

The BACK FENCE

Check out the local MG website: www.muextension.missouri.edu/gkcmg/



Now the gardener is the one who has seen everything ruined so many times that (even as his pain increases with each loss) he comprehends—truly knows—that where there was a garden once, it can be again, or where there never was, there yet can be a garden.

—Henry Mitchell

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Inspiring winterizing

By Majorie Yates, Class of 2006

Being the proverbial procrastinator with a full-time job and many commitments to family and community, I can always find an excuse for not winterizing my gardens. After all, I may be able to enjoy just one more ripe, juicy tomato before the first frost. And the colorful Impatiens greeting me each morning as I prepare the coffee, have become my friends. Surely they can linger for another week.

It’s going to take more than an “I should” to move me from nurturing the last petunia in a pot to moving tomato plants to the yard waste bin. It’s going to take some serious inspiration. So I have developed a Top Ten List of Inspiring Winterizing.

1. Spend a golden, autumn day in the vegetable garden. The way our winters have been quickly descending on us, this could be a last opportunity to soak up the warm sunshine. While you are absorbing the rays and vitamin D, pull out all vegetation. Then cover the ground with aged manure and compost. Later you may also want to add weed barrier. Your friendly earth worms begin to incorporate the manure and compost into your soil. When spring arrives, you can remove the weed barrier and your garden space will be ready for planting.

2. Till organic mulch into or add



organic matter to flower beds. Dig up herbaceous tubers such as cannas and dahlias. It is also a good time to divide and move perennials. Then use a light hand when cleaning out the beds. Sure, you want to remove the most unsightly and sad looking remnants of summer, but leave some flower seed heads and decorative grass stems. These will provide food for the birds and other wild life, as well as interesting visual effects for you to admire when Jack Frost or Suzy Snowflake visit your garden.

3. As you empty and clean all containers, remember to take cuttings of ivy, geraniums and other plants. Unless unhealthy, discarded plants can be placed in the compost pile. Potting soils and compounds can be put into the compost pile or in with the mulch in your cleared out vegetable patch. This is also a good time to discard faded plastic

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pots so you won't be tempted to use them next year. Broken terra cotta and ceramic pots can be cleaned and broken up to provide drainage in next year's containers.

4. If you have not already done so, record this year's knock out plant combinations and successes along with the not-so successful plants and locations. Also, decide now where you might try that new plant combination you observed and jotted down during the last growing season. It is also a good time to mark bare spots in your beds. On a plastic plant label, write the name of the plant, seed or bulb you will insert at this location next year.

5. Each time you shop at garden and variety stores, check the sale rack for garden containers and accessories. If you see something you need or like, buy it now! It probably won't be there when you want it in May. I am still kicking myself because I did not buy the two semi-circular planters I saw last January or the "around the pole pots" I later found when searching for the first items. Twenty stores and 10 months later, I still haven't been able to find either.

6. When purchasing and planting hardy bulbs for spring blooms, save a few for forcing. If you plant and place them in the refrigerator now, they will be ready to grace your table or window sill at Christmas or on Valentine's Day. As you are planting your bulbs outdoors, visualize how you will enjoy



dishes of bright red tulips, regal purple crocus or sunny jonquils on a cold winter afternoon. Check your favorite garden book or the bulb package for directions on forcing.

7. Consider which yard and garden accessories you might leave out all winter. Water features must be emptied, cleaned and stored, but sundials, obelisks, concrete objects, etc. can be left out for visual interest. Sometimes they look even more intriguing with a covering of frost or snow.

8. Sow a package of native Missouri wildflower seeds. Some of these seeds actually germinate during the winter months. This will not provide instant gratification, but the process of watching each seed sprout and grow in its own time will provide several months of wonder. Native Missouri wildflower seeds are available at several nurseries listed in the Grow Native website (www.grownative.org).

9. Make a brush pile for the birds

and other wildlife. Situated near your bird feeders and bird bath, the brush pile provides shelter, and it attracts insects and worms. Instant bird snacks!

