

Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

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October Is Time to Plant Spring Flowering Bulbs



High quality bulbs planted before the ground freezes will put on a colorful show next spring.

By Richard Jauron
Extension Horticulturalist
Iowa State University

Tulips, daffodils, crocuses, and other spring-flowering bulbs are a welcome sight in spring. To enjoy the colorful spring display, gardeners must purchase and plant spring-flowering bulbs in fall.

When purchasing spring-flowering bulbs at garden centers, select large, firm bulbs. Avoid small, soft or blemished bulbs. Store purchased bulbs in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location, such as a garage, until they are planted.

October is the ideal time to plant spring-flowering bulbs in Iowa. When planted in October, spring-flowering bulbs have sufficient time to develop a good root system before the ground freezes in winter. If weather permits, bulbs can be planted as late as mid to late November. However, late-planted bulbs will emerge and bloom later than normal the following spring.

Tulips, daffodils and most other spring-flowering bulbs perform best in areas that receive six or more hours of direct sun each day. All high quality bulbs should bloom well the first spring. However, tulips, daffodils and other bulbs planted in partial shade may not bloom well in succeeding years because of insufficient sunlight.

A few bulbs, such as snowdrops and Siberian squill, can be successfully grown in partial shade. Bulbs also need fertile, well-drained soils. Bulbs may rot in wet, poorly drained sites. Planting bulbs in raised beds may be the best option in poorly drained sites.

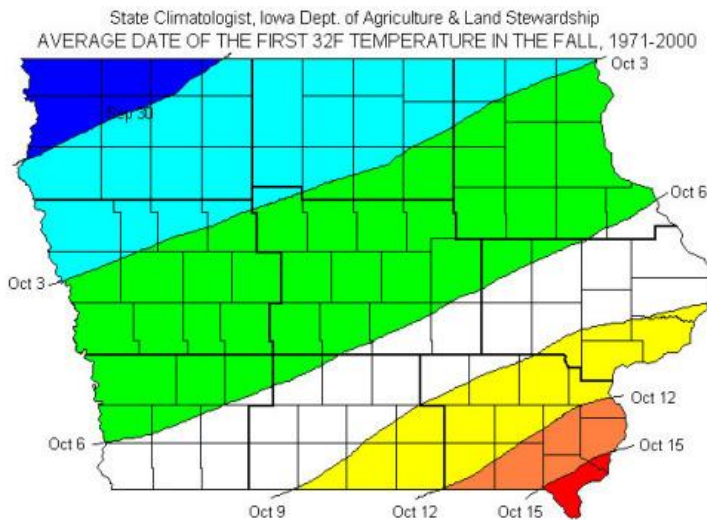
Plant spring-flowering bulbs in clusters or groups to achieve the greatest visual impact in the garden. When planting daffodils and tulips, plant 10 or more bulbs of the same variety in an area. Smaller growing plants, such as grape hyacinths and crocuses, should be planted in clusters of 25 or more bulbs. Plant bulbs at a depth equal to three to four times their maximum bulb diameter. Accordingly, tulips and daffodils should be planted six to eight inches deep, crocuses and grape hyacinths only three to four inches deep. Large bulbs, such as tulips and daffodils, should be spaced four to six inches apart. A three-inch spacing is adequate for crocuses, grape hyacinths and other small bulbs.

After planting, water the bulbs periodically (if the weather in fall is dry) to promote good root development.

Sometimes, winter seems like it will never end. However, winter eventually relents and is replaced by the sights and sounds of spring. Some of the most beautiful sights of spring are the colorful flowers of tulips, daffodils and other spring-flowering bulbs. Be sure to purchase and plant some spring-flowering bulbs in the landscape this fall.



The First Frost



By Sherry Rindels (originally published 10/11/96)
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Nothing sends gardeners running faster than a weather forecast of FROST. Cool air, clear skies and light or calm winds are necessary for frost to occur. Cool air permits temperatures to drop low enough to freeze moisture in the air which would otherwise form dew. When skies are clear, heat from the soil is able to rise, allowing the cool air to settle close to the ground and chilling the plants as they lose heat. Calm winds allow the cool air to settle without mixing it with warm air.

