



## 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.*



Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) is an annual from the Fabaceae family grown in semiarid environments year round but in Zone 4-5 is an annual crop. Fenugreek is best to sow the seeds directly in the ground.

Fenugreek grows to 12-24 inches and likes full sun or partial shade. It is also a legume but most harvest for their greens. The greens are ready for harvest within 3 weeks. If you leave the twigs, you will get regrowth within 2 weeks. The flowers are white or yellow clusters with slightly elongated triangular leaves in some varieties. If you want to save the seeds, wait for the plant to flower and they will produce a thin seed pod. The seeds are ready to harvest when the pod turns yellow.

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The tender, green mild-tasting leaves can be cooked or steamed. The long seed pods are harvested like peas or beans. The seeds can be toasted or made into bean dishes, vegetable dishes or Indian curries. Fenugreek has numerous vitamins and minerals with soluble fiber to decrease the risk of colon cancer, improve breast milk production due to the diosgenin compound, slow mental aging and augment your thinking processes due to the choline content, and soothes digestive problems including ulcers.

## The Flower of the Month

By Roine Klassen, Master Gardener

Moonflower (*ipomoea alba*)



After sunset these nocturnal bloomers unfurl to open huge 6-inch flowers that glow all night in the moonlight. The flower unfurls in less than a minute and is an event some gardeners say is worth waiting for. A heavy fragrance which some say reminds them of magnolias is attractive to night creatures like moths that gather nectar and pollinate the flowers when they visit the flowers. Consider planting the flowers close to the deck or a window so the flowers can be enjoyed in the evening.

Moonflowers are considered annual plants in our area. Seeds can be started indoors 6-8 weeks before transplanting to the garden. They may also be sown outdoors when nighttime temperatures stay in the 50's or consistent daytime temperatures of 70's. Remember to nick the edge of the seed with a nail clipper or soak up to 8 hours in tepid water. Plant the seeds ½ to 1 inch deep and about 6 inches apart. Germination occurs in 10-20 days.

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Full sun and well-drained soil is preferred; mulch around the plants after they come up to conserve moisture and reduce weeding time. Provide trellis or support as these vines can grow 10-20 feet. If the plant outgrows its support, consider winding the stems back down onto the support. Pinch back the growing tips occasionally can help keep the plant in bounds. White sap may “bleed” from the cut stems when they are pruned. It washes off with the next rain; be sure to wash your hands well after pruning. Fertilizer with high phosphorus encourages blooms while too much nitrogen may decrease blossom numbers.

Blooms continue till frost. Purple tinted seed pods will form; they add interest to the plant. Seeds can be saved for planting next year.

Consider planting morning glories that come a wide variety of colors with moonflowers for a great display.

## Fit Composting Into Your Garden

*By Carol Raabe Master Gardener*



It is so satisfying to sink your shovel into a pile of well-rotted leaf mold. For years, we dumped our fall leaves in a pile, then ignored them. In the spring, I'd burrow to the older layers for beautiful compost to amend my garden soil and mulch my plants. My idea of heaven.

This year, dear husband said he doesn't want to compost anymore.

It's true that we haven't produced piles of well-composted plant waste since we've moved to Oacoma. I'm discouraged, too. On the other hand, we've put about as much effort into this compost as we did to the leaves, which transformed themselves so easily into friable loam. Producing soil from plant waste really isn't hard or labor intensive, but the transformation is a process, so it has a couple rules.

The thing is, I'm sold on the benefits of compost. Over a very short period of time, it can change the structure of the soil, making it easier to work and plant.

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It enriches the soil and reduces the need for chemical fertilizers. It helps retain moisture (a great benefit where rainfall is slight) and adds beneficial bacteria and fungi while suppressing plant diseases and pests.

Finally, it keeps stuff out of the landfills, reducing methane emissions and your carbon footprint.

As with my leaves, compost is produced in moist piles of organic material, half of it brown and half green. Adding air once in a while (stirring) speeds up decomposition. The best location is a sunny spot.

Piles can simply be piles. A woman in my Master Gardening class uses a tractor to mix her compost pile. You can imagine how much green and brown material she moves around. Most backyard gardeners, though, use some kind of container that lets them easily add material and moisture and remove “finished” compost.

The two types of compost bins are stationary and rotating. Google “compost bin plans” or “homemade compost bins” or some variation to find many ways to make a compost bin, often at least as good as the commercial products and much less expensive. Pinterest has lots of examples, too. Many can be made with materials you have on hand. As you know, gardeners are notoriously inventive.

Rotating compost bins are designed to tumble the pile. Ideally, their simplicity encourages gardeners to turn them often, infusing oxygen on a regular basis. If the bin also retains heat and the decaying material remains moist, a rotating compost bin can provide compost in weeks.

Stationary compost bins need “stirring.” That’s what my fellow master gardener is doing with her tractor. Sometimes, stationary bins have two or three boxes, so decaying material can be shoveled from one box to another to incorporate oxygen.

I’m considering a 3-box bin made of milk crates piled on one another. The plans (see <https://www.instructables.com/id/Milkcrate-Composter-vertically-stacked/>) don’t discuss stirring, but I plan to keep a tool nearby for that. It might need water once in a while, too.

With this many options, how do you choose? Cost is one consideration, as is size and how much work you want to do to make and use it. My first choice would be a tumbler with two 30 gallon food-grade barrels.

