

From The Ground Up

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Hollyhocks



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By: Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

My mom has always grown hollyhocks. She told me about the summers she and her sister spent at their grandmother's farm as kids. Surrounding the vegetable garden was a fence lined with red-flowered hollyhocks. Since then she has had a great fondness for the flowers. Mom smiled as she told me about making 'hollyhock dolls' as a child; a craft she passed on to me and my sisters. Hollyhock dolls are made by using an unopened flower bud for the head. The 'head' is then attached to the stem of a fully opened blossom that, when inverted, serves as the skirt.

Hollyhocks are in the same family as hibiscus. They are biennials meaning they require two years to complete their life cycle. During the first year, hollyhocks establish roots and grow a rosette of leaves at their base. In the second season, their flowers emerge. Growing hollyhocks is fairly easy. There are many cultivars and heirloom varieties to choose from. You can direct seed them in spring or late summer to produce flowering plants the next year. You need only plant them once as they freely reseed.

Hollyhocks also cross pollinate easily. So if you have several varieties grouped together, new plants may look different from the originals planted.

Plant hollyhocks in a sunny location and allow enough space between plants for good air circulation. Place in a sheltered area out of the way of strong winds. Hollyhocks are tolerant of most soil types but do need well-drained soils. Staking may be required for the taller forms. Short form cultivars are available that work well for cut flowers. Remove dead leaves as needed and prune out old flower stalks that are past their prime.

Hollyhocks were often used to hide unsightly areas in the yard such as an outhouse. Today gardeners commonly use them as a backdrop for other plantings. Flowering usually begins in early summer and continues for many weeks. Their large and colorful blooms have made hollyhocks a favorite of bees and butterflies.

Rust is the most common disease to afflict them. This fungal disease starts on the lower

leaves then progresses upward. Symptoms begin with small brown lesions appearing on the stems and yellow to orange spots occurring on the top side of the leaves.

Following this are the formation of brown, pinhead-sized pustules on the underside of infected leaves. Spores are released from the pustules and can be splashed or windblown on to neighboring hollyhocks creating new infections. Wet conditions are favored by the fungus so avoid wetting the foliage when watering.

The best control for rust is to eliminate infected leaves as soon as symptoms are noticed. Remove badly infected plants and destroy them. Clean up all fallen debris especially in the fall as rust will overwinter on plant remains. Also remove any mallow weeds in the hollyhock bed since they can harbor the fungus. Fungicides can be used for preventative control in severe cases.

Hollyhock flowers carry the meaning of 'fruitfulness and abundance'; grow them as your good luck charm.

Tips for Buying Shrubs

By: Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Shrubs have many uses to the home landscaper. They can be used as hedges, screens, windbreaks, groundcover, wildlife habitat and background for other plants. Not to mention they add great interest to a yard by providing rich colors and textures.

When selecting shrubs, gardeners should first evaluate the growing conditions of the planting site. Important factors to consider include amount of sunlight, soil pH and soil drainage. Many shrubs, particularly the flowering varieties, prefer full sun. However, there are a number of shrubs that do well in partial shade or even require shadier conditions. Before selecting a shrub, observe the available light in the area where you want to plant. Then while at the garden center, check the shrub's tag to make sure the site will meet the plant's light preference.

Soil pH refers to the relative acidity or alkalinity of the soil. The pH of the soil affects how well a plant is able to take up nutrients. In South Dakota, most soils are slightly alkaline. Fortunately, many shrubs do fine in our soils.

Most plants (and shrubs are no exception) like well-drained soils. If the soil drains poorly, look for shrubs that will tolerate moister sites such as redosier dogwood or buttonbush. The practice of adding organic matter to the soil may help improve drainage overtime.

Another characteristic to consider is the expected size of the shrub when it is mature. A shrub that grows too big for a site will require frequent pruning or may need to be removed. Take into account both the estimated height and width of the plant when full grown. Lastly, Choose a shrub that is reliably hardy for your area. Remember the best chance for success begins with selecting the right plant for the site.