Frost (the sparkling ice crystals that form on all surfaces) can occur without severely damaging plants. The critical feature is the internal temperature within plant tissues. If temperatures within these tissues are cold enough to break cell walls or disrupt cell constituents beyond repair, damage, wilting, and dying will occur in those tissues affected.

Some plants are more tolerant of frost than others. Woody plants are less affected than succulent plants. Fruits and flowers may be more sensitive than leaves. Sudden and prolonged freezing will be more damaging than gradual cooling of short duration. Plants already exposed to cool temperatures will be more resistant.

Within our own properties we can find variations on different sides of the house, under trees, on south or north facing slopes, or low lying areas. Cool air settles at the bottom of slopes because it is heavier than warm air. Frost pockets will then form in valleys where cool air becomes trapped. Hilltops are also susceptible to cool temperatures. Hillsides often remain frost free until a more severe frost occurs.

How can we protect plants from that first cold snap? The two most common methods are covering to keep the plants warm or to warm the plants by sprinkling with water. Covering is the most effective for most people. Covering plants the night before with a sheet, blanket, or tarp will trap the warmth from the soil over the plants thus preventing freezing. This type of covering will usually protect plants when temperatures drop into the upper 20's. Plastic used as a covering usually doesn't work as well as the other coverings mentioned.

Sprinkling the plants with water is often used as a "morning after" solution. When water cools and crystallizes into ice, heat is released which may prevent internal damage before freezing occurs within plant cells. The time when the internal plant temperature is coldest is in the morning. If the drop in temperature is not too great (more than a few degrees), watering plants in the early morning may protect tender plants that were left uncovered. Of course it never hurts to wish for cloud cover and a good breeze on those first cool nights of autumn to help prevent damage.

Common Honey Locust or "honey" of a Locust

By Mike Dytrych
ISU Master Gardener
Mills County



Have you ever found yourself in the woods, hunting game, looking for "shrooms", bird watching or just out for a nature walk, and came upon a tree that looks dangerously ominous? One that brings the thought that maybe God may have actually been upset when he created this one. The unmistakable Honeylocust Tree -

“Beauty and the Beast”, “Friend or Foe”, wonderful shade tree yet terribly dirty and dangerous. There are many names and references to this very old tree, native from the eastern Great Plains, south to the Gulf of Mexico, northeast to Pennsylvania, and north to southern Michigan. The Honeylocust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) is a fast growing, medium sized, deciduous tree, belonging to the plant family *Fabaceae* (the pea/bean family), and is found to grow in many soil types and terrains across its region. Here in our area, agriculture has created an ideal habitat, where it has become a pasture, hill side, and fencerow weed. A check with the local NRCS office and the suggestion to “get them out of your property” is spoken almost as quickly as “good morning”. Similar to the cedar trees that dot or clog our hill sides here in the Loess Hills, the common Honeylocust has become a nuisance rather than a beloved tree.

The Honeylocust, also called sweet-locust, derives its common name from the sweet taste of the honey-like pulp that is inside the seed pods, and the rattling of the seeds, in the dried pods, is said to resemble the singing of locusts (thus the second part of the common name). The beauty of the Honeylocust, leafing out relatively late in the spring, has a graceful, lacey canopy which provides good visibility through the canopy. The dappled shade provides enough light for grasses to flourish and grow right up to the base of the tree. Strongly sweet smelling, cream-colored flower clusters follow in early June, much loved by birds and bees alike. The production of fruit follows, creating long, flat, twisted legumes (pods), 6 to 16” in length. They can be found somewhat straight or curled up, leathery and reddish in appearance. Inside the pods you will find the dark seeds, about as big as your pinkie finger nail. Once these pods drop from the tree they are eagerly eaten by grazing cattle, white tailed deer, rabbits, and squirrels. The reddish wood of the Honeylocust is strong, coarse grained and very resistant to decay. It has been used for furniture, interior woodwork, railroad ties, fence posts, fuel wood, and pallets.

