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## In the Herb Garden

By Priscilla Jurkovich, Master Gardener The herb section will highlight an herb that can be grown in the South Dakota region



Ramps (allium tricoccum) is a perennial wild leek from the Allium family (onions, leeks) that can be grown in zones 3-8. The leaves are elongated, oval shape that tapers to a point. The leaves disappear as the flower stalk emerges. The flowers are a pinkish white/white and the seed is dispersed close to the mother plant. In the wild, ramps are found in wooded, moist, shaded areas and thrive in rich, moist soil high in organic matter. To cultivate ramps in an herb garden, you can plant direct seed or bulbs. The seed has a dormant, under-developed embryo and requires a warm period followed by a cold period (to simulate a fall planting followed by a winter cold spell). Planting seeds should be done in late summer. Harvesting mav take up to seven years! Transplanting bulbs may be the easiest but could take up to 3 years before harvesting if you want to establish the perennial plants.

Also remember to mulch to simulate "leaves" falling in the natural environment and also keep the moist environment that ramps love.



The bulbs have a pleasant sweet spring onion with a strong garlic-like aroma. Ramps are nutrient dense in vitamins and minerals and one of the first spring plants. For culinary uses, you can substitute ramps in a variety of recipes that you would use for scallions or leeks. Ramps are high in vitamin A and C and minerals selenium and chromium. Medicinal uses could be for colds, croup or a spring tonic to detoxify. Selenium has been studied for its anti-cancer properties.

#### **Vegetable Storage and Garden Clean-up**

By Julie Waltz, Master Gardener Intern

As we head into fall it is time to think about harvesting the last of the garden produce and cleaning up the garden.

You have probably been harvesting vegetables a good share of the summer, but some of your crops will likely still be in the garden. Late season crops such as pumpkin and squash and some root crops are still waiting for you. Always take care when you harvest vegetables so that you don't bruise or tear the exterior as those with damage will not last long in storage. It is generally better to harvest before a hard frost.



The less hands-on you are with most vegetables the better and the longer they will last. Dispose of any vegetables that have serious defects as they may rot and will likely cause other vegetables in storage to rot as well.

Vegetables that can be stored in cool, dry conditions such as a basement include onions, winter squash, and pumpkins. Make sure there is airflow around the vegetables as it will increase the time you can store your vegetables.

Some vegetables need to have cool, moist conditions. This is usually difficult to maintain in a home situation unless you have a root cellar, so perhaps plan to only store these for a short period of time. These include cucumbers, beets, carrots, turnips, peppers, potatoes, and tomatoes. Canning or pickling is a better option for storing many of these vegetables.

Some vegetables and fruits cannot be stored together, such as cucumbers with apples or tomatoes. Some, like potatoes, should be kept in the dark. Generally, remove the leaves or tops. For most squash and pumpkins leave about a 1-2 inches of cut stem.

#### Garden clean up

After you have harvested all the vegetables in your garden it's time for clean-up. Remove leftover plant debris to a compost pile or a burn pile (if it is diseased). Also, consider a final weeding of the garden as weeds left may produce mature seeds that will sprout next year. Consider soil testing and amendments if needed. Organic material can be applied and tilled in to improve the soil for spring.

Make a list of the vegetables and the locations of each from the current year to help you decide what kind and where to plant your vegetables in the spring.

Perennial plants may require mulch. Be careful of mulch that may contain insects, diseases or weeds. The plants can be trimmed to about three inches after a hard frost or you can wait until spring, especially if the plant has attractive winter foliage.

Remember to clean and repair garden tools and store them appropriately so they are ready for spring. Also, drain all garden hoses for winter storage.

Consider moving houseplants that you have had on the patio inside for the winter. Remember to check them for insect pests and diseases and to re-pot or prune them if needed.

Photo from Wikipedia commons (Free Art License) https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jardin\_potager\_6.jpg#globalusage

Sources:

http://www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/vegetables/harvesting-and-storing-home-garden-vegetables/

http://www3.extension.umn.edu/county/stearns/county-horticulture-educator/article/fall-garden-care

https://extension.illinois.edu/hortihints/0010b.html

### Average first frost date in Minnehaha County: 9/24-9/30 iGrow

#### **Overwintering Plants**

#### By Cindy Jungman, Master Gardener

For those of us who just plain love to grow things, overwintering plants is a way to gain year-round gardening enjoyment. However, there are other good reasons to overwinter plants.

- Specimen plants can be costly to buy, so preserving them for future growing seasons saves money.
- Some plants are unique or hard to find. To avoid the risk of not finding that special plant next year, consider overwintering the plant.
- Some plants have sentimental value that makes them irreplaceable Grandma's geranium, wedding ivy, etc.
- Great enjoyment can be had in simply seeing what you can successfully propagate.

