

# UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION GARDENER'S CORNER



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## IN THIS ISSUE

1. 5 Ideas to Add Shady Spots in Your Backyard
2. Drought Tolerant Plants
3. 'Annabelle' Hydrangea
4. When to Prune Hydrangeas
5. Growing a Rainbow Vegetable Garden
6. Growing Irises

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## 5 Ideas to Add Shady Spots In Your Backyard

BY NANCY KREITH, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

Relaxing outdoors while surrounded by plants is a great stress reducer. As temperatures heat up, you can prolong your time outside by creating some shade in your yard.

Shaded areas let you to stay outside longer without getting exhausted from the sun. Try incorporating some of these landscape design elements to make the most of your yard this summer.

1. **Plant a shade tree:** Putting a tree on the south or west side of your yard can block the intense afternoon summer sun. Of course, it will take time for the tree to mature and provide ample shade, but this is an inexpensive, long-term option. When planting trees, be sure to follow appropriate planting and post-care techniques. Water your tree well the first three years after its planted.
2. **Put up a canopy tent:** Turn patios and seating areas into shady sanctuaries with a canopy tent. Canopy tents come in a variety of sizes and styles and can be easily stored over the winter. During inclement weather, keep an eye on the tent so wind or heavy rainfall does not damage it. Anchor the legs so it does not blow away and remove pooling water from the canopy as soon as possible so it does not collapse. For a more attractive feature, explore shade sails, large patio umbrellas, or retractable awnings. There are many options available.
3. **Build a gazebo or pergola:** These permanent structures are an option if your budget allows it. Design your own or have a carpenter or company install a prefabricated kit.
4. **Hang patio curtains or shades:** If you have an existing structure or decide to build one, patio curtains add a soft touch and can be adjusted to provide shade from different directions as needed. To lower the cost, consider using fabric you have on hand, roll up shades, or shower curtains. UV-protected materials will last the longest outdoors.
5. **Install a water feature:** This could be as simple as a fountain or something larger like a pond or reflecting pool. Situate the feature to take advantage of summer breezes blowing across the water and cooling the air. The most important rule is to keep water circulating, which can be done with a bubbler or low-flow pump.



As you consider these features, be sure to follow installation instructions and look up building codes in your area for rules on permanent structures and water features.

# Drought Tolerant Plants for the Landscape

BY GEMINI BHALSOD, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

It can be a challenge to choose plants that will survive Illinois' changing weather patterns. While we can go inside and enjoy the air conditioning, our plants don't have the same luxury.

Illinois summers can get hot and dry, so it's important to choose plants for your landscape that can survive those conditions. You can even consider planting a specific drought tolerant garden using this list of plants. Be sure to check if there are other varieties or cultivars suited for your area. As summer progresses, watch for symptoms of prolonged drought stress such as stunted growth, curling leaves, leaf drop, leaf scorch, and chlorosis.

## Drought tolerant plants

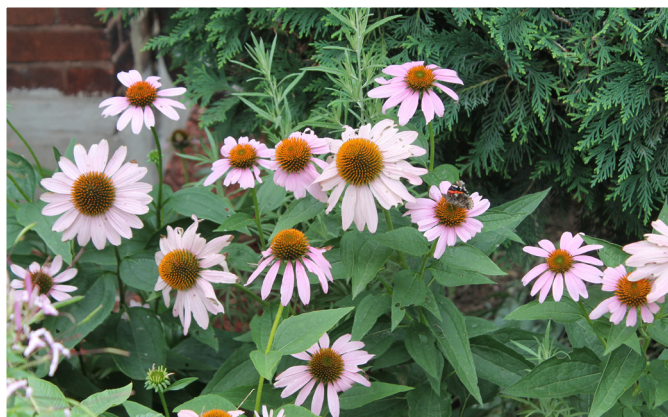
**Hackberry**, *Celtis occidentalis*: This 40- to 70-foot tall tree grows in zones 2 to 9 and flowers in the spring.

**Purple Beautyberry**, *Callicarpa dichotoma*: This 4-foot-tall deciduous shrub grows in zones 5 to 8. It is known for its beautiful purple fruit in the fall.

**Red Twig dogwood**, *Cornus sericea*: This 7- to 9-foot shrub is best known for its striking red twigs in the winter. It grows in zones 2 to 7.

**Big Bluestem**, *Andropogon gerardii*: A quintessential Illinois plant, this grass grows 4-6 feet high and tolerates dry conditions in zones 4 to 9.

