardy. If planted in late summer, they will begin growing again in early spring.
- \* They are good for areas that you will plant late in spring with warm-season vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers or squash.
- \* Turn the green manure into the soil in mid-May, then plant heat-loving vegetables at the end of the month or in early June.
- \* Rye can develop a very extensive and tough root system that may be difficult to break up, making tilling and planting more difficult. Rye also has the same allelopathic qualities as ryegrass.



*Pictured: Annual Ryegrass*



*Pictured: Rapeseed*

# Collecting and Storing Seeds

## New York Botanical Gardens

### Which Plants to Choose

When collecting seeds in your garden, look for healthy plants that possess the characteristics you desire. For instance, if you have a pot marigold (*Calendula*) with a pale apricot color that you admire, collect seeds from the paler specimens to try and keep the nice shade. You will always get variation, but you are participating in the selection process as, in essence, an amateur breeder.

Always choose healthy plants so that you end up with healthy, viable seeds. Don't waste your time collecting seeds from F1 hybrids; they will never come true to seed, and you will get some strange results. Heirloom varieties, on the other hand, tend to be fairly stable and are wonderful to collect.

### When to Collect the Seeds

Gather seeds from your garden once the flower or vegetable has started to ripen. With flowers, the seed heads will start to turn brown. Harvest your seeds on a dry day; you will dry them anyway before you store them, so it helps to get a head start and to ensure they don't rot during the process.

It is essential not to collect immature seeds. Many seeds will continue to ripen as they dry, but if you collect them before they have completely formed, they will not mature and produce viable seed. They should be fully formed and starting to dry.

With fruits and vegetables, the fruits should be just starting to get over-ripe.

There are exceptions to this timing rule; many seeds are catapulted into the air or the inflorescence (the seed head) shatters to help the seeds disperse effectively in the wild. These seeds should be harvested just before they are ripe so that they are easier to collect, otherwise, they will explode as you try to remove them. Place the entire inflorescence in a small paper bag and cut the stem.

### How to Collect Seeds

Cut off the seed heads and collect in plastic containers or paper bags. Make sure you label everything as you go. If you wait until you can spread everything out to identify your seeds, you will be give yourself an unnecessary headache. Record the collection date and the cultivar name. Once gathered, the seeds will need to be cleaned and dried before they can be stored.



Photo Credit: Alamy Images



*Asclepias incarnata* 'Ice Ballet' (swamp milkweed) ready to disperse seeds in the NYBG Native Plant Garden

Photo Credit: Marlon Co



Collecting Lupine Seeds

Photo Credit: Flickr cc/Alan Levine

# Collecting and Storing Seeds

## Cleaning and Drying

Some seeds require only minimal cleaning while others seeds have chaff or are in fleshy fruit and it is important to clean off these seeds so they will germinate properly. Seeds may be separated from the chaff (the seed casings and debris) with a pair of tweezers; not all of the chaff needs to be removed, but just cleaned off a bit.

A simple way to separate chaff from seeds is to make a deep crease down the center of a piece of paper. Place the unclean seeds in the center, tilt the paper at a slight angle and slowly tap the contents out of the folded paper (very similar to what you do when sowing seeds). The contents will separate, with the heavier items moving down the crease faster than the lighter items. If the seeds are heavier they will slide out first, and if they are lighter the chaff will fall out first. If the chaff and the seeds are close in weight the best thing to do is to find a screen that allows the seeds to fall through but traps larger pieces of debris; an old tea strainer or colander works well.

Seedpods are traditionally placed in an old pillowcase and stepped on, releasing the seeds, which are then separated from the chaff. Or place the pods in a bag and crush the pods with a rolling pin.

To clean seeds from fleshy fruits, scoop out the contents and soak them in water. Once cleaned, remove the seeds from the water and dry them on a paper towel. Many people who are serious about collecting tomato seeds ferment the seeds to clean off the fleshy coating (refer to the tab "Cleaning Tomato Seeds" at the top of this page).

Spread the seeds on newspapers, in a cardboard box, or in an old telephone directory, and allow them to dry between one and three weeks.

## Storing Seeds

Before storing your seeds, make sure they are dry, otherwise they will rot. But don't desiccate the seed (it is alive); you merely want to get rid of excess moisture and hold it in a dormant state until you are ready to grow it.

Seeds need moisture, warmth and light to germinate, so give them the exact opposite, a dry, cool, dark environment, when storing them. Place your seeds in an envelope or paper bag and seal them in plastic containers or glass jars. If you are not convinced that your seeds are dry, eliminate the airtight container step. Remember to keep the labels with the seeds.

Store the seed in a cool, dry place such as a corner shelf in the garage, basement, closet or in the back of a refrigerator. The ideal temperature for storing seeds is between 32°F and 50°F. The rule of thumb for storing seeds is that the temperature and the humidity levels should add up to less than 100%. This means that if the temperature is 50°F, the humidity has to be less than 50%. Both high humidity and high temperatures are catalysts for germination and will trigger the seeds' metabolism.