10. Plant a winter garden and decorate it with clear lights. The plants will provide some interesting viewing during the day, while the lights add some sparkle to the long winter evenings. When the local nurseries are still open, select a few four-season perennials and shrubs such as rhododendron, hydrangea, winterberry, azalea, prostrate blue spruce, 'Autumn Joy' sedum and ornamental grasses. Plant them where they can be easily seen from a cozy window seat, the table where you enjoy your morning coffee or your computer desk. A concise winter garden planting guide is included in Katherine Whiteside's, *The Way We Garden Now*. She also suggests *The Unsung Season* by Sydney Eddison and *The Garden in Winter*, by Rosemary Verey for detailed plants lists and photographs for inspiration. All are available at the local library or bookstores.

Pull out your most comfortable gardening garb and get ready for some inspiring winterizing. When you get tired, picture yourself on a cold January afternoon wishing you could be digging in the dirt. Then remember the immortal words of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*,

"Oh Wind, If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"



Autumn has arrived: Can you smell it?

By Joy Durland, Class of 2004

Ah, the smell of autumn. The burning leaves, the pumpkin pie cooling, the caramel apples setting up—all these take me back to the shortening days of fall in the Indiana countryside. I'm too old to jump in the big pile of raked leaves, so there's got to be something for me now that I'm in that "adult" stage of my life. I enjoy gardening and now is no time to sit back and rest like the scarecrow. Here's a few tricks or treats for your garden.

How about some late phlox for a cookie scent? Now that's a no calorie snack for your nose. The row of *helianthus salicifolius* (chocolate sunflower) just oozes of a chocolate scent. It obviously takes some forethought in the spring when sowing, but so worth the effort when it's bloom time. Since we are in the sweet mood, a sweet bugbane should emit a clover and honey aroma and Queen Anne's lace would lend a cream soda scent to the mix. If you are a gambler, try a zone 7 Himalayan Honeysuckle (*Leycestria formosa*). It claims to have a berry that tastes like scorched butterscotch or bitter chocolate. Fall always involves caramel, right? How about a tree whose leaves, when dropped to the ground, reminds you of caramel, ginger, or burnt sugar? That would be the katsura tree (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*) with heart shaped leaves and reaching 40 feet- supposedly hardy to zone 4. Sounds like we're building a sundae here with these ingredient scents. We should top it off with a feverfew—a nutty/peppery topping.

Whew. What happened to the good old stand-bys? They are still there—the butterfly bushes (*Buddleia*), witch hazel, mums, mints—an after dinner mint, and roses; they routinely offer the comfort scents we've come to know and smell.

Let's get away from the food scents. Let's look for something that I'm sure your neighbor has never heard of and will make you the envy of the neighborhood after a sniff or two in the crisp cool air. A quick search of the word "fragrant" on the www.waysidegardens.com site gave me several more scented plants and trees to add to my running list. I did not know the Franklin tree (*Franklinia alatamaha*) will sporadically bloom until hard frost for zones 6-8. Magnolia 'Edith Bogue' will also bloom into the early fall for zones 5-9. I thought magnolias were only for the spring! The five-color evergreen shrub (*Osmanthus 'Goshiki'*) also unfurls in the early fall for zones 6-9.

Have I left anything out? Feel free to drop me an email (Joydurland3@juno.com) if you have a great specimen for the fragrant fall garden. I'd love to add it to my collection. I feel that life is good and scents in the garden make life better and more relaxing. I hope you feel the same!



katsura tree, above and below



Book review

The Way We Garden Now,

by Katherine Whiteside

Published in 2007 in the United States by
Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 300 pages

Reviewed by Marjorie Yates, Class of 2006

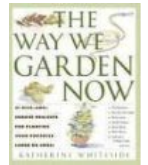
From the first sentence of the preface, Katherine

Whiteside's attractive little garden guide had me hooked. "This is not your mom's garden book," she states. "Nothing against your mom, but just as we have changed the way we arrange our houses, do our work, cook our meals, imagine our families, get our exercise and spend our spare time, we nesters have changed the way America gardens." With years of experience as a gardener and a regular contributor to *House Beautiful*, Whiteside has a wealth of information to share.

