White County Horticulture

November Vol. 9. No. 11

November Garden Calendar

November is the ideal time to plant a new tree. Soils still have some residual heat, we often get ample rainfall in fall and winter and while the trees are dormant, they can get busy putting on roots before they have to worry about supporting leaves and new growth. Choose trees based on mature size. If you are looking for a particular fall foliage color, choosing it when it has fall color can help you determine what you want. Be sure to look up when planting a tree—avoid planting under power lines or your tree won't be able to reach its full potential.

November also marks the beginning of the dormant season which runs from November through February. Cut back perennials as they finish for the year, pull out the spent summer annuals and rake leaves. If you have hardy trees, shrubs or perennials that need to be moved from one part of your yard to another, now is a great time to move them.

Be careful when digging plants when the temperatures are really cold, so that you don't expose the roots to cold temperatures or drying winds for very long. Have the new hole ready before uplifting the plant. Plants that sometimes struggle in a cold winter such as hydrangeas, azaleas and figs should be moved at the end of the dormant season to allow the bulk of winter weather to pass before moving.

If you haven't planted your winter annuals yet, do so soon. From pansies and violas to dianthus, flowering kale or cabbage, there are a lot of ways to add seasonal color to a garden. You have through mid-December to plant seasonal color but having a chance to get the root system established before really cold weather hits will help them handle cold weather better.

November is also a great time to plant spring flowering bulbs. Tulips, daffodils, crocus and hyacinths are planted as dry bulbs. They need chilling hours which they get naturally during the winter months, which help them grow and reach their full potential. Plant your bulbs two to three times the size of the bulb, deep in the ground. You don't have to fertilize at planting, since the bulbs contain everything (flowers, foliage, and stems) when you buy them. They set their blooms for the following season in the spring after

they finish blooming. Once they go dormant, they are all set to go the next year.

Many home gardeners are growing vegetables year-round now outdoors. With the availability of season extenders, or just some ingenuity of creating protection for the plants, they can take even the coldest of temperatures. Most cool season vegetables will be able to tolerate temperatures to about 28 degrees without protection but will need to be covered if temperatures are lower, or if it is a clear, still night. Overturned boxes, flowerpots or small high tunnels can add the protection you need. Many of these cool season vegetables taste sweeter when grown in the cooler months. Some vegetable transplants are still available, so plant soon and keep them watered and fertilized and you can be harvesting vegetables all winter.

We have had a taste of cool weather statewide, and some have had a frost. Now is the transition time from active growth to dormancy. Clean-up in the garden is ongoing, but we typically have a lot of plant material we can add to a compost pile. How happy and healthy you end your garden can determine how well it starts growing next spring.

Starting Seeds That Need Cold

Many plants that are native to temperate regions of the world have seeds that require a moist, cold period before they sprout. You can grow these seeds by sowing them in pots and setting the pots outdoors in late fall or winter. Known as stratification, this treatment replicates the natural conditioning the seeds would undergo in their native habitat, breaking down the internal mechanisms that inhibit their ability to germinate. The seeds will germinate when temperature rise in the spring. This rather low-tech method, which is also called moist chilling, works well for starting seeds of many perennials, including bleeding heart, columbine, globeflower, masterwort, and garden phlox. It's also very useful for starting seeds of many fall-ripening trees and shrubs, such as barberries, dogwoods, lilacs, species roses, and viburnums.

You can use four-inch plastic pots or flats to sow the seeds. If you have used the containers before, clean them first with a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water. Prepare a potting mix of equal parts builder's sand and a peat-based potting mix. The coarse texture of this mix will allow plenty of air to circulate around the seeds and the growing roots. Moisten the mix and fill your containers, tamping each down to within one-half inch of its rim. Sow the seeds about half-inch apart and cover them with a thin layer of mix. Topping the pots with a thin layer of very fine gravel or coarse sand will prevent the rain from washing out the potting mix and the seeds.

Label each container with the plant's name and the date. (Use a permanent marker so it will survive the elements.) Water the pots well to ensure that the seeds receive enough moisture which is a necessary prelude to the chilling period.

