

From The Ground Up

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MINNEHAHAMASTERGARDENERS@HOTMAIL.COM

Autumn Beauties

By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Fall is mum season. While most flowers are coming to the end of their bloom time, mums are just getting started. You can already find these autumn beauties in many garden centers. When I worked for a nursery, I was often asked which mums are the "hardy mums". There was always some confusion about which ones would come back year to year and those that wouldn't. Garden mums are the ones often referred to as "hardy mums". They produce underground stolens that can help the mum persist year after year though this is not a given. The term "hardy" is a bit deceiving because the cold hardiness of mums varies widely depending on cultivar, weather conditions as well as region. Some varieties considered hardy may not be truly cold hardy for our winters.

Florist or greenhouse mums are the ones available year round at floral shops and grocery stores. They produce few, if any, stolens and typically will not make it through a winter if planted outdoors. Even if a florist mum manages to survive the winter, it is unlikely that you would be able to enjoy its blooms. Most mums require long periods of uninterrupted darkness for flower bud development. This is why mums normally flower in the fall. Typically, florist mums take 8 to 14 weeks to flower after the days begin to shorten. So, our region, it's not uncommon for florist mums to encounter a killing freeze before they can bloom. Garden varieties, on the other hand, need only 5 to 7 weeks of short days to flower plus they can tolerate a few light frosts.

If you purchase garden mums to use in fall containers and then want to plant them, be sure to get them in the ground as early as possible. They need sufficient time to get established before winter. Ideally, you want them planted at least 4 to 6 weeks before a killing frost. Spring

is the best time to plant garden mums. This gives them plenty of time to become well established. Fertilize spring planted mums once a month through July using a water soluble fertilizer. Make sure to stop fertilizing at the end of July. Going beyond that encourages new growth too late in the season. For the same reason, don't fertilize fall planted mums.

To boost your garden mums' chances of overwintering successfully, select cultivars hardy for your area. Plant them in a protected spot and don't cut the foliage back in the fall. The remaining foliage helps capture snow, which provides the plant better insulation against the cold, drying winds. Also, remember to apply winter mulch after the ground freezes. This keeps the ground uniformly cold and reduces the risk of root injury from frost heave. Keep in mind that mums need a long night with uninterrupted darkness to trigger flower development, so avoid planting mums under or near night time sources of light such as street lights or motion controlled yard lights.

Experienced mum gardeners will tell you that to keep mums well-groomed and bud-filled from year to year – you have to pinch them. For



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a compact, bushy form with lots of blooms, pinch shoots back every two to three weeks in spring and early summer. Removing the shoot tips forces the plant to produce additional shoots along the stem. Set July 4th as the date to stop pruning your mums. Removing shoot tips later than early July can delay or even prevent flowering.

Mums come in a huge variety of colors and forms making them a great choice to create beautiful, decorative fall planters.

When are melons ready to harvest?



By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Recently, I was asked by a gardener new to growing melons in the home garden, how you can tell when they are ripe. Picking a melon at its peak flavor relies on harvesting at the right stage of maturity. For watermelon, some gardeners use the "thumping" technique. They thump or tap the melon. If a hollow or dull sound is heard, then the melon is considered ready. However, not everyone can clearly hear the difference between the sound a mature melon makes versus an immature one. A more reliable way to determine proper harvest time is

when the underside or "ground spot" turns yellowish or cream in color. Ripe watermelons also tend to lose their glossy look and have a dull appearance.

Muskmelon, often called cantaloupe, is ready to eat when the stem slips easily away from the fruit. It should pull off with little or no effort. Also look at the muskmelon's appearance. The netlike skin becomes rough-textured and turns tan to yellow in color. You should also be able to smell that muskmelon aroma from the fruit.

If you grow honeydew, knowing when to pick the fruit is a little more difficult. Unlike muskmelon, honeydew fruit does not slip off the vine when mature. The most common way to check for ripeness is to press on the flower end. It should feel slightly soft. You may also notice a subtle change in the color of the melon's skin.

