



# White County Horticulture

## February Vol. 10 No. 2

### February Garden Calendar

Our winter annuals don't always thrive in the cold weather, but some do better than others. Pansies and violas struggle valiantly to rebound on warmer days, but Swiss chard and giant purple mustard won't look good until spring, if they do come back. If you have winter annuals with damage, clean up the damaged foliage, fertilize on a mild winter day, and water if it gets dry. If the damage is on permanent plants in the landscape, ignore the damaged foliage until new growth begins in the spring. Pruning them back now will remove any buffer the damaged leaves are providing. Hopefully the damage will be minimal, or even better, you won't have any severe winter weather—keep your fingers crossed! Pay attention to weather forecasts, and if really low temperatures are predicted and you haven't gotten ample rain fall, water your container plants and any newly planted trees or shrubs. If plants are bone dry going into a hard freeze, you stand the chance of having more burned foliage.

February is a big month in the gardening world, with many pruning chores taking top priority. Late February is the time to start pruning fruit trees, blueberry bushes and grape vines. Proper pruning ensures top performance. Both the quality and the size of the harvested fruit will be better if you know how to prune.

Pruning is not limited to fruit crops. All roses need annual pruning as well, and it is recommended that you prune butterfly bush (buddleia), summer spirea, and ornamental grasses back hard each year. Butterfly bush and summer blooming spirea plants bloom on new growth. Cutting them back hard keeps the plants more compact but covered with blooms. Ornamental grasses die close to the soil line each winter, so removing the old foliage makes way for new growth the following growing season. If other summer blooming shrubs need pruning, this too should be done before new growth really kicks in. This list of shrubs includes crape myrtles, althea (rose-of-Sharon), Clethra (summer sweet), Callicarpa (French mulberry or beauty berry) and the Panicle hydrangeas such as Limelight or Pinky Winky. Don't prune the big leaf hydrangeas unless all their new growth begins from the soil line. There are numerous types of hydrangeas, so you need to know which you have to decide when to prune. While most guidelines call for February pruning towards the end of the month, use common sense too. We have had some late springs with winter weather before, and we didn't get around to pruning until March. Late pruning is not going to kill a plant.

By mid-February, you can begin to plant the cool season vegetables. English and snap peas are the most cold hardy, followed by greens, then the Cole crops: cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cauliflower. Transplants should begin appearing in garden centers later this month. Greens, spinach and carrots can be planted from seeds, and onion sets and transplants, along with seed potatoes, will appear at the end of the month. Cool gardening season is from February through mid-April. If you did a

good job of covering any fall or late-planted vegetables, you should be harvesting now. If you did not cover, you will probably need to replant.

Spring bulbs are beginning to make an appearance! Crocus and early daffodils are blooming some years now; we haven't see any signs yet, but it won't be long. After that come hyacinths, tulips and flowering onions. When you see flower buds emerging in your foliage, that is the time to put out some complete fertilizer to aid in bud set for next year. Remember to keep the foliage happy and healthy for at least six weeks after bloom.

### **White County Master Gardener Training Scheduled**

The next White County Cooperative Extension Service's Master Gardener Training will be held in February and March on five consecutive Wednesdays:

**February 22, March 1, 8, 15, and 22, 2023**

The classes will be held at the White County Cooperative Extension Service Conference Room located at 2400 Old Searcy Landing Road in Searcy. Each day's sessions will run from 8:00 a.m. to about 4:30 p.m. Topics include basic botany, soils, fertilizers, pest control, fruits, vegetables, ornamentals, and lawns. University of Arkansas Extension Service specialists, county agents, and others teach the classes. *The Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service is an equal opportunity/equal access/affirmative action institution. If you require a reasonable accommodation to participate or need materials in another format, please contact your County Extension office as soon as possible. For those that are hearing impaired, dial 711 for Arkansas Relay.*

You must attend all sessions to become a certified Master Gardener, (title cannot be used for commercial purposes). Please note the requirements on the application form for volunteer work hours.

**NOTE: We must have 20 participants for the class to be held and the deadline is**

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Cost of the training is \$75, which includes the Master Gardener notebook and all training materials. You may return payment with your application or bring your payment to the first

session. Contact our office for an application – 501-268-5394 or by emailing at [ssanders@uada.edu](mailto:ssanders@uada.edu)

### **Ornamental Kale and Cabbages**

Ornamental kales and cabbages (also known as "flowering" kales and cabbages) are in the same species as edible cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower. While ornamental kales and cabbages are edible, they tend to have a bitter flavor, so they are often relegated to an ornamental in the garden. Technically, ornamental kales and cabbages are all kales (kales produce leaves in tight rosettes while cabbages produce heads). In the horticultural trade, ornamental kale is the term used for plants with deeply-cut, curly, frilly or ruffled leaves, while the broad flat-leaved types are typically called ornamental cabbage. Ornamental cabbages and kales grow approximately one foot wide and 15 inches tall.



