

GARDEN CHATTER

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The Official Publication of Laclede County Master Gardeners



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The Bodhi Tree



Even if you aren't Buddhist, this sacred fig tree is a noteworthy plant.

Bodhi Day is a holiday celebrated primarily in the Mahayana varieties of Buddhism. As with many holidays, this one has a special connection to a specific plant. The Bodhi Tree or *Ficus religiosa* is also known as the peepal tree and it's under this ancient fig tree that Siddhartha Gautama is said to have achieved enlightenment and became the spiritual leader known as the Buddha.

Sacred Fig Tree

While the tree also has significance to Hinduism and Jainism, on the surface it's a simple deciduous semi evergreen with a wide trunk that can reach heights of nearly a hundred feet tall. As its importance in many Asian religions suggests, it's natural habitat is tropical Asia but in the modern day they are cultivated all around the world in different forms.

Continued on page 12 -

From The President -



I want to thank all of you for giving me the honor of serving as President of this great group. I am looking forward to a great year. Your officers have met together, and we believe that we have many great programs lined up for the year. I hope to get to know many of you – if not all – better. I hope to see all of you at a meeting.

Happy Gardening –

Dixie Krisher

He Is Retiring!

**Sam Is Heading
Out the Door**

And There Is an Open House for Sam Lower

Friday, March 1, 2019

3 to 6 p.m.

At the Extension Office on 186 – D N. Adams Ave

At Our Extension meeting room

Please come and say bye to our retiring friend.

He will be missed!

Salvaging Trees after Heavy Snowfall

The recent snowstorm caused considerable damage to trees in Missouri landscapes. With the accumulation of wet heavy snow, tree leaning occurred, limbs broke, trunks split, and some trees were uprooted. Unlike typical ice storm damage, eastern red cedar and other evergreens with dense foliage were severely damaged by the weight of the snow (**Figure 1**). Bradford pear, eastern cottonwood, river birch, Siberian elm, and silver maple trees were also injured (**Figure 2**). Trees with coarse branching patterns generally experienced little injury, including Ohio buckeye, hickories, black walnut, bur oak, catalpa, ginkgo, horsechestnut, and Kentucky coffeetree.

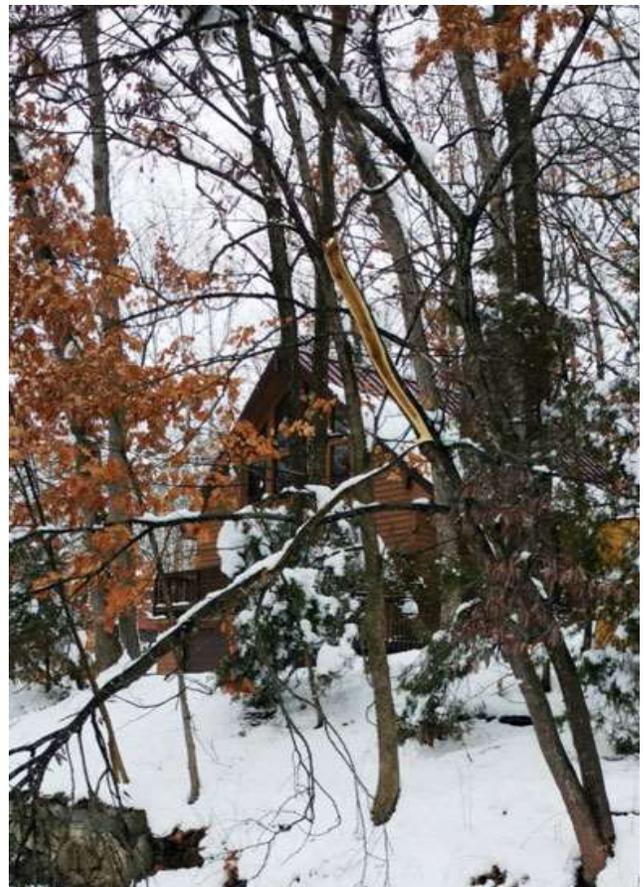


Figure 1 Exposed trunk of Eastern redcedar tree with tree limbs resulting from heavy wet snow.

9. Figure 2 Damage to a tree trunk after sixteen broken inches of snow in early January 2011

Once broken limbs are cleared away, trees can be evaluated for their likelihood of survival. Even though trees may still be structurally sound, the remaining portion may not be aesthetically pleasing when re-growth

occurs in the subsequent growing season, which may necessitate their removal. Tree replacement is a good option when 50% or more of the branches have fallen.

Trees with completely exposed, broken root systems cannot be salvaged. Leaning trees with relatively small trunk diameter (less than 6 inches) without exposed root systems can be brought upright and securely fastened to three or more stakes to support the trunk. With leaning trees, it is difficult to assess underground root injury. These trees may recover during the growing season or can slowly decline and eventually die.

In cases where the tree trunk split near the soil surface, there is a danger of subsequent disease infection. Fungi, such as *Nectria* or *Leucostoma*, can invade exposed wounds of fruit trees after winter injury, resulting in trunk and branch cankers. Ornamental trees can become infected with *Phytophthora* fungi or crown gall bacteria (*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*).

Healthy ornamental trees with sufficient vigor can compartmentalize or wall off the injured tissue and will often produce callus tissue to overgrow the wound. The capacity of trees to compartmentalize wounds or decay varies by species. Although commercial tree wound products are available, they do not prevent further damage and are not recommended.

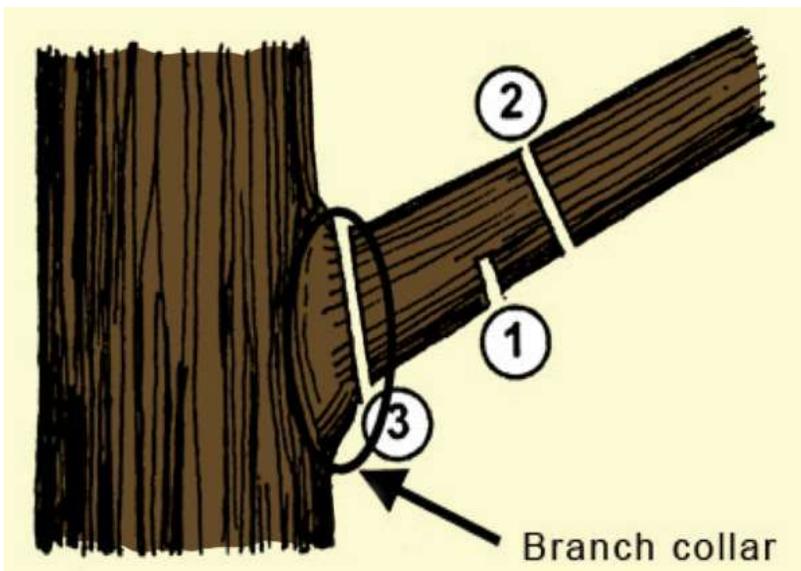


Figure 3 A three cut method for pruning large branches to prevent bark tearing on the main trunk.

Broken branches and split limbs are removed by pruning. Small branches can be pruned back where they attach to a larger-diameter limb, avoiding stub cuts near the break. Large diameter branches should be pruned back to the trunk, using a three-cut

approach to prevent bark tearing and further damage to the tree (**Figure 3**). The first cut is made about one-third of the way through the underside of the limb about four inches from the trunk. The second cut is made beyond the first one (about six inches from the trunk), starting from the

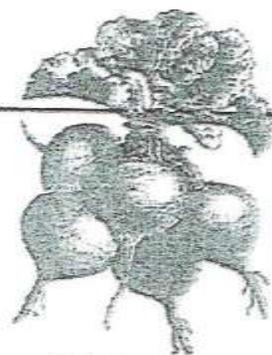
top of the branch and completely removing the branch to remove its weight. The third cut is made nearest the trunk, but outside of the branch collar to promote healing.

After broken limbs are removed, additional tree pruning can improve tree structure. Never "top" a tree or remove all the side branches, leaving only major limbs. This type pruning leads to a proliferation of new branches that quickly become overcrowded. When limbs have narrow crotch angles (less than 45° angles) from the trunk or between two limbs, they are structurally weak and prone to splitting. Trees such as Bradford pears are a good example of those with narrow crotch angles. Limbs with bark inclusions (i.e., bark growing between two branches) should also be removed during pruning.

