

Plant Wise

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
University Extension

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Successful Container Gardens

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In a world of limited time and space, container gardens seem to make more and more sense. Containers allow you to enjoy growing plants in places that might be thought of as impossible or unthinkable in which to plant. Poor soil or no place to put plants in the ground is no longer an excuse for not being able to enjoy the simple pleasures of gardening.

Container gardening allows you to create special gardens to fit any situation. With appropriate containers and proper handling, anything that can be grown in the ground can be grown in a container. Think of a container garden as a living flower (and foliage) arrangement with roots! What look do you desire? Are you interested in something harmonious, dramatic or soothing? For a long period of enjoyment, keep the plants looking attractive by making sure the roots are healthy, and the foliage receives the light it needs to make its own food. Just one kind of plant in a container is the simplest to maintain. Plants that thrive in like soil, watering, and light conditions make successful combinations. When combining plants, size, texture, proportion, color, setting, and lighting all play a role.

As you narrow your list of plants for a container, check the moisture, soil and light requirements of each one. Different plants are adapted to the diverse environments of our planet. Plants adapted to dry climates usually have thick, waxy, or hairy leaves to hold moisture. The roots of these plants often like to dry out between

watering. Succulents like jade plant, Christmas cactus or hens and chicks are examples. Succulents suffer root rot and die if the soil stays too moist or is not allowed to dry somewhat between waterings. Plants native to moist areas need steady, even moisture.

Choosing a Container

Anything that holds soil and has drainage holes in the bottom may be transformed into a container garden for terrestrial plants.

Consider eye appeal, convenience, and cost, when choosing a container. Also think about how easy it will be to keep the plants healthy. For vibrant plant growth, the



containers must provide adequate space for roots and soil media, allowing the plant to thrive. Use containers of vigorous plants to provide focal points to:

- divide outdoor rooms
- create privacy
- screen objectionable views
- accent the landscape
- grow tasty herbs, fruits and vegetables.

Your choice of container (along with choice of plants) communicates feelings and sets a mood. It can be amusing, a statement of value, clever, loud, quiet, classy, creative, solid, sophisticated, stylish, primitive, homespun, environmentally friendly, understated, matched and more. Larger plants may require heavier and stronger pot materials to prevent the pot from blowing over or keep the roots from breaking the pot. Balancing the watering with the pot size, type of container, soil types, and how large the plants are likely to grow in one season can be an art. It is fun and interesting, and unlike people, plants can be replaced, so do not be afraid to experiment. If plants fail, pull them out and replace them. Even people with a "green thumb"

experience a plant dying from time to time. Just enjoy the aromatic and visual pleasures of plants and learn from your inevitable mistakes. Winning container combinations often use three types of plant shapes:

- Tall plants - Thrillers
- Round, mounding plants - Fillers
- Plant that hangs over the side - Spillers

These overall plant shapes vary in texture, size, shape, and color to create an endless variety of combinations.

Experiment by putting different sizes, shapes and textures of leaves side by side. Texture usually refers to the overall size of the leaves so textural sizes are relative to one another. Grasses have narrow, fine textured leaves. Salvias have medium textured leaves. Large Hosta leaves are considered coarse textured. Contrasting size and surface textures provide drama when done well. Alternatively, repeating similar leaf sizes and textures may provide a soothing or harmonious look.

For a complete guide to container gardening with suggestions for plant combinations, visit the University of Illinois Extension Service website at: <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/containergardening/>

Culinary Herbs in the Garden

By Cindy Haynes
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Lately I've been impressed with how frequently fresh and dried herbs are used in recipes and on television cooking shows. In the past, herbs often played a "bit part" in a meal, now some herbs are an essential ingredient in recipes like salsa, pesto and others. Fortunately herbs are relatively easy to grow, and even easier to harvest and preserve for future use in cooking.

