

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS EXTENSION GARDENER'S CORNER

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SPRING • VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 3



IN THIS ISSUE

1. Spring Tree Planting
2. Tips for Growing Ginger
3. Add Beauty to the Garden with Cool Season Annuals
4. Spring Lawn Care
5. Annual Flowering Vines
6. 2019 Perennial Plant of the Year

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Spring Tree Planting

BY ANDREW HOLSINGER

Spring is an ideal time to evaluate the landscape and consider new tree plantings. However, conditions that have caused tree failure in the past may need to be resolved before a new tree planting occurs.

Selecting a tree to plant in the spring depends on a number of conditions. Cold hardiness is an important consideration. Illinois has climatic differences across the state which help determine which trees are suitable for planting. Careful planning can make the difference between a healthy well grown tree and a mediocre tree that will need removal in the future.

Some tree species are best planted in spring, including bald cypress, American hornbeam, ginkgo, larch, magnolia, hemlock, sweetgum, tuliptree, and willow. Regardless of the species, careful attention to the site is needed. Drainage from the tree planting can be critical, especially for fruit trees. Observe the surroundings and complete an analysis of the proposed site.

Look around the proposed planting site for above or below ground utility lines. The mature height and width of the tree is critical to know before you plant. The location below ground has to be big enough to support the root system to support the tree. Call J.U.L.I.E to determine where the utilities are below ground before you dig.

A soil test is worth the expense so that you know the pH level and nutrient composition of the soil. Planting in a soil type that is not suited for the trees growing requirements will hinder the productivity and growth of the tree.

Some trees are adaptable to various conditions and others have more specific requirements. Light



Tree planting photo courtesy of Richard Hentschel.

requirements should be determined by studying the site prior to planting to know if it is full sun, part sun or shade. Planting the wrong tree in the wrong place is an avoidable disappointment.

Choose and buy only quality nursery stock. Examine the roots, graft union, and other features of a tree before purchase. Circling roots can occur in containerized plants and, if allowed to continue, can girdle the trunk of the tree.

Selecting trees that have been bred for disease resistance is an added benefit. Ask questions before making a purchase. Does this particular tree have any cultivars that have disease resistance?

Be aware of the maintenance requirements of a particular tree. The fruits, nuts, leaves, and limbs should be considered as cleanup varies across tree species. Whether a tree needs another tree planted nearby to obtain fruit should also be studied. This can also be considered if fruit is to be avoided by planting only male cultivars of the tree.

Taking time to research before planting a tree is critically important. Trees are an added benefit to the landscape and to humans. Plant the right tree the first time.



Tips for Growing Ginger

BY CHRISTOPHER ENROTH

Ginger (*zingiber officinale*) is a plant steeped in history, lore, and modern cuisine. Today we equate the culinary tradition of ginger with its native range of Southwest Asia. Yet, if we look at worldwide history, ginger has been a staple flavor in dishes since the ancient Romans introduced it from India. In the Middle Ages, ginger was the most popular spice in Europe. From Thai ginger stir-fry to gingerbread cookies to ginger ale, this plant has a diverse culinary history.

Did you know you can grow ginger in the Midwest? The primary part harvested from the ginger plant is a rhizome, a modified underground stem. Many Asian dishes also use the stems in recipes. The leaves can even be used in brewing tea.

While some gardeners have successfully sprouted ginger purchased in the produce aisle of the grocery store, serious ginger growers should purchase seed pieces from a reputable supplier.

Ginger is a tropical plant and won't survive our winters outside. Therefore, a gardener has two options: 1) grow ginger in pots and move them inside for the winter, or 2) grow ginger in the ground and harvest every fall, saving a few seed pieces for the next year.



