



White County Horticulture

April Vol. 10 No. 4

Container Gardening

Many White County residents have limited space to garden. Outdoor pots can be "landscaped" just like the rest of your outdoors. And these planted containers can be worked into your larger landscape to dress up existing plantings.

One way to heighten the drama of these two features is to place the containers by the front door. Plantings such as pink mandevilla, skirted in English ivy can be made to compliment a border of hardy garden mums and a basket of blooming ivy geranium.

Container gardens can be planted in three distinct ways:

1. 'Bouquet containers', which combine three or four plants in one pot to create contrast, color, and grace.
2. 'Accent containers', which feature a prominent, eye-catching plant not usually seen in pots, such as a shrub rose or even an evergreen tree.
3. 'Moveable gardens', a collection of different sized pots and plants that look good on their own, but also complement each other, creating added visual impact.

Maybe the most endearing attribute of container planting is its mobility. This feature can be

exploited to make you seem to be a better gardener than you actually are.

Pots can be rotated, with showy blooming containers coming to the front while those which have finished blooming are moved to a restorative site. Groupings can be shuffled around, like rearranging furniture, for altogether new looks. If company's coming tomorrow and your containers are not just so, it's easy to zip out an underwhelming or underperforming plant and plop in a replacement flower that just happens to be in full glory. Container colors cheer up the places you spend the most time, such as chaise-side in the backyard.

A flowering bouquet is lackluster if it isn't flowering. To avoid container lulls, plant flowers that stay in bloom for extended periods like lobelia, an extended bloomer that thrives in partial sun. You can tuck vegetables such as strawberries, tomatoes, parsley, and pepper into your bouquets of lobelia, viola, petunia, and dahlia, but they are heavy feeders and need extra fertilizer.

By grouping plants according to their cultural needs, you will accomplish two things:

- you will assure that they grow and thrive
- you will make your life a whole lot easier



Pro Tip: Add Slow-Release Granular Fertilizer

In potting up your containers, add a slow-release granular fertilizer to the potting mix. It's a great time saver and a bit of an insurance policy.

1. First, cover the drainage hole with pebbles, broken clay pots, or packing "peanuts." The peanuts make the completed pot lighter and easier to transport. Make sure to use the truly peanut-shaped little noodles, not the concave or hollow ones, which will hold water and possibly rot roots. Fill with potting mix to planting depth.
2. Plant the central upright plant, which is the tallest one. If the pot is to be shoved up against a wall or backdrop, put the tall plant in the back.
3. Plant the skirt. Add soil and position low trailers and cascading plants around the edge.
4. Tuck in mid-level plants, sweeping around your star-performer and rising to greet it. Water thoroughly, avoiding blooms and leaves, when possible. Add more soil if settling occurs and remember to deadhead

(remove spent blossoms) as the season progresses.

April Gardening Calendar

This is a month in which I am not so sure Mother Nature can decide which season we are in. We can have summer-like conditions one day, spring the next, and then winter can reappear for a few hours. Where you live in the state will make a huge difference as to how advanced your spring-blooming plants are. However, each warm, sunny day is like a shot in the arm for our plants, and they can burst into bloom seemingly overnight.

Most plants are beginning to leaf out, but not all fully. Start assessing if you had any winter damage and begin the clean-up process. There is still time to prune summer-blooming plants such as crape myrtles, rose of Sharon, summer-blooming spirea (**NOT spring-blooming bridal wreath spirea**), butterfly bush and more. Don't prune any spring-blooming plants until after they finish flowering. For evergreen shrubs such as boxwoods and holly, you can prune as needed, now through early summer. Ornamental grasses are beginning to grow, and if you have not pruned, pull back the old, dead growth to see how tall the new growth has gotten, and prune above that line. You don't want cut edges on your new leaves.

Vegetable gardening is in full swing, but again, cooler weather may have delayed planting in some gardens. There is still time to plant cool season vegetables including lettuce, broccoli, greens and onions, but get it done by mid-month. Wait for the soil and air to warm up before planting tomatoes, peppers and eggplants—even though garden centers have likely been selling them for over a month now! You won't be gaining anything if you have to replant or the plants get stunted by cold nights.

Lawns are beginning to green up, but there is much competition from the winter weeds—or, as some call them, their “wildflowers.” Whichever you call them, flowering plants in the lawn mean seeds are forming and these wildflowers/ weeds will increase next year. If you aren’t enamored with the flowering weeds, try to keep them mowed now to prevent additional seed set. Many of the weeds are going to be dying out in a few weeks when warmer conditions occur. Herbicide usage now is not very effective and may actually hinder your lawn's green-up, as it is a transition from winter dormancy to summer green. Keep the lawn area mowed and wait until it has totally greened up to apply your first round of fertilizer. Then you can worry about summer weeds.

Many gardeners are chomping at the bit to move their houseplants back outside to reclaim some of their indoor living space. But please, be patient. Even though we may be having some really warm days, we are usually still having some really cool nights, which could cause houseplants to suffer cold damage. Waiting until early May is not going to hurt, especially if you live in the northern tier of the state. If you have plants that are too pot-bound, dividing them or repotting them is a great chore to do when you do move them outside.

Winter annuals are doing well in some gardens, and in others they have barely recovered from winter damage. If yours still look good, fertilize them and enjoy them one more month. If they are non-existent or barely there, start replanting with warm season annuals. Some will tolerate cooler temperatures better than others. You can start planting callibrachoa, verbena, petunias and begonias, but hold off on lantana, periwinkle and summer impatiens. In addition to more annuals, visit your local nurseries and garden centers to see the new selections of perennials, shrubs and trees. If you had some plant casualties, now is a great time to replace them.