This next growing season, it will be important to irrigate damaged trees when moisture is deficient. The general rule of thumb is to supplement rainfall to one inch of water per week. A simple rain gauge can be used to estimate the amounts of rainfall and irrigation water applied. Mulching less than four inches deep in a ring around underneath the canopy and less than one inch deep near the trunk will help conserve soil moisture during periods of drought. Two or three light applications of granular nitrogen fertilizer from just before bud swell through June 30 can enhance tree recovery. Slow release fertilizers, such as Osmocote, provide a gradual release of nutrients favorable for growth. The amount of fertilizer applied is generally based on soil test results and tree size, with no more than a total of two pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet during one season.

Although some damaged trees must be removed, this presents an opportunity to re-design older landscapes with sturdy, well-adapted trees at proper spacings. Most tree care tags list their size at maturity and can be used as a guide when planting trees. Avoid placing trees underneath or near power lines, or too close to homes or other structures. Also make sure trees are selected that do not produce messy fruit, (female ginkgo, sweetgum, crabapple), nuts (black walnut), prickly burs (chestnut) or cones if you lack the time to pick them up. Although Bradford pear produces a multitude of beautiful flowers in early spring, these trees are not recommended for planting because of their tendency to produce upright branches with narrow crotch angles. In addition to their structural weakness, Bradford pear trees produce heavy crops of fruit with seeds that easily germinate and produce unwanted, invasive seedlings.

Guide to Companion Vegetable Planting



The effects of companion planting techniques are widely debated among gardeners. While there isn't a lot of scientific evidence to support them, we offer you these companion planting guidelines — gardener to gardener — because, we know you'll find them interesting...and hey, they can't hurt!

Plant	Does Well Near...	Prefers Not To Be Close To
Asparagus	Basil, tomatoes, parsley	Garlic, Onions
Beans	Cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, parsnips, potatoes, strawberries	Beets, onions, kohlrabi
Broccoli	Beets, carrots, celery, cucumbers, kale, lettuce, onions, potatoes, spinach	Beans, tomatoes, strawberries
Cabbage	See "Broccoli."	See "Broccoli."
Carrots	Bush Beans, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, tomatoes, onions, leeks, peppers, leaf lettuce, red radishes	Pole Beans, kohlrabi, strawberries
Corn	Beans, peas, early potatoes, cucumbers, cantaloupes, squash, cabbage, leaf lettuce, red radishes	No known aversions
Cucumbers	Beans, peas, corn, tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, radishes	Potatoes
Eggplants	Beans, peppers	No known aversions
Onions/Garlic	Beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, parsnips, peppers, strawberries, tomatoes, turnips	Beans, peas, asparagus
Peas	Beans, carrots, celery, corn, cucumbers, potatoes, radishes, turnips	Onions, garlic
Peppers	Carrots, eggplants, onions, parsnips, tomatoes	No known aversions
Potatoes	Beans, cabbage, corn, peas, horseradish, eggplant, parsnips, raspberries, rutabagas	Cucumbers, pumpkins, tomatoes, turnips
Pumpkins	Corn, eggplants, radishes	Potatoes
Tomatoes	Asparagus, carrots, celery, cucumbers, onions, peppers	Cabbage, kohlrabi, potatoes

Native Plants Chart

Attract more birds and butterflies by including native plants in your landscape.

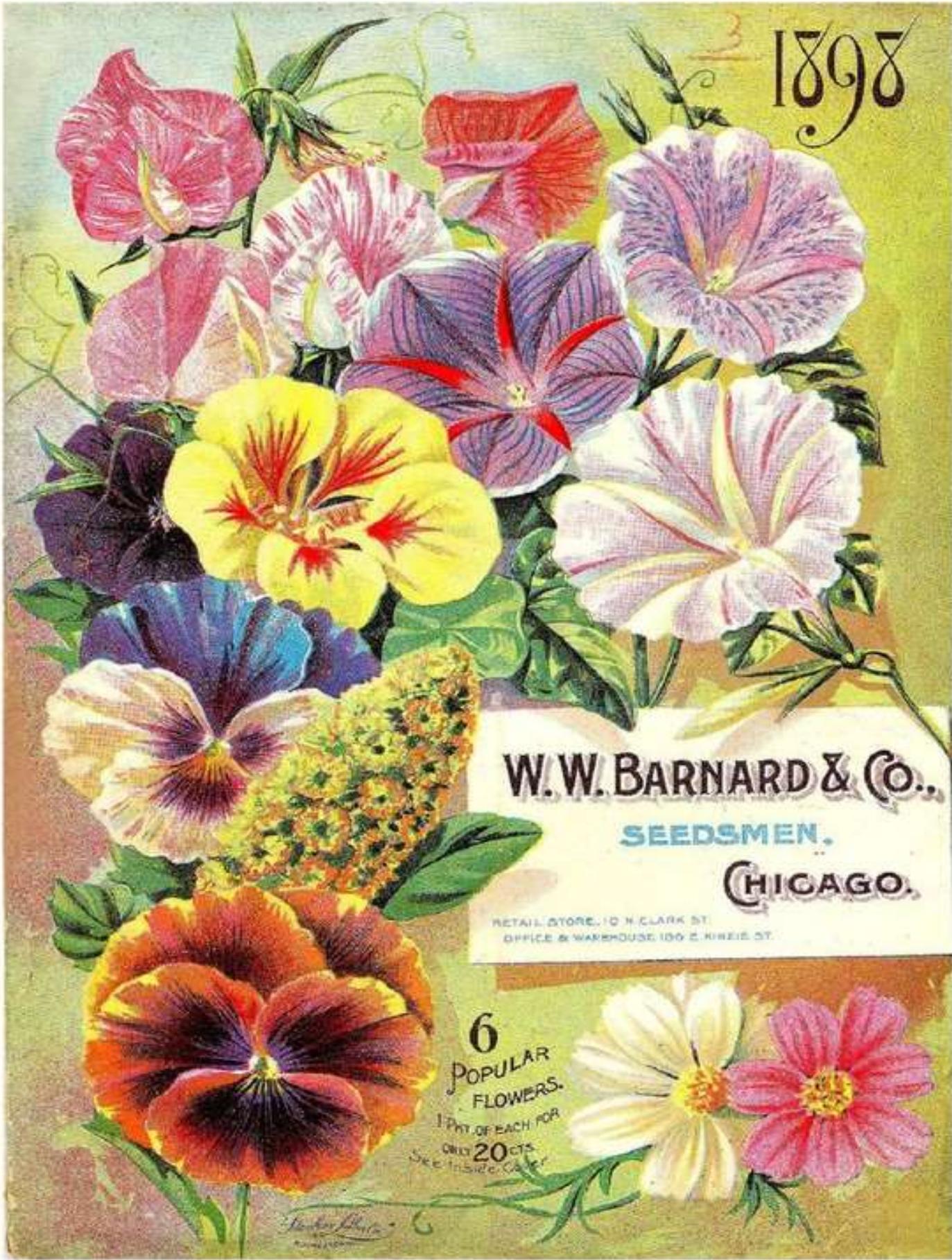
	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	HARDINESS ZONES	FLOWER COLOR	HEIGHT	BLOOM TIME	SOIL MOISTURE
DRY SOILS AND DRY CLIMATES (15"-25" ANNUAL PRECIPITATION)	Leadplant	<i>Amorpha canescens</i>	3-8	Purple	2' - 3'	June-July	D, M
	Butterfly weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	3-10	Orange	2' - 3'	June-Aug.	D, M
	Smooth aster	<i>Aster laevis</i>	4-8	Blue	2' - 4'	Aug.-Oct.	D, M
	Cream false indigo	<i>Baptisia bracteata</i>	4-9	Cream	1' - 2'	May-June	D, M
	Purple prairie clover	<i>Dalea purpurea</i>	3-8	Purple	1' - 2'	July-Aug.	D, M
	Pale purple coneflower	<i>Echinacea pallida</i>	4-8	Purple	3' - 5'	June-July	D, M
	Prairie smoke	<i>Geum triflorum</i>	3-6	Pink	6"	May-June	D, M
	Dotted blazing star	<i>Liatris punctata</i>	3-9	Purple/Pink	1' - 2'	Aug.-Oct.	D, M
	Wild lupine	<i>Lupinus perennis</i>	3-8	Blue	1' - 2'	May-June	D
	Large-flowered beardtongue	<i>Penstemon grandiflorus</i>	3-7	Lavender	2' - 4'	May-June	D
	Showy goldenrod	<i>Solidago speciosa</i>	3-8	Yellow	1' - 3'	Aug.-Sept.	D, M
Bird's-foot violet	<i>Viola pedata</i>	3-9	Blue	6"	Apr.-June	D	
MEDIUM SOILS IN AVERAGE RAINFALL CLIMATES (25"-45" ANNUAL PRECIPITATION)	Nodding pink onion	<i>Allium cernuum</i>	3-8	White/Pink	1' - 2'	July-Aug.	M, Mo
	New England aster	<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	3-7	Blue/Purple	3' - 6'	Aug.-Sept.	M, Mo
	Blue false indigo	<i>Baptisia australis</i>	3-10	Blue	3' - 5'	June-July	M, Mo
	White false indigo	<i>Baptisia lactea</i>	4-9	White	3' - 5'	June-July	M, Mo
	Shooting star	<i>Dodecatheon meadia</i>	4-8	White/Pink	1' - 2'	May-June	M, Mo
	Purple coneflower	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	4-8	Purple	3' - 4'	July-Sept.	M, Mo
	Rattlesnake master	<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>	4-9	White	3' - 5'	June-Aug.	M
	Prairie blazing star	<i>Liatris pycnostachya</i>	3-9	Purple/Pink	3' - 5'	July-Aug.	M, Mo
	Wild quinine	<i>Parthenium integrifolium</i>	4-8	White	3' - 5'	June-Sept.	M, Mo
	Yellow coneflower	<i>Ratibida pinnata</i>	3-9	Yellow	3' - 6'	July-Sept.	M, Mo
	Royal catchfly	<i>Silene regia</i>	4-9	Red	2' - 4'	July-Aug.	M
Stiff goldenrod	<i>Solidago rigida</i>	3-9	Yellow	3' - 5'	Aug.-Sept.	M, Mo	
MOIST SOILS AND MOIST CLIMATES (45"-60" ANNUAL PRECIPITATION)	Wild hyacinth	<i>Camassia scilloides</i>	4-8	White	1' - 2'	May-June	M, Mo
	Tall Joe Pye weed	<i>Eupatorium fistulosum</i>	4-9	Purple/Pink	5' - 8'	Aug.-Sept.	Mo, W
	Queen of the prairie	<i>Filipendula rubra</i>	3-6	Pink	4' - 5'	June-July	M, Mo
	Bottle gentian	<i>Gentiana andrewsii</i>	3-6	Blue	1' - 2'	Aug.-Oct.	Mo, W
	Rose mallow	<i>Hibiscus palustris</i>	4-9	Pink	3' - 6'	July-Sept.	Mo, W
	Dense blazing star	<i>Liatris spicata</i>	4-10	Purple/Pink	3' - 6'	Aug.-Sept.	Mo, W
	Cardinal flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	3-9	Red	2' - 5'	July-Sept.	Mo, W
	Marsh phlox	<i>Phlox glaberrima</i>	4-8	Red/Purple	2' - 4'	June-July	M, Mo
	Sweet black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia subtomentosa</i>	3-9	Yellow	4' - 6'	Aug.-Oct.	M, Mo
	Ohio goldenrod	<i>Solidago ohioensis</i>	4-5	Yellow	3' - 4'	Aug.-Sept.	M, Mo
	Tall ironweed	<i>Vernonia altissima</i>	4-9	Red/Pink	5' - 8'	Aug.-Sept.	Mo, W
Culver's root	<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i>	3-8	White	3' - 6'	July-Aug.	M, Mo	