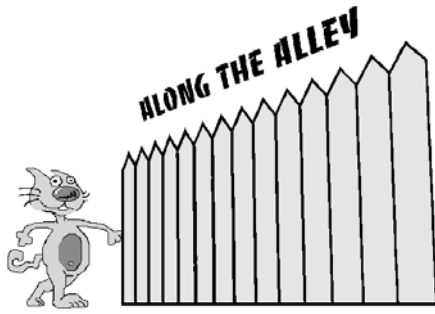
This well organized book includes 41 projects for planning, planting and building. Methods are innovative, cost effective, efficient and environmentally friendly (think IPM and organic). Water color illustrations throughout the book are pleasing to the eye, while the black and white diagrams are easy to follow. Whiteside's writing style is conversational, humorous and easy to understand.

The book is divided into 5 sections of related projects with imaginative titles. While the book is organized around the projects, the index makes it easy to locate specific information about annuals, herbs, perennials, shrubs, trees and vegetables, etc. The five sections and a sampling of their wide range of contents are:

I. "Get Going: Begin with the Basics" includes Making a New Bed, Fertilizing Effectively, Don't get Bugged, and Install a Deer Fence.



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By Joanne Couture, Class of 1991

PLAY "GARDEN JEOPARDY:"

Because this dependable late summer-fall bloomer, native to Canada and the northeastern U.S., was hybridized in England, it is now known by its American and British names. WHAT IS...? (Solution at end of article)

Wow! What a gardener's challenge this year has been. From balmy March to April's killing freeze to summer's searing heat and (for many of us) lack of rain, it's amazing that anything survived. But MGs soldiered on, with occasional losses but also victories.

Celine Porrevecchio ('06) "lost a few roses [out of about 130-150!] but my attitude is, if they don't make it they don't belong in my garden. I do not cover my roses, so this freeze was a good test for them." Among the fallen: 'Abraham Darby' ("a black spot magnet"), 'Queen of the Bourbons,' and 'Papa Meiland' ("a wonderful rose and I would replant it knowing it will require extra help.") Giving up the blooms, she kept the roses deadheaded to help them gain strength for next year. But Celine's vegetable garden was "a disaster." "We spent about \$100 on seed and plants. Between the deer and the ground hog we harvested two peppers. At \$50 each, I will never complain about prices in the grocery stores again."

Peggy Mosbacher ('06) usually buys 'Better Boy,' 'Mountain Spring,' 'Beef Master' (very prolific), and 'Celebrity' tomatoes but got quite a surprise when some plants, apparently mismarked, yielded a "slew of cherry

tomatoes." Yet her abundant crop enabled her to preserve a lot, plus donate extras to the Lutheran church's food pantry and the office staff at NKC's Winnetonka High School, where she taught for twenty-four years (and still substitutes). Other successes: 'Trevi Fountain' pulmonarias, astilbe, daylilies, daisies and a super crop of blackberries. So-so: butterfly bushes (late coming out). Losers: no apple crop because of the late freeze, few hydrangea blooms, and frost-doomed tea roses.

Melody Balentine's ('96) garden "actually did quite well," especially her butterfly garden of echinacea, rudbeckia, and sedum. Her 'Knockout' rose flourished, and a new fountain attracted many birds. Melody mixes "lots of herbs in my cottage garden" with vinca, sun coleus, impatiens, begonias, and "splendid" rose-colored heucheras grown in containers. "Our veggie garden also did pretty well—peppers, okra, lots of wonderful acorn squash." But the tomatoes "were very slow." Like other MGs, she lost some roses "in the weird spring freeze. Other than that, I was fortunate."