**Purple Coneflower**, *Echinacea purpurea*: This herbaceous perennial grows to 2 to 4 feet in zones 3 to 8. This plant is a favorite of birds and has winter interest due to its long stems and prominent seed heads.



**Side-oats Grama**, *Bouteloua curtipendula*: This grass grows 2- to 2.5 feet high in zones 3 to 9. It is known for its seed heads for winter interest.

**Rock Cotoneaster**, *Cotoneaster horizontalis*: This trailing shrub is often used as a ground cover. It grows in zones 5 to 7.

**Yarrow**, *Achillea millefolium*: This 1- to 2-foot perennial grows in zones 4 to 8. Its feathery leaves help bring dimension and texture to an ornamental garden.

**Blue false indigo**, *Baptisia australis*: This 3- to 4-foot tall perennial grows in zones 3 to 9. Its blue flowers bloom in the spring.

**Bundleflower**, *Desmanthus illinoensis*: This plant grows 2- to 4-feet in zones 5 to 8. It blooms June through August and the flowers appear as fuzzy balls due to the long stamens.







# When to Prune Hydrangeas

BY KEN JOHNSON, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

Hydrangeas are popular shrubs grown for their impressive blooms. Their foliage can also be attractive, particularly oakleaf hydrangeas. Pruning hydrangeas can be confusing because each species should be pruned at a different time of the year.

Five species of hydrangea are commonly found in cultivation. These can be divided into two groups for pruning purposes: those that bloom on old wood and those that bloom on new wood.

## Old wood blooms

Hydrangeas that bloom on old wood start to develop their flower buds for the following year in August and September. Therefore, if you are going to prune, try to do it as soon as possible after they are done blooming and by August 1 at the latest. By doing this, you will avoid removing any of the developing flower buds.

The three commonly cultivated *Hydrangea* species that flower on old wood are:

- *Hydrangea macrophylla*, which are commonly called bigleaf, mophead, and lacecap hydrangea.
- *Hydrangea quercifolia*, which are also called oakleaf hydrangeas.
- *Hydrangea anomala*, also called climbing hydrangea.

There are some varieties of *H. macrophylla* that are reblooming, or remontant, meaning these cultivars will produce on both old and new wood. If buds are damaged or killed during the winter, the plant can still flower on new wood. Examples of these types of hydrangeas are the Endless Summer, Let's Dance series, and Tuff Stuff hydrangeas.

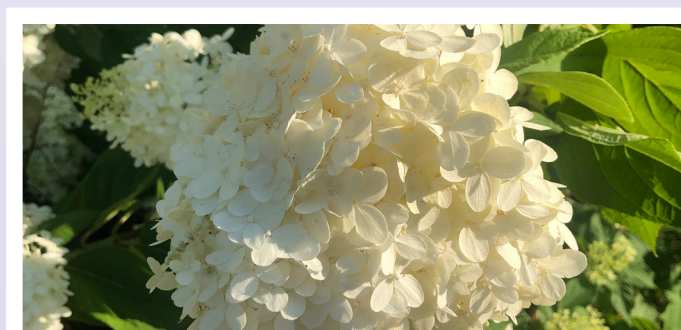
## New wood blooms

Hydrangeas that bloom on new wood produce their flower buds on the current season's wood. These plants can be pruned from late winter to early spring. They can be, and are commonly, drastically cut back in the fall. Repeatedly doing this can weaken the plant, though. Consider pruning every other year or every three years to maintain plant health and vigor over time.

The two commonly cultivated hydrangea species that bloom on new wood are:

- *Hydrangea paniculata*, which are commonly called panicle or PG hydrangea.
- *Hydrangea arborescens*, commonly called smooth hydrangea.

More drastic pruning (size reduction, thinning, etc.) is different than the routine maintenance pruning that can be done at any time. Maintenance pruning helps maintain a plant's shape, vigor, and health, and includes removing diseased and dead wood as well as deadheading spent flowers.







*The 'Annabelle' hydrangea is a cultivar that was originally collected from a wild specimen in southern Illinois and remains one of the most popular in production today.*

## 'Annabelle' Hydrangea a Showy Shrub with Historic Roots in Illinois

BY RYAN PANKAU, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

The 'Annabelle' hydrangea has been a mainstay of the ornamental shrub world since its release in the 1960s. This showy shrub is filled with beautiful snowball-like flowers that adorn its spindly branches each summer. The blooms begin as pretty green puffs that turn white at maturity, often lasting 6 to 8 weeks throughout June and July, and gradually changing to a tan color to provide interest throughout fall and winter.

