

# Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Extension and Outreach

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## Baldcypress: An Excellent Landscape Tree

By Nancy Evans  
Nebraska Forest Service  
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Pine Wilt, Dutch Elm disease and the approaching emerald ash borer (EAB) all illustrate the importance of species diversity when planting trees. Good species diversity minimizes the chances of a single insect pest or disease destroying an area's entire forest resource.

To increase species diversity, ReTree Nebraska has compiled a list of underplanted trees that grow well in eastern Nebraska and western Iowa. Mixing them into our landscapes will help ensure long-term stability and sustainability.

Included on this year's list is baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*), a deciduous evergreen – one of those species that has needles and forms cones like conifers, but changes color and drops its needles every year like deciduous trees. This graceful tree looks like a pine or spruce during the summer, but when it loses needles in the fall, some people who are not familiar with it assume it has died and cut it down – a serious mistake!

Baldcypress makes a great landscape tree and is a nice alternative to spruce and pine. It has a pyramidal shape with soft, feathery, sage green foliage in the summer months that turns a cinnamon color in the fall. The bark is light brown, furrowed and scaly, and it can develop a

picturesque buttressed trunk. Buds are small and inconspicuous, and the fruit is a one-inch round cone that matures in the fall. Baldcypress is relatively fast-growing and can attain heights well over 50 feet with a 20-30 foot spread, so it is considered a large tree. Realistically, though, it may not get that big in this part of the country.

There are almost no sites in our area on which this tree can't grow well except for high pH soils, and even then the tree is amazingly adaptable. It's great for wet areas or in compacted soils, and is drought tolerant.

Baldcypress can stand up against high winds and is resistant to ice storms. During an ice storm, it will naturally bend with the weight of the ice but often returns to a natural shape when the ice melts.

For more information about baldcypress or to contact a forester, visit the NFS website at [www.nfs.unl.edu](http://www.nfs.unl.edu). For more photos of baldcypress in the fall, its cones and unusual bark, see [www.pinterest.com/neforestservice/baldcypress](http://www.pinterest.com/neforestservice/baldcypress)

## New Yard and Garden FAQ's Website

Iowans have gotten their lawn and garden questions answered by Iowa State University horticulturists for three decades by calling Hortline at 515-294-3108, an Iowa State University Extension and Outreach hotline. With the expansion of the Internet, an email option was added in 1997 with inquiries directed to [hortline@iastate.edu](mailto:hortline@iastate.edu). Now the Iowa State horticulturists who support Hortline have assembled frequently asked questions on a Yard and Garden FAQs website at <http://expert.hort.iastate.edu/>.



## Starting Tuberous Begonias

By Richard Jauron  
Horticulture Department  
Iowa State University



“The website lets individuals find answers to common garden questions whenever they wish,” said Richard Jauron, ISU horticulturist and author of the weekly Yard and Garden column. “Hortline hours are limited to 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday, so the Yard and Garden FAQs website allows people to look for answers at other times of the day, evenings and weekends.”

The website currently has answers to more than 750 commonly asked questions on a wide range of gardening topics. The FAQs cover topics on vegetables, fruits, annuals, perennials, roses, bulbs, lawns, trees, shrubs and indoor plants. Searching the site is as easy as typing in one or more keywords or browsing the subject categories.

“Answers are specific to Iowa gardeners,” Jauron said. “The information may not be appropriate for individuals in other regions of the country because of different weather and soil conditions.”

Jauron is the horticulture specialist behind the scenes answering many of the more than 3,200 phone calls and 1,400 emails each year. He has been instrumental in building the database for the new website, calling on his extensive history with the horticulture help line and his understanding of the most common questions asked. Assembling answers to common questions on a website may cut Hortline contact numbers – but it will definitely expand the horticulturists’ reach to even more people looking for answers.

“With the addition of the website, gardeners now have a full range of options for having questions answered by an Iowa State University horticulturist,” Jauron said. “Some questions will be resolved by the website questions and answers. Other gardeners will want to talk to someone and will call Hortline; while others may want to send a photo and prefer using email.”

Jauron also answers yard and garden questions in his weekly news column published on the ISU Extension and Outreach website <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/>.