SOIL MOISTURE KEY

D = Dry (Well-draining sandy and rocky soils), **M** = Medium (Normal garden soils such as loam, sandy loam and clay loam),
Mo = Moist (Soils that stay moist below the surface, but are not boggy; may dry out in late summer),
W = Wet (Soils that are continually moist through the growing season, subject to short periods of spring flooding)

The zones featured in Native Plants Chart should be treated as general guidelines when selecting plants for your garden.

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#SoilYourUndies



Yes, folks, this is a real thing. A Canadian 4-H student developed an ingenious way to check your dirt for signs of life. All you need to do is soil your undies. Grab a new pair of 100-percent white cotton underwear and bury it in the top 6 inches of your soil. Mark the spot and mark your calendar. In two months, dig up your drawers. If they're mostly

gone, your soil is full of hungry critters. If they're in shreds but stained, your soil is leaching nutrients. Feed your soil critters the right plants and lots of organic matter, and they'll do a better job for you, your land, your streams, and your wildlife.

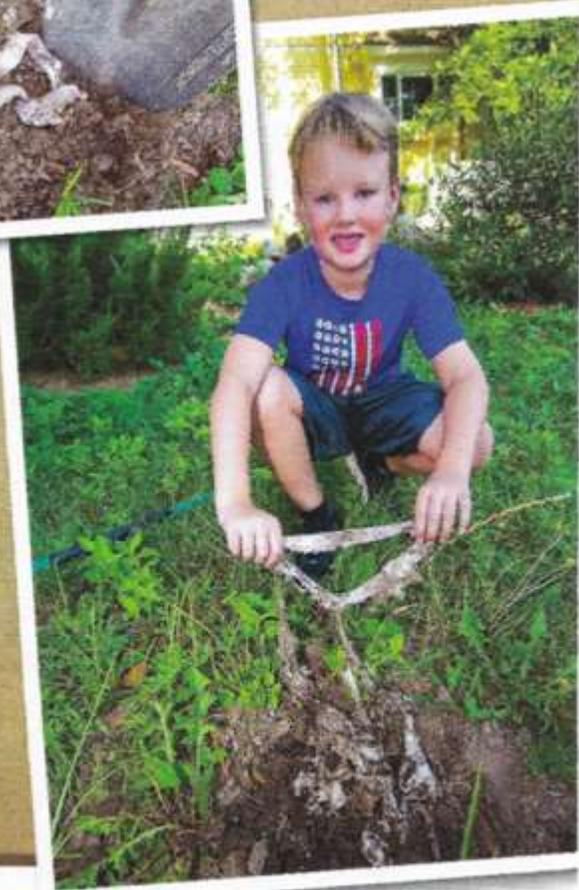


Your soil is full of hungry critters.



Your soil is leaching nutrients.

Two months later:



If You're Serious About Assessment ...

Get in touch with University of Missouri's Soil Health Assessment Center in the College of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources. Soil characterization services include physical, chemical, and biological properties of soil for farmers, landowners, researchers, consulting firms, state agencies, and landscape architects. Visit cafnr.missouri.edu/soil-health.

Expert Tips for Getting the Garden Started

As the season of garden dreaming begins, the Baker Creek team is gearing up for a busy season of shipping seeds. Our expert staff of gardeners would like to share a few pre-season tips to help you ensure a successful and productive gardening year.

Make a Site Assessment

What does your garden look like? Do you garden in raised beds, in sprawling fields, or on a balcony? The layout of your garden can determine which varieties will perform the best. For example, a container garden on your stoop calls for dwarf varieties. A square-foot garden will often perform best with tidy, compact varieties as well as plants that can be trained to grow in a vertical manner.

- Often, drawing a simple map or even a list will help to determine your needs and make for a more successful garden plan. This can also help you to determine how much seed to buy.

Start Succession Planting

Often we are struck with Spring fever and tempted to plant the entire garden plot in one afternoon. While we don't want to stifle this kind of garden excitement, it is important to keep in mind the importance of succession planting. The practice of making small plantings several times throughout the gardening season provides a more consistent supply of fresh produce throughout the season.