'Annabelle' remains one of the most popular cultivars of our native smooth hydrangea, *Hydrangea arborescens*, appearing throughout the eastern U.S. in landscapes from zones 3 to 9. Despite its national-level popularity, the 'Annabelle' hydrangea has roots very close to home, with origins right here in Illinois.

Smooth hydrangea makes an excellent landscape plant, not only for its beauty, but also for its adaptability. It prefers partial shade but does well in full sun with sufficient soil moisture. While it prefers a rich, moist, well-drained soil, it will tolerate a wide range of conditions. It can work in a variety of landscape applications from a single specimen to a border or mass planting.

The story of the 'Annabelle' hydrangea begins in Southern Illinois near the town of Anna. In 1910, Harriet Kirkpatrick noticed a beautiful native hydrangea along a wooded trail in Union County with abnormally large, snowball-like blooms, which she dug up and transplanted in her yard in Anna.

Neighbors and friends noticed the showy plant, and the Kirkpatrick family shared specimens, distributing it around town and in nearby communities.

Given its local popularity, easy transplanting, and culture, Kirkpatrick contacted the Burpee Seed Company to see if there was interest in developing it commercially.

Unbeknownst to her, a recent improved cultivar of *Hydrangea arborescens* had just been released in 1906. E. G. Hill brought the 'Snowhill' hydrangea into production from a wild specimen found near Yellow Springs, Ohio, with similar abnormally large, snowball-like flowers, but an earlier bloom time.

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*For 50 years, the 'Annabelle' Hydrangea was locally popular in Southern Illinois*

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For the next 50 years, 'Annabelle' was an unnamed, but locally popular cultivar. It was distributed by word of mouth throughout Southern Illinois until finally reaching Urbana around 1935, based on the first recorded account.

It wasn't until the 1960s that the Kirkpatrick's find gained the attention of University of Illinois professor Dr. Joseph C. McDaniel. In 1960, McDaniel rediscovered 'Annabelle' by noticing it in cultivation in Urbana. He traced it back to Anna, collected samples for propagation, named the cultivar and released it for commercial production in 1962. The name 'Annabelle' is a nod to the "belles" from Anna that originally discovered the wild specimen. McDaniel called it, "the best form of its species yet found."

# Growing a Rainbow Vegetable Garden

BY BRUCE J. BLACK, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

Color is one of the aspects of design that leads to the beautiful garden, but sometimes vegetable gardens lack a variety of hues.

Thumbing through garden catalogs, you can now find a variety of colorful cultivars. These colors come from pigmented phytonutrients – phyto means plant. For example, the phytonutrient lycopene is red and can be found in tomatoes, carrots, peppers, and red cabbage.

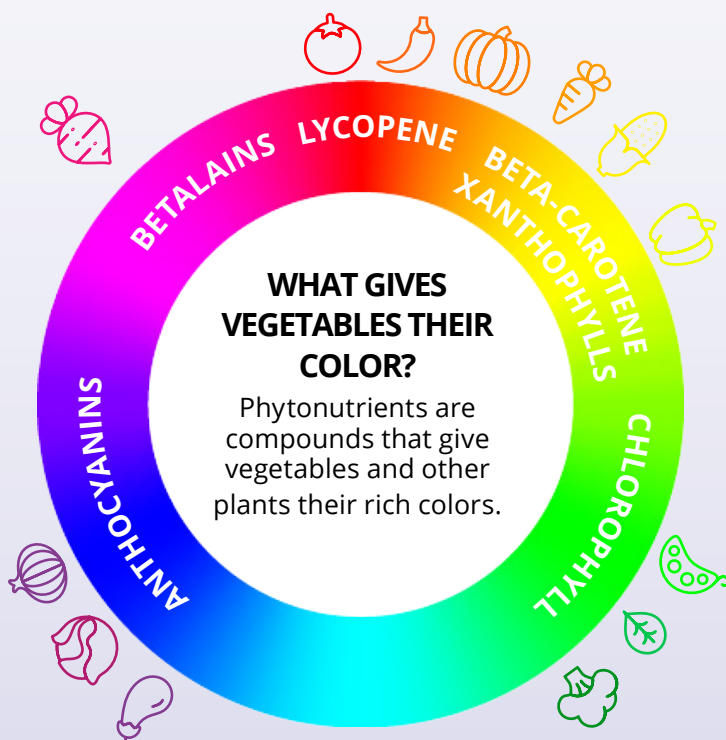
White vegetables do not develop chlorophyll or pigmented phytonutrients. This is often due to blanching or etiolation, which is excluding sunlight to prevent the plant from producing chlorophyll.