Tuberous begonias are popular flowering plants for shady, protected sites in the home landscape. Generally, sites that receive morning sun and afternoon shade are the best planting locations. Tuberous begonias are commonly planted in pots, window boxes, hanging baskets, and in beds or borders. They are available in a variety of colors, flower forms, and plant habits. Blossoms may be single or double, plain or ruffled. Flower colors include white, pink, red, orange, yellow, and bicolors. Plants may be upright or trailing.

Plant the tubers of tuberous begonias indoors about 8 weeks before the average last spring frost in your area. (Tuberous begonias can also be grown from seed. However, seed must be sown in late December or January in Iowa.) Carefully examine stored tubers before planting. Discard any that appear to be soft or rotting.

When purchasing tuberous begonias, select large firm tubers. Small tubers will produce smaller plants with fewer flowers. Start tuberous begonias in pots or other suitable containers. All containers should have drainage holes in the bottom. Use a well-drained potting mix.

When planting the tubers, place the concave or depressed side upward. The rounded side is the bottom. Cover the tubers with approximately 1/2 inch of potting mix. Water well. Then place the container in a warm, 70 F location. Since the tubers are susceptible to rot, keep the potting soil moist, but not wet. Once the tubers sprout, move the plants to a sunny window or place them under fluorescent lights. Plants that don't receive adequate light will get tall and spindly. Fertilize the plants with a dilute liquid fertilizer solution about once every 2 weeks.

To acclimate the plants to outdoor conditions, harden the plants outdoors 7 to 10 days before planting. Initially, place the plants in a shady, protected location. Strong winds are of special concern. Strong winds can tear the foliage or break the brittle stems. Bring the plants back indoors if a frost is possible or storms are forecast. Gradually, expose the plants to longer periods of sun and stronger winds. Plant tuberous begonias outdoors after the danger of frost is past. In southwest Iowa, tuberous begonias can be planted outdoors in mid-May.

## Add a Little Whimsy to Your Garden

By Denise Fikes  
Horticulture Assistant  
Mills County Extension



One of the hottest trends in gardening right now is “miniature” and/or “fairy” gardening. The opportunity for endless amounts of creativity is what first peaked my interest. The opportunity to venture into a world of whimsy where imagination holds no bounds is also very appealing. The fact that this type of garden is well-suited to doing in a small space or even better, in a container, makes it easy for anyone and everyone to give it a go.

The first thing I learned while researching about this garden trend is that there does not seem to be one hundred percent agreement on the difference between “miniature gardening” and “fairy gardening” - or whether or not a difference even exists. In some places the terms are used interchangeably. However, the explanation that makes the most sense maintains that “miniature gardening” is accomplished when the plants and accessories used in the garden are in complimentary scale with each other. Miniature gardens are made of slow-growing plants – typically ones that are “dwarf” and “miniature” combined with miniature accessories and in-scale patios and structures to create real, living mini garden scenes. When done properly, these can last up to eight years in a container with minimal care.

“Fairy gardening”, on the other hand, allows for a little more flexibility. After all, you are creating an imaginary scene in an imaginary world, with imaginary creatures. Who, but you, are to say what the scene “should” look like? Now you can easily transform a miniature garden into a fairy garden by simply adding a fairy figurine, but a strict adherence to standard dollhouse or garden railway scales is not quite as important when working with fairies!



These diminutive creations can be any size that you would like – from an entire garden space in your yard, to a small nook at the base of a tree, to a container of any shape or size. The fun begins when you start imagining what type of garden you want to create and thinking about who the garden is for. Who will be interacting with the garden? You can bring that personality into your scene by your choice of container, plants, and accessories.

The option for plants to use in one of these gardens is larger than you might think. Many garden centers carry a wide variety of dwarf and miniature plants including conifers, alpine perennials, rock garden plants, and small-leaved groundcovers. Some plants, such as rosemary and lavender, can be pruned and trained into a standard to resemble large trees.

As far as accessories to create the magic (after all, a container filled with nothing but miniature plants looks just like a container filled with miniature plants!), there are endless possibilities – especially if you have an endless budget! You can purchase everything from furniture, to paving materials, to garden tools, to gazebos, to wishing wells, to cottages, to castles, to ponds...the list goes on and on. The key word here being “**purchase**”! What I love about this garden trend, is that you have the option to purchase readymade items, but you can be just as successful with a bit of clever shopping and a lot of creativity.