- When planning for successions, first consider your personal preferences. If you like to eat salads every day, you may want to consider sowing small, frequent successions of salad fixings like lettuce and radish to supplement longer season- producing crops like peppers and tomatoes, which do not require succession planting.
- Do you plan to process, can or jam your harvest? This will also influence the number of successions that you plant.
- You can also use succession planting to better tap into seasonal weather patterns. For those who like a consistent supply of spinach, but have had issues with mid-summer bolting, consider starting with a cold-tolerant spinach and transition to a more heat-tolerant green like callaloo amaranth for the summer. This clever timing technique will greatly reduce waste and make for better-tasting harvests.

Get Organized

The use of a garden planner or a calendar will help to keep your garden dreams on track. These tools will also help to keep your planting successions organized, so you don't miss a sowing!

- A garden planner like the Clyde's Garden Planner offered on the rareseeds.com website will do the timing and planning for you. This handy tool will guide you on when to sow your crops based on your frost dates. The Clyde's Garden Planner is small and weatherproof, so you can take it out into the garden with you!
- Keeping a notebook or calendar to track weather patterns and planting dates is tremendously helpful in planning and planting in the future. You will always be able to refer back to your previous years' notes to help plan your garden.
- We offer free shipping on all orders within the U.S, Mexico and Canada. So if you need to buy a few times throughout the season to keep up with successions, you no longer need to worry about shipping costs!

• **How To Grow Elderberries From Cuttings**

• **Growing Elderberry**

- Have you ever gathered plump, juicy berries into your apron and whisked them to the kitchen to make medicine, wine, or jam? Yeah, me neither, but I will! I'm no Julie Andrews and I don't (usually) twirl and sing in my kitchen, but gathering food and medicine from my yard does make things feel a little more magical, and some singing may be involved.
- As I mentioned on Instagram a few days ago, my husband and I are preparing to plant an elderberry patch to go with the other culinary and medicinal plants that grow on our homestead. Like the common backyard weed I use to make our "first aid" ointment, elderberry has a variety of benefits and uses.

• **Benefits Of Elderberry**

- Elderberry syrup has long been revered for its ability to support immune function through cold and flu season. One study found that flu patients who received elderberry syrup recovered about four days sooner than those who received a placebo, while another one suggests it may help open nasal passages. (source)
- For just .000001% more effort, you can transform your elderberry syrup into elderberry jam, or you can use the berries to make elderberry tea. I could go on and on, but what you really need to know is this. Word is getting out about elderberry, and that is AWESOME!
- Except when it's not, because all of a sudden elderberry retailers everywhere are out-of-stock due to high demand. Yikes.
- Fortunately, elderberry bushes are both beautiful and easy to grow. Several of you asked for step-by-step instructions on the Instagram thread, so I put together this post for you. It covers the most common questions I've heard about growing elderberries, plus step-by-step instructions for growing elderberries from cuttings.

• **Will Elderberry Thrive Where I Live?**

- Elderberry bushes are very hardy and do well in zones 3-8. You can type in your zip code here to find out what zone you're in. You have just a few more weeks to gather your cuttings, so it's best to get started as soon as possible.

• **How Long Does It Take To Get Berries?**

- This summer you'll get elderflowers, which you can use to make syrup, tea or lemonade. (See step five for details.) And by next summer you'll have juicy elderberries to use in homemade pies, jam, jelly, wine, and syrup – hooray!

• **How to grow elderberry from cuttings Step-By-Step Instructions**

• **Step 1: Find Your Elderberry Bush**

- If you know of a friend or neighbor that has one, ask them if you can get a clipping. If not, chances are good that if you ask around someone will know where to get one. You might post on Facebook to see if anyone in your extended community has a bush they'd be willing to let you take a clipping from.
- If you have difficulty finding elderberry bushes in your area, you can order from Norm's Farms. My husband found Norm's through his permaculture mentor, and ordered three different types of elderberry cuttings to maximize fruitfulness. According to this article, "Cross pollination is not required to produce fruit, but flowers that are cross-pollinated will produce larger fruit—it is beneficial to have two cultivars of elderberry in close proximity." In other words, if you plant two different varieties within 60 feet of each other you increase the fruitfulness of both.

-
- **Worried You Might Pick The Wrong Thing?**
- When I first started looking for elderberries in the wild, I was terrified I'd confuse it with Pokeberry or Water Hemlock, which are poisonous. Fortunately, if you know what to check for they are VERY easy to tell apart.
- Here's the difference between elderberry and water hemlock.
- And here's the difference between elderberry and pokeberry.
- Still worried? Rodger from Norm's farms gave me a tip that makes exposure to pokeberry even less of a concern. Apparently once a winter frost hits, pokeberry stems collapse and disintegrate. They'll grow back later in the spring/summer, but for now they're probably not even out.
- Once you've identified your elderberry bush, you can cross-check it by cutting it down the center. Elderberry has a hard, woody stem with a soft center that Rodger describes as "like styrofoam."
- **Step 2: Gather Your Elderberry Cuttings**
- While the bush is dormant – usually January through March – use pruning shears to cut a 8-9 inch section of elderberry cane. (That's the hard, woody stem I mentioned earlier.) You want the cut to be slanted to improve the canes ability to draw up moisture.
- According to this article, it's best to "focus on stems that are very green in spring, those that are sturdy but thinner than the older canes at the center of the clump . . . Choose ones that are about as big around as your little finger and located on the edges of the thicket."
- Growing elderberry - Gather trimmings now, and by this summer you'll be making elderflower lemonade. Next summer you'll be harvesting for pies, jam & elderberry syrup.
- **Step 3: Encourage Root Growth**
- And by encourage, I don't mean grab your pom poms and cheer. (Though you can totally do that if you want to.)
- There are two main ways to help your trimmings establish roots.
- **WATER METHOD**
- Place your trimmings (cut side down) in a mason jar and add water until they are halfway submerged. Place the jar in a sunny area for 6-8 weeks, changing the water often.
-
- Spritz with water occasionally – elderberry bushes love a humid environment. Roots grown in water are more fragile than ones grown in soil, so wait until they look sturdy before transferring. When they're ready and there is not risk of freezing temperatures, plant the elderberry bush into quality soil – the kind that you'd use in a vegetable garden – with good drainage.
- Place your trimmings (cut side down) in a mason jar and add water until they are halfway submerged. Allow them to soak for 12-24 hours and then transfer them to pots filled with good, organic soil. (Again, the kind you would use in a vegetable garden.) Keep the pots moist so that the cuttings don't dry out. They need a humid environment to encourage growth, so either:
- Place them in a greenhouse



- Place a plastic bag over the top to trap moisture and create a greenhouse-like effect, then set the pot in a sunny area. (Thanks for this tip, Rodger!)
- The trimmings will send out leaves and then grow roots – it can take six to twelve weeks to see significant root growth according to Rodger. Once it reaches the 6-8-week mark, gently tug on the cutting to assess root development. Once they're well established and



there is not risk of freezing temperatures, plant the elderberry cane (roots intact) into the soil.

-
- Grow elderberry from cuttings
- Should I Use A Root Stimulant?
- Most of the experts I've read or talked with say that a root stimulant is not necessary for elderberry bushes, but you can certainly use one to speed things up if you'd like. Most store-bought ones contain synthetic chemicals, but thanks to Hayley of Health Starts In The Kitchen I recently learned that willow water is a natural alternative. She doesn't have a tutorial for making it on her site, but I did find one here.
-
- **Step 4: Planting Your Elderberry Bush**
- "Transplant the elderberry cutting into the landscape in the spring following rooting. Pick a spot that gets full sun or part shade, with humus rich soil and good drainage. Dig a planting hole and place the new elderberry shrub into the soil with the base of the stem level with the soil line." (source)
-
- Elderberry bushes can grow to be 6-8 feet wide



Bodhi trees grow across a wide range of temperature zones, a trait which it owes to the extremely varied altitudes and temperatures of the continent it hails from. It's also especially tolerant of swings in precipitation. In fact the peepal tree is so fast-growing and well adapted to so many environments, that various parts of the world consider it an invasive species. The only reason we don't see more of this species, sometimes called ashwatha trees, in even greater numbers may be because of its reliance on the aganoid wasp as its only naturally occurring pollinator outside of human efforts to cultivate it. These wasps are even often known as fig wasps since they're so closely linked with the bodhi.

