

Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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African violets – This fuzzy leafed plant is among the favorite of all houseplants. It produces clusters of white, blue, pink or purple flowers that can last from a few days to weeks!

African violets were discovered in West African in the 18th century. Now they are found in homes worldwide!

African violets will bloom with lower light, but medium to bright indirect light is best. They can be a bit fussy so you may have to move your plant several times before you find a spot it likes. Thin, dark green leaves and leggy stems tell you that the plant is getting too little light; light green or bleached leaves indicate too much light.



PLANTING AFRICAN VIOLETS

You can use an actual African violet potting mix or an all-purpose potting soil, as long as it is well-draining. Keep African violets planted in small pots. You can buy actual African violet pots, or you can use any small pot as long as it has a drainage hole and a tray (attached or unattached). Plants should be shifted to larger pots as they grow, but keeping African violets slightly root-bound can encourage them to bloom. The optimal time for repotting is after some leaves have wilted a bit. Violets need to be re-pot once a year, to mix in fresh soil.

The soil should be loose, well-drained and high in organic matter.

CARE FOR AFRICAN VIOLETS

Keep the soil slightly moist and use room-temperature water. Leaves are susceptible to rot if

kept in high humidity, so water African violets from the bottom to avoid getting excess water on the leaves. Thus, the need for the tray and the smaller pot! Before watering, check the soil moisture with your finger. If it is ready to be watered, pour the water in the tray and let the wicking action pull the water to the plant. However, this does not mean that you cannot water from the top. It is recommended to occasionally water from the top to prevent salt accumulation. Just make sure to use room temperature water and avoid getting any water on the leaves of the plant. Dust dirt off the leaves with a small, soft brush. In the active growing season (spring and summer), fertilize every 2 weeks with a high phosphorous plant food. Only start to fertilize when the plant appears to need an extra boost. Over-fertilizing is a more common problem than under-fertilizing. African violets prefer warm conditions. 65°F to 75°F during the day with a 5°F to 10°F drop at night. Keep away from drafty windows in winter.



There are hundreds of varieties and hybrids, from miniature violets to trailing varieties! They differ mainly in the colors of their flowers, which range from white to purple, though some varieties have variegation in their foliage and flowers as well.

African violets are typically classified by size, based on how wide they grow:

Miniature: less than 8 inches across

Standard: 8–16 inches across

Large: more than 16 inches across

You can share your love of an African violet with family or friends. Plants with multiple crowns can be divided. African violets are also easy to propagate by rooting a leaf cutting in water or potting soil.



If you are new to African violets, just remember that they are a fussy plant. They are slow growing, but will be worth the wait. Once you find the right spot, your plant will reward you with beautiful flowers.



Time to start planning your Gardens

January is the time of year your mailbox will be full of Gardening Catalogs! It's always fun to look at new varieties or old favorites. Most catalogs are area sensitive. Meaning, you should receive catalogs with plants and seeds for your area and growing zone. Things that grow in Oregon or Texas, will not necessarily grow in Iowa. The mail catalogs we get here, are generally catered to our mid-west climate.

However, you should always check the growing zone! I know the following map is hard to see, so I recommend that you follow this link and download this free Iowa State Extension and Outreach publication on "Gardening in Iowa Zones".

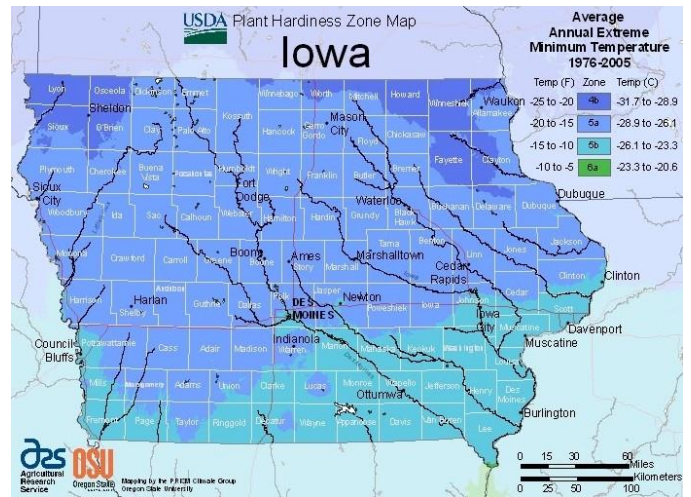
<https://store.extension.iastate.edu/product/Gardening-in-Iowa-Zones>

Most of Southwest Iowa is Zone 5a and 5b.