There are a number of ways to overwinter plants.

- The easiest method is to bring the entire plant into the house for the winter. This is also the most space-consuming method.
- You can also take cuttings to grow new plants.
- Existing plants can be divided into smaller plants that are more space-efficient and manageable
- Offshoots can also be potted up to keep over the winter.
- Some plants produce bulbs or tubers that can be harvested and stored until planting time in the spring.
- Collecting ripe seeds for planting next spring will give you large quantities of the same type of plant.

Questions to ask before you decide to overwinter plants:

- How much space do I have in which to keep the overwintered plants?
- What natural light do I have in this space?
- What is the winter temperature in this space?
- Am I willing to invest in a fluorescent light and timer?
- Will I be available to keep the plants watered over the winter?

If you are lucky enough to have good southern light exposure in your home, you may be able to overwinter plants without them becoming spindly. However, it is difficult in the winter to get enough natural light for sun-loving plants. That is when fluorescent lights become a necessity for growing strong, sturdy plants. I use standard shop lights with full spectrum bulbs. I run the lights on a timer 15 hours each day. One fixture will easily accommodate 16-20 four inch containers.

While there is not one ideal temperature for growing plants indoors, most plants will do well in a relatively cool environment, preferably 55 to 60 degrees. Good air flow will help prevent disease.

So, you are ready to start! Regardless of whether you bring in the entire plant, take cuttings, or plant divisions or offshoots, some general rules apply.

- Choose only healthy plants.
- Make sure you bring plants indoors before frost damages the foliage.
- Treat plants for insects BEFORE bringing them indoors. I recommend several treatments of insecticidal soap or pesticide. This involves some advance planning!
- Avoid plants that show signs of disease.
- Remove any dead foliage.
- Use good quality potting mix, preferably a soil-less mix. The mix should have good drainage. Perlite may be added to improve drainage.

Let's look at how to take the entire plant inside. If your plant is in a container by itself, you can just move the entire container inside. If your plant is in the ground, use a sharp spade to dig it up, making sure to get a good portion of the plant's root system. If your plant is part of a mixed container, you will likewise need to carefully separate it from the other plants. Pruning the plant will help it adjust to the transplant. You may prune back up to ½ of the foliage. Shake off excess garden soil, and place the plant in a container just large enough to accommodate the root system. Fill with potting soil; the plant should be planted at the same depth as it was previously planted. Water thoroughly. No fertilizer is necessary. If you are moving an existing container inside, remove any debris from the top of the soil since debris can harbor insects and encourage disease.

The following are the steps for taking plant cuttings.

- Fill containers with slightly moistened soil-less potting mix. I generally use 3-4 inch containers. Using a pencil, poke a hole in the potting mix to accommodate the cutting.
- Identify a plant stem for cutting. Choose green, non-woody stems for taking tip cuttings. Newer growth is easier to root than woody stems. You are looking for a stem with a node on it. A node is where a leaf is or was attached.
- Using a very sharp scissors or razor blade, cut a stem just below a node, leaving just a few leaves above. The cutting does not need to be very long.
- Remove all but 1 or 2 leaves. The cutting needs some leaf growth to continue photosynthesis, but too many leaves will just sap energy from its efforts to create new roots.
- If you don not choose to use rooting hormone, go to the next step. Rooting hormone stimulates the plant cutting to begin sending out new roots from the stem node. The hormone is not always necessary for the cutting to root, but it does give an advantage. Fill one cup or container with water and place some rooting hormone into another. You won't need much hormone. Dip the node end of the plant cutting into the water and then into the rooting hormone. Tap off excess rooting hormone.

- Carefully place the cuttings into the holes you made in your potting mix and gently firm the soil around them. You can fit several cuttings into one container. Space them so that the leaves do not touch one another.
- Gently water the containers until you see water drain from the bottom. Allow excess water to drain completely before going to the next step.
- Place the container of cuttings into a plastic bag or other humidity cover. The bag will keep the humidity high and hold in heat. Don't seal the bag completely, to allow some airflow. Place the bag and container in a warm spot in the house. Don't put them into full sun until new growth appears and they can be removed from the bag. Check regularly to be sure there is not so much condensation on the top of the bag that it is dripping onto the seedlings. If this happens, the potting mix is probably too wet. Open the bag to allow more air circulation to dry the soil.
- Check your cuttings regularly in case they start to rot before they root. Remove any suspect cuttings as soon as you spot trouble. Keep the cuttings moist and in a few weeks check for roots by tugging gently on the cuttings and testing for resistance.
- Once the cuttings have developed roots, they are ready to be removed from the bag. If you planted more than one cutting in a pot, they can now be transplanted to individual containers.

