



Garden Talk!

for the Heartland Garden Enthusiast

January 2003

What's Inside

- **Winter Stratifications**
- **Farmer's Markets ...more than just a place to sell food**
- **Growing African Violets**
- **State Flowers**
- **Garden Tips for January**
- **Upcoming Events**
- **Private Applicator Training to be held in Kirksville**



CARING FOR THE POINSETTIA AFTER CHRISTMAS

Did you get a poinsettia for Christmas? Want to save it for next year? It can be done, it just requires some time and effort on your part. Here are a few tips for caring for your poinsettia:

1. Keep your poinsettia indoors until the danger of frost is past.
2. Cut your plant back before moving it outside. Cut the branches back to 4-6" long. Don't worry if no leaves are left, new ones will soon appear.
3. Plant the poinsettia, pot and all, outside in the yard or garden. Choose a location that receives full sun all morning.
4. Don't forget to feed and water after planting it outside.
5. Around September 1, cut your poinsettia back again. Leave branches 4-6" long. Remove the plant from the ground and move to a slightly larger pot.
6. After repotting, the plant can still be left outdoors until about the first of October unless you expect frost.
7. Beginning the first week of October, it is necessary to start a period of 12-13 hours of total darkness for the plant. This treatment must continue for the month of October. This dark period is critical, without it your plant will not bloom for Christmas. Place the plant in a closet or unused room around 5 p.m. each day. Be sure not to turn the light on in that room at night, even for a short period of time. The other requirement is that the temperature in these rooms must be 60-65 degrees F. Each morning at 7 or 8, move the poinsettia back to a sunny window. Do this every day until November, then just leave the plant in a sunny location. Continue to feed and water it the same way you did the previous winter. If you follow this schedule faithfully, you will be rewarded with a beautiful Christmas poinsettia that you grew yourself!

PLANT PROFILE: Common Bleeding Heart

Scientific Name: *Dicentra spectabilis*

Flowers: bright pink, heart-shaped flowers resemble drops of blood

Bloom Time: early spring to early summer

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

Hardiness: zones 2-9

Culture: evenly moist, humus-rich soil; partial shade

Propagation: divide clumps in fall or as they go dormant; take root cuttings in late summer

Landscape Uses: Plant common bleeding hearts with spring bulbs, primroses, and wildflowers for a striking spring display

Disease & Insect Susceptibility: no serious insects or diseases



Winter Stratifications

By: Dr. Mary Ann Gowdy, UMC

Cold winter winds, freezing rain, and falling snow; winter is quickly approaching. Although we usually dread the winter season, nature relies on these conditions to promote plant propagation. Most woody plants produce a crop of fall maturing seeds. At maturity the plant drops, or sheds its seeds. Seeds commonly fall to the ground directly under or near the tree that produced them. However, many seeds are carried to distant locations by wind, water, or animals. Regardless of where the seeds ultimately land, if they were to immediately germinate the newly emerging seedlings would be killed by cold temperatures and harsh winter conditions.

Since the survival of many woody plants depend on seed propagation, germination must occur at a time when seedlings will survive and grow. Nature has developed a mechanism that prevents fall produced seeds from immediately germinating; it's called dormancy.

Trees and shrubs produce seeds that commonly have an internal type dormancy. Cells deep within the seed are physiologically dormant and cannot become active, even if exposed to warm conditions. Without cellular activity, germination will not occur. Cellular dormancy is overcome by exposing seeds to cool conditions for a designated period of time. This process is called stratification. The length of cold treatment required varies with each plant species; however, 3 months of stratification is quite common for many species.

For seeds to perceive the cold temperatures they must be moist and well aerated. Nature provides these conditions by covering fallen seeds with leaf litter; snow, sleet and rain wets the leaf litter and the seeds stay moist. As the temperature drops the seeds are chilled. After the seeds have received the required period of stratification, the internal cells are activated and germination can occur. Coincidentally, this activation phase occurs in spring as the natural temperatures outdoors are warming.

Home gardeners can stratify large quantities of seeds using natural outdoor conditions. Begin by researching the crop of interest, determining when to collect seeds, the stratification requirements etc. For example, hickories can be collected when they fall to the ground and require at least 90 days stratification. Till an area in the garden and bury the seeds 1.5 inches deep and 2 inches apart. If you're concerned about hungry rodents feasting on the stratifying seed, fabricate a small box or cage from wire and place the seed/soil mixture in the box. Bury the box so the seeds are 1.5 inches deep. Mulch the site well and water thoroughly; nature does the rest. Remove the seeds from the stratification bed in early spring, sowing them in their permanent location. Germination should occur as the soil naturally warms.