*Photo Credit: Flickr cc/MICOLO J Thanx 4*

**Source:** <https://libguides.nybg.org/collectingstoringseeds>

**Have a gardening question?**

Contact us at 315-536-5123, or stop by the CCE-Yates County office!

# Dividing Perennials

*Editor's Note: this article is an experiment done by a Master Gardener using Chat GPT. After fairly extensive editing, we felt it was worth sharing, but we're curious to know what you think!*

Dividing perennials is an essential gardening technique to rejuvenate plants, control their size, and create new plants from existing ones. Be aware that some plants prefer not to be divided or have specific intervals at which they should be divided. Fall and spring are the best times to divide perennials but as our springs heat up, fall is becoming my favorite time to divide my plants, particularly those that bloom in the spring and early summer such as peonies, salvia, columbine, hellebores, and irises.

## Here's a basic guide on how to divide perennials:



*Photo Credit: Miracle Gro*

### \* **Choose the right time:**

Fall divisions and transplants are best done in early September through mid-October before the ground gets too cold, or about six weeks before the first hard frost.

### \* **Gather the necessary tools:**

You'll need a few basic gardening tools, including a shovel, garden fork, pruners or a sharp knife, and gardening gloves.

### \* **Prepare the area:**

Water the plant a day or two before dividing to ensure the soil is adequately moist but not waterlogged. This will make it easier to dig up the plant.

### \* **Dig up the plant:**

Use a shovel or garden fork to carefully dig around the perimeter of the plant. Dig a few inches away from the plant to avoid damaging its roots. Gently lift the plant from the ground, shaking off excess soil.

### \* **Divide the plant:**

Once you've lifted the plant, assess its root structure. Some plants have clumps of roots that can be pulled apart by hand, while others might require cutting. If the roots are densely entwined, you can use a sharp knife or pruners to separate them into smaller sections. Each section should have healthy shoots and a good amount of root mass.

### \* **Trim and prune:**

Trim away any dead or damaged foliage and roots from each divided section. This encourages the plant to focus its energy on new growth rather than struggling with unhealthy parts.

### \* **Replant the divisions:**

Dig holes in the new planting areas that are large enough to accommodate the root systems of the divided sections. Amend the soil if needed and work in some all purpose plant food. Place each division into its hole at the same depth it was originally planted. Backfill the hole with soil and firmly press it down around the plant.

# Dividing Perennials

## \* **Water and mulch:**

After replanting, water the divisions thoroughly to settle the soil around the roots. Applying a layer of mulch helps retain moisture and prevent weed growth.

## \* **Care for new plants:**

Keep an eye on the newly divided plants over the next few weeks. Water them regularly to keep the soil consistently moist while they establish new root systems.

## \* **Monitor growth:**

Once the divided perennials begin to show new growth in the spring, you can resume your regular care routine for each individual plant type, including fertilizing and pruning as needed.



*Dividing perennials keeps your plants healthy and provides more plants for yourself or for friends. Photo*

*Photo Credit: LIANEM/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM*

# Storing Dahlias, Elephant Ears, and other Tender Perennial Tubers

Gardeners in Hardiness Zones below 7 have a little extra work on their hands come late fall if you are growing dahlias, elephant ears and other tender perennials. After the first hard frost, the foliage of these plants will begin to die down and their growing season has ended, however the tubers are still maturing and will continue to develop and store better if left in the soil for a while longer.

Once you are ready to store for the winter, cut back all the foliage, leaving approximately 6 inches of the main stalk or neck on the bulbs. Next, gently lift the clumps from the soil taking care not to pierce or cause damage to the clusters. Place the tubers out of direct sunlight to dry slightly for a day or two. After a few days, gently brush off any excess dirt to avoid contamination. At this point you may choose to divide the clumps, though that can also be done before planting in the spring. Note, when dividing dahlias, it is important to remember that the crown (containing the growth eyes), neck, and tuber are all required for new growth in the spring.

Partially fill a large, covered container (cardboard, wood, Styrofoam or other breathable material) with peat moss, place the tubers for storage into the container and cover with more peat moss. Be sure not to crowd them in the container. Slightly dampen the peat moss to prevent the clumps from drying out but do not soak it as the tubers will rot. Cover and store the container at 35-50 degrees Fahrenheit until spring. Your garage or basement makes a suitable location for the container(s).



*Pictured: Black Magic Elephant Ears*

*Photo Credit: Home Depot*

# Storing Guidelines for Home-Preserved Foods

## Martha Zepp (Penn State University Extension)

A plumber said he never wanted to eat home-canned food because he saw so many black moldy jars of food stored on open shelves in basements. He figured that they were many years old and, probably correctly, they might not be safe to eat. The point of this story is to inventory your canned goods each year putting older foods where they will be used first and discarding foods that have spoiled or have discolored to the point you will not use them. This is called the **FIFO method**, "first in, first out" method of storage. Put dates on both canned and frozen foods.



Photo Credit: lawcain / bigstockphoto.com

### Home-Canned Goods

The most important step is to use preservation methods that will control the growth of microorganisms. Use only research tested recipes that have determined time, temperature (or pressure), and processing method (boiling water, atmospheric steam, or steam under pressure) that will destroy bacteria, molds, and yeasts that can cause food borne illness or spoilage.