Place the pots in a cold place. For the winter chilling period, choose a location out of direct sun, such as an unheated porch or shed, or an uncovered cold frame on the north side of the house. A place where temperatures remain between 35 and 45 degrees Fahrenheit is ideal. (Higher and lower temperatures will produce changes in the seeds at slower rate.) If you opt for a cold frame, lay it with a layer of moist sand so you can bury the base of the pots to help keep them upright. Covering the pots with wire screen will keep out rodents and birds.

Check your pots frequently and water if the top of the soil mix feels dry. As spring approaches, you should begin to see signs of growth. Different species will germinate at different rates. Some may appear in very early spring, others in late spring, while a few kinds may take up to a year or more. As the seedlings sprout, move the pots to a nursery area or an unheated greenhouse where they receive bright but indirect sunlight. Keep an eye out for slugs and snails, which can devour young seedlings overnight.

When the seedlings have grown their second set of true leaves, thin or transplant them to prevent overcrowding. If you don't need many plants, thin to one seedling per pot by cutting off the extras with small scissors. If you want a lot of plants, transplant the seedlings, one per container, into 2 ¼ or 3-inch-wide plastic pots filled with moist, peat-based potting mix. Use a fork to gently lift the seedlings out of their original containers and tease them apart. Handle the seedlings by their leaves to avoid damaging their stems.

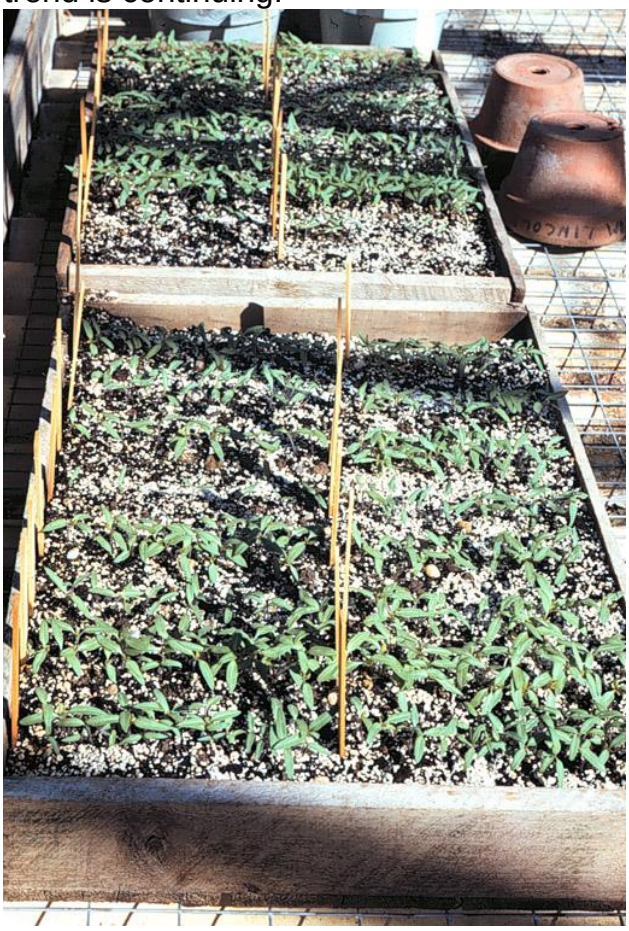
Water the seedlings and place them out of direct sun for a few days to recover. After a week, put them in a place where they receive morning sun. Begin feeding the seedlings once a week with liquid fertilizer diluted to half strength.

By late summer or early fall, many of your seedlings will be large enough to set into the garden. Transplant them on a cool day and water carefully for a few weeks afterwards until they are well established. Some slower-growing species may not be large enough to move yet. Keep these in a cold frame over winter and set them out the following spring.

Information for this article was adapted from Horticulture Online.

Saving Seeds

Those in the greenhouse and nursery industry know that their field of endeavor is close to recession proof. Ironically, it is when times are booming, and customers are jetting off to Europe that garden center sales may slump a bit. But throw in a good crisis and people return to the gardening fold. One of the shortages of the 2020 pandemic season was vegetable garden seeds and the trend is continuing.