Deb Montagna ('01) "had another contributing factor to the death of the perennials besides the late frost.... Last year I put down a heavy layer of organically dyed mulch that matted together to form an impenetrable barrier to water.... We ended up removing all the nasty stuff. By the end of the season, plants were looking stressed. The spring freeze did them in." What Deb lost: 'Gold Flame' spirea, three barberry, petite veronicas, balloon flowers, 'Little Henry' sweetspire, and 'Pieris Japonica.' Replacements included a beautyberry shrub ("the berries are just beginning to turn purple" and attract birds), striped iris, a dwarf red 'Razzle Dazzle' crepe myrtle, and a 'Hot Shot' orange azalea. Plant problems: Deb's 'Becky' Shasta daisy "hasn't lived up to its hype: It gets a

fungus each year, and the leaves turn brown" (a growing complaint against the highly promoted 'Becky'). Both of Deb's 'Jane' magnolias have a "fungus issue, though they are fine otherwise." Her 'PeeGee' hydrangea tree flowered beautifully this spring but was hurt by the summer's heat and wind. "I don't know if I'm going to lose it or not."

Mary Chris Blickhan ('02) has little ones to chase after, so gardening time is limited. Her small veggie garden did well, especially peas, green beans, and broccoli, even a couple of cantaloupe. "The potatoes did fair, and the squirrels got the tomatoes." Disappointments: pumpkins and strawberries. But "it was great for the kids to see where these things came from, not the grocery store." Mary Chris was cheered that her Japanese maple "came back pretty strong" from the April freeze, "even though it looked really bad for a long time." The summer *Back Fence* mentioned how many MGs mourned their Japanese maples.

Ruth Cheshier ('03) is "starting from scratch with the landscape" at her newly constructed house. She planted *Caryopteris x clandonensis* 'Dark Knight' blue mist spirea whose beautiful and prolific flowers attracted a variety of butterflies. (This summer Ruth and family visited the White River Gardens in Indianapolis. It has a two-storey indoor butterfly hatchery and garden with over a hundred varieties of butterflies flitting among flowering shrubs and tropicals. "The experience was a taste of heaven.") Ruth praises her agastache 'Desert Sunrise,' a "hummingbird mint that smells wonderful and truly attracts hummingbirds." Her 'Citrus Splash' shrub roses and 'Fairy White' miniature roses also bloomed beautifully all summer. Disappointments: "My shasta daisies just performed minimally.... my weeping cherry suffered from the freeze and

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struggled all summer. I don't think it will make it over the winter."

Kathy Hoggard ('02) ordered caladiums from "Caladium World" which were "the best in years." A second set of blooms from *eupatorium* 'Gateway' (Joe-Pye Weed) surprised her—never happened before! And her heirloom tomatoes 'Cherokee Purple' and 'Sungold' were "delicious and prolific." However, she's worried about her oak leaf hydrangea; and the hostas that she thought "were goners—the freeze turned them to slime"—are not thriving but are still alive. "One of my weeping Japanese maples has put out below the graft and no longer weeps." Local gardens Kathy admires: "The new landscaping around the Bloch building [new addition] at the Nelson Art Gallery is fabulous. The grove of ginkgo on the front lawn is spectacular when the leaves turn yellow in October. And the giant patch of sedum 'Autumn Joy' along Rockhill Road is astonishing. If you look at the patch up close, you'll see that they're planted in a bed of sand. Wow!"

Georgia Lou Quentin ('06) has a new sun garden after the loss of a pine tree last winter, but that location's success with sun annuals and perennials is just so-so. Otherwise, her begonias "have never been nicer," and the coleus, zinnias, and marigolds, and most geraniums were still going strong in late summer. Boxwoods in front of her house were hit by the April freeze. "A little green has come back but at this point I have no hope."

In my own garden, Park's new "Pink Paint Brush grass, *Melinis nerviglumis* 'Savannah,' lived up to its catalog hype. Though a perennial, from early summer the short perennial thrust up prolific plumes that matured from plum to rose to cream. They also stood up well through several high-wind storms. Amazingly,

in late June up staggered my favorite salvias, 'Reference' and 'Evolution,' thought lost to the freeze. By mid July they were in bloom, enticing their butterfly customers. The smallish but dependable tomato 'Fourth of July' bore fruit in late June and will continue till frost, while the grape tomato 'Juliette' overwhelmed with abundance. Disappointments: Shasta daisy 'Becky' succumbed to disease and summer heat cooked most of the dramatic ornamental cabbage 'Color Up' to a pile of leathery leaves.