In some parts of the state, the winter cold can take its toll, making the plants unattractive. But, in some parts, they can take a little hit but still grow strong. They can give us a lot of winter color in shades of pink, purple and white from fall through spring, depending on the winter weather. If they are doing well, they typically begin to stretch or get leggy as warm temperatures increase in the spring, and then begin to produce some straggly yellow blooms, which signal the end of their growing season (if Mother Nature didn't end it sooner!).

### **February Beekeeping Calendar**

#### **Bees:**

The queen will be spending a lot of time in the cluster, but a few warm days will lure some

workers outside to investigate. When the first spring flowers begin to bloom, they will return with pollen. Fresh pollen will stimulate the queen to begin some limited egg-laying activity. Workers will take cleansing flights on warm days.

Increased activity and brood-rearing will cause the bees to consume a substantial amount of stored honey this month. Unless an unusually warm and early spring promotes early flowering, their surplus food supplies may be running low.

### **Beekeepers:**

Check the bees' food supply, and provide emergency feeding if needed. Continue to read up on bees. Attend your local beekeeping association meetings. Finish your workshop chores so that all your hives are ready for spring. On a mild, sunny day with little wind, it may be possible to have a look inside the hive. Don't remove any frames, which may risk chilling the brood, but you can estimate the size of the cluster between the frames. Patties of pollen or artificial pollen substitute can be provided to promote earlier brood production. However, in periods of extended cold temperatures the worker population may not be large enough to incubate a large brood nest. If weather permits inspection, weak colonies (those with less than two full frames of bees) will probably not recover adequately and can be united with other colonies. Medicate with Fumidil-B for Nosema, if necessary. Excessive condensation on the inside of the lid may mean ventilation is inadequate.

### **Lenten Rose**

Though spring is still weeks away, a few perennials push the season and are already in full bloom. Lenten rose (*Helleborus orientalis*) is one of these early bloomers and probably the plant with the most to offer the average gardener interested in late winter bloom.

Lenten rose is one of several species of Hellebores offered as straight species or as hybrid crosses with one of the other 15 species in the group. The earliest to bloom of these, the Christmas rose (*H. niger*), flowers in December and January but is more difficult to grow than the

Lenten rose or its hybrids. Because many of the plants offered as Lenten rose are hybrids with the Christmas rose, the bloom time can range from late January through early April.

This long-lived evergreen perennial is a member of the buttercup family and is native to northern Greece and southern Turkey. It grows to 18 inches tall with coarse textured, deep green leaves that arise from an underground rhizome. The leaves are palmately arranged with seven to nine segments.

The flowering stems arise from the ground in late winter along with a new crop of leaves. The flowering stem is erect and terminates in a cluster of branches, each bearing three to five nodding flowers. Flower colors range from white to pink, often with the petal-like sepals marked



with darker spots. Because the showy portion of the flower are sepals (modified leaves), they persist for six to eight weeks. But during this long period the bloom color changes. The white flowered forms become more greenish; the pink ones age to deep rose and tan.

The individual blooms are to 2 ½ inches across and have numerous prominent stamens in the center of the flower. Once pollination has been achieved, three angular capsules form in the center of the blossom, but the flower remains attractive as the seeds develop.

All parts of the Lenten rose are poisonous, but there is nothing about the plant likely to tempt children to graze on it. Because of its toxic foliage, it's one of the best deer-proof plants offered in the nursery trade.

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The plant has been cultivated for centuries. Gerard, an Englishman remembered for his 1633 herbal which describes the pharmacopeia of his day, says that the plants were common in London gardens during his time. He also indicates two species were found in the wild in England, probably having been introduced by Roman soldiers during the fourth century AD.

Gerard describes several medicinal uses for hellebore extracts. Most concoctions were given as purgatives and to worm children, but it was also used to cure melancholy and, if things really got out of hand, to treat insanity. Though Gerard doesn't mention it, other writers of the time warn that overdoses, especially when worming children, often kill the worms and the patient. Hellebores are ideal plants for the shade garden because they form evergreen masses and form large, long lasting colonies that persist for years. They tolerate dry shade quite well. If the plant is in a good site, expect it to reseed and increase the size of the colony.



When the new leaves emerge in late winter, the old foliage becomes lax, sprawls across the ground and begins to die. To keep the plant tidy, trim off the old leaves in late winter just as the new crop of shoots begin to emerge.

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*Sherri Sanders*