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Jennifer Schutter
University of Missouri Extension
Horticulture Specialist
660-665-9866
schutterjl@missouri.edu

If you need this newsletter in alternative format, please contact Jennifer Schutter at the Adair County Extension Center.

STARTING SEEDS INDOORS

Starting your own seeds indoors can be an enjoyable experience for some gardeners. It is a relatively inexpensive way to grow a wide variety of plants that you might not otherwise find in garden centers. Seeds can be purchased from a number of sources including garden centers, hardware stores and mail order catalogs. Seeds can range greatly in price. The newest hybrids command higher prices, as do seeds of rare, heirloom or unusual plants, as well as certified organic seed.

To get started you will need a soil-less seed starting mix, which is sterile and weed-free, and containers. Cell flats work best for starting seedlings. Place potting mix into your cell flats and wet the soil before planting the seed. The potting mix will settle and more will have to be added and watered again until the cells are almost full.



Follow the package directions and sow one seed per cell in the containers. If using old seed, plant two seeds per cell, as only one or neither may germinate. The directions will tell you how deep to plant the seeds. When finished, label each container with the name of the plant and the date planted.

Flower seed to start in February includes snapdragons, pansies, violas, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and wax begonia. In Missouri, snap dragons and pansies can be planted outdoors usually by the end of March. They tolerate the cool days of spring. Cool-season vegetables that should be sown in February include broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi, Brussels sprouts, and head lettuce. These vegetables like cool weather and can usually be planted by the end of March in north Missouri.

Light is important for seedlings once they have germinated. A window sill is not an ideal location for starting seeds. It's much better to grow seedlings under fluorescent lights than to rely solely on natural light, even in a greenhouse. Some brands of lights are sold as "grow lights," designed to provide light in specific ranges required by plants, but standard fixtures with two "cool white" fluorescent tubes per fixture also give plants adequate light and are inexpensive. A combination of cool white and natural daylight tubes would provide good light for plants that is more appealing to people. Hang the lights from chains to ease raising them as the plants grow. Keep lights no more than 4 inches above the tops of your seedlings: as close as 2 inches is ideal. Lack of light is the major cause of elongated, skinny stems. Plants need 12

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to 16 hours of light daily, but don't leave the lights on continuously, as many plants need some dark period each night to develop properly. A simple timer can be part of the set-up.

Most seeds need consistently warm soil to germinate and produce strong roots. Providing a constant bottom heat can be very beneficial to seedlings. Bottom heat can help prevent damping off and death of seedlings due to pathogens at the soil surface. Keep the soil moist, not wet. Do not fertilize seedlings until they have several sets of true leaves. Only fertilize once a week with a general purpose water-soluble fertilizer.

Slowly harden plants off by exposing them to cooler outdoor temperatures for a week or two. Gradually increase the time they are outdoors. Plants not hardened off will be exposed to full sun, wind, and fluctuating temperatures and may be scorched, wilt and die. Transplant seedlings when they outgrow the cell packs and are hardened off properly. Make sure the plant is able to withstand the cool or cold temperatures if you are planting them in late March. Most of the cole crops like cabbage and broccoli tolerate cool weather.



GARDEN WORKSHOP FEBRUARY 19

University of Missouri Extension-Adair County, along with the Northeast Missouri Community Action Agency, will host a garden workshop on Friday, February 19 from 1-4 pm at the Missouri Department of Conservation office in Kirksville. Topics include: Getting Started Growing A Garden (things you need to know to grow your own garden-soil preparation, what to grow, growing in raised beds, containers and directly in the garden); Starting Seeds (includes hands-on seed planting and everyone takes home packets of seeds); and Food Preparation (now that I've grown it, how do I prepare it, recipes will be given out). Horticulture Specialist Jennifer Schutter and Nutrition and Health Specialist Margo Myers, will teach the workshop. There is no cost to attend. Supplies for the workshop are sponsored by Northeast Missouri Community Action Agency. Please pre-register by calling the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866.

GROWING AFRICAN VIOLETS

By: Donna Aufdenberg, horticulture specialist, MU Extension

African Violets come in many colors and varieties. They are very adaptable to most growing conditions which makes them a wise choice for novice and beginning gardeners.