The benefit of growing melons in the home garden is that they can be harvested at peak ripeness for the best taste. Proper storage will help prolong their shelf life. Uncut watermelon stored at room temperature will last about a week. It will keep longer if kept between 50 to 60 degrees F. Store freshly harvested muskmelon in the refrigerator where, depending on the cultivar, it can last up to two weeks. Honeydew should also be kept at a cooler temperature. Store between 45 to 50 degrees F. for best results.

From The Ground Up

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2001 E 8th St.

Sioux Falls, SD 57104

Phone 605-782-3290

minnehahamastergardeners@hotmail.com

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Calendar

By Kathy Osterloh, Master Gardener

Lawns

- Plant grass seed but be sure to water daily until established.
- Fill low spots with excellent quality topsoil and seed. If your lawn is thin, overseed it by sprinkling on additional lawn seed. Water in and keep well watered for the next 2 weeks.
- If you have compost, rake it over your lawn to feed it and to fill low spots.

Trees and Shrubs

- If necessary, plant trees and shrubs, keep watering until ground freezes.
- Continue to water established trees if we have inadequate rainfall—especially toward the end of the month to prepare for winter.

Flowers

- In the second half of the month, plant spring-blooming bulbs such as tulips and daffodils. You can also plant Asiatic and other true lilies now.
- Divide spring-blooming perennials and replant as soon as possible.
- You can also plant perennials and container-grown roses now.

Fruits

- Apples, pears, and elderberries should all be ready to pick.
- Thin/move strawberry plants and clean raspberry patches of canes that are finished bearing.

Vegetables/Herbs

- Place herbs you wish to winter indoors into pots.
- Plant garlic for next year's harvest late in September or early October, depending on first freeze.
- Leave produce on vines until overripe for seed-saving. Do this at the end of production as that signals to the plants that they are done

General

- Clean up garden areas as plants are done producing. Remove and destroy diseased plants. Healthy plants when done can go on the compost pile. Ensure that no weed seeds end up in compost.
- Treat any thistles or broad-leaf weeds, such as dandelions, just before first freeze as they are pulling nutrients into their roots for over-wintering.

Can, can, can, and then, can some more!

Herb Garden

By Priscilla Jurkovich, Master Gardener

Herbs for the South Dakota region

Oregano, *Origanum vulgare*, is from the Lamiaceae (Labiatae) family. This hardy perennial herb grows great in zone 5 and will survive South Dakota winters as well. The plant has a spreading growth habit with a bushy form. The leaves are oval and hairy. It loves full sun with well drained, slightly sandy and dry soil. Propagation can be by seed, cutting or root division. As with any mint family herb, it has a distinct fragrance, square stems, paired, opposite simple leaves and can be used as a digestive aid.

Historically, oregano was introduced in the USA after WWII when soldiers returned from Italy. Oregano often accompanies marjoram and basil in prepared dishes of tomato, bean, pizza and eggs.

Studies on oregano essential oils have documented its antibiotic qualities against the super bug MRSA (methicillin resistant staph aureus). Some of the essential oils constituents include thymol, origanene, and carvacrol. In alternative medicine, any essential oil that has “ol” in the last part of the word is generally a good antiseptic or has antibiotic qualities. It can boost your immune system and has been used in the treatment of colds, flu, mild fevers, and fungal infections such as athletes foot.



Photo from Priscilla Jurkovich's garden

Weed of the Month: Field Bindweed

By Paulette Keller, Master Gardener



Growth: Field bindweed is a native of Europe and Asia. It is thought to have been introduced to North America in the 1870s with wheat imported from Turkey. Field bindweed can be found throughout the Great Plains in small grain fields, waste places, gardens and roadsides. It is a prostrate plant forming a tangled mass or mat of stems and leaves until it finds some plant or structure to climb on. The plant has an extensive root system. Vertical roots can reach a depth of 20 ft. or more. But 70% of the total mass of the roots is in the top 2 ft. of soil with most of the root system no deeper than 1 ft. The arrow-shaped leaves are ½ to 2 inches long. The flowers are trumpet or funnel-shaped and are either pink or white. Blooms are open during the early morning hours and close late in the day.

Duration: Field bindweed is a perennial weed that is sometimes called creeping jenny.