Color can be a great way to get picky eaters, children and adults, to try vegetables. It can also get people involved in the garden by growing their favorite color. Plus, growing purple carrots and yellow cucumbers is fun. If you're looking to add some uniquely colorful to your garden, these vegetables are great places to start.

## Carrots

Carrots come in shades of orange, red, yellow, purple, and white. Although not a true black, 'Black Nebula' is a purple carrot variety that is so high in anthocyanins that it looks black with a lighter purple center.

If you want to take your carrot colors further and have fun, you could plant a themed colorful carrot garden with these cultivars 'Black Nebula,' 'Lunar White,' 'Atomic Red,' and 'Solar Yellow.'



Fresh picked colorful vegetables: Yellow beans, striped zucchini, purple eggplants, white cucumbers, and yellow tomatoes. Photo Credits: Bruce J. Black

## Peppers

Peppers are known not only for their heat, but also their beautiful colors. Peppers can have shades of green, red, orange, yellow, purple, and white. Most people are familiar with the triad pack of yellow, red, and orange bell peppers at the grocery store, but depending on your heat tolerance, that is just the start of the colors. 'Sweet Chocolate' peppers might not taste like chocolate, but they have the glossy brown color of melted chocolate. 'Mixed Cayenne' is reminiscent of Mardi Gras colors: purple, red, yellow, and green. These peppers are great for cooking, eating fresh, and they can even be made into a dried colorful cayenne pepper powder.

## Cucumbers

In recent years 'Lemon Cucumbers' have been more readily available at garden centers. 'Lemon cucumbers' are yellow and have a similar appearance of lemons inside and out. Another unique cucumber is 'Poona Kheera'. This cucumber is reminiscent of a russet potato at maturity. During growth, it has a white skin that turns into the golden-yellow russetting color. The 'Poona Kheera' is also a hardy, disease-resistant, 55-day cucumber.

Whether you are a new gardener or have been gardening for life, splash some new color into your vegetable garden and liven up your next meal.





# Growing Irises: How to Plant, Grow and Care for Iris

BY JENNIFER FISHBURN, EXTENSION EDUCATOR - HORTICULTURE

There aren't very many plants that come in a wider range of color than iris. In the past 50 years, thousands of cultivars in various colors, sizes, and forms have been developed. I have about 20 cultivars of bearded iris in my garden including a small white and lavender variety that has been passed down in my family for four generations.

## Types of iris

Iris come in three categories: bearded, beardless, and aril, according to The American Iris Society. Many are long-lived perennials in Central Illinois. Iris range in height from 6-inch-tall dwarf crested iris to 5-foot-tall yellow flag iris.

## Flower color

The six-petaled flowers come in a rainbow of colors including pink, varying shades of purple, pale yellow, bright yellow, peach, pale green, light blue, white, tan, bronze, almost black, and bicolor. The three inner upward true petals of iris are called "standards." The three outer turned down flower petals are referred to as "falls." Many cultivars have different colored standards and falls. Be sure to remove old blooms after flowering.

## The most common variety: bearded iris

These easy-to-grow iris range in height from 18 to 36 inches. Bearded iris also vary in bloom time and flower color. They grow best in well-drained soil in a full sun location. They will not tolerate poorly drained soil.

## Pests and diseases

Bearded iris do have a few problems including iris borer, bacterial soft rot and fungal infections of the rhizomes, and leaf spots. Imagine my disappointment last year when I noticed several of my iris plants looked rather frail. Upon closer inspection, I found the rhizomes had turned to mush from soft rot. This bacteria often enters wounds caused by iris borers. Proper sanitation is important, remove and discard infected rhizomes and plant parts. Iris borers are destructive and difficult to control and can infest all types of iris. For more information on iris borer visit University of Minnesota Extension website: [extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-insects/iris-borers](https://extension.umn.edu/yard-and-garden-insects/iris-borers).

## Planting and dividing

Most iris clumps become crowded and should be divided every three to four years. Four to six weeks after they flower, divide by digging up the clump and removing the mother plant. Place the rhizome on a ridge of soil, with the roots in the soil, but the rhizome just above soil level. Space rhizomes 12 to 18 inches apart to allow for good air circulation and help prevent diseases. Since iris have a short bloom period, consider adding iris in the middle of a perennial garden where later blooming plants can hide the iris foliage.

Learn more about iris species and cultivars by visiting the Plant Finder page on the Missouri Botanical Garden website at [www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening](http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/gardens-gardening).

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