If there's one aspect that you could say this fig tree is particular about, it might be the soil it prefers. It can still grow in **numerous different soil types**, but its preferred place to put down roots is in deep sandy loam, or loose soil that contains small amounts of clay. The bodhi also thrives in soil with good drainage.

Growing a Bodhi Tree

Regardless of the meaning the tree may hold for you, peepul trees are still grown by nurseries and are sold as ornamental trees. Sacred fig trees can indeed produce figs, but they're tiny and have questionable color and flavor sometimes reaching only 1 to 2 centimeters in size.

Their vibrant, heart-shaped leaves with a signature tip makes them a **visually pleasing addition to yards**, pots, and even public parks in some countries. For a variety that produces edible figs, the **Ficus carica is your best bet**. Unlike their religiously significant counterpart, this fruiting and flowering tree grows best in specific conditions. Aim to plant fruiting fig trees in Zone 8 or warmer areas, and like the Bodhi these plants also prefer loamy soil with good drainage.

When is Bodhi Day?



According to tradition, Siddhartha adopted an ascetic lifestyle and sat under a common fig tree meditating for years. In doing so, he was able to understand what the root of all suffering was, and was subsequently able to free himself from the world's suffering and gain enlightenment. His title of the Buddha is a direct reference to the bohi tree.

Sadly, the original tree where this event is said to have taken place has since been destroyed. The site remains to the present day and the tree has been replaced many times. However, a cutting from the original did survive destruction and was transplanted in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. The sacred fig that's grown in its place also has spiritual significance and is known as Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi, and the site is a well traveled destination for Buddhists on pilgrimages.

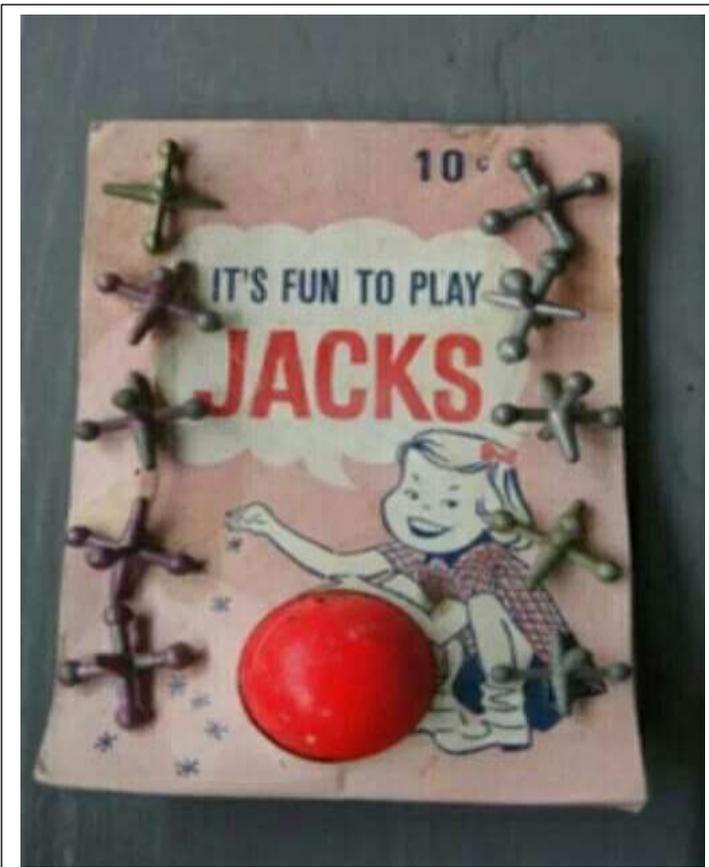
Many Buddhist sects observe Bodhi day in accordance with the Chinese lunar calendar, with the celebration typically falling on the 8th day of the 12th month in that date system. In conventional dates, the holiday falls on January 13. A notable exception is the sect of Zen Buddhism in Japan which maintains the 8 and 12 rule, but uses a calendar many of us in Western culture may be familiar with. Consequently, their observance of Bodhi Day falls on December 8 and is sometimes called Rohatsu. However, both are meant to celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha.

Bodhi Day Celebrations

The holiday is **celebrated in a number of ways**. Though it's largely a day of celebration, it is also a day of remembrance which means that Buddhists and laypeople alike are encouraged to spend the holiday to thoughtfully consider the meaning of enlightenment and the significance of the Buddha. For instance, eating a meal of rice with can be a tradition Buddhists practice on this day as this was said to be the first meal Siddhartha ate to replenish himself after his extended fasting and meditation. Interior spaces are often decorated with lights to symbolize the enlightenment.

Of course, it all comes back to the tree. Similar to the way Christmas trees are adorned in Christian homes, Buddhists may often keep a small potted *Ficus religiosa* indoors. During the holiday, the sacred fig is covered with colorful lights and strings of beads strewn together as a tangible reminder of the Buddhist belief that all things are united. Unlike other festive trees which hold many decorative ornaments, a Bodhi Day tree will often only have three distinct ornaments of specific colors to symbolize the Three Jewels, or the three forms of expression for the awakened mind: the Buddha represented in yellow, the Dharma represented in blue, and the Sangha represented by red.

LOOKING BACK 50+ YEARS AGO



Gardening by Month - March

Monthly Tips and Tasks

Category	Week				Activity
	1	2	3	4	
Houseplants	x	x	x	x	Two handsome houseplants that provide fragrant blossoms indoors this month are the Confederate jasmine (<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>) and Japanese pittosporum (<i>Pittosporum tobira</i>). Both thrive in average home conditions and are easy plants to grow.
	x	x	x	x	As day lengths increase, plants begin new growth. Repot rootbound plants, moving them to containers 2 inches larger in diameter than their current pot. Check for insect activity and apply controls as needed. Leggy plants may be pruned now.
Ornamentals	x	x	x	x	Trees, shrubs and perennials may be planted as soon as they become available at local nurseries.
	x	x	x	x	To control iris borer, clean up and destroy the old foliage before new growth begins.
	x	x	x	x	Fertilize bulbs with a "bulb booster" formulation broadcast over the planting beds. Hose off any granules that stick to the foliage.
	x	x	x	x	Dormant mail order plants should be unwrapped immediately. Keep the roots from drying out, store in a cool protected spot, and plant as soon as conditions allow.
	x	x	x	x	Loosen winter mulches from perennials cautiously. Re-cover plants at night if frost returns. Clean up beds by removing all weeds and dead foliage at this time.
	x	x			Heavy pruning of trees should be complete before growth occurs. Trees should not be pruned while the new leaves are growing.
	x	x			Seeds of hardy annuals such as larkspur, bachelor's buttons, Shirley and California poppies should be direct sown in the garden now.
		x	x	x	Summer and fall blooming perennials should be divided in spring.
			x	x	Ornamental grasses should be cut to the ground just as the new growth begins.
			x	x	Spring bedding plants, such as pansies and toadflax (<i>Linaria</i> sp.), may be planted outdoors now.

Category	Week				Activity
			x	x	Apply a balanced fertilizer such as 6-12-12 to perennial beds when new growth appears.
			x	x	Apply sulfur to the soils around acid-loving plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, hollies and dogwoods. Use a granular formulation at the rate of 1/2 pound per 100 square feet.
				x	Gradually start to pull back mulch from rose bushes.
Lawns	x	x	x	x	Mow lawns low to remove old growth before new growth begins.
		x	x	x	Apply broadleaf herbicides now for control of cool-season perennial and annual weeds. These must not be applied to areas that will be seeded soon.
		x			Apply controls for wild garlic. It will take several years of annual applications for complete control.
			x	x	Thin spots and bare patches in the lawn can be overseeded now.
Vegetables	x	x	x	x	Any root crops such as horseradish, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes, or carrots still in the ground from last year should be harvested before new green top growth appears.
	x	x	x	x	Cultivate weeds and remove the old, dead stalks of last year's growth from the asparagus bed before the new spears emerge.
	x	x	x	x	Fertilize the garden as the soil is being prepared for planting. Unless directed otherwise by a soil test, 1 to 2 pounds of 12-12-12 or an equivalent fertilizer per 100 square feet is usually sufficient.
	x	x			Delay planting if the garden soil is too wet. When a ball of soil crumbles easily after being squeezed together in your hand, it is dry enough to be safely worked.
	x	x			Asparagus and rhubarb roots should be planted as soon as the ground can be worked.
		x	x	x	Plant peas, lettuce, radishes, kohlrabi, mustard greens, collards, turnips, Irish potatoes, spinach and onions (seeds and sets) outdoors.
			x	x	Plant beets, carrots, parsley and parsnip seeds outdoors.
			x	x	Set out broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, Chinese cabbage and cauliflower transplants into the garden.
				x	Start seeds of tomatoes, peppers and eggplants indoors.
Fruits	x	x	x	x	Gradually remove mulch from strawberries as the weather begins to warm.