Control: Management of field bindweed is difficult and can only be done with cultivation, competitive crops and herbicides such as glyphosate, dicamba, and 2, 4-d. Because field bindweed stores energy in its roots and of the seeds long shelf life, repetitive procedures are needed to completely eradicate it.

Add a Touch of Autumn Splendor to Garden Containers

By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Celebrate the season's change by creating fall containers that capture autumn's colors. Create a new design or freshen an existing container by replacing tired-looking summer-annuals with brightly colored fall blooms and showy foliage.

Fall color schemes generally include assorted hues of orange, yellow, and red. These are welcoming, bold tones that grab ones attention even from a distance. With today's flower choices, you can now also find blooms in shades of bronze, copper and terra cotta. Cool-season flowers that do well in fall planters include calendulas, pansies, sedums, asters, and goldenrod. Of course we can't forget mums, which come in an amazing array of autumn colors. Plants such as coral bells, Swiss chard, ornamental kale and cabbage are used for their decorative foliage. They offer leaves in different shades of green, deep reds and dark purples.

When designing a container, consider the height and spread of the plants you choose. Spikes and other eye-catching, upright plants add vertical interest and are usually the focal point of the container. Ornamental grasses and tall flowering plants work well for adding height to an arrangement. Mounding or spreading plants add fullness and should help show off the vertical centerpiece. Trailing plant varieties that cascade over the edge will soften and anchor the pot to its surroundings. Creating a design using all three types (often called thrillers, fillers and spillers) is the traditional container blueprint; however, containers with just one type of plant or all one color can work just as well.

For containers that will be viewed from all sides, place the thriller plant or plants in the middle and build out from there. With pots seen just from the front, place the focal plant in the back and build the design forward.

Grouping your containers together by mixing different heights, colors and forms can have a huge, eye-catching impact. It can help make a large, open area such as on a porch, patio or front entrance seem less stark. Placing together several containers with a repeating design pattern can bring a more harmonious feel while containers with contrasting

designs and colors create more of a pop. You can also arrange pots vertically by stacking them into a tower form. Place a smaller pot into the soil of a larger, broader pot. To help secure the pots, place a stick or garden stake through the top pot's drainage hole and push it down into the larger pot's soil. I did this using



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three different sized pots. I placed my thrillers in the top pot, fillers in the bottom two pots and a few spillers in all three. The effect was amazing giving the corner of the patio an attention-grabbing display.

In the spring, plants are vigorously growing and will quickly fill in the container. During the fall, however, plant growth is slowing down so use mature plants already in bloom or with large, interesting foliage. Place plants more closely in a fall container than you would in a spring pot for an instant full effect. For a loud burst of color, put several of the same plant together in a cluster.

Surround your design with pumpkins, decorative gourds or other seasonal odds and ends that you may come across. As we get closer to Halloween, you can easily find straw bales, cornstalks and decorative scarecrows to help put together an autumn harvest theme. For something different, scoop out a pumpkin, put in a drainage hole, then fill with potting soil and plant pansies or mums to create a pumpkin planter.

Whatever you do, have fun and enjoy your fall decorating!

Eggplant Season!

By Margaret Murphy, Master Gardener

Eggplants are ready for harvest! The cultivation of eggplant is thought to have originated in India domesticated from a wild form. This nightshade has a colorful history. Folks in medieval times believed it to have properties of a love potion. In later years, the eggplant was held with suspicion as it was thought to cause madness.

The first varieties grown were not the familiar purple eggplant so commonly seen today but rather produced a small, white, egg-shaped fruit – hence the name eggplant. Today, the fruit of eggplants comes in many different shapes, sizes and colors.

Harvest young, ripe fruit for the best flavor. Size is not always an indication of maturity as it will vary by cultivar. Fruit that is ready to be picked should have

firm and shiny skin. Press the skin with your thumb, if it's ripe, the skin will spring back. If it's too firm with no give, leave the fruit on the vine for a while longer. If the thumb imprint remains, then the fruit is over mature and may taste bitter. Another sign of over ripeness is seeing brown seeds when you cut into the fruit. The seeds should be light yellow. When harvesting, cut the stem with a sharp knife or pruners. Leave a bit of the stem and the calyx (or cap) attached to the fruit. With some cultivars the stem and calyx have thorns so harvest these types wearing gloves. Regular harvesting will encourage continued fruiting.

