

GROWING POINTS

Gardening Ideas from Colorado Master Gardeners

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Which Seeds??

By Carey Harrington, Colorado Master Gardener

Are the seed catalogs piling up at your house too? The catalog season sure helps get many El Paso County Master Gardeners through the off season. As this is the time to be ordering seeds, I thought it would be a good time to pass along recommendations from Master Gardeners on the varieties of vegetables (and a few herbs) that did best for them in our area last year.

TOMATOES

Let's start with the all-time king of the vegetable garden (and we'll just ignore the whole "fruit or vegetable?" issue). Not surprisingly, all of our recommendations are fairly short season (70 days or less) varieties:

Champion This variety comes strongly

recommended from several Master Gardeners. Doris Duckworth gardens in Monument and



Monument and says she grew this variety last year and for the first time, she had red tomatoes before the first frost!

Goliath – Original Goliath is my personal favorite in the semi-large tomato category for my downtown garden. Leslie Holzmann, who gardens in Black Forest, likes the "early" version of this variety as well. The tomatoes are nice size, and they ripen early, taste great, and are usually perfectly smooth with no cracks. (Note: This

(Continued on page 2)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Getting to Know Your Houseplants: Schefflera 4

Gambel Oak 4

Annuals, Tender Perennials and Hardy Perennials 5

Book Review 6

Landscape Symposium 6

Introduction to Rocky Mountain Horticulture 6

Soothing the Winter Gardening Blues

By Deb Ross, Colorado Master Gardener

In the wintertime, avid gardeners must make do with stopgap measures to feed our gardening desires. We pour through seed catalogues and gaze longingly at the pictures in gardening books and magazines. We cultivate our houseplants and long for weeds to pull or rows to hoe. All we desperately want is a shovel in our hands, dirt under our fingernails, and some kind of leafy green thing to plant. Another way to beat the winter gardening blues is to experiment with plant propagation.

(Continued on page 3)

WHICH SEEDS ?? (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)



variety is only available from the Totally Tomatoes catalog—www.totallytomato.com)

Roma—This is the favorite paste tomato of several Master Gardeners.

Sungold—Several of us love this cute little orange cherry tomato. Ruth Levy gardens on the north side of the city and says she always makes sure to have one of these in her plot each year.

Other Recommended Varieties—Sweet 100, Early Girl.

Green Beans



Blue Lake – This is the only green bean that Stephanie Jensen will grow, and as the person who babysat her garden last July, I can see why! I picked enough green beans while she was away to feed me and to give away. And when Stephanie came home, she called and asked me why I hadn't picked any green beans! So this is a heavy producer. Stephanie warns that you need to give these some space and some sort of support. She also has tried the bush variety of Blue Lake and says that it doesn't perform nearly as well for her.

Lettuce and Leafy Greens

Simpson Elite Lettuce – This was one of Leslie Holzmann's many recommended varieties. This is a loose head, light green leaf variety. **Oak Leaf** is another green leaf variety that she likes.

While Jan Roes didn't recommend any specific lettuce varieties, she wanted other Pikes Peak area gardeners to know that sowing lettuce seeds in early September really does work for a fall crop. She said she was eating fresh lettuce until the end of October!



Green Wave Mustard Greens — OK, I was given these free with a seed order and was less than enthusiastic. But I'd just moved my veggie growing area and had a raised bed made up of soil dug from the middle of my driveway. I thought I'd toss these seeds

in along with my lettuce seeds to see how they did. The lettuce did quite poorly (my soil preparation was not too great) but the mustard greens sprouted and grew into the prettiest leafy heads that lasted all season, even past frost. They were quite ornamental! I finally got up the nerve to actually taste a leaf late in the summer and found I liked the taste much better than I thought I would. So this year, I'm ordering this one on purpose.

Other recommendations Mizuna greens, Minutina greens, Divina lettuce, Freckles lettuce.

HERBS

Sweet Basil – Several of us recommend this variety of basil. Stephanie Jensen reports trying several varieties over the years and having by far the best success with this, the standard variety. (Don't confuse Sweet Basil with Genovese or Large-Leaf.) She shared some of her plants with me, and they were the best basil plants I've had in my garden. I enjoyed many batches of delicious pesto (I can also highly recommend the Basic Basil Pesto recipe in the *Colorado Collage* cookbook!).