Another thing that is good to know is the average last and first frosts for your area. Those dates can be found on the following website for Iowa.

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/2005/5-4-2005/iowafrostdates.html>

We generally use May 10th and September 30th for most of Southwest Iowa.



Now that you know your zone and frost date, you can pick out your seeds and plants. Plan out your garden on graph paper every year. Write down the name of the variety you plant. Make notes all summer on how it produced. Keep these graphs from year to year so you can compare them. This is also a good way to keep track of rotating your crops to help prevent disease. How was last year's garden? What worked? How did things produce?



When you get catalogs from multiple suppliers, it's nice to compare the different seeds and plants. Go through your catalogs and circle or mark those that interest you. Often companies will have special offers for ordering early. Because of the rise in demand for gardening supplies in 2020, it is recommended that you place your orders early. If you are ordering plants, most companies will wait to ship them until it's time to plant.



Periodically Check your Stored Produce and Bulbs

Fresh Produce

As winter passes, check on stored apples, potatoes, onions and other root vegetables you may have. As they say, one bad apple spoils the whole bunch! You should have your stored produce in a cool

place such as the basement or a cellar. Remove anything that is spoiling or looks like it may have a bad spot on it. Remove onions that start have started growing. It's easy to lose your produce if not checked frequently.



Canned Produce

While in your storage area, check on the fruits and vegetables you canned over the summer. Correctly sealed jars will be concaved and will have a higher pitched ping when tapped with your finger. Poor seals will be popped outward and make a thud when tapped.

When in doubt, throw it out!

Throw it out if the jar is leaking or if the lid is bulging, or swollen.

If the container looks damaged, cracked, or abnormal.

If the container spurts liquid or foam when opened.

If the food is discolored, moldy, or smells bad.

Always! When in doubt, throw it out!

As a general rule, unopened home canned foods have a shelf life of one year and should be used before two years.



Frozen Produce

Routinely check your freezer to make sure it is working. Especially if there has been a power outage. If you find that it is not working, keep it closed! Most freezers will keep your foods frozen for close to 3 days. If possible, get the new freezer running and cold before you begin to load it. Also, freezers are more efficient when kept close to full.

It's something to think about when purchasing a new one. Buy the size that will be best for your family's needs.

Keep your older foods on top so you will use them first. Home frozen food will keep for three months in a standard home freezer before starting to show signs of freezer burn.

You can still eat food that has been frozen for 6 months. However, over time all frozen food will deteriorate in quality and become unappetizing to eat when defrosted. Storage times for frozen food can also vary depending on the type of food, how it was prepared, how it was packaged and what type of freezer you have.

Food can remain frozen indefinitely and technically be safe to eat, as bacteria will not grow, but the quality and taste will be greatly affected.



Flowering Bulbs

This includes bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, and roots. The bulbs should be held in a location with temperatures between 35 and 45°F and relative humidity of about 50%. An unfinished area of the basement away from heat sources, a place in an unheated garage that does not freeze, or a root cellar can be ideal, but make sure the area is not too warm or too cold.

Check the bulbs periodically during the winter. Remove any that show signs of rotting and check the moisture level. If they have dehydrated (they have shrunk and are wrinkled) moisten lightly with a spray bottle. If they are too moist, spread them out to air dry for a few days, then repack them.



Water Plants

If you are lucky enough to have a deep lily pond, you do not have to do anything.

If you have to bring in your potted lily pond plants, store them in a cool dark and dry place, just like your flowering bulbs. You will need to check them to see if they need water. The dirt should be kept moist. Do not let them dry out. In the spring you can divide and re-plant them before you put the plants back into the lily pond.



Rabbit and Deer Damage

Rabbit damage is a real problem, yet many people lack either the time or inclination to drive the pests away with repellents, keep them at arm's length with a chicken-wire fence, or relocate them after a successful capture using a Hav-a-hart live trap. Rabbits can ravish rose plants, nipping them off at ground or snow level. They can be devastating to young shrubs. The tender bark is easy for rabbits to nibble through. If it's true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, you may want to consider overhauling your backyard landscape this coming summer by planting a variety of rabbit-resistant plants.



The bonus is that most of them are also deer-resistant plants, offering you double the protection from common pests. The drawback is that some of these flowers are poisonous plants so it's important to exercise caution and be aware of what you are buying. Avoid poisonous plants if you have small children or pets at your house or in town next door neighbors.