They grow best when placed in bright, indirect light from a southeast or west facing window. While you can expect reasonable success if you grow African Violets in natural light, artificial light provides better growing conditions. The most common cause of bloom failure is insufficient light. Thin, dark green leaves with long petioles indicates too little light whereas stunted plants with short petioles and small leathery leaves indicates too much light.

Violets grow best between 65 to 70 degrees F night temperature with a 10 degree increase during the day. Keep them away from chilly windows. Cold will cause them to turn dark, appear water soaked, and withered. If plants are placed in temperatures above 80 degrees F and sunrays are strong, leaves can scorch. Humidity is beneficial for growth.

Proper watering is one of the most important requirements for growing beautiful plants. Over watering can cause root rot and crown rot. Under watering can cause withering, browning and death. Watering methods differ from gardener to gardener. The main thing is to water thoroughly and allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Avoid getting water on the leaves and crowns.

Most people water violets from the bottom because they believe water damages the leaves. It is not the water itself but the temperature of the water that causes the damage. If you water with luke-warm water, there is no danger of damaging the leaves. Regardless of how you water, allow the plant to sit in the water of the saucer for no longer than 30 minutes to an hour...or however long it takes for the soil to completely moisten. Discard excess water that remains in the saucer.

It is recommended to feed plants with a dilute fertilizer solution at each watering, however, over fertilization tends to be a problem with African Violets. A well balanced formula such as 20-20-20 is adequate for most growing conditions if the plants are actively growing.

GROWING AND CARING FOR AMARYLLIS

The amaryllis is a popular plant grown during the winter. People often receive these as gifts with little knowledge of how to care for them. Although red and scarlet are the most popular colors, the flowers may be pink, white, salmon, apricot, rose, bicolor or picotee (petals with a different edge color) and in both single and double forms. Because they can produce flowers in mid-winter, they are prized for the color they add to indoor landscapes.

Amaryllis plants should be kept out of direct sunlight while they are in flower to prolong the life of the flowers. The secret to successfully growing amaryllis is to keep the plants actively growing after they have finished blooming. After the flowers have faded, cut them off to prevent seed formation. Do not remove the flower stalk until it has turned yellow; it will help manufacture food that will be stored in the bulb.

If the bulb does not produce a flowering stalk the next blooming period, it has not stored enough nutrients during the post-blooming period. It is important that amaryllis receive plenty of bright sunlight after they have finished blooming so place it in the brightest possible location indoors. Water the plant from the top of the container thoroughly whenever the top 2 inches of the soil is dry to the touch. Empty any excess water that drains from the pot as wet soil will promote root and bulb rot. Continue to fertilize the plant regularly.

When all danger of frost is past, acclimate the plant to the outdoors by first placing it in shade or indirect light. Gradually move it to a bright garden or bed where it will receive full sun for at least 6 hours daily. Sink the pot into the soil and fertilize with a

balanced houseplant fertilizer monthly to build up nutrients for flower production the next year.

Amaryllis plants should be brought indoors before the first frost in the fall. Amaryllis do not require a resting period and will bloom if kept evergreen. However, blooming time can be controlled by allowing the bulb to go through a resting period. After bringing the potted plants indoors, store them in a dark place like a basement or cool closet (above freezing) and do not water. Do not remove the foliage until it has become dry and shriveled. The bulbs can be forced into bloom again after resting for 8 to 12 weeks. Inspect the bulbs periodically and bring them into light if new growth appears. If no new growth appears, they can be forced to bloom by bringing them into bright light and watering the soil thoroughly. Usually one or more flower stalks appear first, but occasionally they are preceded by leaves. Flowers usually develop in about 4-6 weeks from dormant bulbs, so they can be timed to flower at Christmas or for Valentine's Day.

Amaryllis plants bloom best when they are potbound so they will require repotting only every 3 or 4 years. The best time to repot them is after they have gone through a dormant period, and you are bringing them up from the basement to reflower. Follow the same potting procedure as with a newly purchased bulb. Amaryllis require some care and attention throughout the year, but those beautiful trumpet shaped flowers are a great reward in the long months of winter.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension, <http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/flowers/growing-and-caring-for-amaryllis/>

Master Gardener News



Left: At the December meeting of the Salt River Master Gardeners, president Janet Miller presented Carol Rees from the Trees for Tomorrow program in Quincy, Illinois, a check for \$280.00 to purchase a tree to replace one lost in their July 13 windstorm.

