

# "Lett-uce" Inform You



February 2009

## Come Learn with Us in 2009

**February 21**, Saturday, 9-3:30 at the Elizabeth Middle School. The Natural Resources Group is hosting a **Small Acreage Seminar**. Topics to be covered include; Grazing and Weeds, Manure Management, Energy Alternatives, Animals on Small Acreages, and Ag Status and Zoning Restrictions. There is a fee for the seminar and lunch is included.

**February 28**, Saturday, 1 p.m. at the Mercantile Building in Elbert. The Elbert County Master Gardeners present Jack Murphy and **Skunks, Raccoons, Deer, and Me**. This seminar will deal with all your wildlife concerns. From getting rid of those skunks under the porch, keeping the deer out of your garden, coyotes too close to your home, how to get those flickers to stop destroying your siding---the list is endless. Come learn about the best way to coexist with the beautiful wildlife we have in Elbert County. Cost \$5.00.

**March 10**, Tuesday, 7 p.m. at the Elizabeth Middle School Cafeteria. The Elbert County Master Gardeners present Dr. David Whiting and his seminar on **Vegetables: A Hedge Against Rising Food Costs**. Come learn about the varieties of vegetables that do well at our altitude and with our short season. Get information about soil preparation, raised beds, protecting the garden from critters, and sustainable and perennial vegetables and herbs such as asparagus, rhubarb, thyme, oregano, and more. The Master Gardeners will be available to share their own success stories with your favorite veggies. Cost \$5.00.

**March 24**, Tuesday, 7 p.m. at the Carlson Building next to the Elizabeth Library. The Elbert County Master Gardeners present C.S.U.'s Dr. Whitney Cranshaw and his presentation on insects titled, **Hopping Mad Over Grasshoppers?** Did you lose your garden vegetables and flowers to an invasion of grasshoppers last summer? This seminar will introduce you to the bothersome, destructive insects we dealt with last summer, as well as some that are predicted to appear this year. You will receive help with dealing with them before they can do too much damage. Also included in the seminar will be information about the good guys in the insect world such as lady beetles, lacewings, mantis, etc. Cost \$5.00.

**May 16**, Saturday (time and place to be announced). The Elbert County Master Gardeners present your Elbert County Extension Director Kipp Nye and his seminar on **Common Weeds**. Kipp will introduce you to the most common weeds in Elbert County, lead a weed walk to visually identify them, inform on their toxicity or not, and instruct on how to control or eliminate them. Cost \$5.00.

Please RSVP for each class by calling the Elbert County Extension Office in Kiowa (303-621-3162) or Simla (719-541-2361).



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# Plants in Their Place

## Plants for your Garden: The Colorado 2009 Plant Select® Program

By Dianne White,  
Colorado Master  
Gardener



© Gary A. Monroe  
**Littleleaf Mountain Mahogany *Cercocarpus intricatus*, Rose Family (Rosaceae)**

The Plant Select® choices this year include ground covers, shrubbery, annuals, perennials and grasses. Quite a variety! While these plants are tested all over the state and will do well in most areas, it is always a good idea to check your specific conditions and match them against the recommendations. A plant that does best in a USDA Zone 5 is often marginal in parts of Elbert County. However, if you are willing to create a microclimate for one you really love, it could do very well. So think, plan and have fun gardening in '09.

Littleleaf is a thick evergreen shrub that is native to Colorado and the desert southwest. It is found growing on dry rocky slopes in the desert mountain areas that also have pinyon and juniper.

The Plant Select selection grows 30 to 60 inches high and about 2 to 3 feet in diameter. (Native specimens may grow to 25 feet high with a 10 inch diameter trunk.) The bark is a light gray color and the inconspicuous May blooms are tiny and yellow. The seeds are spiral shaped plumes that add interest to the bush.

Littleleaf isn't very particular about the soil it lives in: clay, sand or loam is acceptable. It prefers full sun, but will tolerate light shade. Water requirements are from light to moderate and it is hardy in USDA Zones 3-9 up to 8000 feet.

This is an excellent hedge plant for a sunny, dry spot and very Xeric once established.