Growing and Harvesting Herbs

With "culinary herbs" comprised of so many plant species, you might think it would be hard to give general statements about growing requirements for herbs. Not so – most, if not all, culinary herbs thrive in sunny sites with well-drained, infertile soils. If you've ever visited an herb garden you've probably noticed that they are all in sunny locations and, without fail, have well-drained soil. The fastest way to kill an herb is to place it in a shady, wet spot in the landscape. Herbs rarely need fertilizer. In fact, fertilize them too much and they don't taste as good.

Herbs are either perennials or annuals in the garden. Knowing which are annuals and which are perennials is essential when planning and planting an herb garden. Perennial herbs like sage, thyme, lavender, chives and mint do not need to be replanted each year. But annuals like basil and cilantro will not survive an Iowa winter – so they must be replanted each spring. To make matters more confusing, dill, fennel, and a few other annual herbs reseed each year. Once planted, they often return year after year. Just don't expect them to be in the same place in the garden every year!

The best time to harvest herbs is in the morning when the sprigs are fresh. Harvesting herbs is simple. Most herbs have the best flavor and fragrance before flowering. Harvest about one-third to one-half of the plant just as the flower buds appear. Annual herbs can be cut back more severely since they do not overwinter and they will regrow quickly. After harvest, be sure to wash the leaves and stems thoroughly and let them dry slightly on clean towels before use or preservation.

Preserving Herbs

Most herbs can be dried and stored for long periods in air-tight jars in the kitchen. There are several ways to dry herbs. The most popular and easiest method is air-drying. After harvesting and cleaning the herbs, simply hang small bunches in a warm, dark, well-ventilated location for a couple of weeks until the leaves are crispy. Once dry, the leaves can be separated from the stems, then crushed and placed into air-tight jars. Keep the jars in a dark location in the kitchen for easy access when cooking.

Herbs also can be dried on cheesecloth or screens in well-ventilated locations. My grandmother would often dry herbs on a cheesecloth covered window screen outdoors. Drying herbs outdoors may take longer, is often dependent on weather and can invite some pests to the area – but it always worked well for Della.

The oven or microwave is a faster way to dry herbs. In the oven, place herb leaves in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Set the oven to 180 F and place the cookie sheet in the oven for several hours. Open the oven frequently and stir the herbs to make sure they are drying evenly without burning.

While drying herbs in the microwave is fast, it does require a bit of practice. A small amount of herb leaves are placed in a single layer on paper towels and heated in several short intervals (usually a minute or less). Through the process of trial and error you'll learn about how long it will take to dry different herbs without blackening the leaves. You'll also notice that some herbs dried in the microwave will retain more of their "natural color." As long as they are dried completely, they will keep for long periods in air-tight containers.

A few herbs, including basil, actually can be preserved better by freezing than drying. Frozen basil leaves also will keep the bright green foliage color that air-drying usually takes away. After basil leaves are harvested and cleaned, simply blend them with a little water (and/or oil, if wanted) in a blender or food processor. The resulting bright green goop can then be placed in small containers or even ice cube trays in the freezer and frozen until needed.

Herb vinegars, oils, butters and even herb mustards can be made with fresh and dried herbs. While these mixtures generally don't last as long as dried or frozen herbs; they can be a tasty addition to almost any meal.

Following are some herbs often grown in Iowa, including whether they are annuals or perennials, and methods of preservation:

- Basil -- Annual; fresh, dried or frozen. Many cultivars offer different leaf sizes, flavors, and colors.
- Chives -- Perennial; fresh, dried or frozen. Some species will reseed.
- Cilantro -- Annual, fresh or dried. Cilantro seed (called coriander) can be harvested as well.
- Dill -- Annual, fresh or dried. Reseeds; seed also can be harvested.
- Fennel -- Annual, fresh or dried. Reseeds; seed also can be harvested.
- Marjoram -- Annual; fresh, dried or frozen.
- Mint -- Perennial, fresh or dried. Aggressive spreader in the garden.
- Oregano -- Perennial, fresh or dried.
- Parsley -- Biennial, treated like an annual, fresh or dried.
- Rosemary -- Perennial, fresh or dried. Tender perennial, bring indoors over the winter
- Sage -- Perennial, fresh or dried. Several variegated cultivars available.
- Thyme -- Perennial; fresh, dried or frozen. Flowers also can be used.