In January, try to remember that the falling snow and howling winter winds are serving essential roles in the natural propagation of many woody plant species.

STATE FLOWERS

Alabama-Camellia

Alaska-Forget-me-not

Arizona-Giant Cactus

Arkansas-Apple blossom

California-Golden poppy

Colorado-Columbine

Connecticut-Mountain laurel

Delaware-Peach blossom

Florida-Orange blossom

Georgia-Cherokee rose

Hawaii-Hibiscus

Idaho-Mock orange

Illinois-Blue violet

Indiana-Peony

Iowa-Wild rose

Kansas-Sunflower

Kentucky-Goldenrod

Louisiana-Magnolia

Maine-Pine cone and tassel

Maryland-Black-eyed Susan

Massachusetts-Trailing arbutus

Michigan-Apple blossom

Minnesota-Lady's slipper

Mississippi-Magnolia

Missouri-Hawthorn

Montana-Bitterroot

Nebraska-Goldenrod

Nevada-Sagebrush

New Hampshire-Purple Lilac

New Jersey-Purple violet

New Mexico-Yucca

New York-Rose

North Carolina-Dogwood

North Dakota-Prairie Rose

Ohio-Scarlet carnation

Oklahoma-Mistletoe

Oregon-Oregon grape

Pennsylvania-Mountain Laurel

Rhode Island-Violet

South Carolina-Carolina Jessamine

South Dakota-American Pasqueflower

Tennessee-Iris

Texas-Bluebonnet

Utah-Sego lily

Vermont-Red Clover

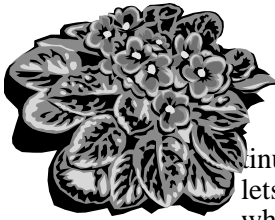
Virginia-American dogwood

Washington-Rhododendron

West Virginia-Rosebay Rhododendron

Wisconsin-Wood Violet

Wyoming-Indian Paintbrush



GROWING AFRICAN VIOLETS

African Violets are the most popular of the continuously flowering houseplants. They are not really violets at all, but members of the larger Gesneriad family, which includes gloxinias (*Sinningia* species) and the lipstick plants (*Aeschyanthus* sp.) African Violets were first discovered by European colonists in Africa in 1892. They were introduced to the United States by a New York florist in 1894. In the drafty homes of the late-eighteenth-century, the plants often took chill and died. African Violets soon earned a reputation as being finicky and difficult to grow.

Many modern African Violets are the result of the hybridization of two species. Most often the parent plants are *Saintpaulia ionantha* and *Saintpaulia confusa*. Modern African Violets come in many different colors, and are available in a wide range of foliage types and sizes as well as a variety of blossom choices.

You need to consider your home growing conditions (heat, humidity, and light) when growing African Violets. If your home is lacking in humidity, choose a soil mix high in organic matter. This mix will hold more water and will not dry out quickly. Choice of container is an important consideration when choosing a potting mixture. Clay pots are porous and tend to lose water to evaporation; plastic pots tend to retain water. The biggest challenge you will face as you attempt to bring your plants into bloom indoors is to provide them with enough light. Place plants in bright, indirect light from a southeast, or west facing window. Plants that are grown in daylight need to be turned a quarter-turn weekly to maintain their symmetrical rosette form. While you can expect reasonable success if you grow African Violets in natural light, artificial light provides more consistent results. Because the duration and intensity can be controlled, plants grow larger, more vigorously, more symmetrical, and bloom regularly. The most common cause of bloom failure is insufficient light.

Proper watering is one of the most important requirements for growing beautiful African Violets. They grow best when watered thoroughly, and then allowed to dry slightly between watering. Most African Violet growers recommend feeding plants with a dilute fertilizer solution at each watering. A standard chemically balanced formula such as 20-20-20 is adequate for most growing conditions.

Some common African Violet problems include Botrytis blight, gray mold blight, crown rot, petiole rot, powdery mildew, cyclamen mites, mealy bugs, and thrips.

For more information on growing African Violets, contact your county extension office or The African Violet Society of North America, Inc. P.O. Box 3609, Beaumont, TX 77704.