For additional information or to find retailers that carry the Plant Select® plants visit their website at [PLANTSELECT.ORG](http://PLANTSELECT.ORG).



## Onions

By Doris Smith,  
Colorado Master Gardener

Sometime in May, depending on the weather, it's time to plant the more cold-hardy vegetables: peas, broccoli, onions and other root crops. They can sustain moderate frost, but it's always a good idea to cover them at night if cold temperatures are forecast.

Onions are easy to start from seed in early March if you want a particular variety not available in sets. Generally the sets found for sale are simply designated red, yellow or white onions. If you are planting a lot of onions, be sure they specify they hold up well in storage. Some gardening articles claim that stored properly, onions can keep for a year, so it's possible you could harvest and keep all the onions you'll need until next harvest. At least that's my personal goal this year.

I intend to plant sixty yellow onion sets in one bed because yellow are what I use most for cooking year-round. Before planting, it's recommended that the sets be soaked in compost tea to ward off fungal diseases. Compost tea is simply made by shoveling rich compost into an old pillow case which is left to soak in a bucket of water for a day. Then toss out the pillow case, and what remains is compost tea.

(Continued on page 3.)

# Plants in Their Place

## Onions

(Continued From Page 2)

Since onions prefer a slightly acidic soil, and since our native soils are definitely alkaline, the bed will need lots of good compost and organic matter added to it. The sets (or plants, if started from seed) should be planted an inch deep about four inches apart. They should be watered well when planted and given about one inch of water per week throughout the growing cycle.

Most problems can be prevented by keeping the leaves as dry as possible. Watering is best with a soaker hose or drip system rather than sprinkling from overhead. It is also very important to remove weeds in the bed, as they will deprive the onions of needed water and nutrients.

The tops of the onions will fall over on their own as the growing season nears the end. Stop watering for the next two weeks, and then carefully dig up the onions. Leave them lying on the ground for a few hours to dry and then spread out in a dark dry place to finish drying.

You can braid the tops, secure with twine and hang in a well-ventilated area, or snip off all but an inch or two of the tops and store in mesh bags or ventilated baskets. They should be stored in a cool and dry place between 30 and 50 degrees. If all works well, you should be eating the last of the previous year's harvest just as you're bringing in this year's new crop.

For additional information on growing onions, you can find several publications on the Colorado State University website. These are just a few: [Planttalk 1808: Growing Onions from Seeds](#) and [Garden Notes #719: Vegetable Garden Hints](#)

## ASPARAGUS "FOOD OF KINGS"

By Steve Delgadillo  
Colorado Master Gardener



A member of the lily family, asparagus, (*Asparagus officinalis*), comes from the Greek word *asparagos*, which first appears in English print around 1000 A.D. It cannot be definitively tracked to any one specific area of origin, although it is known to be native to the eastern Mediterranean and Asia Minor areas. As early as 200 BC, Cato the Elder, a Roman statesman, gave excellent growing instructions for asparagus. The ancient

Egyptians cultivated it, and Romans, from Pliny to Julius Caesar to Augustus, prized the wild variety.

There is a recipe for cooking asparagus in the oldest surviving book of recipes, Apicius's (the title of a collection of Roman cookery recipes) third century AD *De re coquinaria* ("On the Subject of Cooking"), Book III. The name Apicius had long been associated with excessive love of food, apparently from the habits of an early bearer of the name. The most famous individual given this name because of his reputation as a gourmet was Marcus Gavius Apicius, who is sometimes mistakenly credited as being the author of the book.

Asparagus gained popularity in France and England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. King Louis XVI of France loved asparagus and instructed his gardeners to grow it in hothouses year round. Early colonists brought it to America and that is when it is said to have been called the "Food of Kings".

Ancient Chinese herbalists have used asparagus root to treat many ailments from arthritis to infertility. The root contains compounds called steroidal glycosides, which may have anti-inflammatory properties. Asparagus is a heart-healthy food, containing no fat, cholesterol or sodium. Asparagus has a diuretic effect, and asparagine, an amino acid present in asparagus, may be the source of its diuretic properties, and when excreted, gives urine a strong odor.