For more information on specific herbs consult *Growing and Drying Herbs* (PM 1239) available at your local county Iowa State University Extension office or online at www.extension.iastate.edu/store.

Are Ticks Worse this Year?

By Donald Lewis and Ken Holscher
Department of Entomology
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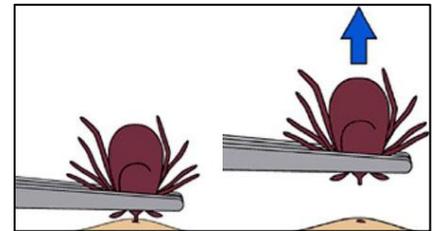
While everyone has an opinion about "how bad" the ticks are in any given year, the bottom line is there is no state-wide survey or census to measure tick abundance. All we have are people's perceptions, and those vary all over the place! That's in part because tick populations are highly variable from place to place and



from moment to moment depending on weather and other conditions. Experiencing a large number of ticks on you or your dog after being outdoors is largely just the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It is our experience talking to many callers from around the state each year that for each person who asks "why are there so many ticks this year?" there will be an equal number of callers who ask "why aren't there so many ticks this year?" This leads to the somewhat cynical conclusion that on a statewide basis, every year is an average year for ticks though individual locations may be far above or far below average at the time someone was in the locale to "check" for ticks. The answer to the question, "Are the ticks worse this year?" is, "It depends."

How should attached ticks be removed? Grasp the tick firmly and as close to the skin as possible with fine-tipped tweezers and pull straight upward as shown in the drawings. Do not use nail polish, petroleum jelly, matches or cigarettes in a misguided effort to make the tick "back out" of your skin.



Other questions about ticks:

1. **What ticks are common in Iowa and how do I recognize them?** See ISU pamphlet PM 2036, "Ticks and Tick-borne Diseases in Iowa" available from the ISU Extension store. Ticks may be submitted for identification by the Plant & Insect Diagnostic Clinic. Send a photo or sample as described on the Clinic web page.
2. **How do I control ticks in my back yard and landscape?** Ticks are rarely in lawns and high maintenance landscapes. Instead, ticks are most abundant in humid areas of tall grass, weeds and shrubs where there is an abundant food supply from small mammals. For more tick control considerations see the HHPN from June 9, 2010.
3. **Does ISU still want tick samples from around the state?** Yes, ticks are still collected for a state-wide surveillance program.
4. **Can you test my tick for Lyme disease?** ISU does not test ticks for Lyme disease. Ticks submitted to the Plant & Insect Diagnostic Clinic that are identified as blacklegged ticks (aka "deer ticks") are sent to the Iowa Hygienic Lab in Iowa City for Lyme disease testing. However, the results of these tests are compiled for research purposes and are not returned to the person who submitted the tick or to their health care provider. Please speak with your physician and veterinarian about the risk of Lyme

disease. To learn more about Lyme disease see the CDC website.

Upcoming Horticulture Events of Interest:

Glenwood Lake Park Farmers Market

Wednesdays, June 5 to Sept. 4, 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Vendors offering locally-grown garden and orchard produce, baked goods, eggs, crafts, plants, etc. Mills County Master Gardeners will usually have a question/answer table to help solve your garden problems.

Silver City Farmers Market

Saturdays throughout the summer beginning on June 8
Time: 8:00 AM – 11:30 AM
Located in the Silver City Park

Mills County Master Gardeners on hand to answer all your gardening questions!

Leaf Cast Workshop

Date: Tuesday, June 11
Time: 6:30 PM
Location: 183 Glenbrook Drive, Glenwood, IA 51534

Master Gardener, Carol Tedder will be hosting a workshop on how to make cement leaf casts. Cost of the workshop is \$5.00 and is limited to 8 attendees. If you are interested in attending, please RSVP to Carol Tedder via email at tedder@mchsi.com

Master Gardener Field Trip

Date: Saturday, June 15
Time: 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Location: Meet at Shopko parking lot at 10:00 AM in Glenwood, IA

Master Gardener, Preston Sargent has organized a field trip to gardening sites in the Loess Hills. The group will travel to Magnolia, Iowa to visit the Lavender Farm and Aronia Berry farm, then to Honey Creek Creamery and Harvest Studio. There will be an option for a meal and/or wine in Crescent following the tours. If you are interested in attending, please RSVP to Preston Sargent via email at sargetech@hughes.net

Garden Walk

Date: Thursday, July 11
Time: 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Location: 3 locations in Glenwood. IA

Rain or shine and will include 3 homes. Admission is free will donation.