Large Leaf (or Santo) Cilantro – Leslie Holzmann says this variety reseeds prolifically, so be sure to start harvesting those leaves early. Cilantro is often best grown in successive plantings so that you still have leaves to harvest as older plants are going to seed.

Other Veggie Recommendations

Beets – Action, Red Ace

Broccoli – Packman, Green Comet

Carrots – Danvers Half-long, Mokum

Cucumbers – Cool Breeze, Salad Bush

Peas – Mr. Big, Super Sugar Snap

Radish – Easter Egg mix (multiple colors – good for planting with carrots to help space the carrots)

Zucchini – Dali White, Condor

Soothing the Winter Gardening Blues *(Continued from page 1)*

As a child, I remember being amazed at what happened when my mother cut the top off a carrot, placed the top in a shallow saucer of water, and set the saucer in a sunny window. The carrot top came to life, sending up leafy, fern-like sprouts. Magic! Hands-on science!

I recently repeated this wonderful occurrence by accident. No doubt everyone has had the experience of cleaning out an overfull refrigerator and finding a few mad scientist experiments within: containers of leftovers that no longer bear any resemblance to the original contents. Said contents now look fuzzy or gooey, and often have odiferous characteristics that make us instantly go: YUUUUCK!

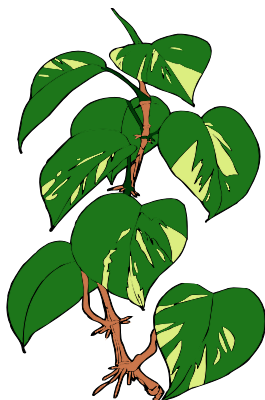
This time, while cleaning out my fridge, I discovered an onion that elicited a COOOOL reaction instead! Tucked into a brown paper bag, the onion had no odor and it had sprouted a lovely green leaf at the top and little rootlets at the bottom. I propped it in a plastic container, set it in my kitchen window, added some water, and for several weeks, enjoyed watching more leaves appear.

I managed another propagation accident while vacuuming when I knocked a leaf off my *Schefflera* houseplant. Feeling guilty at removing a perfectly good leaf from my plant, I put the leaf in a little green glass jar near the kitchen sink. To my surprise, the leaf stayed green and healthy for months. I admire any plant that hangs in there, determined to live, so I kept on watering this brave little leaf and otherwise

ignored it. Just the other day, I realized that roots had sprouted from the bottom of the leaf! I will pot it up and add another *Schefflera* to my houseplant collection.

Of course, one does not have to wait for accidents to happen. While many plants can be rooted in water, purists like to use hormone rooting powder and sterile potting mediums. Hormone rooting powder is a synthesis of the growth hormones naturally produced by plants, and is available at stores that sell plants and garden supplies. Applied to the end of a cutting, rooting powder stimulates root growth. Sterile potting mixtures can be used instead of traditional potting soil. Potting mixtures have the proper texture and hold moisture yet prevent waterlogging which benefits newly formed roots.

A popular houseplant, often commonly called a philodendron, is *Scindapsus aureus*, now more correctly called *Epipremnum aureum*. These leafy plants, whose leaves are often streaked with yellow, are vines that climb trees in the wild. Take cuttings immediately below leaf nodes, and remove the bottom leaf. These cuttings readily form new plants.



Many varieties of *Chlorophytum*, commonly known as spider plants, are easily rooted. The plantlets that grow on long stems from the main plant will eventually form roots and can be easily potted up.

Chunks of *Geranium* (*Pelargonium*) stems can be cut and put into rooting mediums, with or without hormone rooting powder. Keep them damp and soon you will have a collection of miniature plants.

Leaf cuttings of *Sansevieria*, commonly called snake plant or devil's tongue, can be rooted. Slice leaves crosswise into 2" long pieces and place - right side up - into potting mixture. Give them bright light and water sparingly.

Many kinds of fibrous-rooted and rhizomatous begonias can be rooted from cuttings. According to the January/February 2006 issue of "Garden Gate" magazine, a leaf from the Rex Begonia can be rooted by making cuts across the leaf veins on the back of the leaf. Anchor the leaf, cut veins down, using T-pins to hold the leaf to the rooting mix. The article recommends: cover the container with plastic wrap, keep the container warm and moist and be patient.