Regardless of what method chosen, here are some important things to know about growing ginger:

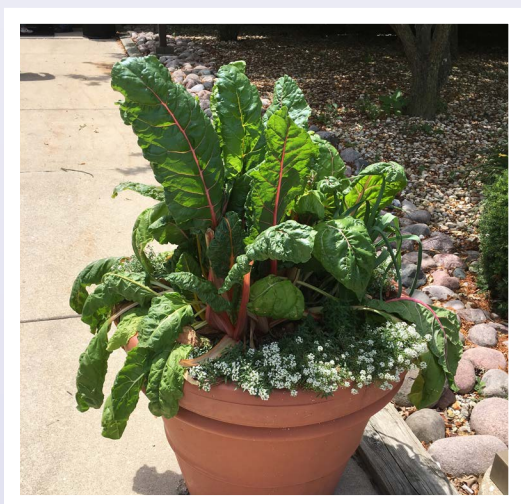
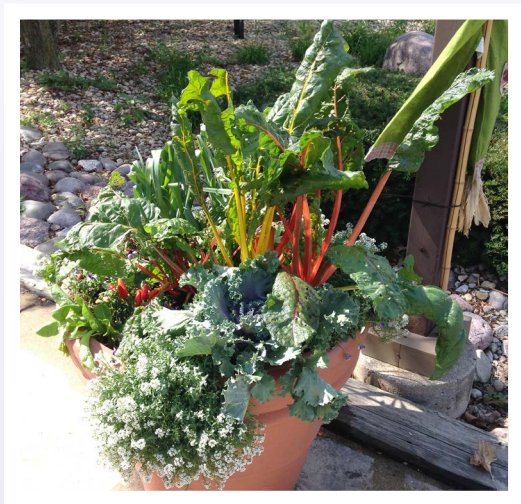
- Presprout ginger indoors. Place the ginger root in a shallow flat and cover with a soil-free mix. Place a heat mat under the flat. Keep the soil moist, not saturated! Presprouting can take as long as four weeks.
- Ginger growth can be damaged if air temperatures dip below 55 degrees F. If the soil temperature dips below 55 degrees, roots may also be damaged.
- Ginger will languish if soil temperatures exceed 90 degrees. In Southern Illinois, provide afternoon shade.
- Be consistent with watering. Monitor the soil moisture to test the consistency.
- Ginger is a heavy feeder, but poor at taking up nutrients. Plant in a soil amended with compost and mulch with more compost.
- Ginger rhizomes grow up and out. Hilling is the practice to cover up the exposed tops of ginger roots. This is an important practice to encourage more growth. Hill every four to six weeks.
- Baby ginger can be harvested starting in August. Baby ginger root is white with pink tops, has no skin, and no fibrous texture. Fantastic to cook with, but baby ginger lasts only two weeks. Freeze it to extend its shelf life.
- As days shorten and temperatures cool, the top growth will turn brown. Harvest or move plants inside as nighttime temperatures go below 55 degrees F.
- Dormant or mature ginger rhizomes can be used in cooking or saved for planting next year. Store next year's seed pieces in the container it was growing in or dig up and place in a paper bag in a cool, dry location, but not the refrigerator.

Add Beauty to the Garden with Cool Season Annuals

BY NANCY KREITH

“If you’re looking for high performing cool season annuals, you may want to consider a few specific plants” says University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Nancy Kreith. “Annuals bring beauty to a spring garden and benefit pollinators looking for food after a long winter.”

Most of the annuals below benefit wildlife. The two that don’t have significant blooms (chard and kale) certainly have colorful foliage and are suitable for human consumption. Humans also enjoy consuming the tasty flowers of nasturtium and Viola sp. These annuals can be planted in the ground or in containers if you’re lacking garden space.



- **Alyssum** (*Lobularia maritima*) is a full sun to part shade plant that grows 3 to 6 inches tall. It prefers moist, well-drained soil and works well as a border or in rock gardens. Colors include pink, purple, white and yellow. Often self-sown seedlings appear the following year. The blooms are a favorite of pollinators.
- **Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*) grows best in full sun to part shade and reaches 8 to 15 inches tall. The trailing types can stretch several feet. Bloom colors include orange, red, yellow, pink and bi-color. This plant responds well to direct seeding in spring. Seeds should be scarified before planting.
- **Swiss chard** (*Beta vulgaris* var. *cicla*) is a cool season leafy vegetable that grows up to 24 inches tall and prefers full sun. It can be direct seeded into rich, well-drained soil and soaking seeds overnight will aid in germination. Many cultivars come in magnificent colors of red, yellow, orange and pink. Be on the lookout for ‘Ruby Chard,’ ‘Rainbow Chard,’ and ‘Rhubarb Chard’ cultivars as they will be sure to add texture and color to the garden.
- **Snapdragon** (*Antirrhinum majus*) requires full sun and range in height from 6 inches to 3 feet. It prefers moist, well-drained soil and is very cold tolerant. It can be planted in spring and again in mid to late summer. Shorter varieties serve as great borders and taller varieties work well as a center piece or background. Blooms can be found in pink, purple, red, white, yellow and bi-color.
- **Pansy, Viola** (*Viola x wittrockiana*) is a full sun to part shade plant maturing at 6 to 12 inches tall. It prefers moist, well-drained soil and blooms include blue, peach, red, white, yellow and bi-color. Some of the newer cultivars and many of the viola (smaller flowers) have the ability to overwinter with light protection.
- **Ornamental kale** (*Brassica oleracea*) prefers full sun and moist, well-drained soil. It grows 12 to 24 inches in height. Like chard, this will add color and texture to the garden with its unique foliage. Leaf colors range from red and green, solid blue, to white and green. Two cultivars to look for are ‘Nagoya Garnish Red’ and ‘Redbor’.