The Honeylocust, or thorny-locust, however, is also known for some less flattering characteristics. A great deal of maintenance is needed for clean-up of small limbs as well as the many seed pods, dropped by the tree, creating a raking chore. However, more notably are the frightening thorns. These



conspicuous thorns, on the trunk and limbs, are modified branches, and will occasionally bear leaves. The scientific name *triacanthos* means three thorns. The thorns will branch off in groups of three or in factors of three and reach lengths as long as 15 inches. It is thought that they have likely evolved over geologic time as protection against large herbivores. In the past, the very hard thorns have been used as nails, for carding wool, and as pins for closing sacks.

As the common Honeylocust matures, its thorn production usually diminishes gradually, and finally ceases in the upper and outer crown growth as the tree ages. When cuttings from the thorn-less portions of mature trees are propagated, they tend to remain thorn-less. The nursery industry has used this, to produce Honeylocust cultivars that have no thorns as well as desirable growth forms and interesting foliage colors. These new cultivars *Gleditsia triacanthos* var. *inermis*, Thornless Honeylocust as well as other thorn-less varieties such as Imperial, Shademaster, Skyline, Moraine, Sunburst, Summer Lace, Ruby Lace, provided fruitless options, color variations, sizes and shapes. These varieties have recently become some of the more widely planted trees, by home owners and business property managers alike, perhaps setting the stage for problems similar to the “Dutch Elm Disease” or “Emerald Ash Borer” crisis’. However, the common Honeylocust will likely live on.

Related species of the common Honeylocust are the Black Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), and the Kentucky Coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*). Many mistake the identities of the common Honey Locust for the Black locust; however, the differences are not hard to distinguish. The easiest thing is to look at the leaves. The Black Locust leaves are more round and do not come to a point at the end. When looking for thorns on the black locust, look on the branch. You should find two thorns every time you find some, one thorn exactly opposite the other along the branch, and a length of ¼ to no more than 1 inch long. When you look at the seedpods, they are much smaller than the honey locust. They can be about half the size, about 6 inches max. The pod is not as red, nor is it as leathery. Inside, the seeds are very tiny and dark in color. Although black locust is toxic to humans and livestock, it is thought that birds, rabbits, and deer can safely eat the seeds.

So the next time you find yourself out in the hills walking along and something gives you a sharp “poke”, slowly turn around and give a wink to the “Maker” above, that you have met one of his creations, the common Honeylocust, and you understand just a little bit better “why”.

"Autumn is the eternal corrective. It is ripeness and color and a time of maturity; but it is also breadth, and depth, and distance. What man can stand with autumn on a hilltop and fail to see the span of his world and the meaning of the rolling hills that reach to the far horizon?"

- Hal Borland

Upcoming Mills County Master Gardener Seminars:

“The Beauty & Value of Native Plantings on Your Property”

Date: Monday, October 12

Time: 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Place: Glenwood Resource Center
Visitor’s Center Conference Room

Cost: \$2.00

Jan Faraci, Master Conservationist & Mills County Conservation Board member, will speak about the unique features of the Loess Hills, the plants and animals found only here in our area. Learn how and why to incorporate these native plantings into your own property.

“Lifelong Gardening”

Date: Monday, November 2

Time: 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Place: Glenwood Resource Center
Visitor’s Center Conference Room

Cost: \$2.00

Denise Fikes, Mills County Master Gardener, offers a presentation on the many benefits of continuing our gardening efforts well into our “golden years”. She will offer tips and techniques, and tools that will help you to do just that!

For more information, call the extension office at 712-624-8616

ISU Extension & Mills County Master Gardeners Offer Small Acreage Workshops

You’ve always wanted to live in the country, so you sell your house in the city and move to a small acreage (something less than 20 acres) to live the “good life”. But now you are faced with issues you have never had to face before – or didn’t even think of! Perhaps you are still in the decision mode of whether to move to the country or not.

ISU Extension, together with a committee of Master Gardener volunteers, is happy to offer this multi-session workshop providing valuable information and several hand outs on a wide variety of topics, all related to living on a small acreage. The dates, times, and topics to be covered are as follows:

November 4, 2009 6:30 – 9:30 PM

Life is Different Here in the Country!