Category	Week				Activity
	x	x	x		Continue pruning apple trees. Burn or destroy all prunings to minimize insect or disease occurrence.
	x	x			Continue pruning grapes. Bleeding causes no injury to the vines. Tie vines to the trellis before the buds swell to prevent bud injury and crop loss.
		x			Cleft and splice grafting can be done now. This must be completed before rootstocks break dormancy.
			x	x	Aphids begin to hatch on fruit trees as the buds begin to open.
			x	x	Apply dormant oil sprays now. Choose a dry day when freezing temperatures are not expected.
			x	x	Spray peach trees with a fungicide for the control of peach leaf curl disease.
				x	Mulch all bramble fruits for weed control.
				x	Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
Miscellaneous	x				Red maples begin to bloom.
	x				Set up nesting boxes for bluebirds.
	x				Watch for the harbinger of spring (<i>Erigenia bulbosa</i>) blooming in rich wooded areas.
		x	x	x	Spicebush is blooming in moist woodlands.
		x			Raise purple martin houses this week.
			x		Purple martins return to the St. Louis area.
				x	The white flowers of serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier</i> sp.) and wild plum (<i>Prunus americana</i>) are showy in wooded areas.
				x	Watch for the fuzzy blooms of the pussy willow (<i>Salix</i> sp.).

It Is Only Weeks Away –

Spring



March Pests and Problems

Spray to control lawn weeds such as chickweed and dandelion now when they are growing actively.



Winter Annual Weeds

Common chickweed (*Stellaria media*)--also called, *Alsine media*, starwort, starweed, bindweed, winterweed, satin flower, tongue-grass--can be a pest of the lawn or garden



Winter Annual Weeds

Henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*)--also called, dead nettle, blind nettle, bee nettle--can be a pest of the lawn or garden



Perennial Broadleaf Weeds in Lawns

Dandelion in bloom, a common perennial weed in lawns and gardens

IMPORTANT

Apply crabgrass preventor between mid-March to mid-April or about the time forsythia is blooming. If you decide to use a weed and feed product, do not use a fertilizer high in nitrogen.

You've probably never heard of 'Black Apples' but they grow in China*

SHARE TWEET EMAIL



Black Diamond Apples growing in the mountains of Tibet, China. PHOTO COURTESY: TENCENTNEWS

Apples are commonly grown at orchards around the world and come red, green, yellow or a mixture of the three colors, but they can apparently grow dark purple, almost black, as well.

These rare apples are called “Black Diamond” and they are only grown in the mountains of Tibet, according to the [Oddity Central](#).

Black Diamond apples are a breed of Hua Niu apples (also known as Chinese Red Delicious) that get their unique dark purple color from the geographical conditions of Nyingchi, in the Tibet Autonomous Region of China.

The Chinese company Dandong Tianluo Sheng Nong E-Commerce Trade Ltd has set up a 50-hectare orchard at an elevation of 3,100 meters above sea level, making it the ideal place to grow this mysterious fruit.

The main cause of why these fruits turn dark are the notable temperature differences between day and night, and the intense sunlight and ultraviolet light which causes their skin to go from the characteristic deep red to dark purple.



An apple grower picks ‘Black Diamond Apples’ from his orchard.

“Black Diamond apples are purple, gleaming, and have a nice texture. From the outside, the apples almost look like candle wax and are as beautiful as a diamond. That is how they got their name,” said Ms Yu Wenxin, Market Director at Dandong Tianluo Sheng Nong E-Commerce Trade Ltd.

FFC creating awareness about apple farming

Only selected high-end supermarkets in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are selling these rare apples in gift packages of 6 to 8 fruits. According to Chinese Language [Tencent News](#), the price of Black Diamond apples is around 50 yuan per fruit.

“Because the Chinese production is limited, and distribution costs are rather high, the highly priced black diamond apples belong to the high-end segment of the market,” Yu Wenxin said. “We mostly sell them in gift packages of 6 or 8 apples. Last year, small quantities of our apples were sold to high-end supermarkets in first-tier cities in China, where they were received very well.”



A customer buys 'Black Diamond Apples' in a supermarket in China.

Its issues like the ones mentioned above, coupled with the special geographical conditions required to grow Black Diamond apples that make fruit growers reluctant to adopt this breed.

Black Diamond apples are a bit of a mystery, even among experienced apple growers, as apart from the handful of sources listed in this article, there really isn't much information about them online.

While fruit growers online claim that the pictures of the mysterious "Black Diamond apples" circulating online have been enhanced to make the fruits darker than they really are. But until someone gets their hands on these apples, there's really no way to know who's right.

A high price

Because Black Diamond apples are so rare, farmers and companies that grow this fruit are able to hike up their prices. Instead of selling their produce at local markets or grocery stores across the globe, they have chosen to sell their black apples in high-end grocery stores in Shenzhen, Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou.

Customers can buy these apples in gift baskets that include anything from 6 to 8 apples and will cost you just over \$42 for the whole pack. However, these apples may not be around for much longer...

Exclusive fruits

Black apples have not made their way into everyday society, which means that farmers cannot mass produce this fruit. Instead, they have to cultivate small crops in harsh conditions, which can be extremely expensive.

This coupled with the fact that only a small portion of Black Diamond apples pass quality control means that they have to hike up the price to make a profit. This has given them a reputation, and they are now known as exclusive fruits for those who can shell out \$7 for a single apple. After all, you can get a whole pound of apples in the United States for less than \$2.

***While this store features the China connection it is really an Arkansas apple and yours truly was brought a bag of them that had been grown locally by the Glenn Raef family here. Be it noted it is the best cooking apple I have ever cooked – It is way better than the Granny Smith which has always been the number one cooking apple. If you were to call Glenn next fall he might find you one or two. It is not a good eating apple raw but boy what a cooking apple. – Thanks, Glenn, for putting me on to it.**

Top Tools For a Perfect Lawn



Whether it's trimming back an unruly lawn or getting enough air to down to the roots of your grass, these tools will give you a winning lawn.

Maintaining the perfect lawn is no easy task. In fact, most homeowners are surprised at the upkeep required in order to have a lush lawn year after year. However, like with any home maintenance, having the right tools makes the job much easier. Here are the must have tools when it comes maintaining a healthy lawn that thrives.

Rakes



Picture a rake in your mind. This tool seems pretty simple and universal, but there are actually several different kinds of rakes that serve different purposes. A shrub rake is used to spread mulch

into tight spaces and has a long narrow end with bent tines. This means shrub rakes can be used to clear debris very close to base of plants without raking or disturbing large areas. On the other end of the spectrum is the bow rake, which is often used in the garden to redistribute soil. Bow rakes have short, wide heads with spiky tines on the end and handles similar to a push broom.

When it comes to choosing the right rake for lawn care, the leaf rake is a must. Leaf rakes have triangular heads with curved tines. Not only will you use it to [clean up in the fall](#), but a leaf rake is also a handy tool for raking up grass following your weekly spring mow.

Shovels

There's also more than meets the eye with the simple shovel, but to be perfectly honest a shovel of any kind is unlikely to see much use in your standard lawn care routine. Unless you are replanting grass or prepping a lawn for the first time, your shovel will get more use in the garden or flower beds. While it's nice to have one around when it comes to filling gopher holes that may mar your grass, a spade is the tool that really comes in handy when it's time to cut sod or edge your lawn.

Edger



Speaking of edging, an edger is a major help when it comes to beautifying the lawn. Grass has a mind of its own and it doesn't matter how many times you try to train it, it will always reach into the space next door, whether that is a flower bed or rock path. An edger [creates an appealing boundary line](#) for your lawn and cuts through the roots to discourage their rambling ways.