(Image courtesy Gerald Klingaman.)

In the spring of 2020, lots of people decided about March 10 that, being as they were home anyway, it was a good time to plant or expand their vegetable gardens.

Though there has been a general increase in vegetable gardening over the past several decades, the last really big surge in demand for garden seeds was in 2000, when the Y2K

craziness was all the rage. Though the Y2K seed sales increase was big, it pales in comparison to that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Saving your own seeds for coming years is a viable alternative to buying them. But make sure the cultivar you are saving is an open pollinated line, not a hybrid. By definition, heirloom vegetables are all open pollinated. Allow the fruit you intend to harvest seed from to reach full maturity while still on the vine. Ideally, choose a time during peak production when the plant is growing best, not at the beginning or end of the season when it is slowing down.

Cleaning and saving seeds from over-ripe tomatoes, slimy pumpkins or dry okra pods all involve specific tricks to make the job go easier. As a long time seed saver, I've always found saving, cleaning and storing seeds a therapeutic balm that enhances my enjoyment of gardening. Many communities, often through Master Gardener groups, have local seed exchanges in the spring and afford the opportunity to share your bounty and try new things in the garden.

The pandemic too shall pass, and things will return to normal. The shape and texture of the new normal is anybody's guess, but it will include millions of citizens who have been inoculated with an exposure to the gentle, sometimes frustrating, art of gardening. This can only be a good thing.

Experiment Station hops study

By John Lovett
U of A System Division of Agriculture

Horticulture researchers with the Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station have partnered with three breweries across the state in a quality research study of hops grown in Arkansas with a public release set November 5 in Siloam Springs.

Following a three-year study to find varieties of hops that grow well in Arkansas, the

(U of A System Division of Agriculture photo by Fred Miller)

experiment station will collaborate with Ivory Bill Brewing Company in Siloam Springs, Prestonrose Farm and Brewing Company in Paris, and Stone's Throw Brewing in Little Rock on the research. The experiment station is the research arm of the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Ivory Bill will hold a public event beginning at 7 p.m. Saturday, November 5 at the brewery, 516 E. Main Street in Siloam Springs, to release a pale ale made with Crystal hops grown at the experiment station's Fruit Research Station in Clarksville.

"We know it's possible to grow hops in the state, but we want to know more about what brewers think about the quality and feasibility of using whole-cone, dried Arkansas-grown hops," Amanda McWhirt, associate professor, and extension horticulture specialist, said.

An initial three-year research project on growing hops was completed in 2021 at the Fruit Research Station in Clarksville. The study showed that Cascade and Zeus hops varieties had the best yields, plant health and vigor. Crystal and Cashmere showed moderate potential for being grown in Arkansas. Canadian Red Vine hops grown at the Fruit Research Station will also be evaluated by brewery partners. The horticulture team is continuing its research into growing hops, with new trials started in 2022 aimed at increasing yield through new methods of plant training.

Most of the nation's hops for the craft beer industry are grown in northern states where the day length is longer, which results in the highest yields. The Arkansas study showed that some hops varieties could produce a viable specialty crop in Arkansas to appeal to the state's growing microbrewery industry, McWhirt said. Renee Threlfall, horticulture post-harvest and processing research scientist with the department of food science, said she expects initial interest in hops production will mostly be small-scale growers to supply the local microbrewing industry.

The post-harvest research with the brewery partners includes evaluating the use of whole-cone hops in the brewing cycle, from bittering in the boil to "dry hopping" for additional hops aromas during late-stage fermentation. While some breweries use whole-cone hops for specialty beers, most breweries use hops that have been dried and pelletized by processors for day-to-day brewing, McWhirt said. An Arkansas-based hops industry would initially rely primarily on whole-cone hops because of the state's lack of access to hops processors, she added.

The hops study is funded by a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Arkansas Department of Agriculture through 2024.

"We're so excited to be hosting Amanda McWhirt and to be part of the conversation about the future of farming in Arkansas," Casey Letellier, owner/brewer at Ivory Bill Brewing Company, said. "We value the opportunity to connect people with the idea that drinking beer is an agricultural act."

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