If you will now excuse me, I have some plants to propagate. There are lots of weeks of winter still ahead of us. I have all the tools and plant parts that I need, more than one available sunny window, and the mad scientist-gardener part of me is eager to experiment!

Getting to Know Your Houseplants: *Schefflera*

By Deb Ross, Colorado Master Gardener

Gardening in the Pikes Peak Region is a unique challenge.

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Scheffleras, commonly known as Queensland Umbrella trees or Octopus plants, are popular houseplants. The long-stemmed leaves have 5 to 8 glossy leaflets that spread out like umbrella spokes. These plants are a good example of why it is important to know the scientific names of plants in order to find the specimen that you really want when you are on a plant hunt.

According to “Wyman’s Gardening Encyclopedia”, *Schefflera actinophylla*, is now referred to as *Brassaia actinophylla*. Closely related to the *Brassaia* genus is *Heptapleurum*.

Brassaia is native to Australia. Both *Brassaia* and *Heptapleurum* can become good sized trees in the wild. And they can grow tall and leggy as houseplants. One way to keep them small is to regularly pinch out the top growth.

S. arboricola or *H. arboricolum* is also known as a Hawaiian Elf *Schefflera*. It can reach 20 feet or more in the wild, but is easily cultivated as a houseplant. I acquired one of these plants on a trip to Kauai. A restaurant I visited there had one of these plants as a centerpiece on each table. They were no more than six inches tall, like tropical bonsai trees, and each had been planted in lava rocks that sat in shallow trays. The leaves are smaller than more common *Schefflera* and they require bright light and regular watering. Our waitress told me they were available at local nurseries, and of course, one came home with me. My bonsai *Schefflera* has been thriving for over a year in the bright light and tropical warmth of my bathroom and it regularly takes a shower with me to give it a taste of a tropical rainfall.

GAMBEL (SCRUB) OAK

By Vicki MacWilliam, Colorado Master Gardener

Many creatures depend upon Gambel Oak for food and protection. Most of us have seen birds, deer and squirrels feeding on the acorns but did you know that it is also the main habitat for Colorado’s state insect, the Hairstreak?

The adult Colorado Hairstreak (*Hypaurotis crysalis* “Edwards”) inhabits oak thickets and throughout the summer feeds on tree sap, raindrops, and aphid honeydew. The joy of seeing these attractive purple and orange butterflies is reason enough for keeping oak shrubs in a garden landscape, but these lovely creatures also lay their eggs on the twigs of oak in late summer and early fall where they remain until the caterpillars emerge the following spring. The caterpillars grow and develop on new leaves until June and the cycle begins again. A few holes in the leaves does no harm to the shrub and what a pleasant sight when the adults emerge!

During the recent drought years, many stands of Gambel Oak were severely damaged and suffered dieback of the upper branches. Usually, the shrubs will regenerate by putting up shoots from the base or suckers from the roots. Along with being unsightly, dry and broken limbs create disease opportunities and a real fire hazard. Fortunately, judicious pruning can keep the shrubs healthy, fire-wise safe and available for wildlife habitat.

Warm winter days are a good time to get out and prune. The shrubs are dormant and with fewer leaves to obscure the view it is easier to see the dead, broken, crossed and damaged limbs that need to be removed. You may need to prune again later in the spring after they have leafed out and you can get a better look at the shape of the canopy.

Since Scrub Oak contains flammable oils and burns easily, none should be allowed to grow under or near a wooden deck. Away from structures, the shrubs can be limbed up.

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Gambel (Scrub) Oak *(Continued from previous page)*

Removing the lower branches reduces the ability of fire to climb into the canopy. An alternate method of controlling the potential spread of fire is to shape the oak thickets into islands, allowing clear spaces between each island and other plantings. This method either leaves the lower branches intact or, if limbing up, allows space for including shade loving plants. The overall effect provides cover for wildlife and screens for outdoor rooms within the landscape.

