



Garden Talk!

for the Heartland Garden Enthusiast

April 2003

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Garden Questions:

**My lettuce seeds did not germinate. Why?*
 Perhaps the seeds were seeded too deep. Also, old seed will have reduced germination. Lettuce seed does not store well.

**Can cucumbers cross-pollinate with cantaloupes and watermelons?* No. Cucumbers will not cross-pollinate with other cucurbits because they are different species.

Let's Get Growing: Cool Spring Flowers

by Sandra and Sam Fleak, Master Gardeners, Kirksville, MO

As the short days of winter give way to the longer days of spring, it is time to think about plants that will thrive and provide a colorful display in gardens and containers during this cool period of the year. Pansies, violas, and linarias are colorful, easy-to-grow plants that thrive during the mild days and cool spring nights in Missouri. Because they grow and bloom in cool weather, pansies, violas, and linarias make some of the earliest spring or latest fall color in a garden, border, or container.



Pansies (*Viola wittrockiana*) come in a diversity of colors from blue, red, yellow, pink, and white with various combinations of blotches to make their faces. Colorful pansy flowers can be cut to make small bouquets, and pansy flowers can also be used as a garnish to brighten salads, fruit dishes, or desserts. Violas are a different species than pansies and have smaller blossoms than pansies. Pansy and viola plants can reach from six to nine inches in height.

In Missouri, pansies and violas are usually grown as annuals, and plants are commonly found at garden centers. Most people set out purchased plants that are just starting to flower. Pansies and violas do well in full sun or partial shade. They prefer fertile, well-drained soil and cool temperatures. In fact, they will tolerate temperatures that dip slightly below freezing. If pansies and violas are planted in containers, they can be brought into the garage or house on those few remaining evenings when forecasted temperatures dip into the low 20s. For optimal flowering, keep the plants well watered and fertilized. For the best flowering, remove the old flowers to prevent seeds from forming.

Linaria (*Linaria maroccana*) plants are even more cold tolerant than pansies and violas. Linarias thrive in cool weather and provide masses of bright flowers until hot summer weather. The plants grow from nine to twelve inches tall, and the flower colors range from yellow, blue, white, lavender, pink, and red. Each linaria flower looks like a small snapdragon. Linaria grows vigorously, does well in almost any soil type, and recovers well from any wind and rain damage. The cut flowers are long lasting in indoor bouquets. Linaria plants are less commonly found at garden shops and greenhouses than pansies and violas but are well worth searching out and adding to the spring garden.



Neither pansies and violas nor linarias do well during the hot days of Missouri summers. By mid to late June, these plants have provided showy flowers three months, and the plants decline quickly when the hot days of summer arrive. While the plants can be cut back and mulched to help them survive until cooler weather again arrives, most gardeners replace pansy, viola, and linaria plants with other colorful annuals that are more heat tolerant.

PLANT PROFILE: Balloon Flower

Scientific Name: *Platycodon grandiflorus*

Flowers: blue, white, or pink flowers have five-pointed petals that open from inflated buds that resemble balloons.

Bloom Time: summer

Size: 2-3 feet tall; 1-2 feet wide

Hardiness: zones 3-8

Culture: well-drained, average to humus-rich soil; full sun to light shade; established plants are drought tolerant.

Cultivation: New shoots are slow to emerge in spring. Take care not to damage them by mistake. Remove spent flowers to encourage more bloom. Established clumps seldom need division.

Propagation: Lift and divide clumps in spring or early fall; dig deeply to avoid root damage. Take basal cuttings of non-flowering shoots in summer, preferably with a piece of root attached. Sow seeds outdoors in fall. Self-sown seedlings may appear.

Landscape Uses: Plant balloon flowers with summer perennials like yellow yarrows, sages, bee balms, and phlox.

Disease & Insect Susceptibility: No serious pests or diseases.