Today China is the world's largest producer of asparagus at approximately 88 percent, followed by Peru, the United States, Mexico, and other Mediterranean countries. In the United States, Michigan, Washington, and California are the main producers.

Hopefully many of you are saying to yourselves, "I had no idea! I want to grow some asparagus in my garden; how do I go about it?" The first question is whether asparagus will grow here in Elbert County, and the answer is yes.

Asparagus is an herbaceous perennial plant. You'll need to pick a spot out of the way in the garden, asparagus need space about 4 to 5 feet per plant. They won't spread out much in the first couple of years, but once established, they will quickly fill in. They are a heavy feeder and prefer full sun. Asparagus is not particular about soil PH. Anywhere in the range of 6.0 to 7.0 will be fine. A word of caution about weeds, get them while (Continued on page 4.)

# In Your Garden

## ASPARAGUS “FOOD OF KINGS”

(Continued from page 3.)

the asparagus plants are young. Asparagus plants form a tightly woven mat, from which no weed can be removed intact. If properly maintained, asparagus plants can last over 10 years.

There are basically three different colors of asparagus:

- Green asparagus, ranging from pencil-thin to very thick; most American asparagus is of this variety.
- White asparagus, preferred in Europe; these sunlight-deprived stalks are a little milder and more delicate.
- Violet or Purple asparagus; this variety is most commonly found in England and Italy and has a very thick and substantial stalk.

White asparagus comes from the process of etiolation, which is the deprivation of light. Dirt is kept mounded around the emerging stalk, depriving it of light. The plant cannot produce chlorophyll without light, thus there is no green color to the stalks.

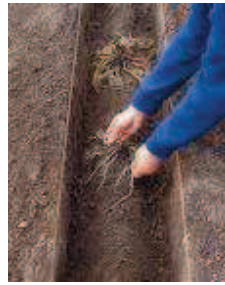
Asparagus comes in the following grades: colossal, jumbo, large, standard, and small.

You can grow asparagus from either seeds or from crowns. Asparagus crowns are really just the base and roots of a one year old plant. Most people find it easier to grow from crowns, which are readily available in the spring. Unlike many plants, the roots on asparagus crowns can withstand some air exposure and you will usually find them for sale loose. They should still look firm and fresh, not withered and mushy.

Early spring is the preferred time for planting crowns in cooler climates, about 4 weeks before the last expected frost date. Crowns can handle some frost because they are below ground.

If you choose to start asparagus seeds, start them indoors about three months before your last expected frost. After three months, they should be about 12 inches tall and ready to plant outside. At this point, treat them the same way you would crowns.

Asparagus is usually planted in rows, since you are going to dig trenches to plant them in. Start with a trench that is about a foot deep and 1 ½ feet wide. Working



some compost into the bottom of the trench will get your plants off to a good start.

Then make small mounds, about 6 inches high, along the bottom of the trench about every 18 inches. Spread the roots of each crown over the mounds and fill in the trench until the crowns are covered with 2-3 inches of soil. As the plants begin to grow, you can gradually fill in the

remainder of the trench.

Now you have to be patient. You won't actually harvest any spears for the first two years. Allow the foliage to grow and feed the plant. Keep the plants well watered and weed free. The plants are actually very attractive and ferny, turning a lovely gold color in the fall. By late winter or early spring, it is safe to cut the old foliage back in preparation for new growth.

By the third year, you should be harvesting good finger sized spears, ready for picking. Some people snap their spears off; others prefer to cut. If you are cutting below the surface, be careful not to damage any emerging shoots. As a general rule, shoots should be about 8 inches long and the scales on the tips should not yet have begun to open. In year three you can harvest for up to 4 weeks then let the plants gain some strength. After that feel free to harvest until it gets too warm for the spears to thicken.

Whether you prefer the thick or thin spears, be certain they are fresh. The sugar in the plant quickly converts to starch after harvesting, causing a loss in flavor and development of a woody texture. Select firm, straight, smooth, rich green stalks with tightly-closed tips. Ridges in the stems and a dull green color are an indication of old age. The stalks should not be limp or dry at the cut.