Sowings

For you grass fanatics out there, consider the problems besetting Trevor Vance, the Kansas City Royals groundskeeper, with roughly three acres to keep pristine and professional. Not many fans realize that the grass, like the team uniform on a road trip, switches appearances. Vance starts with a bluegrass carpet for the season (which begins in early April), then

switches to a hot weather bermuda mix in mid June while the team is on a long road trip. Because of its sand base, there's great drainage—but it also means frequent watering. Vance said his biggest problem is covering the field with tarp because of rain, causing compaction and encouraging disease.

(Source: *The Kansas City Star*)

And last, for any MGs bored in the downswing of the season, try this trick: Remove a leaf from a showy sedum spectabile such as 'Autumn Joy.' With your finger tips, gently squeeze the leaf base until the upper and lower surfaces begin to part. Then blow it up like a balloon. (FloridaData.com/ref/s/sedu_spe.cfm) It works. Just don't let your neighbor, who thinks of you as "that crazy gardener," catch you doing it.

GARDEN JEOPARDY solution: What is the New England aster (Aster novae-angliae) aka the Michaelmas daisy in England because flowering coincided with the feast of St. Michael (Sept. 29).

GARDOONS

ARDYART



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II. "Get Going: Go Over your Design Dilemmas" includes Build a Dad-io Patio, Plot Some Paths and Hedge your Bets.

III. "Get Growing: Organize your Ornamentals" includes Plant Perennial Pleasures, Slip in Some Shrubs, Please Your Trees and Fashion a Sunflower Folly.

IV. "Keep Growing: Add Edibles in Increments" includes Pick Your Own Salad, Root for Autumn Vegetables and Manage your Potager. (*Potager? It's not in my unabridged dictionary, but based on the project guide, it must be a place to grow vegetables!*)

V. "Keep on Going and Never Stop Growing: Celebrate the Seasons" includes Spring Forward, Bury Summer Treasure, Fall into Bulbs, Welcome Winter and Garden Indoors.

Gardeners of all levels will appreciate the way projects are labeled as small, medium or large. Each project begins with a motivating payoff, a shopping list and a description of all tools needed. Instructions are set up recipe style with numbered steps. Some chapters contain lists of plants suitable for a specific loca-

tion, but there are no pictures to help identify specific flowers, shrubs, etc. Some of the lists contain information about plant hardiness and include Whiteside's helpful comments.

This guide for the modern gardener is available at Mid-Continent Public Library; in fact, they have 14 copies in the system. The purchase price is listed at \$29.95, but I found it on Amazon.com for \$19.77. If you buy two (or any combination of items with a total purchase price of more than \$25), shipping is free. I was so taken with the book that I ordered one for myself and one for my favorite gardening friend.

Katherine Whiteside states she approaches gardening as a creative process rather than a race to the finish line. She writes, "I am a hands-on gardener with a healthy disregard for fancy tools, an aversion to overspending, and no time to recover from extreme exhaustion." *The Way We Garden Now* can be used as a reference book or a simple project guide. Either way, after reading even a few of the lovely pages, you will be ready to heed her advice to "get out there, get going, get growing and have a great garden!"

A "Reel" Man's mower!

By Beth Flemington, Intern, Class of 2006

A raised eyebrow, a smirk – those are the reactions that I usually get when I mention that I bought my husband a reel mower for Fathers' Day. For you youngsters out there, a reel mower is a mechanical mower (no engine or electricity) that operates via real manpower. Most people think it is some kind of cruel joke – like a vacuum for Mothers' Day (although I actually wouldn't mind that). Or maybe they think I'm trying to satisfy my own overdeveloped "eco-guilt" at my poor husband's expense. I am a firm believer that the perfect American lawn is an environmental disaster. I even wrote my final project on the harmful effects of the typical lawn-care regime of overwatering, pesticides, herbicides and gas-powered mowers. So, I guess my critics have a point.