- “Rural Family Life” – Safety, Emergency Planning, County services
- “Water & Septic” – issues with well water and septic systems
- “Legal Issues” – easements, property lines, rights and responsibilities

November 11, 2009 6:30 – 9:30 PM

What to do With All That Extra Space!

- “Trees and Windbreaks” - planning, planting, maintenance and disease issues
- “Prairies and Native Grasses”
- “Ponds and Water Features”

November 18, 2009 6:30 – 9:30 PM

Important But Often Overlooked Issues

- “Equipment Needs for Rural Living”
- “Alternative Forms of Power” - overview of geothermal, wind, solar, generators, etc.
- “Animals in the Country” – wildlife issues, dealing with strays and other domestic animal issues

The workshops will take place at the ISU Mills County Extension Office in Malvern.

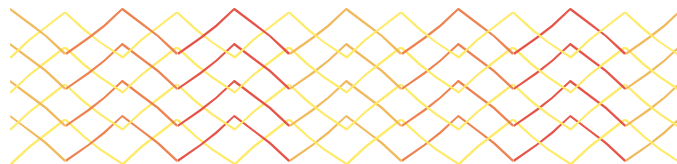
The cost for the workshops is \$10 per person each night or \$25 paid in advance for all three nights on Nov. 4

OR Pre-register and receive a discount!

Pre-registered cost is \$8 per person per night or \$20 in advance for all three nights. Payment must be received by Nov. 2 to receive discount.

Couples can attend and pay single fee!

Advance registration forms can be picked up at the Extension Office or call 712-624-8616 to register by phone.



Extension programs are available to all without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, or disability

Ask the ISU Extension Gardening Expert

When should I harvest my parsnips?

Parsnips should be harvested in late fall after exposure to several light freezes. The low temperatures convert starches to sugars, improving the parsnip's sweet, nut-like flavor. After harvest, trim off the foliage one-half inch above the roots and store the parsnips at a temperature of 32 F and relative humidity of 95 to 98 percent.

Gardeners also can leave a portion of the crop in the ground over winter. After several light freezes, cover the parsnips with several inches of straw. Harvest the remaining crop in early spring before growth resumes.

How do I overwinter my gladiolus bulbs?

Carefully dig up the plants with a spade in late summer/early fall. Gently shake off the soil from the bulb-like corms. Then cut off the foliage one to two inches above the corms. Dry the corms for two to three weeks in a warm, dry, well-ventilated location. When thoroughly dry, remove and discard the old dried up mother corms located at the base of the new corms. Remove the tiny corms (cormels) found around the base of the new corms. Save the small corms for propagation purposes or discard them. Place the corms in mesh bags or old nylon stockings and hang in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location. Storage temperatures should be 35 to 45 F.

What is a biennial plant?

A biennial is a herbaceous plant that completes its life cycle in two years. The plant produces only leafy growth during the first growing season. Biennial plants flower, produce seeds, and then die in their second growing season. Biennials include foxglove, hollyhock, mullein, carrots, beets, and parsley.

Are the fruit of the American cranberrybush edible?

The American cranberrybush viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) is a deciduous shrub that grows 8 to 12 feet tall and produces flat-topped clusters of white flowers in spring. After flowering, berry-like fruit develop that turn bright red in fall. The fruit are edible and can be made into jellies and preserves.

Are butterfly weed and butterfly bush different names for the same plant?

Butterfly weed and butterfly bush are actually different plants.

Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a herbaceous perennial. A member of the milkweed family, butterfly weed grows two to three feet tall and produces flat-topped clusters of bright orange flowers from July through September. The flowers attract several butterfly species, hence the common name.

Butterfly weed is easy to grow. It performs best in full sun and tolerates drought and infertile soils. Because of its rather long taproot, transplanting the butterfly weed can be difficult. Carefully choose a site and don't disturb it. Also, the butterfly weed emerges rather late in spring. To prevent possible injury, mark the planting site and don't cultivate in the area until the plant emerges.

