



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.



Cleavers (*galium aparine*) is an annual from the Rubiaceae (coffee) family that can be grown in most areas of the world. Cleavers are easy to grow but prefer a loose, moist soil with partial shade. Many have suggested cleavers is a noxious weed and has names such as stickywilly, goosegrass, bed straw or catchweed since its fine hairs on the narrow leaves “cleave” to your body or clothes with prickles that point backwards. Most wear gloves and long sleeve when harvesting due to potential of contact dermatitis for some people. The stems are square and can grow up to 6 feet. The flowers are white, tiny and star-like in 6-8 per cluster. Flowers can bloom April through September.

The tender, spring leaves and stems of the plant can be cooked in dishes you would use spinach. The fruits can be dried, roasted, and then used as a decaffeinated coffee substitute. A permanent red dye is made from the roots. As a medicinal herb, cleavers is a diuretic and stimulates the lymphatic system. The fresh plant or juice of the cleaver leaves have been used to treat upper respiratory infections, tonsillitis, bladder infections, skin problems such as bug bites, eczema or psoriasis and a mild laxative.

Hyacinth Beans (*Lablab purpureus*)

By Roine Klassen Master Gardener

If you want a fast-growing colorful vine that grows quickly even in a cooler climate, consider planting some ornamental Hyacinth beans. It's big enough that will need a sturdy support by the end of the summer since they can grow 10-20 feet long. Glossy green leaves on red stems, masses of white or purple flowers and shiny red pods will provide a showy display. Flowers resemble sweet peas but without the scent. They will provide loads of color and interest through the fall until frost stops the show. Butterflies may lay eggs on the leaves.

Jefferson was reported to have purchased these seeds. The "Jefferson bean" is now in the heirloom plants section at Monticello's kitchen garden. Immature tender pods can be cooked but the flavor will be stronger; the purple color will disappear with cooking. Generally, though these pods/beans should be considered ornamental since the mature beans contain a toxin and require special preparation to eaten safely.

Growing tips: these beans aren't fussy. Soak the beans overnight. A site in full sun, almost any kind of soil, keep them watered but not overly wet—stand back and let them grow! They can be planted indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost otherwise plant the seed 1- 2 inches deep about 6 inches apart after nighttime temperatures stay in the 50's. Fertilize every 4-5 weeks with lower nitrogen type like 5-10-10.

Once the flowers die away and pods have grown to a significant size, harvest the pods just before the first frost. Allow the pods to dry and store the dried beans for seed for next year.



False Indigo and Ash Gray Beetles

By Carol Raabe Master Gardener



It's early June, and I feel like a whole season of gardening has passed. My garden is ahead of the typical season schedule and is not following the "rules." A case in point is the denuding of my False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*). By the end of May, they were already full height and covered with their indigo flowers, a joy to behold. By early June, they are a denuded hedge of upright, green sticks. The transformation happened, virtually, overnight.

False Indigo seemed like a good choice for my garden for a number of reasons: they are native plants, hardy to zone 3, and drought tolerant once established. More to the point, they have long roots (up to 12 feet deep) to help stabilize our hill and have few pests and diseases. They seemed a perfect plant.

A pest they *can* be bothered by is the ash gray blister beetle, as we discovered when we inspected the newly denuded green sticks. According to the internet, ash gray blister beetles are uncommon in this area and they generally appear in July, according to Planet Natural Resource Center (<https://www.planetnatural.com/pest-problem-solver/garden-pests/blister-beetle-control/>). "In mid and late summer, they can arrive in swarms, seemingly overnight and because of their numbers, will do great damage in a short time."



And here they were, denuding my supposedly pest-free False Indigo the first week of June. Apparently, ash gray blister beetles have been seen in this area and on False Indigo, emailed David Graper of the South Dakota Extension Service in response to my panicked request.

The ash gray blister beetle is a nasty little devil, one of hundreds of species of blister beetles. They are hard to kill and impossible to eradicate. They are especially dangerous in hay and other crops grown for feed because they are toxic to livestock, especially horses, even after they die. Alive, they can bite humans and leave a painful blister. Human ingestion of these pests can cause unpleasant and lasting health

problems.