Clump-like plants lend themselves well to division. Good candidates are grasses and sedums. Identify a part of the plant that has the newest healthiest growth. Using a sharp shovel or knife, cut the section of new growth from the clump, being careful to get as much of the root system as possible. Plant the division in a container just large enough to accommodate the root system; plant at the same depth as the original plant.

Some plants make offshoots that can be separated from the parent plant and potted separately. This is particularly true with succulent plants.

Plants that form bulbs or tubers that can be harvested for the winter include oxalis, cannas, and dahlias, to name a few. A good article on harvesting bulbs or tubers can be found at <a href="http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg1117.html">http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/dg1117.html</a> .

So, you have brought your plants inside for the winter. How do you make them thrive during the next five to six months? There are four key elements: **light, humidity, water, and temperature**. Plants that do not receive adequate light will become weak and spindly as they struggle to reach a light source. In my opinion, artificial light supplements such as fluorescent lights are a necessity. Fluorescent shop lights are relatively inexpensive and worth the investment if you are expending the effort to overwinter plants.

Maintaining a high humidity level while cuttings are forming roots is a real key to success. I prefer to use humidity domes to place over my cuttings until they form roots. However, there are endless ways to make homemade humidity covers, such as clear trash bags or Ziploc bags. Once your

cuttings are rooted, you can gradually remove the humidity covers. Make sure your plants are not placed near furnace vents where dry air will blow on them. If your home tends to be on the dry side, as most are in the winter, you may consider placing your plants in trays with a layer of pea gravel on the bottom. Add water to the gravel. The water will evaporate and provide more humidity around your plants.

Water your plants thoroughly, until you see water run from the bottom of the container. Do not allow your containers to stand in the drained water. Do not water again until the top of the soil is dry to the touch. Remember that plants inside will not use as much water as they did outside. Not only can you kill your plants by keeping the soil too moist, you will also encourage disease and fungus gnats. While your plants are under humidity covers, you will likely not need to water at all. Of course, you should never let the soil dry out completely, as young tender cuttings will not survive dry soil.

Most homes are kept relatively warm during the winter months. If temperatures are too warm, your plants will be encouraged to actively grow, which is not ideal because lower light levels do not support active growth. Your purpose during the winter months is to maintain a slow growth rate until you can move your plants outside in the spring. For most plants, temperatures in the low 60's are preferred. Many plants will thrive in even cooler temperatures. However, some plants that originate in tropical climates, such as coleus, do need temperatures of at least 55-60 degrees to survive. Don't be daunted! Plants are quite resilient and they will show signs of stress if they are too warm or cold. I grow most of my plants in my basement where the temperature is usually 60-65 degrees.

Remember to monitor your plants frequently for signs of insects. Insects can multiply quickly, and if not addressed early, they can easily infest your carefully tended plants. Spider mites and aphids are the two predominant insects that can plague your indoor plants. You will need to kill them with insecticidal soap or spray labeled for indoor use. If possible, it is best to isolate plants that have signs of insects to help prevent the insects from spreading to other plants.

Do not fertilize your plants until late winter/early spring. At this time, you can begin to lightly fertilize, and lightly prune back your plants to encourage branching. As the days begin to warm, gradually introduce your plants to outside temperatures. This usually means taking your plants outside during the day and bringing them back in at night. Remember to harden off your plants before placing them in full sun.

I wish you good luck and enjoyment in your overwintering project. Get growing!

# FIRST DAY OF SPRING: MARCH ZOTH ZO18

## **Evening Primrose (oenothera) Family: Onagraceae**

### By Roine Klassen, Master Gardener

If you need a perennial in a hot dry location, don't want to transplant them, and want bright yellow flowers until fall, try evening primrose.

These annuals or perennials have large 4-petaled flowers in bright yellow, white or pink. Some open in the evening and last all night but others are day bloomers. This variety is due to the fact that there are 80 + species native to the New world. Their growing habits vary as well; some are ground-hugging plants while others grow upright. Some varieties will self-sow, but this is not particularly common.

Plant it in full sun, but it will tolerate light shade. Soils most suited drain well and have lots of organic matter. These plants will die in compacted or boggy soils. Water frequently when plants are young but mature plants are drought tolerant. Sprinkle 10-10-10 fertilizer around the plant base in spring and water in well. Deadheading will encourage more blooms but if seed pods are desired don't deadhead. Mulch for winter when plants are young or when there is no snow by early winter. Remove the mulch in early spring.

Insects and disease are rarely an issue. Propagation can be by division, seed or stem cuttings. They develop interesting winged seed pods.

Ozarks sundrops are related to evening primroses and often called by that name, however sundrops blossom during the day. These bloom spring to summer.