The butterfly bush (*Buddleia spp.*) is a medium-sized, woody shrub. However, it's generally regarded as a herbaceous perennial in Iowa because the shrub typically dies back to the ground each winter. Fortunately, the performance of the butterfly bush is not greatly affected by the extensive dieback. The butterfly bush grows back rapidly after the dead wood is removed in early spring and blooms on the current year's growth. Plants generally have a loose, open, arching habit. By the end of summer, plants are often five to six feet tall.

The butterfly bush produces flowers on dense, 6- to 12-inch-long spikes (panicles). In Iowa, flowering typically begins in early summer and continues until frost. Flower colors include white, yellow, pink, blue, violet and purple. The fragrant flowers attract butterflies, hummingbirds and bees.

Butterfly bushes perform best in moist, well-drained soils in partial to full sun. Avoid wet, poorly drained sites. Also, select sites that provide winter protection.

The leaves on my maple tree are covered with a black, sooty material. What is it and is it harming the tree?

The black sooty material is likely sooty mold. Sooty mold is caused by several different fungi. The fungi don't infect plants, but grow on the sugary honeydew excreted by aphids, scales, mealybugs and other insects. In Iowa, sooty mold is most common on pine, maple, linden and elm trees.

While sooty mold can reduce plant vigor by blocking sunlight and interfering with photosynthesis, the damage is mainly aesthetic. Sooty mold does not cause serious harm to healthy, well established trees. Sooty mold does not need to be controlled.

While sooty mold is not a serious problem, the scales, aphids, and mealybugs may need to be controlled. Properly identify the insect pest and follow recommended control measures if their presence threatens the health of the tree.

OCTOBER GARDENING TO DO LIST



- Aerate lawns with in areas with compacted or heavy clay soils.
- Continue to water newly established trees, shrubs, and perennials.
- Try something different this year for Halloween. Carve a jack-o-lantern face into a spaghetti squash or large gourd.
- Stop fertilizing house plants.
- Check trees for bagworms and fall webworms. Hand prune and destroy.
- Fall tilling, except in erosion-prone areas, helps improve soil structure and usually leads to soil warming up and drying faster in the spring, thus allowing crops to be planted earlier. Incorporate compost, manure, or leaves into the soil.
- Continue to mow your lawn until the grass stops growing – when temperatures are consistently below 50°.
- Dig and store tender garden flowers for winter storage. Gladiolus corms should be dug when leaves begin to yellow. Caladiums, geraniums, tuberous begonias, and calla lilies should be lifted before a killing frost. Dig canna and dahlia roots after a heavy frost. Allow to air dry, then pack in dry peat moss or vermiculite, and store in a cool location.
- Remove stakes and supports as plants decline. Clean and store for next year's garden.
- Protect fruit trees and berries from hungry rabbits and deer.
- Carefully blow or rake tree and shrub leaves off your perennial gardens. Large leaves get wet, mat down, and provide poor insulation for your plants. Shred fallen leaves and use them as a soil mulch or amendment for new plantings. Or rake and bag them for use in next year's garden.
- Leave stems, flower heads, and seedpods standing for winter interest.

**I trust in Nature for the stable laws
Of beauty and utility.
Spring shall plant
And Autumn garner to the end of time.**
- Robert Browning

2010 ISU Calendar Now Available



This full-color 12-month calendar focuses on earth-friendly gardening. Each month lists specific tips plus the back pages offer details on four green garden topics: compost, rain collection, beekeeping, and houseplant choices. Gardening resources, such as web sites and publications, also are listed.

Makes a great gift! Order yours now!

PM 0815 \$6.00

Resources for Horticulture information

ISU's Hortline at (515) 294-3108

(Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-4:30 p.m)

ISU/Mills County Extension: 712-624-8616

www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/yardgarden.htm

Iowa State University Publications

- PM 731 Harvesting and Storing Vegetables (\$1.00)
- PM 2079 Flowering Plants for the Late Summer Garden (free)
- PM 534 Planting & Harvesting Times for Garden Vegetables (Free)
- RG 0319 When to Divide Perennials (free)
- RG 0311 Growing and Overwintering Tender Perennials (free)
- RG 0305 Growing Chrysanthemums in the Garden (Free)

Horticulture Publications on-line

<https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListCategories>