



Horticulture



Garden Guide

Things to do this month

Order perennial plants and bulbs now for cut flowers this summer. Particularly good choices are phlox, daisies, coreopsis, asters and lilies.

Check stored bulbs, tubers and corms. Discard any that are soft or diseased.

Order gladiolus corms now for planting later in the spring after all danger of frost has passed. Locate in full sun in well-drained soil.

Branches of forsythia, pussy willow, quince, spirea, and dogwood can be forced for indoor bloom. Make long, slanted cuts when collecting the branches and place the stems in a vase of water. Change the water every four days. They should bloom in about 3 weeks.

Check any vegetables you have in storage. Dispose of any that show signs of shriveling or rotting.

This year plan to grow at least one new vegetable that you have never grown before; it may be better than what you are already growing. The new dwarf varieties on the market which use less space while producing more food per square foot may be just what you are looking for.

Send off seed orders early this month to take advantage of seasonal discounts. Some companies offer bonus seeds of new varieties to early buyers.

Do not start your vegetable transplants indoors too early. Six weeks ahead of the expected planting date is early enough for the fast-growth species such as tomatoes. Eight weeks allows enough time for the slower-growing types such as peppers.

Prune fruit trees and grapes in late February or early March after the worst of the winter cold is passed, but before spring growth begins.

Late February is a good time to air-layer such house plants as dracaena, dieffenbachia and rubber plant, especially if they have grown too tall and leggy.

Check all five growing factors if your house plants are not growing well. Light, temperature, nutrients, moisture and humidity must be favorable to provide good growth.

Late winter is the time to prune many deciduous trees. Look over your trees now and remove dead branches, sprouts growing at or near the base of the tree trunk and crossed branches.

If bird feeding has been a favorite activity this winter, order shrubs which provide cover and small fruits for your feathered friends. Consider species such as dogwood and cotoneaster which can help lure hungry birds from cultivated fruits, if planted on the opposite side of the yard.

Repair and paint window boxes, lawn furniture, tools and other items in preparation for outdoor gardening and recreational use. (MJF)

Azalea Plant Care

Florist azaleas are not hardy in southeastern Nebraska and should not be planted outdoors for survival. However, they can be cared for as a regular blooming houseplant.

Make sure the soil does not dry out and the plant does not wilt. Many azalea soil mixes are composed of a high percentage of peat moss which dries quickly, especially when the plant is in full bloom. It may be necessary to water daily.

Submerging the pot and allowing the peat-like soil to absorb water, and then draining in the sink may be beneficial.

Once the petals have fallen, keep the plant in a cool, sunny location. Plants may be set outdoors in partial shade for the summer. Fertilize monthly with a houseplant fertilizer. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Keep the plant outdoors as long as possible in the fall, but bring indoors before a heavy frost.



In order for the plants to re-bloom, it is necessary to go through a cool, dormant period. Temperatures between 40 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit are ideal. Warmer temperatures will probably limit flower bud formation. Plants should receive full sun during this period. Continue to water but limit fertilizer. When flower buds start forming, move the plant to a warmer location and increase humidity. (MJF)

2003 All-America Rose Selections

Dazzling and unique colors stamp the four 2003 All-America Rose Selections (AARS) winners as great additions to any garden. Add great vigor, wonderful form and disease-resistance and even an inexperienced gardener will be able to quickly establish a showplace with these nationally AARS tested roses.

AARS is a non-profit association of rose growers and introducers dedicated to the introduction and promotion of exceptional roses. Since 1938 the AARS seal of approval has graced outstanding new rose varieties that have withstood the test of time — and Mother Nature.

The four 2003 AARS winners — Eureka, Cherry Parfait, Hot Cocoa and Whisper — are the “best of the best.” They’ve been at the “top of the class” in 27 AARS test gardens across the country, proving they will do well in all climates.

For more information about AARS, visit online at rose.org.

Cherry Parfait

The 2003 Grandiflora winner, Cherry Parfait, has an outstanding color and appearance.



