

The Green Scene

February , 2022

Volume 20, Issue 2



Attract Beneficial Insects by Growing Sweet Alyssum

By Ajay Nair, Taylor Mauch

AMES, Iowa—Gardeners who are looking for a creative way to control insects might consider planting some sweet alyssum.

This flowering annual or short-lived perennial adds some bright colors to the garden, and most importantly, it attracts beneficial insects such as ladybugs and hoverfly. These insects are beneficial to plants because they feed on pests, especially aphids.

Taylor Mauch, a graduate horticulture student at Iowa State University, has found success with sweet alyssum in her vegetable plot at the Iowa State Horticulture Research Station north of Ames. Mauch grows the alyssum between rows and at the end of rows, and has found a significant reduction in insect damage to her pepper plants.

Mauch explains how to plant and grow sweet alyssum in an article called “Sweet Alyssum to Attract Beneficials,” which was published in January-February edition of [Acreage Living Newsletter](#). The article was co-written with Ajay Nair, associate professor in horticulture and extension vegetable production specialist with Iowa State.

“Sweet alyssum flowers attract beneficial insects, which then move on to other plants in the vicinity,” said Mauch. “Having sweet alyssum as a food source could help to enlarge beneficial insect populations, providing more opportunity for these beneficial insects to attack pests.”

One adult ladybug can consume as many as 50 aphids per day, according to the article. The more ladybugs, the more aphids consumed.

The mature size of sweet alyssum plant is 3-9 inches tall and 10-48 inches wide, depending on variety and does best in full sun to partial shade, though prefers shade from afternoon sun in warmer climates.

Sweet alyssum is easy to plant, according to Mauch, and can be started indoors or planted directly outdoors.

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All Hearts

By Cynthia Haynes, Department of Horticulture

In February heart-shaped gifts are everywhere! In addition to roses for Valentine's Day, consider something longer lived for your sweetheart. Nothing says love more than a plant with heart-shaped leaves, right? Whether indoors or outdoors, consider the following plants for Valentine's Day gifts for your sweetheart—or yourself!

Indoor plants with heart-shaped leaves

Sweetheart plant (*Hoya kerrii*) is a succulent that is sold as a single heart-shaped cutting in a pot. While the thick dark green heart-shaped leaf in a pot is super cute and unique, alas, the cutting rarely lasts, so treat this one as a temporary houseplant. The full form of this plant (which is covered in heart-shaped leaves) is more durable and a long-lived houseplant, but just like true love, sometimes harder to find.

Heartleaf philodendron (*Philodendron cordatum* or *P. scandens*) is great for a novice gardener. This trailing vine is nearly impossible to kill. Plants are adaptable to moderate or low light situations and inconsistent watering practices. Another easy-to-grow trailing plant with green and gold heart-shaped leaves is **golden pothos** (*Epipremnum aureum*), but its other common name is devil's ivy. **English ivy** (*Hedera helix*), another vining plant, will occasionally have cultivars with heart-shaped leaves.

For more indoor plants with heart-shaped leaves, visit hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2022/02/all-hearts

Outdoor plants with heart-shaped leaves

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is a smaller tree (20-30 feet tall) with attractive pinkish-purple flowers in spring. The gray-green heart-shaped leaves follow the flowers and turn a vibrant yellow in fall. Redbud is native to the US and performs best in partial shade with fertile, well-drained soils.

For larger tree with heart-shaped leaves consider the **Katsura tree** (*Cercidiphyllum japonicum*). The leaves are smaller than redbud, but the tree is larger (often 50 feet tall). The leaves have scalloped edges and sometimes have a sweet scent when they drop in fall.

Littleleaf Linden (*Tilia cordata*) is a wonderful large shade tree (over 50 feet tall) with dark green, heart-shaped leaves. Many lindens also have small fragrant, yellowish flowers in early summer. While this tree is often planted in urban areas with diverse conditions, it performs best in full sun with fertile, well-drained soils.

Catalpa (*Catalpa speciosa*) is a large tree (over 50 feet tall) with large, showy, orchid-like white flowers in late spring. This fast-growing tree is native to the US and adaptable to diverse soils. The heart-shaped leaves of catalpa are also large, and sometimes 12 inches long.

Enjoy knowing that you are surrounded by one of the symbols of love.... Hearts!