Consider the time of year you need color help in the garden and choose plants that can extend your color palette.

Arkansas Native Plants

Arkansans have always been conscientious about the environment, but today, sustainable gardening or "going green" seems to be of the utmost importance. When choosing plants for the landscape, many gardeners are looking for reliable performers which are showy, yet need minimal care. Easy care plants should not be invasive. One group of plants that seems to fit almost all of those criteria is native plants.

There are many definitions for native plants—native to Arkansas, native to the south, or simply native to the United States. As one person put it, all plants are native somewhere!

How Do We Recognize Native Arkansas Plants?

To fit our criteria of low maintenance, **able to adapt to Arkansas growing conditions** and **non-invasive**, gardeners should look a bit closer to home when choosing natives.

Plants that have been surviving on their own along roadsides and in wooded areas in the south, should be well adapted to growing in our home landscapes. Native plants (also called indigenous plants) are **plants that have evolved and adapted to local conditions over thousands of years**. They have adapted to the geography—including rocky soil or heavy clay, and climate of that region—whether hot and dry, or hot and humid. Most regional natives are vigorous and hardy, so can survive summer heat, winter cold, dry conditions or wet ones without additional care.

When choosing native plants for your own yard, match the conditions you have—sun or shade, wet or dry.

Each native plant species is a member of a community that includes other plants, animals and microorganisms. The natural balance in that community keeps each species in check, allowing the native plant to thrive in conditions where it is suited, but preventing it from taking over the garden. Thus, native species rarely become invasive, as plants introduced from other areas can be—(consider privet, kudzu, bamboo and vinca—all introduced and all highly invasive). A community of native plants provides habitat for a variety of native wildlife species such as birds and butterflies. Once established, they require little to no irrigation or fertilization, however they may flourish with a little extra care in your garden. Native plants are resistant to most pests and diseases—there is no one to spray or monitor for pests in the wild, yet they still survive. Native plants suit today's interest in "low-maintenance" gardening and landscaping.

Misconceptions About Native Plants

Often a misconception about native plants is that they are weedy and only used in a meadow or natural setting. Many great native perennials and shrubs are mainstays in gardens, including:

- Echinacea (purple coneflower)
- Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*)
- Native Ferns

Arkansas Native Shrubs:

- Yaupon holly
- Beautyberry – *Callicarpa*

- *Calycanthus* (Sweet Shrub or Carolina allspice),
- *Illicium* (Florida Anise)
- Native azaleas and *Clethra* (Summersweet).

Of course, many recognize the native trees, including oaks, hickories, pines and cedars, but think of the more ornamental species: Dogwoods, redbuds and magnolias.



Caption: American Beautyberry in full flowering glory

How native is your native will always be debated among plant folks, however, most gardeners are interested in what works. Giving gardeners success without heavy maintenance schedules is important. Choosing plants that not only thrive, but don't spread prolifically is also important.

Whether the plant is the native species or an improved cultivar of that native—a "nativar", really doesn't matter. What does is that we match the conditions in our yards with the conditions a plant needs to grow. So if you are looking for reliability and low maintenance, look no further than native plants; you have many options to choose from.



WHITE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER

Plant Sale

Proceeds will fund educational outreach and scholarships for area students

Educational Speakers

Bobbie Sandlin, White County Master Gardener
"The Soil's Sign Language" at 9 am

Sherri Sanders, County Extension Agent - Agriculture
"Adding Color to Your Landscape" at 10 am

Ann Wood, White County Master Gardener
"Happy Hellebores" at 11 am

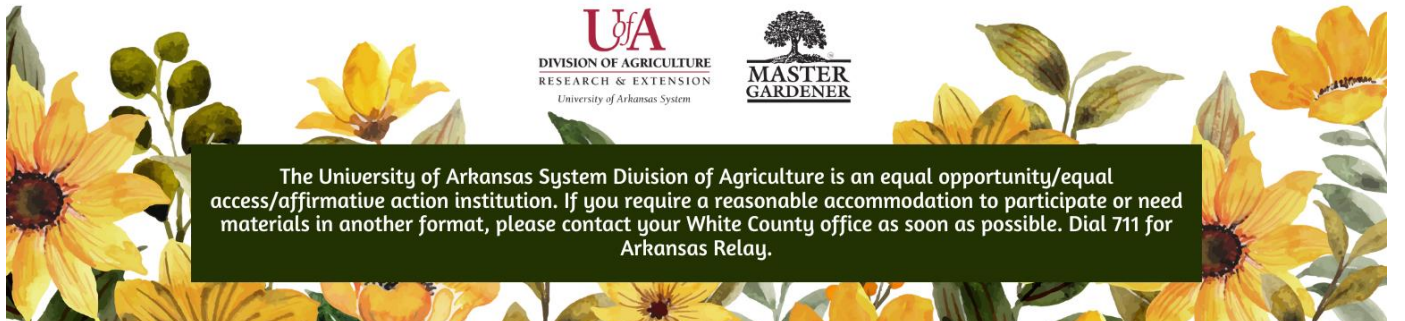
----- April -----
Saturday 15 8 am-2 pm
----- 2023 -----

2400 Old Searcy Landing Road, Searcy, AR 72143

There will be a Kid's Corner with special gardening activities for youth to enjoy!



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