52257 Brookside Ave, Glenwood – Home of Norma and Gretchen Reimersma – Sawtooth Farm
21900 Brookside Circle, Glenwood – Home of Bruce and Jane Obrecht
52501 Brookside Ave, Glenwood - Home of Chris and Michelle Morris

Mills County Fair

Date: Saturday, July 20
Open Class Floriculture & Agriculture
Entries received at the Mills County Fairgrounds
8:00 AM – 12:00 Noon

Enter your Flowers and Vegetables!

Open Class fair books are available at area banks, libraries, and the Extension Office in Malvern.

Master Gardener Webinars

Date: Tuesday, July 23 and August 13
Time: 6:30 – 8:30 PM
Location: Mills County Extension office, Malvern

July 23 - Richard Jauron - "Landscape Plants for Moisture Extremes"; Denny Schrock - "Waterwise Landscaping"
August 13 - Jeff Iles - "Diagnosing Drought Damage, Flood Damage, and Other Abiotic Stress Injury on Landscape Trees & Shrubs"

Fall Master Gardener Training Offered

By Nancy Crews
Mills County Extension and Outreach

Would you like to become an Iowa Master Gardener and volunteer in our community? Whether you are a long time gardener or a novice you are welcome to join our group! A new series of training classes will be offered by Iowa State University at the Mills county Extension office in Malvern beginning Tuesday, September 24 and running consecutive Tuesdays through November 12. The cost for the training is \$195. The Mills County MG's are offering scholarships. For more information contact Nancy



Renovation of June Bearing Strawberries

By Richard Jauron
Horticulture
Department
Iowa State University



A June-bearing strawberry planting can be productive for several years if the bed is given good care. One important task is to renovate June-bearing strawberries immediately after harvest. The renovation process involves leaf removal, creation of 8-inch-wide plant strips, and fertilization. After the initial renovation steps have been completed, irrigation and weed control are necessary throughout the remainder of the growing season.

Start the renovation of June-bearing strawberries by mowing off the leaves 1 inch above the crowns of the plants with a rotary mower within 1 week of the last harvest. (Do not mow the strawberry bed after this 1 week period as later mowing destroys new leaf growth.) To aid in disease control, rake up the leaf debris and remove it from the area.

June-bearing strawberries grown in 2-foot-wide matted rows should be narrowed to 8-inch-wide strips with a rototiller or hoe. When selecting the part of the row to keep, try to save the younger plants and remove the older plants. If the strawberry planting has been allowed to become a solid mat, renovate the bed by creating 8-inch-wide plant strips. Space the plant strips about 3 feet apart.

Fertilization is the next step in renovation. Apply approximately 5 pounds of 10-10-10 or a similar analysis fertilizer per 100 feet of row to encourage plant growth and development.

Water the strawberry plants during hot, dry weather. Strawberries require 1 inch of water per week for adequate growth. Irrigate the planting during hot, dry summer weather to insure optimum production next season. Irrigation during the summer months encourages runner formation and flower bud development. (The flower buds on June-bearing strawberries develop in late summer and early fall.) Control weeds in the strawberry planting by cultivating and hand pulling.

Some June-bearing strawberry varieties are extremely vigorous, producing runners beyond the 2-foot-wide matted row. These runners should be placed back within the 2-foot row or removed to prevent the planting from becoming a solid mat of plants. Well-maintained strawberry plantings that are renovated annually may

remain productive for 4 or 5 years. Poorly managed beds may be productive for only 2 or 3 years.

Ask the ISU Extension Gardening Expert

Why is my rhubarb flowering?