Look around outside for some natural elements such as moss, twigs that can be fashioned into fences, trellis, or a gazebo; pebbles for paving a pathway, thriftstore ceramic dishes broken to create flagstone, etc. A small bowl can hold water to become a miniature water garden. A marble atop a golf tee makes a lovely gazing ball. Yard sales are great sources for dollhouse items. The point is that this project doesn’t have to cost you a second mortgage!

For more information and sources for miniature/fairy gardening supplies, visit these websites or enquire at your local garden center. Make some magic this year!

[www.Fairygardening.com](http://www.Fairygardening.com)  
[www.twogreenthumbs.com](http://www.twogreenthumbs.com)  
[www.morelandcreations.com](http://www.morelandcreations.com)

### **Check out these nearby 2013 Garden Shows!**

What: **Atlantic Garden Seminar**

When: Saturday, March 16th

Where: Atlantic High School

Who: Cass County MG’s

[www.extension.iastate.edu/cass](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/cass)

What: **Siouxland Garden Show**

When: March 22 – 24th

Where: Marina Inn Center, South Sioux City, NE

Who: ISU and NE Extension

[www.siouxlandgardenshow.org](http://www.siouxlandgardenshow.org)

What: **Spring Garden Conference**

When: Saturday, March 30th from 8:30am-4pm

Where: Council Bluffs Senior Center

Who: West Pottawattamie County MGs

[www.extension.iastate.edu/westpottawattamie](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/westpottawattamie)

## Upcoming Horticulture Events of Interest:

### ***“Spring Into Spring” 2013 Seminar Series*** **Presented by the Mills County Master Gardeners**

#### ***“A Vegetable Growing Primer”***

**Date:** Monday, February 11  
**Time:** 7:00 – 8:00 PM  
**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center  
Visitor’s Center Conference Room  
**Cost:** \$2.00

The series will get started with a presentation by West Pottawattamie County Master Gardener, Diana Benzing. This long-time vegetable gardener with loads of experience growing as well as teaching about vegetables, will share her knowledge on many aspects of successfully cultivating a garden full of delicious and nutritious goodness!

#### ***“Turf and Tree Talk”***

**Date:** Monday, February 25  
**Time:** 7:00 – 8:00 PM  
**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center  
Visitor’s Center Conference Room  
**Cost:** \$2.00

Mike Meiers and Brad Thede will combine their expertise in turf management for a presentation focusing on strategies to care for lawns that may have suffered drought damage. Both come to us from Struyk Turf, LTD in Council Bluffs. The family owned company is a pioneer in developing granular based turf programs specifically designed for Southwest Iowa. Mike is also an Iowa Certified Arborist and will discuss tree care. A question-answer time will allow for questions on all aspects of growing beautiful lawns and trees.

#### ***“Growing Daylilies and Peonies”***

**Date:** Monday, March 11  
**Time:** 7:00 – 8:00 PM  
**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center  
Visitor’s Center Conference Room  
**Cost:** \$2.00

Don’t miss this opportunity to visit with local daylily and peony expert, Tim Stanek. Tim has many years of experience in not only growing these very popular perennial plants, but has even done some hybridizing with both of them. Join him for this presentation to learn about the many different forms of these garden beauties and how to plant, divide, maintain and even hybridize them!

#### ***“GRC Greenhouse Tour / Seed Starting”***

**Date:** Monday, March 25  
**Time:** 7:00 – 8:00 PM  
**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center  
Meet at the Visitor’s Center  
**Cost:** \$2.00

Want to see where the healthy vegetables grown in Glenwood’s Giving Garden get their start? Want to know what it takes to grow seedlings in your own home? Then plan to join us for a tour of the greenhouses located on the Glenwood Resource Center campus. The tour will be led by Kevin Lingren, Greenhouse Manager, who starts almost all of the cabbage, tomato, and pepper plants for GGG as well as hundreds of plants used at the GRC. We’ll meet at the Visitor’s Center and then walk the short distance to the greenhouses for an informal tour.