Around The Region: Spring Flowering Plants To Observe

Daffodils	Lilac
Bradford Pear	Peony
Saucer Magnolia	Crocus
Eastern Redbud	Dogwood
Star Magnolia	Tulips
Flowering Cherry	Crabapple
European Mtn. Ash	Forsythia
Pussy Willow	Hawthorn
Flowering Plum	Apple trees
Serviceberry	Peach trees
Red Maple	Hyacinth
Grape Hyacinth	Bluebells
Autumn Olive	Catalpa



Spring Frost Can Spoil The Show

By: B. Rosie Lerner, Consumer Horticulture Extension Specialist,
Purdue University Cooperative Extension

At long last, signs of spring are everywhere.....forsythia, daffodils, and magnolias blooming, trees budding, and songbirds chirping happily. But along with the hope of spring, winter's last grasps in the form of frost and freeze can spoil the show. The further along the plant buds are in their development, the more likely they are to be damaged by below freezing temperatures. The lower the temperature drops below freezing, the more damage can be expected. Also, different species of plants vary in their susceptibility to freezing. Early spring flowering trees and

shrubs are most likely to have some flower damage, since their flower buds were set last fall. Depending on the conditions mentioned above, the damage may just be brown edges along the petals, or it may be failure to bloom. For fruit crops, every flower that is freeze-damaged results in decreased fruit potential. Foliage buds are generally considered to be more resistant to cold damage. Depending on the severity of low temperatures, freeze-damaged foliage buds usually leaf out as warm weather returns. However, foliage will likely appear distorted, scorched, and/or tattered. Most plants should be able to outgrow this type of damage.

Spring flowering bulbs such as daffodils and tulips are also likely to be damaged if temperatures drop into the teens and low twenties. The flowers can take freezing temperatures without much damage but colder temperatures will likely cause some damage to flowers and foliage. If flowers are in full bloom when frost or freeze strikes, the flowers may wilt as the flower stalk thaws. Many gardeners ask if they should cover the plants for protection. Blankets, tarps, ect., may provide a few degrees of warmth, but if temperatures drop into the teens, the covers may not be sufficient to prevent damage. Snow is a great insulation, but if it is heavy and wet, the weight may cause stem breakage on tender shoots. Likewise blankets can become heavy from snow load and cause breakage. Providing some support under the blanket in tent like fashion should help prevent mechanical damage. Keep in mind that even if the flowers are damaged, the bulb is well-protected in the soil. If the foliage is allowed to mature, the bulbs should make a good comeback next year.

Top 10 Ways You Know You Are a Master Gardener

Author: Unknown

10. You have the Horticultural Hotline number on your speed-dial.
9. When attending your children's soccer game, you check for crabgrass.
8. You would turn down a job transfer to a city with a shorter growing season.
7. You know the precise botanical name of every plant in your yard, but have difficulty remembering the names of your spouse and children.
6. You buy beer for slugs.
5. Your children's hair has been clipped into topiary forms.
4. At parties you've been overheard discussing the pros and cons of sterilizing garden soil in your oven.
3. You enjoy receiving a load of well-rotted manure for a special occasion.
2. Your bumper sticker reads: "I'll brake for worms", "I'd rather be weeding", or "Have you hugged your cactus today".
1. You're disappointed to learn that you can't order vegetable seeds from L.L. Bean.

Bees Essential to Many Garden Crops

By Ray R. Rothenberger

Where would we be without bees? The arrival of spring reminds us that many of the flowers we depend on to give us fruit or vegetables depend on the honeybee. Among the fruit trees that are largely pollinated by bees are apple, peach, plum, cherry and pear. Blackberry, blueberry, gooseberry and raspberry are also largely dependent on bees for production. The work of bees extends to many vegetable crops which include squash, cantaloupe, watermelon, cucumber, green bean and lima bean. Even for crops that are largely self pollinating, bees may have some influence. Some of these include tomato and pepper. Workers have found that cross pollination of these crops by bees may increase fruit set in some varieties. The work of bees goes far beyond horticultural plants and also influences production of seeds in alfalfa, clover, lespedeza trefoil, cotton, soybean and sunflower.

Fruit trees without a strong hum of bees in them may not be adequately pollinated. Although it has not been definitely determined, it is believed that one bee is able to pollinate 5,000 flowers per day per tree. Bees work best when temperatures are above 65 degrees F. Incomplete pollination results in excessive fruit drop or even poorly developed fruit which may eventually drop off. Many apple varieties are not self fruitful and must have the pollen carried from another tree of a different variety. Only bees can do an adequate job of carrying pollen from one tree to another. Although wind is the primary pollinator for important food crops such as wheat, rice, corn, sorghum and other grains, bees are by far the most important pollinators of horticultural crops in the world.