Not many insects are interested in asparagus. The asparagus beetle feeds on the foliage but can be easily controlled by hand picking if started early. Rust used to be a major asparagus problem but most modern varieties have been bred for resistance to this fungal disease. A more likely problem is fusarium wilt. Your best defense here is offense. Look for certified disease free crowns and keep them growing vigorously.

To learn more about asparagus, contact the Elbert County Extension Master Gardener Office at 303-621-3162 and ask for Garden Notes #719, Planttalk 1806, or visit the CSU Extension website at <http://www.cmg.colostate.edu/gardennotes/719.pdf>

# In Your Garden

## Are Grapes in your Future?

By Audrey Steffan,  
Colorado Master Gardener



Have you thought about growing your own grapes, be it for fresh fruit, drying, jelly, juice or wine? Here are some interesting facts and helpful hints for successful grape growing in Colorado.

Grapes belong to the *Vitaceae* family, the genus *Vitis* is broadly grown in

eastern Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. *Vitis* is split into 2 subgenera: *Euvitis* or “true grapes” such as the common Concord, (*V. labrusca*) and Muscadinia or “muscadine grapes” which are small fruit clusters that are thick skinned (*V. rotundifolia*). *Vitis vinifera* is thought to be native to an area near the Caspian Sea in southwestern Asia, the same area where apple, cherry, pear, and other fruits are native. Grapes came to the new world with the settlers on the east coast but did poorly or died out due to poor cold hardiness, insect and disease resistance. Spanish missionaries brought *Vinifera* grapes to California in the 1700s and found that they grew very well there.

Grape cultivars can be American, French or European hybrid types. American and French cultivars are generally best suited for northern growing conditions because they are more winter hardy. In Colorado, planting a grape variety that is not hardy to our varying temperatures could cause plant death. Only grape varieties that are hardy to at least minus 20 degrees F should be planted. Concord is a variety that is cold hardy and is excellent for making jelly and for juicing. Niagara is a white grape this is also great for juicing. Seedless table grapes that are cold hardy include Canadice, Reliance and Vanessa. If you are looking for a wine grape, cold hardy varieties include Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Depending on the cultivars, grapevines produce berries that may be red, blue, white (greenish-yellow), purple or black with distinctive flavors. Both seeded and seedless types are now available. Grapevines available to gardeners are self-pollinated and do not require bees for pollination.

Grape species and cultivars are also classified by food usage: *Table grapes* are consumed as fresh fruit with Thompson seedless as the major cultivar. *Raisin grapes* are also

Thompson seedless making up 90% of the raisin production in the USA. *Sweet juice grapes* is primarily dominated by Concord. *Wine grapes* - wine is produced from all grape species but most production is of the *vinifera* cultivars.

If you are thinking about planting grapes in your yard, keep in mind that they require full sunshine and support for their canes from a fence, trellis or arbor. The support needs to be strong but simple enough so the vines won't become entangled making pruning difficult. Grapes do not grow well in soggy soil conditions and require less nutrients and water than grass, fruit trees or other plants. Grapes can also be ornamental and valuable as shade or a sunscreen when trained on a trellis or arbor.

When planting grape roots, a deep hole is required. The major portion of the root should be at least one foot deep in the ground. Grapes are very sensitive to 2,4-D and should not be planted anywhere near where this chemical is used for weed control. Early spring is the best time to plant grapevines. Grapevine establishment is a 4 - 5 year process. The first year is important to get as much growth as possible so supplemental watering may be necessary. During the first year it is necessary to mulch, fertilize and keep them weed free and tie the vines to a stake to keep them off the ground to prevent damage and disease. The second year, often called the “training year“, is much the same as the first year but the training of the vines becomes more important. This is a critical period in the development of the vines and the goal is to prune and train the vines as straight as possible. Proper training will help the trunk of the vines carry the weight of the limbs and fruit in the future. Proper pruning is very important. Keep in mind that fruit is produced on the current season's growth that in turn grows from last season's wood. Heavy pruning produces the most fruit, light pruning produces large yields but lower quality fruit and really heavy pruning produces mostly vegetative growth and/or very little fruit. During the third season, some harvest may be expected but the first full harvest won't come until the fourth or fifth year. (Continued on page 6.)