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Calendar

By Kathy Osterloh, Master Gardener

- For all nursery plants - go early in May for best selection, less stressed plants.
- Pick off excess apple/pear blossoms or fruit for larger fruit. The center blossom of a cluster, on apple trees, is usually the 'main' one.
- Plant trees in early May. Water as needed.
- Do NOT use 'weed and feed' type products where they may reach the trees' roots.
- First year of planting June bearer strawberries - pick off all blossoms for the first year so plants do not become stressed (you'll reap rewards for years after for doing this). For 'everbearer' strawberries, just remove the first set of blossoms they set, then let them bear.
- Divide perennials that bloom in late summer or fall.
- Do not remove the foliage of bulbs (such as tulip or daffodil) until it yellows and dies.

After last average frost date:

- ◇ Plant seedlings of warm-season annual flowers, such as marigolds, impatiens, petunias.
- ◇ Direct seed outdoors easy, fast-growing annuals that like warmer weather, such as sunflowers, cosmos, nasturtiums, zinnias, and hollyhocks.
- ◇ Plant seedlings of warm-season annual vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant. Remember to harden off plants which are being transplanted outdoors.
- ◇ Plant seedlings of warm-season herbs such as basil.
- ◇ Plant summer-flowering tropical bulbs and tubers, such as cannas, elephant's ear, gladiolus, and tuberous begonias.
- You can also plant seedlings of squashes, cucumbers, and melons now. (Plant seeds of these a little later, if you choose to go that route. They need warm soil to germinate but are okay to plant as seedlings now since they need less warmth once already started.)
- Thin seedlings to prevent overcrowding and weak growth.
- Stagger plantings of beans and corn for extended harvest.



Herb Garden

By Priscilla Jurkovich, Master Gardener

Herbs that can be grown in the South Dakota region.

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) is a tender annual in zone 4 from the Lamiaceae or Mint family. As with most mints, basil is aromatic with square stems and opposite leaves. Basil loves full sun and can become leggy if in the shade. The white whorled flowers bloom July through August.

Start the seeds indoors 6 weeks before you want to plant outside. Wet the potting soil, sprinkle the small seeds and place dry soil on top. Pat the soil and moisten the top. Keep soil moist until the seeds erupt. Transplant once the danger of frost is over. When transplanting, both the soil and night air temperatures should be 60 degrees F. To encourage the basil to become bushy, once it has 6 sets of leaves, pinch back the tops. When harvesting, storing in the refrigerator can cause the leaves to turn black. Keep them fresh in a flower vase, enjoy the aroma and keep out of the sunlight.

The aroma can be an antidote to mental fatigue and forgetfulness. The phenol constituents have antibiotic and antiseptic qualities. Some of the different scents from the many cultivars can make an interesting lemon tea or put the leaves in vinegar and use as an antiseptic cleaner or salad dressing.

Basil can relieve indigestion and nausea, especially after chemotherapy.

The antioxidant qualities can fight colds and congestion. The anti-inflammatory qualities help with joint pain. Basil can be used in pesto (pine nuts, basil and olive oil), salad, on a sandwich or to create many different Italian dishes. The aroma deters insects so it makes a great companion plant in the garden. Basil is a wonderful complement to any garden.



Photo: Priscilla Jurkovich

Weed of the Month: Pennsylvania Pellitory

By Paulette Keller, Master Gardener

Growth: Pennsylvania pellitory can be found throughout the Great Plains in waste sites, gardens, lawns, cropland, woodlands, rangeland, and fence rows. The leaves are arranged alternately on the stem. They are oblong and blade like with gradually to rounded or pointed tips. The flowers are green or brown in color, lack petals and are found on the axils of middle and upper leaves. This weed can grow to over a foot high and reproduces by seed. It likes to grow in dense colonies.

Duration: Pennsylvania pellitory is an annual and blooms from May to September.

Control: The plant is easy to pull due to its shallow roots. It can also be controlled by an herbicide. Red admiral butterfly caterpillars love to eat the leaves if you miss a few plants.

Other: Pennsylvania pellitory is a member of the nettle family but lacks the stinging hairs.