To maintain the productivity of trees and garden, also to help the bees, be alert to the bee activity whenever you plan to spray a crop to control a damaging insect pest. Too often, indiscriminate spraying can kill many bees. Treat for pests only when necessary, and at a time of day with less tendency to harm them.

In spring as fruit trees flower, avoid spraying them with insecticides when they are in bloom. Spraying for fruit pests can be done before and after flowering without harm to bees. This is true at all times – do not spray plants that are in flower. The gardener may say, "What about cucumbers? They flower constantly." The best time to spray such plants, if needed, is in the very early morning or late evening when bees are not active. Evening may often be better since some plants have new flowers that open during the morning and, therefore, would not have spray residue on them. Liquid sprays rather than dusts are also less likely to be picked up by bees. They drift less and, therefore, can be less damaging. One of the most widely used insecticides for eliminating many pests is carbaryl (trade name Sevin), which is widely used in flower and vegetable gardens. Although it is one of the less toxic materials in regard to human use, it is highly toxic to bees. Therefore, this pesticide should not be used at any time that bees are active. Use care whenever using any insecticide. Check labels for correct amounts and for any special precautions that should be taken.

Always be aware that bees may be on nearby wildflowers, clover, or other plants near the garden. When spraying plants that are not visited by bees, keep watch for any nearby area where bees may be active. Do not allow the pesticide to drift over them. With caution, there will be better pollination, better production, and better honey for everyone.

Gardening Tips For April

VEGETABLES:

- Start cucumber, cantaloupe, summer squash, and watermelon seeds indoors in peat pots.
- Finish sowing seeds of all cool-season vegetables not yet planted outdoors.
- Flower stalks should be removed from rhubarb plants if they develop.

ORNAMENTALS

- Winter mulches should be removed from roses.
- Shrubs and trees best planted or transplanted in the spring include butterfly bush, dogwood, Rose-of-Sharon, Black Gum, redbud, grapes, magnolia, tulip poplar, birch, ginkgo, hawthorn, and most oaks.
- Fertilize established roses once new growth is 2 inches long. Begin spraying for black spot disease.
- Easter lilies past blooming can be planted outdoors. Set the bulbs 2-3 inches deeper than they grew in the pot.
- Apply controls for holly leaf minor when the new leaves are just beginning to grow.
- Evergreen and deciduous hedges may be sheared. Prune the top narrower than the base so sunlight will reach the lower limbs.
- Prune spring flowering ornamentals after they finish blooming.

FRUIT

- Blemish-free fruits that are unmarred by insect or disease injury can rarely be produced without relying on regular

applications of insecticides and fungicides. For specific information, see MU guidesheet G6010, Home Fruit Spray Schedule.

- Plant bare-root or potted fruit trees as soon as the soil can be worked.
- Remove tree wraps from trees now.
- Prune peaches and nectarines now.
- Leaf rollers are active on apple trees. Control as needed.
- Stink bugs and tarnished plant bugs become active on peaches.
- Destroy and prune off webs of eastern tent caterpillar.
- Protect bees and other pollinating insects. Do not spray insecticides on fruit trees that are blooming.
- Begin sprays for fireblight susceptible apples and pears using an agricultural streptomycin.
- Spider mites and codling moths become active on apples.

MISCELLANEOUS:

- Termites begin swarming. Termites can be distinguished from ants by their thick waists and straight antennae. Ants have slender waists and elbowed antennae.
- Mole young are born in chambers deep underground.
- Honeybees are swarming.

- Wasp and hornet queens begin nesting.
- Hummingbirds return from their winter home in Central America.

LAWN & TURF

- Start mowing cool season grasses at recommended heights.
- Aerate turf if thatch is heavy or if soil is compacted.
- Topdress low spots and finish overseeding thin or bare patches.
- Apply crabgrass preventers before April 15. Do not apply to areas that will be seeded.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 5: "Spring Forward Into Gardening", educational workshop sponsored by Salt River Master Gardeners, Partee Center at Hannibal LaGrange College; for more information or to register contact Alix Carpenter at 573-769-2177.

June 22: Kirksville Area Master Gardener Club Garden Tour, Kirksville, MO. See upcoming issues for more information.



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Jennifer Barnes, University Outreach and Extension
Horticulture Specialist
503 E. Northtown Road, Kirksville, MO 63501-1999
barnesje@missouri.edu 660-665-9866