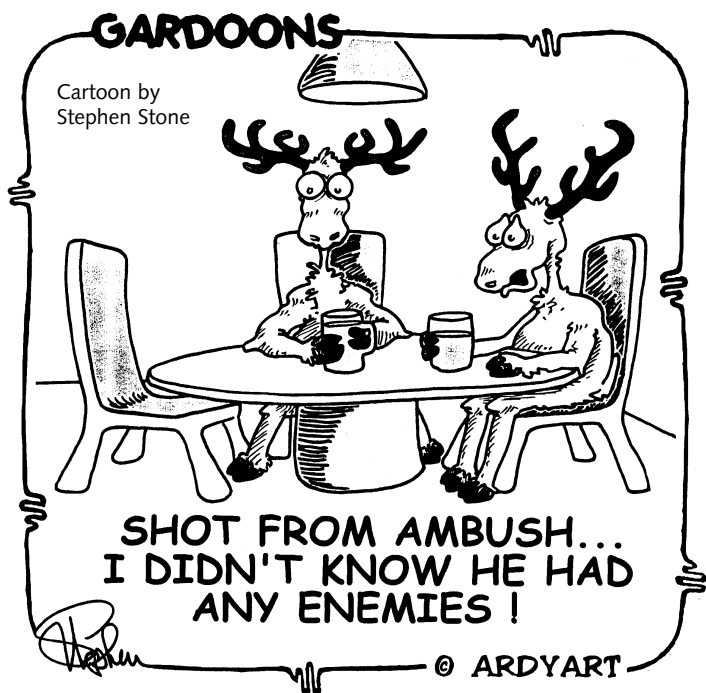
There are some legitimate concerns when switching to a person-powered machine. The common complaints include: "it is hard work," "it takes longer to mow," "it doesn't do so well on tall grass and weeds." These claims do hold some truth, but there are some real benefits also. The reel mower has proven to be an effective, well-made machine; it was easy to assemble and a cinch to use (if you don't let your grass grow too tall). Still, most people think it just isn't a feasible option for them, and a very poor choice for a father's day gift.

So, I will attempt to make my case for the misunderstood push-mower:

- It is harder to push, but we can all use a little more upper body strength. And it means one less trip to the gym.

- It takes a little longer, but you

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Kansas City figs

By Becky Peck, Class of 2003

This summer, The Food Network had their version of a reality show. Several contestants competed to name and make the next Ben and Jerry's ice cream flavor. One of the finalists was an ice cream with figs as its base ingredient. The rich, sweet flavor of a Fig Newton center mixed into ice cream definitely creates palate excitement. Although the fig variety didn't win this time, figs are showing up in menus with increasing frequency. Katherine Odell with *Bon Appetit* did a little checking for me and sent an email with this summary of the current use of figs: "I have spoken with one of our food editors and she has advised me that figs are now widely used in salads, paired with cheeses for a cheese course after dinner, wrapped in prosciutto for an appetizer, poached in a spiced simple syrup and chilled for a dessert compote..."

This spring, I had purchased a Chicago fig just for the fun of it from an online nursery. The description indicated that the fig might die down to the ground level with very cold weather, but would shoot back up the next year from the roots ("root hardy"). Figs certainly can shoot. After I got my little two-foot tree, it grew quickly and put out eight figs. I noticed that when the weather got hot, giving it a good soaking with the garden hose caused it to shoot up another foot. Not quite as fast as my weeds, but a nice level of growth.