For small spaces, an edger that looks similar to the flat edge of a spade is an adequate tool for the job. It has a handle as well as a spot to put your feet as you apply pressure to drive it into the ground. For another manual option, you can get a rotary edger which is basically a wheel with a second wheel

of claws next to it. As you push the rotary edger, the claws dig up the soil. For a power tool option you can get a fully electric edger that does the job while you walk behind it.

Even if it seems excessive, a good gardening habit to start is to edge your lawn each time you mow. More frequent edging means the task will ultimately be easier as your blade can pass deeper and more smoothly without needing to make multiple passes with your tool.

Leaf Blower

Leaf blowers can be gas or electric and make the job of leaf removal a whole lot easier. If you have large trees that create a blanket of leaves on your lawn, a leaf blower will help you maintain lawn health without hours of raking.

Aerator



The roots of your lawn needs air, water, and nutrients to grow healthy and strong. An aerator digs into the soil and pulls out plugs, which decreases the compaction of the soil. The holes left in place of the plugs allow water, air, and nutrients to get down to the roots. There are manual and electric models of aerators. In fact, you could just use a pitchfork for the same affect. However, that is time consuming and physically exhausting so if you have a large lawn, consider renting an aerator every year or two. Maybe share the cost with a neighbor and aerate both lawns at the same time.

Mowers

Anyone who has maintained a lawn is familiar with lawn mowers. The only thing you need to decide is whether to get an electric model or a gas model. Of course, you could get an entirely manual model for a small lawn or a riding lawn mower for a very large lawn. Regardless, you will want to maintain your mower annually and throughout the season to ensure proper function for your lawn.

Seed Spreader



A seed spreader helps you evenly disperse seeds and pellets to your lawn. There are many different varieties that could meet your needs. For the occasional overseeding, a handheld unit might do the job. However, if you have a larger space, a push seed spreader is much more convenient as well as accurate in its distribution of the seeds.

Dethatcher

Dethatching the lawn is another way to allow your lawn to breathe. There are specialty tools made for this purpose, but any tool that scrapes away the dead, compacted grass will work. There is a dethatcher that looks like a rake made for this task. Then there is a rotary style and also power models that would suit the needs of a larger lawn.

Weed Eater

Another convenient tool to have around to help maintain your lawn is [a weed eater, or trimmer](#). These machines offer a fast rotating string that cuts through grass and weeds. Available in gas or electric models, a trimmer helps reign in unruly lawns.

When it comes to lawn maintenance having the right tools is a major part of your success. If you are just starting out, focus on



The Apron

I don't think most kids today know what an apron is. The principle use of Mom's or Grandma's apron was to protect the dress underneath because she only had a few. It was also because it was easier to wash aprons than dresses and aprons used less material. But along with that.....

It served as a potholder for removing hot pans from the oven.

It was wonderful for drying children's tears, and on occasion was even used for cleaning out dirty ears.

From the chicken coop, the apron was used for carrying eggs, fussy chicks, and sometimes half-hatched eggs to be finished in the warming oven.

When company came, those aprons were ideal hiding places for shy kids.

And when the weather was cold, she wrapped it around her arms.

Those big old aprons wiped many a perspiring brow, bent over the hot wood stove.

Chips and kindling wood were brought into the kitchen in that apron.

From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables. After the peas had been shelled, it carried out the hulls.

In the fall, the apron was used to bring in apples that had fallen from the trees.

When unexpected company drove up the road, it was surprising how much furniture that old apron could dust in a matter of seconds.

When dinner was ready, she walked out onto the porch, waved her apron, and the men folk knew it was time to come in from the fields to dinner.

It will be a long time before someone invents something that will replace that 'old-time apron' that served so many purposes.

REMEMBER:

Mom's and Grandma's used to set hot baked apple pies on the window sill to cool using that ole apron.

But sadly, today their granddaughters set theirs on the kitchen counter to thaw.

Today, they would go crazy now trying to figure out how many germs were on that apron.

I well remember my grandmas' apron. I don't know who wrote this, but they did a dang great job.

They left one thing out.

I can remember my grandma slipping over to the cabinet first thing in the morning.

She would take out her little Birch paddle and begin putting a dip of snuff in that front lip.

Then she would take the corner of her apron and wipe each corner of her mouth.

Now, she was set for the day

I don't think I ever caught anything from an apron - but love!

Send this to those who would know (and love) the story about aprons.

Recipe of the Month of MARCH

Slow Cooker Corned Beef and Cabbage

This corned beef and cabbage recipe is a traditional favorite that's sure to act as a welcome reminder of home-cooked meals growing up.



What You'll Need

- 4 large carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks
- 4 large potatoes, peeled and cut into quarters
- 1 (3- to 4-pound) corned beef brisket (seasoning packet included)
- 1 1/2 cups apple juice (see Note)
- 1 green cabbage, cut into 1-inch wedges
- Salt to taste
- Black pepper to taste

What to Do

1. In a 5-quart or larger slow cooker, place carrots and potatoes. Place corned beef on top and sprinkle with seasoning packet. Add apple juice.
2. Cover and cook on LOW 6 hours. Add cabbage and continue cooking another 2 to 3 hours, or until beef and cabbage are tender. Remove beef, potatoes, and vegetables to a platter and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

Notes - If you do not wish to have a sweet tasting corned beef, the Test Kitchen recommends substituting water in place of the apple juice.



Tomatoes – Tomatoes - Tomatoes

Any time you start talking about gardening the conversation always begins and/or leads to tomatoes. It seems the true goal of any gardener is to have a ripe tomato before the Fourth of July. I will say this is it possible to do but in many instances it's very difficult to do because of the length of time it takes to grow tomato. Some of your 55 and 60 day tomatoes make by that date, but not very often.

First off, the tomato has no business being planted before May 15. That is when the ground begins to warm up sufficiently to help that tomato plant grow, blossom, and produce. Any time before that your tomato is just going to sit in the ground and take up space. However I will tell you that the lack of are the stream cold weather this spring has made this year and exception rather than the rule. So I along with many others already have a tomato of almost baseball size that will be right before July 4.

The following is from the University of Virginia and their definitions and suggestions on growing tomatoes. The one that is of most interest you'll find towards the end and that talks about the setting and dropping of blossoms. This has mainly to do with the temperatures of the area and that time of year.

Based on plant characteristics -

- (a) **Midget, patio, or dwarf** tomato varieties have very compact vines best grown in hanging baskets or other containers. The tomatoes produced may be, but are not necessarily, the cherry type (1 inch diameter or less). Some produce larger fruit. These plants are usually short-lived, producing their crop quickly and for a short period.
- (b) **Compact or determinate** tomato plants refers to the plant habit of growing to a certain size, setting fruit, and then declining. Most of the early ripening tomato varieties are determinate and will not produce tomatoes throughout the normal growing year.
- (c) **Indeterminate** tomato plants are the opposite of the determinate types. The vines continue to grow until frost or disease kills them. These are the standard, all-summer tomatoes that most people like to grow. They require support of some kind for best results, since otherwise the fruit would be in contact with the soil, thus susceptible to rot.

Based on fruit characteristics -

- (a) **Cherry** tomatoes have small, cherry-sized (or a little larger) fruits often used in salads. Plants of cherry tomatoes range from dwarf (Tiny Tim) to seven-footers (Sweet 100). One standard cherry tomato plant is usually sufficient for a family, since they generally produce abundantly.

(b) **Beefsteak** type tomatoes are large-fruited types, producing a tomato slice that easily covers a sandwich, the whole fruit weighing as much as two pounds or more. These are usually late to ripen, so plant some standard-sized or early tomatoes for longest harvest.

(c) **Paste** tomatoes have pear-shaped fruits with very meaty interiors and few seeds. They are less juicy than standard tomatoes and are without a sizeable central core. Paste tomatoes are a favorite for canning since they don't have to be cut up and since they are so meaty.