Generally speaking, these are the qualities in flowers and foliage that deter rabbits:

Leaves that are jagged, prickly, or spiky, like yucca.

Flowers that are toxic, like Lenten rose or foxglove.

Leaves and flowers with strong smells, particularly mint, lavender, and yarrow.

Leaves that are fuzzy or leathery.

Plants with stems that are sappy.

Rabbits, like humans, have different tastes in food.

These flowers are avoided by most rabbits.

Viburnum, Butterfly bush, Adam's needle, Russian sage, Cotoneaster, Flowering quince, Boxwood, Blue Star juniper, Chinese juniper, Holly, Japanese rose and Lavender plant.

Perennials:

Salvia, Montauk daisy, Avens, Rodgers flower, Columbine, Delphinium, Yarrow, New England aster, Coreopsis, Daylily, Poppy, Snow-in-summer, Candytuft, Perennial bachelor's button, Bleeding hearts, Dutchman's breeches, Monkshood, Bee balm, Torch lily and Silver Mound.

Bulb Plants:

Spanish bluebells, Alliums, Reticulated iris, Daffodil, and Siberian squill.

Annuals:

Sweet alyssum, Flossflower, Wax begonias, Geranium and Pot marigold

Trees:

Japanese maples, Hawthorn, Eastern redbud, Maidenhair, Ash and Magnolia.

Vines and/or Ground Covers:

Ajuga, Wisteria, Creeping myrtle, Yellow alyssum, Lily-of-the-valley, Creeping junipers, Blue Rug, Virginia creeper, Catmint, Japanese spurge and Spotted dead nettle

Foliage Plants:

For those who do not mind growing a plant that puts on more impressive foliage than flowering display, the following plants may be of interest: 'Silver Mound', Blue fescue ornamental grass and Lamb's ear.

To Deter Deer:

Remember "deer-resistant" is not "deer-proof." Some animals still might choose to take a bite out of these shrubs, especially if food options are limited. Here are the top ten shrubs to deter deer. Boxwoods, Juniper, Arrowwood Viburnum, Andromeda, Bluebeard, Russian sage, Butterfly bush, Shrub roses, Bayberry and Daphne. Planting these shrubs can help keep the amount of damage cause by deer down to a minimum. Remember, this is nature, and deer and rabbits are wild animals trying to survive. Keeping your yard clear of their favorite foods will help keep them out of your yard, and prevent unwanted damage to your plants.



Sometimes, not even Frosty is safe!





Spinach and Ham Quiche

YIELD: Serves 6 PREP TIME: 15 minutes
OVEN: 400°F COOK TIME: 30 to 40 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 uncooked pie crust
- 1 Tablespoon butter
- 1/2 cup finely chopped yellow onion
- 1 cup cubed ham
- 1/4 cup cooked bacon (crumbled)
- 5 large eggs
- 1/2 cup half and half (or milk)
- 1 cup cheddar cheese (finely shredded)
- 1/2 cup mozzarella or parmesan cheese (finely shredded)
- 1/2 teaspoon dried parsley flakes
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/2 to 1 cup chopped spinach

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat oven to 400°F. Press the dough around the edges of a 10-inch tart pan or pie dish. Place on a baking sheet. Pierce the bottom of the pie crust with a fork. Cook for 5 minutes and then remove from oven. Set aside. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a small frying pan over medium heat. Cook onions for 2 minutes. Stir in ham and bacon pieces and let cook for an additional 3 minutes, or until the onions have caramelized. Remove from heat and allow to cool. In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs and half and half. Stir in cheese, parsley flakes, pepper, spinach, and the ham mixture. Then pour into the tart pan. Bake for 25 to 35 minutes, or until the top is golden brown and a toothpick comes clean. Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly. Enjoy while warm!

Feel free to add in extra veggies like mushrooms or peppers.



Do you Remember When?

As a kid, when it began to snow? All you wanted was to stay home from school and go sledding! Getting up early in the morning to listen to the radio to hear if school was canceled! Excitement was in the air! Watching Dad scoop the side walk and seeing how deep the snow was! You swore it was 4 foot deep! The anticipation of the snow blowing in your face as you headed down the hill on your sled or toboggan! You - Just - Couldn't - Wait!!