Chemical insecticides can effectively kill ash gray blister beetles, but they will also kill pollinators like honey bees, so we opted for an organic treatment. Some sources recommended spreading food grade [diatomaceous earth](#) around threatened plants or using it as a barrier in raised beds or other small plots to keep the range and numbers of beetles down. Others said the diatomaceous earth did nothing.

Literally every site I looked at suggested hand picking and dropping the insects into soapy water; in our situation, there were so many beetles that the stems looked gray. Not a possible solution.

We finally opted for a spray containing [Spinosad](#), an OMRI-listed biopesticide that kills within 24 to 48 hours. Not fast enough for the False Indigo, but what choice did we have? Spinosad breaks down into inert ingredients within two or so days when exposed to sunlight, keeping it out of the water supply.

It's non-toxic to birds and fish but can harm honeybees when first applied. Read the product label and time your applications accordingly.

Even before the ash gray blister beetle infestation, we had been working on reducing the grasshopper population that makes our lawn crawl in August and September. It turns out that ash gray blister beetle larvae feed on grasshopper eggs—they are good for something—so reducing grasshoppers may reduce the beetle. In the past, we have tried chemical pesticides, but the grasshopper horde is not impressed. This year we are trying a product containing *Nosema locustae*, a naturally occurring grasshopper control. Eating the product makes grasshoppers sick so they eat less and die. The disease spore spreads to healthy grasshoppers through cannibalism, and the grasshopper population declines.

This was our first experience with ash gray blister beetle. Since they are not unknown in these parts, it is likely that other gardeners have experience controlling or maybe even eradicating them.

Minnehaha Master Gardeners Annual Garden Tour

June 20th 10:00-8:00 (extended hours)

**Tickets at all Lewis Drug locations in
Sioux Falls/Brandon**

\$10 + map

My Fall Experience with the Teaching Gardens at the Mary Jo Wegner Arboretum.

By Vanessa Lambert Master Gardener

The Teaching Garden was initially set up to teach educators at schools how to use gardening in their daily lessons, to help their students understand where food comes from and to get them involved in gardening and to give the educators a chance to get dirty.

Last year, I made use of the garden for a different purpose. The Arboretum educators had a program where the students had to make use of the senses they have, to experience something new. These were 3rd graders. Most of them couldn't keep quiet long enough to hear a bird unless they saw it first but since sight, sound and touch are pretty easy senses to experience at the Arboretum, I decided to use the teaching gardens for taste and smell as well as touch, hoping to enhance their lesson.

So we stopped along our hike at the garden, to let students try some of the herbs planted in the garden. We mainly used sage, chives, peppermint and catnip.

First they had to smell it and let me know what they thought it was, they had a hard time with identifying the plant from smell. Chives was the easiest since most of them guessed onion, mint was the next most recognizable one. One boy told me the herbs smelled like an essential oil.

Then the students all got a small piece to touch and notice the difference in the feel of each leaf or stem. Finally came the most anticipated part... tasting it.

Their reactions were varied from "I like it and give me more" to "uck," and every reaction in between. For most of the students, it was their first time of eating anything directly from a garden. They didn't think it was safe, and if it was safe could they eat everything out there? That became a lesson in itself as catnip, field corn, soybeans and milkweed are plants we don't eat. The students were eager to learn but my job was just for them to use their five senses. Hopefully, the teachers went back to their classrooms and helped their students learn to think about what to plant in a garden, how to use what they planted, how to protect the plants from wildlife and learn the difference between a plant and a weed.

My biggest challenge was to keep the students out of the strawberries. Since about 500 students came through with the program, we would not have had any strawberries left after the first school visited. The strawberries were covered in fencing to keep out the deer, although many students found they could reach their little hands in there and covet a strawberry.

I loved their questions, one which I received many times was about the rainwater collection system we have. That of course, led to why it is there and how it works, which the students found fascinating along with the adults accompanying them.

Since we were on a pretty tight time structure, the sense program came before learning about gardening which is why I made that stop the last one. But it is easy to see the students would love to know more about gardening, where their food comes from and how to experiment, so I am hoping the schools take an active part in teaching this subject.



The point of this article is to let the Master Gardeners and Groundworks know that their work is appreciated, and the garden is used. Thank you to Richard Dickey and Steve Sikorski. Even though we may not see the garden in use, it is a teaching tool I like to make use of if possible.