FARMER'S MARKETS

MORE THAN
JUST A PLACE
TO SELL
FOOD



There is a growing interest in farmer's markets or community markets. The term "farmers market" is often used since it describes the direct selling to the consumer by the producer. A major advantage of the farmer's market is that it provides an effective marketing system for the producer or farmer. The producers are often part-time, retired, or hobby gardeners looking to supplement their incomes. The farmer's market allows an opportunity for a "mix" of vendors operating side by side in the market. Farmer's markets are much more than just a place to sell food. They are a venue for socializing, where urban residents meet farmers. Consumers benefit by receiving fresh, high quality products and the opportunity to directly interact with the producer. Farmer's markets have figured in the revitalization of downtown districts, bringing people into areas that were once vacant on Saturday mornings. Many people look forward to market day and this interaction at the farmer's market. If you are a grower, get involved in a market near you. There are several farmer's markets in northeast Missouri. Contact your county extension office for the market nearest you.

PRIVATE PESTICIDE APPLICATOR TRAINING TO BE HELD IN KIRKSVILLE

Private Pesticide Applicator Training will be offered January 23 at 7 p.m. at the Kirksville TCRC at 315 S. Franklin Street. Requirements for initial licensing or license recertification by the Missouri Department of Agriculture will be fulfilled at this training session. Anyone who purchases or applies restricted-use pesticides for producing his own agricultural commodity must be licensed as a private pesticide applicator. License recertification can no longer be done by taking a short booklet exam. It can be accomplished by either viewing a video tape at your local University Outreach and Extension Center or attending a training session. Topics to be covered include pest control, pesticide handling and mixing, personal protective equipment, emergency contacts, environmental concerns, and laws and regulations. The training is free and open to anyone wanting to receive a license or renew one. Training sessions will also be offered in Edina on January 21, Kahoka on January 30, Downing on February 4, Memphis on February 5, Bowling Green on February 17 & 20, and Louisiana on February 27. For more information contact your local extension center.

GARDEN TIPS FOR JANUARY

ORNAMENTALS:

- Brush off heavy snow from trees and shrubs
- To reduce injury, allow ice to melt naturally from plants.
- Check stored summer bulbs such as Dahlias, Canna's, and Gladiolus to be sure they are not rotting or drying out.
- Limbs damaged by ice or snow should be pruned off promptly to prevent bark from tearing.
- Sow pansy seeds indoors.

HOUSEPLANTS:

- Wash dust off plant leaves on a regular basis. This allows the leaves to gather light more efficiently and will result in better growth.
- Set pots of humidity-loving house plants on trays filled with pebbles and water.
- Kill mealy bugs on plants by wiping them off with a cotton ball soaked in rubbing alcohol.
- Insecticidal soap sprays can be safely applied to most house plants for the control of many insect pests.
- To clean heavily encrusted clay pots, scrub them with a steel wool pad after they have soaked overnight in a solution consisting of 1 gallon of water, and one cup each of white vinegar and household bleach.

MISCELLANEOUS:

All Month

- Store wood ashes in sealed, fireproof containers. Apply a dusting around lilacs, baby's breath, asters, lilies, and roses in spring. Do not apply to acid-loving plants. Excess ashes may be composted.
- Check fruit trees for evidence of rodent injury to bark.
- Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns as this may injure turf grasses.

Week 1-2

- Christmas tree boughs can be used to mulch garden perennials.
- If you didn't get your bulbs planted before the ground froze, plant them immediately in individual peat pots and place the pots in flats. Set them outside where it is cold and bury the bulbs under thick blankets of leaves. Transplant them into the garden any time weather permits.
- Seed and nursery catalogs arrive. While reviewing garden catalogs, look for plants with improved insect, disease, and drought-tolerance.
- Old Christmas trees can be recycled outdoors as a feeding station for birds. String garlands of peanuts, popcorn, cranberries, and fruits through their boughs.

HAPPY NEW YEAR



January 9-11: Great Plains Vegetable Conference and Trade Show, St. Joseph, MO. Topics include farmers markets, tomatoes, asparagus, no-till pumpkins, beans, peppers etc. For more information contact Dr. Keith Hawxby at 816-279-1691.

January 28-30: Mid-America Fruit Grower's Conference, Olathe, KS. For more information contact Dr. Michele Warmund at 573-882-9632.

February 10: Master Gardener training begins in Kirksville. For more information contact Jennifer Barnes at the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866.

February 17-19: Missouri Small Fruit Conference, Clarion Inn, Springfield, MO. For more information contact Pat Byers at the Southwest Missouri State Fruit Experiment Station at 417-926-4105.

Salt River MGs are planning an educational meeting in Hannibal on April 6, 2003. Watch for more details.



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