# Insects and Other Creatures

## Grasshoppers

By Aija Tobiss  
Colorado Master Gardener

The grasshopper season is not here yet, but judging from last summer's population in our garden there may be a big crop. Grasshoppers increase gradually over several years. Then in favorable conditions they increase in massive numbers. One female can lay as many as 400 eggs and even if small numbers survive, the result will be legions of grasshoppers.

There are many species of grasshoppers in Colorado. The most widespread and the most destructive is the Migratory grasshopper



(*Melanoplus sanguinipes*). He is about one inch long with a black patch on the neck. He prefers grains and grasses. But if the food supplies run out, he will devour anything in his path.

Grasshoppers emerge in mid June to early July when the eggs have hatched. Most of the grasshoppers in Colorado lay their eggs in late fall. These eggs remain in the soil all winter and hatch in spring or early summer and are adults by mid summer. A few species will lay their egg in the summer. Then in August they hatch and spend the winter as nymphs, immature grasshoppers. These nymphs become adults much sooner.

According to Dr. Whitney S. Cranshaw and John L. Capinera, "Grasshoppers breed and develop each year in dry, undisturbed sites such as pastures, empty lots and roadsides. As the plants in these areas dry out or are eaten, the grasshoppers move to the lush growth found in yards and gardens. Successful management of grasshoppers must include the breeding areas."

Enemies of grasshoppers: Birds, rodents, spiders, skunks, flies and horsehair worms.

It is possible to slow down the movement of grasshoppers in your yard, by watering the breeding ground to promote green growth and by leaving a barrier strip of weeds and grass around your yard to concentrate the grasshopper population. Treat these strips with insecticide for greater control.

Highly effective insecticides against grasshoppers can be purchased at any garden shop. Pick insecticides that are labeled for grasshoppers and for specific locations, such as rangelands pastures or specific plants that are in your garden. Remember, insecticides are poisonous and can be toxic to animals and beneficial insects. ***Always read, understand and follow all label instructions.***

For additional information you can find these fact sheets on Colorado State University's website: [Fact Sheet 5.535: Grasshoppers in Field Crops](#) and [Fact Sheet 5.536: Grasshopper Control in Gardens and Small Acreage](#).

## Are Grapes in your Future?

(Continued from page 5.)

Grapes change in color long before they are fully mature so it is possible to pick them before they are at their peak in flavor, size and sweetness if berry color is used as a guide. For best fruit, taste the grapes first to see if they are ripe. Grapes will not improve in quality once they are harvested. Birds can be a real nuisance to grapes. The only protection is to use a net to cover them.

For more information on growing grapes in Colorado, Colorado State University Extension has published an 85 page bulletin, titled "Colorado Grape Growers Guide" and can be downloaded and printed from <http://www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/garden/550a.pdf>.

### Plant Markers

Don't buy wooden plant markers, which rot in the ground. Instead purchase a bag or box of plastic knives. Write the name of the plant or seeds with a permanent marker and stick in the dirt. Can be thrown away or reused again.

# Insects and Other Creatures

## Controlling Rabbits in the Garden

By Laurie Wasmund,  
Colorado Master Gardener

Rabbits are a pest common to many Colorado gardens and yards. Colorado is home to the cottontail rabbit and two kinds of jackrabbits—the black-tailed jackrabbit and the white-tailed jackrabbit. Snowshoe rabbits can be found in the mountains.



Cottontail rabbits spend their lives in relatively small areas of less than 10 acres. They prefer brushy spaces to open areas. In summer, the growth provides rabbits with all the food and protection they need. In winter, when

food supplies are short, rabbits eat twigs and bark from woody plants. For this reason, young trees need to be protected from rabbits during winter.

Rabbit damage on trees differs from the damage left by deer. Rabbits gnaw on bark and bite off twigs at a very precise 45-degree angle. Rabbits prefer apple, plum, pine, ash and honey locust trees, among others, and may attack shrubs such as cotoneaster, sumac, dogwood and roses.