White petals with a broad red edge create a treat for the eyes. Excellent in all climates, this rose’s relaxed habit makes it a perfect companion plant in the garden for perennials and shrubs. Seemingly always in bloom, this attractive bicolor rose is attractive throughout the season, accented by its dark foliage.

Eureka

Eureka, which is nearly as wide as it is tall, provides a sparkling hedge-type look with its

glittering gold hues. The four foot tall All-America Rose Selection (AARS) award-winning floribunda offers a beautiful old-fashioned looking bloom of rich apricot yellow with four-inch flowers. In groups of three or five, Eureka offers a golden anchor to the border, a centerpiece or accent area. It will become very popular because of its abundant blooms, exceptional reblooming ability, glossy green leaves, easy-to-grow vigor and light fragrance.

Whisper

Hybrid Tea lovers will find

the pureness of Whisper’s white color most attractive, one of the most stunning white roses introduced in the past decade. Whisper enchants the viewer with classically formed flowers of creamy white with dark green, semi-glossy leaves. Very resistant to disease, Whisper is equally at home as a specimen plant or in a cutting garden. This sophisticated rose will grow up to 5 feet by 4 feet and boasts five-inch flowers.



Hot Cocoa

Gardeners

will be debating the color of Hot Cocoa. A Floribunda with petals that are brownish-orange on the top and a deep rusty orange on the underside. People of all ages are attracted to Hot Cocoa, whose pointed buds of deep rust unfurl to reveal the color that some call ‘cinnamon brown’ and which often takes on a purply cast. Large four-inch flowers hold their color and tolerate heat very well. (MJF)



Hints for Starting Transplants

Starting flower and vegetable transplants at home can be fun. Growing quality transplants requires good seed, a sterile, well-drained growing medium, proper temperature and moisture conditions and adequate light. Since the home is usually not the best environment for growing transplants, problems occasionally develop.

Poor or erratic germination of seed may be caused by improper planting, for example, planting too deeply. Uneven moisture and cool temperatures can also cause problems. Medium to large seeds are sown at a depth of two times their minimum diameter. Fine seed is usually dusted on the surface of the seedbed. Cool potting mix temperatures, below 70 degrees Fahrenheit, delay germination. Maintain the proper germination temperature and even moisture conditions for rapid, uniform germination.

Damping-off, caused by several fungi, can cause serious plant loss. Seedlings may develop water-soaked spots on their stems near the soil surface, then collapse and die. Environmental conditions usually associated with damping-off are a poorly drained potting soil and over watering. Damping-off can be prevented by using clean containers, a sterile, well-drained potting mix, and by following good cultural practices. Previously used containers should be

washed in soapy water, then disinfected by dipping in a solution containing one part chlorine bleach and nine parts water. Flower and vegetable seed need an evenly moist potting mix for good germination. After germination, allow the potting soil to dry somewhat between waterings.

the seedlings grow. Leave the lights on 12 to 16 hours a day. When the first pair of “true leaves” appear, thin or transplant the seedlings. Allow the potting soil to become somewhat dry between waterings. The best quality transplants are short, stocky, and dark green.

Green algal or brownish fungal growth may appear on the soil surface or sides of peat pots. While their appearance generally causes little harm, their presence usually indicates excessive moisture levels. Allow the potting mix to dry somewhat before watering.

A lack of essential nutrients produces characteristic deficiency symptoms. Phosphorus and nitrogen deficiency symptoms sometimes

occur on vegetable and flower seedlings. Phosphorus-deficient plants frequently have purplish leaves and growth is stunted. Yellow lower leaves may indicate a nitrogen deficiency. Other symptoms of a nitrogen deficiency are stunted growth and small leaves. Apply a soluble fertilizer, such as 15-30-15, to the seedlings. Fertilize weekly with a one-quarter strength solution.

While there are obstacles to growing transplants indoors, home gardeners can produce good quality transplants if they follow good cultural practices.