Flower development is natural for rhubarb and most other plants. Drought, extreme heat, and infertile soils may encourage flowering. Age is another factor. Old plants tend to flower more than younger ones.

Regardless of the reason, flower stalks should be promptly pulled and discarded. Plants will be less productive if allowed to flower and set seeds.

Flower formation can be discouraged with good cultural practices. Water rhubarb plants every 7 to 10 days during dry weather. Sprinkle $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of an all-purpose garden fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, around each plant in early spring. Control weeds by shallow hoeing, hand pulling, or mulching.

In regards to tomatoes, what is meant by the terms determinate and indeterminate?

Determinate and indeterminate refer to the tomato's growth habit. Determinate tomatoes are small, compact plants. They grow to a certain height, stop, then flower and set all their fruit within a short period of time. The harvest period for determinate tomatoes is generally short, making them good choices for canning. Indeterminate tomatoes continue to grow, flower, and set fruit until killed by the first frost in fall. Accordingly, the harvest from indeterminate varieties often extends over a 2 or 3 month period. Yields are generally heavier than determinate types, but are usually later to mature. Indeterminate tomatoes are large, sprawling plants which often perform best when grown in wire cages or trained on stakes.

How late can I plant snap beans?

Snap beans are a warm-season vegetable and should be planted after the danger of frost is past. In central Iowa, it's usually safe to begin planting snap beans in early May. If harvested frequently, plants should produce well for several weeks. The last practical date for planting snap beans is August 1.

Should I fertilize the lawn in summer?

Do not fertilize Kentucky bluegrass and other cool-season grasses during the summer months (June, July and August). The best times to fertilize cool-season grasses in Iowa are spring, mid-September and late

October/early November. When fertilizing the lawn, do not apply more than one pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in one application.

JUNE GARDENING TO DO LIST



- Finish harvesting rhubarb and asparagus this month to allow the plants to start storing reserves for next year's crop.
- Stake or cage indeterminate tomatoes to support vines and keep the fruit off the ground.
- Cover broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and brussels sprouts to prevent cabbage worms from reaching and feeding on the plants. Use cheesecloth or a lightweight row cover to form the barrier.
- Moisten and turn your compost pile on a regular basis.
- Don't remove clippings from the lawn unless grass is excessively tall or weedy. Clippings return some nutrients to the soil and do not add to thatch buildup.
- Continue to sow seeds of sweet corn and beans for an extended harvest.
- Harvest herbs for drying before they flower.
- Harvest radishes, lettuce, and spinach.
- Hand thin apple trees that are loaded with small fruits. After thinning, apples should be spaced 8 to 10 inches apart on the branches. Pears, plums and apricots should be spaced 6 to 8 inches apart.
- Continue deadheading plants to prolong bloom, prevent unwanted seedlings, and improve the overall appearance.
- Renovate June-bearing strawberries after the last harvest.
- Plant groundcovers in shady areas where grass doesn't grow.

- Apply mulch around trees, shrubs, and perennials to conserve moisture, control weeds, and prevent injury from mowing too close.
- Remove cool-season vegetables, before they start to bolt, or form seed stalks, during hot, dry weather.
- Keep newly planted trees and shrubs well watered.
- Plant groundcovers in shady areas where grass won't grow.
- Raise the height of your lawn mower blade.
- Apply sunscreen before working outdoors.
- Give Dad a new garden tool for Father's Day!

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

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| RG 105 | Guidelines to Seasonal Garden Chores (free) |
| NCR 0025 | Lawn Weeds and Their Control (\$7.25) |
| RG 209 | Organic Mulches |
| PM 1891 | Sweet Corn |
| RG 601 | Gardening for Butterflies |
| PM 0819 | Planting a Home Vegetable Garden |
| PM 534 | Planting & Harvesting Times for Garden Vegetables (Free) |
| RG 206 | Questions about Composting (free) |
| RG 319 | When to Divide Perennials (free) |
| PM 2036 | Ticks and Tick-borne Diseases in Iowa" |

Horticulture Publications on-line

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

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