Many options exist to control rabbits. Cottontails can be excluded from the garden by a 2-foot-tall, 1-inch-mesh galvanized fence. The bottom should be buried a few inches to prevent rabbits from crawling under. Tree protectors can also be used to exclude rabbits. The protectors should extend 12 to 18 inches above expected snow depths. Paper, plastic wrap, and tin foil can be placed around trees to protect them from cottontails, although these methods are less successful against jackrabbits.

Habitat modification can discourage rabbits from damaging plants. Remove brush piles, weed patches, junk piles and other dense cover where rabbits can hide. Mow or cultivate grass near trees to reduce the area's attractiveness to rabbits. Easy to grow perennials such as yarrow, foxglove, hosta, Oriental poppy, and iris naturally repel rabbits. Aromatic herbs such as lavender or catmint discourage rabbits in the garden.

Repellents can provide seasonal control of rabbits, although they may fail when food supplies are scarce. Area or odor repellents include ammonium soaps, bone tar oil and naphthalene mothballs, but must be reapplied after rain. Contact or taste repellents must be applied whenever new growth emerges during growing season. Poisoning rabbits is not recommended, and no toxicants or fumigants are labeled for rabbit control in the state of Colorado.

Rabbits can be removed by hunting. Cottontails are considered small game, but may be killed by legal owners of the land when found to be destroying property. Jackrabbits are considered “non-game” animals and may be hunted year-round. Hunting in early morning or late evening may effectively reduce cottontail populations. Jackrabbits are most active at night.

Trapping with wooden or wire traps can reduce rabbits in a given area. Traps can be baited with corncobs, dried alfalfa or dried apples in winter, and apples, carrots or cabbages in summer. Rabbits may be relocated, under certain conditions. However, once a cottontail population is well established, it is very hard to eradicate it. If rabbits are removed, others from nearby areas will move in.



***Here's what to do in the months ahead...*** Compiled\* by Pat Meyers,

Colorado Master Gardener

### February

- Start planning your garden for this year, starting with the perennials you want to include. Find out when they bloom and try to plan for color all season.
- The best time to prune most deciduous trees and shrubs is late February, all of March or early April.
- If it has been dry, water flower beds, roses, shrubs, trees and lawns. Water early in the day when the ground is unfrozen.

### March

- At the end of the month, core aerate the lawn, leave 4 inches between plugs. Leave cores/plugs on the lawn to disintegrate.
- Do not fertilize your lawn if you fertilized last fall.
- If you didn't clean your flower beds at the end of the season, you can start working on them now.

\*Source: CSU Gardening Calendar/Planning and Planting Guide.



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***February 2009***

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Master Gardener Office Hours are Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, April through September from 1:00 to 4:30 p.m. Stop by the Extension Office at the Fairgrounds in Kiowa or give us a call at 303-621-3162 Kiowa or 719-541-2361 Simla. You may also email questions to [elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu](mailto:elbertmg@ext.colostate.edu).

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Do you have a friend or neighbor who might wish to receive this newsletter? Please call or email the Extension Office with their name and address. Also let us know if you wish to receive this newsletter electronically. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Kipp A. Nye  
Elbert County Extension Director  
Colorado State University

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## ***You and Wildlife***

Winter is a stressful time for most wildlife. Our greatest contribution to the safety of wildlife, especially deer and elk, is to keep our dogs from chasing them. In Colorado and Elbert County, it is illegal to let a dog roam free at any time. Most people do not realize that their dog(s), even gentle dogs, have a natural instinct to run after wildlife. In the winter, dogs can run on top of the crusted snow, but deer and elk have to break through, slowing them down and making them easy prey. Many times deer and elk end up dying from injuries or exhaustion, even though they may have escaped the dogs. Wildlife and law enforcement officers are authorized to shoot dogs chasing wildlife, and the fines for allowing a dog to harass wildlife are substantial. Dogs are a constant threat to all kinds of wildlife all year, so please watch them carefully.