Eggplant can encounter a few pest and disease problems. Flea beetles are



probably the most common pest. These insects will create small, round holes in the leaves. They tend to be most damaging in early spring. This year we are prone to seeing more environmental-related troubles brought on by extreme temperatures. These include flower drop, misshaped fruit or blossom-end-rot.

I get mixed reactions when I mention that eggplant is one of my favorite vegetables. People either like it or want nothing to do with it. I suspect some folks in the latter category have never actually tried eggplant. I encourage them to do so, if they haven't. It is one of the most versatile vegetables around. It can be baked, steamed, grilled, boiled sautéed, breaded and stuffed. The only way not to eat it is raw. Eggplant is a good source of dietary fiber and is more nutritious with the skin left on when eaten. Eggplant does not store well so it's best to harvest right before you plan to cook it. If need be, it can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days in plastic wrap or a plastic baggie.

Upcoming Events

Visit with SDSU Extension, Associate Director, Karla Trautman, at 1:30 p.m. Friday September 14th at the McCrory Garden Visitor Center.

Hear an update on SDSU Extension. Also a great opportunity to share about your Master Gardener programs.

2012 State Update Meeting "Seasons in the Garden" at the new McCrory Gardens Education Center on Sept. 14-16, 2012.

International Master Gardener Conference
Sept 7-14, 2013— on a Holland Cruise off Alaska.

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

Featured Perennial

By Jayne Wessels, Master Gardener

Solidago rose 'Fireworks'

Introduced in 1993 from the North Carolina Botanical Garden, 'Fireworks' has become a popular plant used in many garden settings. Hardy from zones 3 to 5. It grows 24 to 36 inches tall and wide with a crown of golden yellow blooms that look like an explosion of fireworks late summer to early fall.

It likes to be sited in a sunny to lightly shaded area with well drained soil. It will grow well in our area with our clay soil and is quite drought tolerant once established. Unlike some solidago, this beauty grows in a clump so it can be used as a specimen plant or massed planted for a dramatic display when in bloom. Because of its height, its best used in the back of the garden. Contrary to the negative believe, solidago does not cause allergies and makes a good cut flower in arrangements. Cut the spent flowers to encourage additional blooms and to keep it vigorous. Divide it every 2 to 3 years.

Watch for butterflies on their fall migration stopping to get refueled on the rich nectar or the honey bees storing up for the winter months. You may also see finches, juncos and sparrows collecting the seeds.



Photo: Jayne Wessels

Local Foods Corner

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

CSA's: Another option for purchasing local food

CSA's, short for Community Supported Agricultural Programs, are gaining popularity across the nation as well as in South Dakota. This is an additional avenue for producers to direct market their produce to local consumers. This type of program allows a farmer to sell subscriptions or shares prior to the growing season. When the produce or food product is harvested it is then delivered on a scheduled basis to the customer.

The arrangement allows the producers to have funds up front to pay for items such as seeds, potting soil, packaging, early season labor and other farm expenses that might occur, prior to harvest season. Consumers also support the farmer by sharing in the risk of a horrendous growing season, but more often than not, reap in the rewards of pounds of tasty and fresh produce.

Due to shorter travel distances CSA are often able to grow produce that is known for its flavor vs. shipping



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qualities. Often these producers provide unique looking or shaped vegetables that are not available in the main stream markets. Consumers purchasing through this outlet are able to know their farmer and will often be able to participate in farm visits or even work days if desired.

CSA's can vary from home delivery to a specified pick-up site. Weekly deliveries could strictly contain produce to a range of products from a multi-farm CSA. In South Dakota prices are seen from \$350-\$780, however this range results from a difference in delivery contents and the number of weeks the subscription runs. Here we typically see anywhere from 12-26 weeks. The production method will also be a factor, with Certified Organic produce, for example, costing more.

Currently there are 15 CSA's registered on some of the major local food sourcing websites that service the state of South Dakota.

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