#### ***“Making the Most of Water in a Drought”***

**Date:** Monday, April 8  
**Time:** 7:00 – 8:00 PM  
**Place:** Glenwood Resource Center  
Visitor’s Center Conference Room  
**Cost:** \$2.00

The series will conclude with a presentation by Rich Maaske. After a summer like last year, many of us are wondering what more can we do to preserve and efficiently use what little water we may receive in rainfall. Rich has some great information on various aspects of water conservation including using rain gardens to capture runoff from impervious surfaces, such as roofs and streets. Learn how to keep your garden growing lush and green this year!

## Ask the ISU Extension Gardening Expert

**I purchased a miniature rose for Valentine’s Day.  
How do I care for it?**

Miniature roses need direct sun. In the home, place the miniature rose in a south or west facing window. Rotate plants once or twice a week to promote even growth.

Miniature roses also require a consistent moisture supply. When the soil surface becomes dry to the touch, water the plant until water flows out the bottom of the container. Discard the excess water. Fertilize the

miniature rose (once or twice a month) with a dilute fertilizer solution.

Miniature roses prefer daytime temperatures around 70 degrees Fahrenheit and a minimum nighttime temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep the plant away from cold drafts or heat sources. To promote new growth and additional blooms, remove flowers as they fade. Cut off the stem just above the uppermost five-leaflet leaf. Also, remove any yellow leaves or dead growth.

In May, the miniature rose can be placed outside. Harden or acclimate the plant to outdoor conditions by initially placing the plant in a shady location. Then gradually expose it to longer periods of sunlight. After the miniature rose has been acclimated outdoors for several days, place the potted plant on a sunny patio or deck. The miniature rose can also be planted outdoors in the garden. While miniature roses are small, they're actually more cold hardy than hybrid tea roses. Select a sunny site with fertile, well-drained soil.

### **I have some leftover vegetable seeds from last year. Will they germinate and grow this spring?**

Most vegetable seeds will remain viable for several years when stored in a cool, dry location. If properly stored, cabbage, broccoli, cucumber, squash, watermelon, eggplant and radish seeds will remain viable for five years. Snap bean, carrot, pea, pepper, tomato, cauliflower and pumpkin seeds can be stored for three to four years. Seeds of sweet corn and onion remain viable for only one to two years.

### **How do I control mealybugs on a houseplant?**

Mealybugs on houseplants are difficult to control. Unless the plant is particularly valuable, it's often best to throw away the infested plant before the insects spread to other houseplants. The standard remedies for houseplant pests can be successful if done with diligence and persistence. On lightly infested plants, pick off individual mealybugs and egg sacs or dab each one with an alcohol-soaked cotton swab. It's also helpful to syringe plants with a forceful spray of lukewarm water to dislodge the mealybugs from the infested plant.

Mealybugs also can be controlled with insecticide sprays. Use aerosol or hand pump spray products made specifically for houseplants. These may contain any of several different ingredients, including insecticidal soaps, pyrethrin, neem or a synthetic pyrethroid, such as permethrin, bifenthrin or resmethrin. Granular insecticides that you apply to the soil of infested houseplants also may be effective. When using pesticides, carefully read and follow label directions.

### **How do I control spider mites on houseplants?**

Spider mites are a common pest of houseplants. Spider mites use piercing-sucking mouthparts to puncture the plant tissue and feed on the liquid within the cells. In light infestations, the foliage appears to be speckled with very tiny yellowish green spots. The foliage of heavily infested plants often turns greenish yellow and eventually tan or brown. Severely stressed plants often drop some of their leaves. Close examination of infested plants may reveal very fine webbing (produced by the mites) on the leaves and stems.

When mites are present, determine the extent of the infestation and the value of the plant. It's usually best to discard a plant that is heavily infested with spider mites. Small mite populations can be reduced by washing or syringing infested plant foliage. Move plants outdoors or into the bathtub or shower and then use a forceful spray of water to dislodge the mites from the infested plant.

Several miticides (pesticides that control mites) are available for houseplants. Products can often be purchased at garden centers, greenhouses and other retail businesses. When using pesticides, carefully read and follow label instructions. Keep plants watered and fertilized to promote plant health and to reduce the impact of mite feeding.

### **How do I control whiteflies on houseplants?**

Whiteflies are common insect pests of hibiscus, poinsettia, chrysanthemum and a number of other indoor plants. They are most often noticed when watering or handling a plant. When disturbed, whiteflies flutter about the plant for a short time before returning to the plant.