Right: A check for \$200.00 was also presented to Becky

Taylor from the Heritage Seekers for landscaping at the Gardner House and Museum in Palmyra, MO.



GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY

Ornamentals

- Water evergreens if the soil is dry and unfrozen.
- Inspect summer bulbs in storage for rot and dryness.
- Winter aconite (*Eranthis* sp.) and snowdrops (*Galanthus* sp.) are hardy bulbs that frequently push up through snow to bloom now.
- Take geranium cuttings now. Keep the foliage dry to avoid leaf and stem diseases.
- Sow seeds of larkspur, sweet peas, Shirley poppies and snapdragons where they are to grow outdoors. To bloom best, these plants must sprout and begin growth well before warm weather arrives.
- Seeds of slow-growing annuals like ageratum, verbena, petunias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and salvia may be started indoors now.
- Start tuberous begonias indoors. "Non-stop" varieties perform well in this climate.
- Dormant sprays can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs now. Do this on a mild day while temperatures are above freezing.

Fruit

- Inspect fruit trees for tent caterpillar egg masses. Eggs appear as dark brown or gray collars that encircle small twigs. Destroy by pruning or scratching off with your thumbnail.
- Collect scion wood now for grafting of fruit trees later in spring. Wrap bundled scions with plastic and store them in the refrigerator.
- When pruning diseased branches, sterilize tools with a one part bleach, nine parts water solution in between cuts. Dry your tools at day's end and rub them lightly with oil to prevent rusting.
- Begin pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears first. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- Grapes and bramble fruits may be pruned now.
- Established fruit trees can be fertilized once frost leaves the ground. Use about one-half pound of 12-12-12 per tree, per year of age, up to a maximum of 10 pounds fertilizer per tree. Broadcast fertilizers over the root zone staying at least one foot from the tree trunk.

Vegetables

- Run a germination test on seeds stored from previous years to see if they will still sprout. Start onion seeds indoors now.
- Season extending devices such as cold frames, hot beds, cloches and floating row covers will allow for an early start to the growing season.
- If soil conditions allow, sow peas, lettuce, spinach and radish.
- Sow seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage indoors now for transplanting into the garden later this spring.

Miscellaneous

- When sowing seeds indoors, be sure to use sterile soil mediums to prevent diseases. As soon as seeds sprout, provide ample light to encourage stocky growth.
- Repot root-bound house plants now before vigorous growth occurs. Choose a new container that is only 1 or 2 inches larger in diameter.
- To avoid injury to lawns, keep foot traffic to a minimum.
- Branches of pussy willow, quince, crabapple, forsythia, pear and flowering cherry may be forced indoors. Place cut stems in a vase of water and change the water every 4 days.

-Missouri Botanical Garden-

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 2: Salt River Master Gardener meeting, 7:00, Hannibal History Museum, 200 N. Main St., Hannibal. Lisa Marks (aka Molly Brown) from the museum will give an informational tour of the museum and discuss flowers grown during Mark Twain's childhood. For information, please contact Janet Miller, 573-784-2584. Everyone welcome and please bring friends.

February 19: Gardening workshop, See page 2 for details.

February 20: Beginning Bee-keeping workshop, 9am-5pm, Macon High School. Sponsored by the North Central Missouri Beekeepers Association. Cost is \$40 and includes lunch, materials. Call Crooked Hill Beekeeping, 660-214-0132 to register. Seating limited.

March 4: Soil Health Workshop, Missouri Department of Conservation, Kirksville. Landowners/farmers 9-12; homeowners/home gardeners 1-4 pm. Afternoon topics include: good homeowner and household practices for water and soil quality--what you put down your sink and toilet or set out on the curb, etc., good practices for managing landscapes, lawns, wells, septic systems, household trash and waste, home and yard chemicals, etc. To register call the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866. No cost to attend. Sponsored by Adair County Soil and Water Conservation District.

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University of Missouri Extension Center,
503 E. Northtown Road, Kirksville, MO 63501
Ph. 660-665-9866 Fax 660-665-9876*

Editor: Jennifer Schutter

Production: Vanessa Miller, Jill Belling and our fabulous Master Gardener volunteers

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