[http://www.sdstate.edu/ps/extension/weed-mgmt/weed_description.cfm?weed=Pennsylvania Pellitory](http://www.sdstate.edu/ps/extension/weed-mgmt/weed_description.cfm?weed=Pennsylvania%20Pellitory)

Straw Bale Gardening

By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Have you ever thought about creating a vegetable garden in a bale of straw? Well, it's not as crazy as it may sound. It even comes with certain advantages. No digging is required as the bales are placed right on the ground. They can also be placed on a patio or rocky surface. Straw bale gardening actually has much in common with traditional raised bed gardening. It allows you to garden in areas of the yard that have poor soil conditions. For those with limited mobility, the height of the bales makes it easier to tend the plants. An added bonus is that after the growing season, the bales can be recycled. Use them for compost or work them into the soil to add organic matter.

If using fresh straw bales, they first need to be conditioned. Conditioning helps get the decomposition process going inside the bale. Fresh straw bales must be allowed to decompose for a few weeks before planting since during this time the bales will get hot. This heat can damage seeds or seedlings. If you are using older bales from the year before, you can skip this step.

Conditioning involves keeping the bales wet for three to four weeks prior to planting. If time is a factor you can add fertilizer to help things along. Adding fertilizer will speed up the decomposition process so that a fresh straw bale is usually ready for planting in less than two weeks. To do this method, West Virginia University Extension Service suggests keeping the bales wet for three days. Then on days 4, 5, and 6, sprinkle a nitrogen-rich fertilizer such as a ½ cup of urea (46-0-0) on top of each bale. You can also fertilize with bone meal, fish meal, or compost tea. Work it in well with water and continue to keep the bales moist.

On days 7, 8, and 9, cut the fertilizer application in half adding

only a ¼ cup of urea on each bale per day. Again, continue to moisten the bales daily. On day 10, stop fertilizing but still keep the straw damp. Finally, with day 11, check the tops of the bales for heat. They should be warm as a result of the

decomposition. Once the bales are cool to the touch, you can start to plant. You can also insert a meat thermometer several inches into the bale to check whether or not the temperature is cool enough to plant. The bales should be at our body temperature or lower. Keep in mind that with the decomposing straw may come a few mushrooms. It is not necessary to remove them, however, don't eat them.

Now that the bales are ready it is time to plant. Gardeners typically use one of two types of planting methods. One is to dig individual holes in the top of the bale and carefully place a seedling in each. Then carefully firm the straw with some good quality potting mix around the roots of the plant. For seeds, make several small holes in the top and fill each with potting mix before sowing. The other method consists of spreading soil on top of each bale to about a three inch depth. Then add the seedlings or seeds. You can grow a variety of vegetables in straw bales. After planting, water thoroughly.



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Problem Solvers

By Margaret Murphy,
Master Gardener

The other day I was comparing notes with a friend of mine. We both have trouble spots in our yards where grass just doesn't grow or the terrain makes it difficult to mow. Thinking about alternatives, we began to discuss the benefits of perennial groundcovers. Most spread quickly and can be used to carpet large areas of landscape.

Groundcovers come in a huge assortment. Whether your site is in full sun or full shade has dry conditions or moist you can find a variety that will work. Groundcovers can be an effective solution to many problems in the yard.

One issue they can solve is the nuisance of mowing steep slopes or uneven terrain. Replacing the turf in these areas with groundcover eliminates the need to mow. They also serve to stabilize the soil.

If you have trouble keeping grass alive under trees or shrubs, consider installing ground cover instead. Several types grow well in



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shade plus many handle dry soil conditions. Drier soil is often common under trees that have thick canopies. The canopy can deflect rainfall from the ground directly beneath it. Another advantage of growing groundcover under a tree is not having to mow around the tree. This prevents injury to the trunk by the lawn mower. Groundcovers will also help keep weeds down so there is no more temptation to weed whack around tree trunks.

My backyard has a hill with several steep-faced slopes. The hill remains in dappled sunlight all day due to several beautiful, old shade trees. The slope faces have shallow soil with descent sized rocks jutting out here and

there. Clearly areas I'm not interested in maneuvering a lawn mower through. So I need plants that will tolerate less than perfect growing conditions.