In reality the snow was only about a foot deep but the roads were drifted just enough to call school off. Oh how things have changed! Now we watch the weather on TV and our phones, thinking "Man, I sure hope it doesn't snow tomorrow!" Our county roads and ditches are so much better now than back in the day. They catch the snow, with much less drifting. When it does snow our loyal county employees are out first thing in the morning to clear our roads. The State employees have been running their snow plows all night, keeping the highways cleared, so you can get to work on time. Because of COVID, and virtual learning, will there be an end to school snow days? Hey, teachers need time off too! Kids need to be Kids! Winter is Winter! It will be cold. There will be snow. It will melt in the spring. Winter is a time to do things indoors, clean out that closet. Play cards and board games with your young kids or grandkids. Relax by the fire place, read a book, take a well-deserved nap! If the roads are bad, stay home! Look out your window and enjoy what nature has provided! A beautiful landscape, all covered in sparkling white snow! Make that pot of chili with those tomatoes you canned during summer. Nothing warms you and makes you feel all snug and cozy like a good bowl of homemade soup or stew.

As we go into this new year of 2021, let us reflect on what we went through in 2020. We have all learned how important Family is. It should always be on the top of our list!

Wishing you a Safe and Happy New Year!

January UP COMMING EVENTS



- Thursday, January 7, 2021 - 12:00pm
[How Does Landscape Design Impact Health & Well-being \(webinar\)](#)
- Friday, February 19, 2021 – 10 am and 3 pm
Siouxland Garden Show (Free Webinar Series)
Please join us for 12 virtual sessions that will be held at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Friday's in February and March. Sessions will start at 10 a.m. on February 19th. Register with the link below.
<https://www.siouxlandgardenshow.org/>
- International Master Gardener Conference will be virtual this year. It will be held September 12-17, 2021 Follow these two links for more information.
[About](#) | [Registration opens April 5](#)

- If you brought in Herbs such as parsley, rosemary, chives, thyme and marjoram, enjoy their fresh flavors all winter long.
- Plan a trip to Lauritzen Gardens (Omaha, NE), Reiman Gardens (Ames, IA) or the Botanical Center (Des Moines, IA). A trip to one of these indoor oasis can lift your sprit on cold snowy days.



Resources for Horticulture information

ISU's Hortline at (515) 294-3108
(Monday-Friday, 10am-noon, 1-4:30 pm)
hortline@iastate.edu

Iowa State University Publications

RG 215 Gardening in Iowa Zones
PM 1595 Houseplant Insect Control
PM 780 Pruning and Training Fruit Trees
PM 0453 Fruit Cultivars for Iowa
PM 607 Suggested Vegetable Varieties for the Garden
RG 322 African Violets
RG 316 Poinsettia Care
RG 328 Growing Amaryllis
RG 308 Growing Holiday Cacti

Horticulture Publications on-line

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

January GARDENING TO DO LIST



- Recycling your **real** Christmas tree. Remove all tinsel, lights and ornaments. Check your local town for tree recycling drop off sites. Or cut it up to be used for **outdoor only** fire wood. You can chop up the small branches for your compost pile. Another use can be for outdoor wildlife habitat by placing the tree in the yard and hang fruit slices, seed cakes and suet bags on it.
- If you have been storing bulbs, corms, or tubers, check them to make sure that they are neither rotting nor totally drying out.
- Carefully check your house plants for scale, aphids and spider mites. If found they can be controlled with an application of insecticidal soap.
- Start planning your spring garden. Make a graph to help. Send for and start browsing gardening catalogs. Make a list of what you will need and place your order early.
- Continue to care for your Poinsettias, Amaryllis and Holiday cacti. Remember not to over water them. You will be able to plant them outside during the summer months, and hopefully be able to make them re-bloom next Holiday season.

ISU Hotline Links and Numbers

Hotlines available for all

Iowa Concern 800-447-1985 Financial questions, legal education, stress counseling, crisis/disaster resources and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Beginning Farmer Center 877-BFC-1999 Program to match beginning and retiring farmers (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

Teen Line 800-443-8336 Personal and health-related information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

Iowa 2-1-1 211 Resource referral for housing, health, food, family, transportation, employment, education, and legal assistance (24 hrs - all days)

Hot lines available for Iowa Residents Only

AnswerLine Toll-free: 800-262-3804 Local: 515-296-5883 Questions relating to home and family (9 am-noon & 1-4 pm)
Iowa Healthy Families 800-369-2229 Health information and referral (24 hrs - all days)

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