Locate your bin in a sunny spot and start your compost. Try to keep a fairly even mix of brown, such as shredded newspaper, wood chips from untreated wood and dry leaves; and green, like grass clippings and kitchen waste. Blending big pieces into smaller pieces will speed up decomposition.



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Items not to add to compost include meat products, oil, fat or grease; diseased plant material; sawdust or chips from treated wood; dog or cat feces; weeds that go to seed; or dairy products. (If you want to use weeds that might seed, put them in a 5 gallon pail and cover with water; it becomes a tea that can add nutrients to your plants as you water.)

Add ingredients as needed, water if the pile is too dry, stir twice a week, and harvest the best soil you can imagine.

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## How To Control Aphids On Milkweed Plants

Report submitted by Cindy Jungeman, Master Gardener

<http://monarchbutterflygarden.net/control-aphids-milkweed-plants>

By Tony Gomes

### 11 Good Ideas for Keeping Milkweed Aphid-free...and 1 Bad One!



One problem that plagues almost all gardeners across North America is the relentless attack of oleander aphids. They suck the life from milkweed like **little orange vampires**.

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The degree to which their infestations affect plant health is debatable, but the ugliness they unleash upon your *butterfly garden* is not!

Here's are 8 tips to keep that aphid army from ever forming, so you can save your **precious milkweed plants** for monarchs:

1. **RUB THEM OUT:** some people simply *get rid of aphids* by rubbing them off with their fingers and thumbs . This can be effective when the numbers are low if you're not afraid to get your hands (or gloves) dirty.

2. **HOSE THEM DOWN:** a steady stream of water on the aphids can also displace them. You'll need to hold the milkweed plant with your other hand to avoid stem breakage. Using a *spray bottle* on stream is also effective.

3. **ALCOHOL OVERDOSE:** This was reported in the *LA Times* as **the secret to killing milkweed aphids and not monarch eggs**

*Please note that if isopropyl alcohol is applied directly to monarch eggs or caterpillars it will kill them.*

**UPDATE:** Community Member Joe G. says he uses a *small spray bottle* filled with isopropyl alcohol to spray the aphids on his plants. After about 5 seconds, he hoses the plant down with water and those pesky milkweed invaders are dead. This sounds like a great idea, but I would only recommend this for heavy infestations...don't destroy your local ecosystem with an aphid-free garden!

4. **WASH THEIR MOUTHS OUT:** a little soap never hurt anybody, but it can kill those pesky aphids. Add 2 Tablespoons of dish soap to 1 gallon of water and spray the aphids directly, rinse, and repeat.

5. **BRUSH THEM ASIDE:** Use a detail brush to brush them off the milkweed plants and get in those nook s and crannies without damaging the plants:

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6. **GROUND THEM:** Those naughty aphids need a time out, so keep them away from their favorite milkweed plants by sprinkling coffee grounds around them. There are conflicting reports as to how effective this is, but it can't hurt to try.

7. **DIVERSIFY and SCRAMBLE:** This preventative measure can become very effective as your milkweed patches start to mature. Try planting several species of milkweed, and put them in several areas of your yard and garden. The aphids will likely have a favorite area and you can sacrifice one small patch to the *angry aphid gods*.

More milkweed varieties could attract more aphid predators too. Could it also attract more monarch predators? Yes, but that's a good excuse to bring a few eggs/caterpillars inside to watch the amazing process of **monarch metamorphosis**.

*Still have aphids?* You have a couple options left to regain aphid control. Unfortunately, this next option option is unpredictable and could have unintended consequences...

8. **WHO'S BUGGING WHO NOW?!** Introducing beneficial insects to eat the aphids sounds like a great *natural* solution, but beneficial bugs like ladybugs and mantids also feed on monarch eggs and larvae.

In some regions, parasitic wasps have been released to control unwanted pests. Unfortunately, these wasps are also targeting beneficial species, including monarchs!

There are already enough monarch predators in your garden...what will happen if you unleash thousands more?

9. **REPEL WITH PLANTS:** Some plants, including **onions** and marigolds, have been shown to repel aphids and naturally reduce their numbers. Planting these repellents close to milkweed can attract more butterflies *while* keeping aphid numbers down to reasonable levels.

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California Butterfly Lady, Monika Moore, takes thin strips of banana peels and places them on milkweed stems near buds/blooms where aphids like to congregate...not *appealing* to aphids!

10. **CUT IT OUT:** If it's come to the point where aphids have completely engulfed your milkweed, *cut back all areas of moderate to heavy infestation* and throw out. Make sure to discard the cuttings far away from the garden to avoid a touching aphid-family reunion. I suggest using a yard waste can if you have one.

Then, try options #2 , #3, or #4 on less crowded areas so they can't start *another* infestation.

*It's not fully understood if/how oleander aphids overwinter, but cutting back infested milkweed plants in late summer/early fall might help you avoid an aphid Gardageddon next season!*

11. **SUCK THEM UP:** This aphid-control strategy was recently shared with me and it eliminates the aphids without using any harsh chemicals *or* hurting the milkweed. Use the crevice tool on a **handheld vacuum cleaner** . (We have one on our dirt devil.)

12. **A BAD IDEA:** You could also apply a professional grade pesticide like malathion, but it's likely that monarchs, other wildlife, and the environment could suffer injury (or worse) from using harsh chemicals. There's a reason butterfly gardeners use *organic pest control*...it won't kill the butterflies!

*Whatever solution you choose to control aphids, remember that early intervention is your best chance for for defeating these sap sucking pests.*