Gratefully, I have several choices of perennial groundcovers to rescue me. One of the most prolific groundcovers to conquer my slopes is the 'Beacon Silver', a spotted dead nettle. This mounding plant has silver leaves edged in green, which compliment nicely the clusters of lavender-colored flowers. Near the cement steps that bisect the hill are several varieties of sedum or stonecrops. Most grow as a mat covering the soil and do a great job controlling erosion.

Then there is the commonly grown vining groundcover, *Vinca minor* or periwinkle. This perennial plant is a good choice for the roughest areas as it forms a dense, weed-smothering cover that trails over outcrops of rock. Pretty pale blue or purple flowers poke up through its evergreen leaves in early spring.

Utilizing groundcovers in areas where turf is difficult to grow offers an opportunity to introduce a range of different colors, textures and form into the yard. It also cuts down on overall mow time and creates mow-free zones providing extra protection to wildlife

Upcoming Events

Master Gardener Plant Sale at Fairgrounds- May 12, 2012

2012 Master Gardener training
Brookings – Tues & Thursdays 5:30–9:00 p.m. May 1st thru June 28th
Sioux Falls – Fridays, 8:30–4:30 May 4th thru July 6th
Aberdeen – Tuesdays, 8:30–4:30 May 15th thru July 10th
Rapid City – Thursdays, 8:30–4:30 MDT, May 31st – July 26th

Garden Tour -July 11, 2012; rain date is July 12, 2012.

Gardening with the Masters: A seminar series on gardening, Outdoor Campus,

- May 7- Vegetables, flowers-annuals and perennials- layout of gardens, season extension.
- August 20- Garden Cleanup, Winter weed control, fertilizing, fall watering, tool cleanup

For more details about these events call 605-782-3290 or email minnehahamastergardeners@hotmail.com

Featured Flower

By Jayne Wessels,
Master Gardener

Ajuga reptans “Black Scallop”

This perennial ground cover has large glossy dark purple-black scalloped leaves with spikes of 8 to 10 inch deep blue flowers from early spring to early summer. It's a great plant that is not picky about its location; growing well in moist, well drained, loamy, sandy or clay soils. You can plant it in sun or shade making these very versatile plants in any garden. I have mine growing in my xeric garden on the south side of our garage. This easy care plant can be divided in either spring or fall to replant and share with friends. Being a zone 4 it grows well in our area. Also pictured are great companion plants *Sedum reflexum* “Anglina” and *Sedum* “Vera Jameson”



Photo: Jayne Wessels

Local Foods Corner

By: Chris Zdorovtsov, Community Development Field Specialist, SDSU Extension

Plant a Row for the Pantry

The Brandon Area Food Pantry has a program that might be of interest for pantries and gardeners in your community. ‘Plant for the Pantry’ encourages gardeners to help supply fresh produce to those in need.

Amy Weber from the Brandon Area Food Pantry promotes the program to community members and asks them to share their bounty. Last season they received over 300lbs of fresh produce donated for about an 8-week period. During that time, 75-100 people received the fresh produce weekly.

If your local pantry is interested in starting a program, Weber suggests marketing the idea by developing a flier to promote the program, and post it around town at local



businesses or in churches. If cold storage space is an issue, consider having a specified drop off time with a pick-up time within a couple hours.

If your community doesn't have a food pantry, consider a ‘Harvest Table’ concept. Find a drop of site, such as a local church and indicate when

produce can be left, picked-up or even exchanged (for those with limited garden space).

Gardeners could participate in a number of ways. Dedicate a row, an additional plant or crop to be donated to the pantry. If there is a community garden available, a team of people could work together to oversee a plot for the purpose of donation. If you are not a gardener, buying and donating extra produce bought at a farmer stand or local orchard may be an option.

Weber has plans to continue in 2012. She indicated that people utilizing the pantry truly appreciated the access to fresh produce and encourages other pantries in the state to start similar programs.

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