At the July Gardeners' Gathering, Alan Branhagan quickly mentioned the figs, such as "Chicago," going into the new Harvest Garden. He asked us if any of us were trying figs. A quick online search showed that Raintree Nursery seems to have the largest number of varieties available. When I sent an email and asked for advice on



growing them in our area, not one, but two Raintree employees popped online and talked to me. "My understanding is that our hardiest figs are hardy to 10 degrees F. However this doesn't mean they die below that. They just die back to the ground and grow back. Also there are several methods where you can put something like chicken wire around your tree in the late fall and protect it with straw. This needs to be removed in early spring. Or you can plant your tree in a large pot and bring it into a garage in late fall. If you live in a colder area, the overwintering breba crop that we rely on here in our region won't overwinter and won't be ripe to eat in August. However, if you have hot summers the crop that starts in the spring and ripens in late fall will ripen for you. If you need more information, email me and I can try to help you. Sam at Raintree Nursery." Then, the next Raintree email came with this bit of advice: "The secret to success in borderline areas is to have REALLY good drainage! Sincerely, Katy."

In Kansas City, if you leave your tree outside, only one (fall) picking of figs is possible each season due to our climate. In warmer areas or if you keep your fig in a pot, both a spring and fall crop are grown.

A call to Alan on Powell's experiences took the information further.

He agreed that good drainage was essential. The "sure fire way" to grow figs here is to put them in a container and put it into the garage or unheated area of the house where it won't freeze. Don't bring it in until all the leaves have fallen off. Alan has a Mission fig in a pot. He doesn't water it in the garage much. It usually starts to leaf out at the end of March or first of April.

Figs are quite cold tolerant. They can take temperatures into the teens. If the plant freezes back, you lose the spring crop, if you keep it from doing that, you will also have the spring crop in addition to the fall one. Heat zone 7 is required to have enough heat to produce and ripen fruit. Alan felt that Chicago was one of the hardier fig varieties. There will be twelve fig trees in the Harvest Garden at Powell.

Other tricks Alan suggested for pulling the fig tree through the winter are to cut some of the roots on the side to pull down the tree for winter. Then, put bags of leaves on top. This works well in the city. At one point, Alan had seen a tree that was twelve feet tall on Oak or Main in downtown Kansas City that this was done to every year. Unfortunately, that tree is no longer there. Another trick is to wrap the tree in insulation that has a shiny side. The leaves pop out over the top of the insulation. This has not worked well for Powell because rodents got in and chewed the insulation back. Putting the tree up against the house or foundation helps too.

Here is a picture of my spring-planted Chicago fig with its guard dog, Maggie. It has no fruit on it as I ate it all as rewards for doing my gardening work! Pick a site with lots of sun and good drainage and order your fig for planting in the spring. Or, look for a fall sale on large pots and set one aside for a fig tree that will spend its winters in your garage or basement so you can have two harvests of the sweetest fruit you can imagine.



illustration by
Laurie Chipman

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Editorial Staff:

J. Braswell
Becky Peck

Layout

Laurie Chipman

Contributors

Marjorie Yates
Joy Durland
Beth Flemington
Joanne Couture
Stephen Stone
Becky Peck

Lala Kumar
Horticulture Specialist

Lal Kumar

University of Missouri, Lincoln University, U.S.
Department of Agriculture & Local University
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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
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can mow any time of day without the worry of annoying your neighbors.

- It doesn't work very well (actually not at all) on zoysia patches, so he often has to resort to the gas-powered

machine for that section. The upside to that claim is, well, that it might motivate me to finally do the tear-out-the-grass-and-make-a-beautiful-perennial-bed plan (I know that's a bit of a stretch).

- It provides an imperfect cut. This is true, but we don't live on the 9th hole putting green, and perfection, in general, is overrated.

- It might be the only piece of sleek German engineering that will ever grace our garage.

- The very best attribute is that my children don't run for the door with their ears covered when he starts to mow. Instead, they continue happily hunting for bugs just a few feet away from the whirring blades. He can hear them laugh and play, all over the quiet whirring of the mower's blades. And that might actually make the push mower one of the best father's day gifts ever!

GARDOONS

cartoon by
Stephen Stone



**SUDDENLY I HAVE THIS
OVERWHELMING DESIRE
FOR HOT DOGS**

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