Gambel Oak leaves produce a vivid array of colors in the fall and seemingly set the hills on fire, all for too short a time. Soon the leaves turn a solid but not unattractive brown. Some of the shrubs have a juvenility trait that stops the leaves from falling and they remain on the shrub until the following spring. If you are choosing plants from a nursery or other source and want to obtain specimens with this trait, winter is a good time to make your selections. These specific plants are particularly valuable as barriers or living fences.

ANNUALS, TENDER PERENNIALS, AND HARDY PERENNIALS WHEN TO PLANT AND WHY

By Jackie Goodwin, Colorado Master Gardener

It can be confusing -- when to plant annuals, tender perennials, and hardy perennials. Let's begin by understanding what the growing season is for our area. The growing season is the total number of frost-free days, or the days between the last frost in the spring and the first frost in the fall. In Colorado Springs, we average 152 frost-free days. The date of the last spring frost is important to gardeners planning to set out frost-sensitive annuals, tender perennials, and even container plants. You must decide how much of a chance you are willing to take to place a tender plant outdoors. Typically, May 9-11 along the Front Range is a safe bet for putting out your tender perennials and annuals.

Annuals are plants whose life cycle lasts only one year, from seed to blooms to seed. They are an excellent way to create a great splash of summer color in the garden. Don't get in a hurry to plant too soon. Most annuals prefer warm soils and stable temperatures to grow well.

Annuals should be planted after the average frost free date has passed. If you choose to plant them earlier, you must take precautions to protect your plants when "a chance of frost" is forecast.

A tender perennial is a perennial that cannot tolerate freezing weather. Often times a tender perennial will survive frost on the foliage, but the same frost will kill any flower buds which have emerged. If the temperature drops far enough for the plant cells to freeze, non-hardy plants will die. Tender perennials should be planted with care. If you choose to plant before the frost-free date has passed, you need to pay attention to the weather forecast and cover your tender plants if a frost or freeze is forecast. The difference between tender and hardy perennials is simple - hardy perennials tolerate colder tem-

peratures than tender perennials.

Hardy perennials are plants that live for several growing seasons. The term "perennial" refers to the plant's normal life cycle. It does not imply that a plant is cold hardy. The ability of a plant to withstand and survive our winters here depends on the hardiness of the plant. Plant hardiness is defined as a plant that has the ability to withstand low temperatures or frost. Plant Hardiness Zone maps were created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help gardeners select plants that will survive our winter temperatures. Most of the Colorado Front Range falls into Zone 5 with cool mountain areas in Zone 4.

Most perennials can be planted in the fall or early spring. Fall planting gives the plant more time to become established before the start of active growth in the spring. Fall-planted perennials are usually well-established before hot weather. Fall planting should be finished at least 6 weeks before hard-freezing weather occurs. Early spring is also considered a good time to plant perennials. Planting early, just after killing frosts have passed, is better than later spring planting.

If you choose to plant early, remember that most annuals and tender perennials come to you from the protected environment of a greenhouse. They need a gradual introduction to the elements (heat, cold, winds). Set your plants outdoors in a sheltered, lightly shaded spot, increasing the amount of sun they receive each day.

After planting, mulch your new plants with compost or other organic matter to keep the roots cool and help retain moisture in the soil.

BOOK REVIEW

By Peggy Gardner, Colorado Master Gardener

As I perused the shelves of new acquisitions at the Penrose Public Library, I came upon a wonderful book of gardens. *Gardens Around the World: 365 Days* by photographer Mick Hales is a sheer delight. Outstanding pictures of public and private gardens, along with descriptions and sometimes brief histories, allow us to accompany Mick throughout the world.

There are 150 gardens displayed in this book. The book is hefty for its size, giving an indication of the quality of the paper used to show these gardens in all their glory.

Gardens in Indonesia, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Central and South America, to name just a few countries, and many areas of the United States show their distinctive styles.

The book is beautifully scripted as well as showing the many colorful gardens. The Shanks Garden on Long Island, NY, is shown in full bloom, and the next page shows the same location covered in winter snow. It's gorgeous in both seasons.

After the index, there is a directory of public gardens with addresses, telephone numbers, and in many instances, their web sites. So far the web sites I have explored have been interesting and offer plant information, what is blooming at any given time, catalogs of gifts, etc.

This book shows many garden rooms and acreages, and gives unique ideas for your own designing. Enjoy and learn at the same time!

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