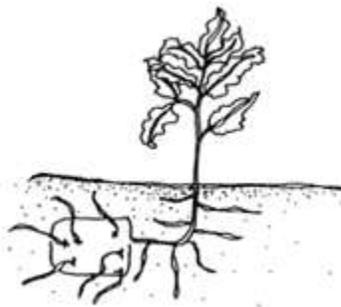
(d) **Color** of tomatoes include orange, yellow, pink, or striped, and often the only way to get a specific one is by growing your own. Most are heritage varieties obtained through seed-saver groups. Tests have shown that there is no relationship between color and acidity of tomatoes.

(e) **Winter storage tomatoes** are a relatively new item for gardeners. The plants are set out later in the season than most tomatoes and fruit are harvested partially ripe. If properly stored, they will stay fresh for twelve weeks or more. While the flavor does not equal that of summer vine-ripened tomatoes, many people prefer them to grocery store tomatoes in winter. One of the most common ways to store tomatoes for the winter is to wrap each individual tomato in newsprint, packing them gently in a cardboard box and setting in a closet or dark area. You will find that you will have ripe tomatoes all the way to New Year's. But be sure and check in from time to time for some will go bad.

Planting Tomatoes

Tomato plants may be started indoors from seed or transplants may be purchased. If starting your own plants, use a light soil mix and give the plants plenty of light. Tall, spindly transplants are usually caused by low light levels in the home. Unless you have a sunny, south-facing window, supplemental light will probably be necessary. The seeds are sown six to eight weeks before the last frost date in your area. A few weeks before transplanting time, harden-off indoor-grown plants by exposing them to an increasing number of hours outdoors each day. Bring plants in if there is danger of frost. A few varieties of tomato (the sub-arctics) are bred to grow well in low spring temperatures; however, these are rarely available in the usual markets and ordinarily must be grown from seed.

When you are ready to put home-grown or purchased plants into the ground, select stocky transplants about 6 to 10 inches tall. Set tomato transplants in the ground covering the stems so that only two or three sets of true leaves are exposed. Horizontal planting of tomato plants is an effective way to make plants grow stronger, especially leggy ones. Roots will form along the buried portion of the stem, giving better growth and less chance of plant injury from a too-weak stem. Do not remove the containers if they are peat or paper pots, but open or tear off one side to allow roots to get a good start. If non-biodegradable containers are used, knock the plants out of the pots before transplanting, and loosen the roots somewhat. Press the soil firmly around the transplant so that a slight depression is formed for holding water. Pour approximately one pint of starter solution or dilute fish emulsion around each plant to wash the soil around the roots.



Plants should be staked or caged. Though it requires more initial work, this makes caring for tomatoes easier than letting them sprawl. Since they are off the ground, fruit rots are reduced, spraying is easier and may be required less, and harvesting is much less work. For staking, space them 24 inches apart in rows 3 feet apart. Use wooden stakes 6 feet long and 1 1/2 or 2 inches wide. Drive them 1 foot into the soil about 4 to 6 inches from the plant soon after transplanting. Attach heavy twine or strips of cloth to the stakes every 10 inches. As

the plants grow, pull the stems toward the stakes and tie loosely. Prune staked tomatoes to either one or two main stems. At the junction of each leaf and the first main stem a new shoot will develop. If plants are trained to two stems, choose one of these shoots, normally at the first or second leaf-stem junction, for the second main stem. Remove all other shoots, called suckers, weekly to keep the plant to these two main stems. Pinch shoots off with your fingers. Tomato plants may also be set along a fence or trellis and tied and pruned in a manner similar to that used with stakes.



Growing tomatoes in wire cages is one method popular among gardeners because of its simplicity. Cage-growing allows the tomato plant to grow in its natural manner, but keeps the fruit and leaves off the ground. Using wire cages requires a large initial expenditure and a large storage area, but many gardeners feel that the freedom from pruning and staking is worth it. The cages, if heavy duty, will last many years. Be sure to get fencing with at least 6 inch spacing between wires so that you can get your hand inside to harvest the tomatoes. If tomato plants in

wire cages are pruned at all, once is enough; prune to three or four main stems. Wire-cage tomatoes develop a heavy foliage cover, reducing sunscald on fruits and giving more leeway when bottom leaves become blighted and have to be removed. Many staked plants are nearly naked by late summer. Caged plants are less prone to the spread of disease from plant handling, since they do not have open wounds and must be handled less frequently than staked plants. However, it helps to space the plants somewhat further apart (3 feet is good) to allow good air circulation between plants; humidity is higher because of the foliage density, and diseases, such as late blight, spread rapidly in humid situations. If well-nourished and cared for, caged tomatoes can produce exceptional harvests and make up for the extra space with high production. This type of culture is especially suited to indeterminate varieties.



Causes of Poor Tomato Fruit Set

Fruit Set. The transition of a flower into a young fruit is very sensitive to several environmental factors over which gardeners have some control. Following is a brief discussion of some of the causes of poor tomato fruit set with particular emphasis on urban gardening.

Temperature and Humidity. Daytime temperatures above 90°F and night temperatures above 70°F result in reduced flowering and fruit set. There is considerable evidence that night temperature is the critical factor in setting tomato fruit, the optimal range being 59° to 68°F. With night temperatures much below or above this critical range, fruiting is reduced or absent. Low temperatures reduce the production and viability of pollen. High temperature, especially if accompanied by low humidity and moisture, hinders fruit set through failure in pollination and/or fertilization.

[Tomato plants can drop their blossoms for any of the following reasons: too high or too low temperatures, lack of pollinating insects, too much or too little nitrogen, too much or too little humidity, lack of water, or stress from insect or disease damage. Try an artist's brush to see if you can pollinate the blossoms yourself by brushing pollen on the flowers. If that doesn't help I bet it's related to your local weather conditions.](#)

Plant Nutrition. Reduced fruiting may result from either stunted or excessively vigorous vegetative growth. Injury from disease and insects, especially sucking insects such as aphids and thrips, can severely check growth. Inadequate moisture and/or available nitrogen can hinder growth and flower production. Conversely, abundant water and nitrogen can stimulate rapid vegetative growth with low levels of carbohydrates remaining for the normal processes involved in fruit set.

Garden sites located on heavy subsoils are infertile and poorly drained. Gardeners create faulty nutrition by either not applying any fertilizer or by adding too much. In addition, water for irrigation is often not available during times of drought.

Photoperiod (length of day). Although the tomato plant can flower and fruit at any daylength (day neutral plant), fruit set has been shown to be retarded under continuous light. Thus, tomato fruit set may be reduced under the continuous illumination characteristic of some environments.

CULTURAL: Blossom-end rot, irregular soil moisture or calcium deficiency; poor color, yellow spots or large whitish-gray spots, sunscald from lack of foliage cover; leaf roll, physiological condition often found in pruned tomatoes; fruit cracking, irregular soil moisture; black walnut wilt, caused by roots of tomato plants coming in contact with toxin from black walnut tree.

HARVEST: Harvest fully vine-ripened but still firm. Picked tomatoes should be placed in shade. Light is not necessary for ripening immature tomatoes but it is necessary for color development. Some green tomatoes may be picked before the first killing frost and stored in a cool (55°F), moist (90% relative humidity) place. When desired, ripen fruits at 70°F.

Heirloom Tomatoes

Heirloom tomato varieties are treasures from the past. Chosen for outstanding flavor, color, or overall performance, they can be grown in your garden, but probably never found in a supermarket.

With the change in trends of food production after WWII, there came a need to develop tomatoes that could be harvested green, withstand shipping, etc., and maintain a good, uniform appearance. These qualities were achieved through hybridizing. The sacrifice of this breeding was flavor - which, in recent years, scientists have been trying to re-introduce. Though hybridized tomatoes have their place, heirloom tomatoes definitely surpass them in one general characteristic - their taste.

Here are some common heirloom tomato varieties you may want to try:

Big Rainbow - This very large tomato is a gold/red bicolor, and is described as being meaty and mild-flavored.

Brandywine - This large beefsteak variety tomato is legendary for its "exceptionally rich, succulent flavor" and "old-fashioned tomato taste." An Amish heirloom, it is solid pink-red.

Green Zebra - This green and yellow tomato has "a sweet zingy flavor" and is "as sweet as an apple." It is beautiful when served with yellow, red, orange and pink varieties.

Yellow Pear - This variety produces an endless supply of yellow, bite-sized, pear-shaped fruit that have a mild flavor.