- \* **Most canned goods maintain their quality for up to one year**, therefore it is recommended you only can the amount of food that you will use within one year. However, if foods have been canned using **USDA recommendations** or the recipes in Penn State's **Let's Preserve** articles, they will be safe as long as the seal is not broken.
- \* **Canned goods stored in a cool, dry, dark place will keep their quality best.**

- \* **Prevent exposure to light.** Store jars in closets, boxes or cover with paper to keep light away from the product.
- \* **Save yourself time and effort** by planning to can only the amount you will use within one year. There really is no point in canning all the beans in the garden if they are going to sit in a basement for several years, become soft, and end up being discarded.
- \* **Prevent exposure to heat**
  - Store canned goods between 40°F and 70°F.
  - Avoid storing canned goods above 90° F. Avoid placing jars near heating pipes or a furnace or in direct sunlight. Canned goods can spoil and release their seal at high temperatures.
  - The quality (firmness, color, and flavor) of the product does deteriorate over a period of time.

### Frozen Foods

When freezing food, the goal is to quickly reach temperatures of 0°F or below. Freezing does not kill microorganisms already present on or in the food, but does prevent their growth. While bacteria will not grow in food stored at 0°F, the quality of the food can deteriorate over time.

### Freezer Burn

- \* Freezer burn is caused by moisture loss or ice crystals evaporating from the surface area of a food. It appears as grainy, brownish, dry looking spots.
- \* Freezer burn will show up if freezer bags get torn or lids of freezer boxes become loose or were not vapor proof to start with.
- \* Freezer burned areas are likely to develop off-flavors.
- \* Freezer burn will not cause illness but the desirability of the product is reduced.
- \* In severe cases of freezer burn, you may choose to discard the product.
- \* Freeze only the amount of fruits and vegetables that will be used within one year.

# Storing Guidelines for Home-Preserved Foods

## Freezing Meats

The recommended storage times for freezing meats for best quality varies with the type of meat and its fat content.

- \* Beef or venison roasts and steaks maintain good quality for 8 to 12 months.
- \* Whole chicken or turkey can be frozen for a year. It is best to use ground meat within 3 to 4 months.
- \* Cured meats such as ham and bacon can only be frozen for 2 to 3 months because their salt content hastens rancidity.
- \* Lean fish such as flounder or haddock are suitable for freezing 4 to 6 months, but fatty fish such as salmon or tuna are best used within 2 to 3 months.

## Freeze-Thaw-Refreeze

- \* Check for signs that frozen food might have thawed and refroze during storage.
- \* Stained packages are a warning sign.
- \* Discard food that at any point has completely thawed and reached a temperature above 40°F.
- \* Keep a thermometer in the freezer

## Featured Recipe: Apple Butter

**RECOMMENDED VARIETIES.** Jonathan, Winesap, Stayman, Golden Delicious, or McIntosh 8 lb apples

- 2 cups cider
- 2 cups vinegar
- 2¼ cups white sugar
- 2¼ cups packed brown sugar
- 2 Tbsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp ground cloves

**Yields approx. 8 to 9 pints**

**PROCEDURE.** Remove stems and wash, quarter, and core apples. Cook slowly in cider and vinegar until soft. Press apples through a food mill, colander, or strainer. Combine fruit pulp with sugar and spices. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer; stir frequently to prevent scorching.

To test for doneness, remove a spoonful and hold it away from steam for 2 minutes. It is done if the apple butter remains mounded on the spoon. Another way to determine when the butter is cooked adequately is to spoon a small quantity onto a plate. When rim of liquid does not separate around the edge of the butter, it is ready for canning. It will take 1 to 3 hours for apple butter to cook to this stage, depending on the juiciness of the apples. Fill hot product into sterile half-pint or pint jars, leaving ¼ inch of headspace. Quart jars need not be presterilized. Adjust lids and process jars in a boiling water bath or atmospheric steam canner.

**Half-pints or pints: 5 minutes**

**Quarts: 10 minutes**

## Keep a Freezer Inventory

- \* One method of avoiding forgotten foods is to maintain an inventory near the freezer.
- \* List the foods and dates of freezing as you put them in the freezer.
- \* Check them off as you take foods out. You will then know the exact amounts and kinds of foods in the freezer at all times.
- \* Organize the food in the freezer into food groups for ease of locating.
- \* Arrange packages so that those which have been in the freezer the longest are the first ones used.
- \* For commercially bought foods the **USDA FoodKeeper** app is a great tool to help you maximize the freshness and quality of all types of food items and help reduce food waste.

## References:

- \* Andress, E. & Harrison, J. (2014, updated 2020). *So Easy to Preserve*, Bulletin 989, Cooperative Extension. University of Georgia.
- \* Penn State Extension. **Let's Preserve Fact Sheets**. (<https://bit.ly/3rbJJyN>)
- \* USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (2019, April 26). **"Food Keeper App"**. (<https://bit.ly/48iyy83>)

**Source:** <https://bit.ly/3t59XmS>



# 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!



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