Whitefly adults are tiny, white, moth-like insects. Female adults lay eggs on the undersides of the plant's foliage. After five to seven days, the eggs hatch into tiny, pale green, immatures called nymphs. The nymphs crawl a short distance before settling down to feed for two to three weeks. After feeding, the nymphs progress to a non-feeding stage and then finally to the adult stage.

The nymph and adult stages of whiteflies feed by inserting their short, needle-like beaks into foliage and sucking out plant sap. Heavy whitefly infestations often cause stunting or yellowing of leaves, leaf drop and a decline in plant health.

Whiteflies on houseplants are extremely difficult to control. Prevention is the best management strategy. Carefully check newly purchased plants and plants brought indoors from the garden or patio in the fall. Indoors, isolate these plants from other houseplants. Frequently check the new arrivals. Begin control measures at the first sign of a whitefly infestation. One way to reduce the whitefly population on an infested plant is to wash the undersides of the leaves with a moist cloth or sponge. Unfortunately, washing is labor intensive and only practical for small plants.

Insecticides are another control option. Insecticides must be applied uniformly and frequently (at weekly intervals) to the undersides of the plant's foliage. Apply insecticides specifically labeled for use on houseplants. Carefully read and follow label directions. It's usually best to discard heavily infested plants to prevent the whiteflies from spreading to other indoor plants.

### When is the best time to prune shade trees?

February through March is generally regarded as the best time to prune most shade trees. The absence of foliage at this time of year gives the individual a clear view of the tree and allows the selection and removal of appropriate branches. Also, the walling-off or compartmentalization of wounds occurs most rapidly just prior to the onset of growth in spring. Oaks are an exception. The winter months – December, January and February – are the best time to prune oak trees.

Large amounts of sap often flow from pruning cuts on maple, birch and elm when pruned in late winter. However, the loss of sap doesn't harm the trees. The trees won't "bleed" to death. Eventually the flow of sap will slow and stop.

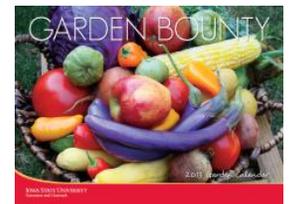
Shade trees can also be pruned in midsummer. If possible, avoid pruning shade trees in spring as they are leafing out. In spring, the tree's energy reserves are low and the bark tears easily. Another poor time to prune is during leaf drop in fall.

## FEBRUARY GARDENING TO DO LIST



- Repair and prepare lawn and garden tools for the upcoming season.
- Do not use softened water on houseplants as the salts are damaging to them.
- February is one of the best months to prune woody plants. Fruit trees, shade trees, raspberries, grapevines, and many shrubs can be pruned successfully while they are dormant. Dormant pruning is easier too, since you can see the branch structure because there are no leaves.
- Late this month start seeds of broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage for planting outdoors in April. Some of the flowers to start include geranium, petunia, snapdragon, pansy, impatiens, and salvia.

- Keep monitoring stored fruits and vegetables. Remove any that have rotted.
- Check stored bulbs for sign of rot and disease. Discard infested bulbs immediately.
- Keep bird feeders filled. Remember to periodically clean feeders and water containers.
- Rotate houseplants to prevent one-sided growth and periodically check for signs of insect infestation.
- Inspect young trees and shrubs for rabbit damage. Replace or repair protective coverings.
- Check the condition of overwintered geraniums. Geraniums that are stored bare root may need a brief soaking in warm water once or twice during the winter months.
- Pick up your copy of the 2013 ISU Garden Calendar at the Mills County Extension Office. **Now on sale for 50% off! Only \$3.00!**



### 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](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/yardgarden.htm)

### Iowa State University Publications

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|---------|--|
| PM 874  | Starting Garden Transplants at Home (free) |
| PM 814  | Where to Put Your Vegetable Garden (free)  |
| RG 318  | Early Spring Blooming Perennials           |
| RG 214  | Choosing an Arborist                       |
| SUL 5   | Pruning Trees and Shrubs                   |
| PM 1943 | Deciduous Shrubs                           |
| PM 1383 | Identification of Conifer Trees in Iowa    |

### Horticulture Publications on-line

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

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