Cool season annuals can be planted in early to mid-spring. They thrive in cooler temperatures. As the heat of summer comes, most of these will look ragged. Alyssum plants can be rejuvenated by cutting them back to the ground. If you do not have the patience to wait for them to re-bloom, they can be replaced by warm season annuals. Nasturtium are unique in that they last from spring to fall. Chard and kale can be refreshed by harvesting the outer, mature leaves. The center point will continue to grow fresh leaves all season.

In Illinois, gardeners should take advantage of the changing of the seasons. “This spring, plan for getting a jump start on the growing season by incorporating cool season annuals in your landscape,” reminds Kreith. With a little effort your yard will be looking colorful well before much else is beginning to show.

Spring Lawn Care

BY RICHARD HENTSCHEL

It is always exciting to see the lawn begin to green up every spring. There are always those “have to” lawn care tasks and then there are those “Do I need to or do I have to?” kind of lawn care questions.

The typical ones we expect to do involve lawn clean up, just like any landscape bed cleanup we do. Over the winter, Mother Nature will deposit both organic and inorganic things we will clean up. Organic materials include leaves, twigs and dead foliage from your yard and the neighborhood. Inorganic materials includes the plastic bits and bags that escaped the recycling bin. Using either a leaf rake or hard garden rake may be your best bet, especially if you are finding the leaves to be wet. If you’re lucky and the debris is dry, a leaf blower will get the leaves and other debris out of the beds. Then it is a matter of raking them up, separating the plastic out and adding to the compost bin or landscape waste bag.

While you are waiting to mow for the first time, look over the mower. Is the blade sharp, has the air filter been cleaned

or renewed, how about fresh gas or a new spark plug, is the mower deck level and set to cut at 2.5 inches?

One of those “Do I have to?” questions is to fertilize or not. If that answer is yes, then that triggers other maintenance during the year. If you want the lawn green all season, then you will be watering all summer. If you feed and water, then expect to mow all summer. Lawns will naturally green up in spring, go dormant during the heat of late summer, and green up when moisture and cooler temperatures return.

If you only fertilize once a year, do it in the fall when all that energy will be stored by the grass roots for the next season.

Another “Do I need to?” question is about weed control. Spring will be about the only time to get ahead of crabgrass, especially if the grassy weed has been a consistent problem. The application timing of the preemergence crabgrass herbicide is crucial to control—put down too early and the product does not last long enough. Put down too late and any crabgrass seed that has already sprouted escapes control.





Cardinal Climber vine

Annual Flowering Vines

BY BRITTNEY HAAG

Each spring, gardeners begin looking for new and colorful plants to make their garden pop. If you are looking for a plant that grows quickly, has interesting and colorful flowers, and will add a vertical element to your garden, you may want to consider an annual flowering vine. All of these vines are easily grown from seed—either started directly in the soil, or indoors 4 to 6 weeks before planted outside and after the threat of frost has passed.

Most annual vines climb by tendrils or twining (twisting their stems or leaf stalks) up any support, such as a fence, trellis, or arbor. They can also be planted to creep along the ground to form a colorful groundcover. These vines are sun-loving, easy to care for, and have very few pest issues—an all-around great plant! While you don't need to prune annual vines, they may need limited "redirection and guidance" every so often. Many of these plants easily reseed in the gardens. Here are some of my favorites.

Cardinal Climber (*Ipomoea Multifida*)

This vine will add unique color and texture to the garden. It has palm-shaped leaves, and grows 10 to 20 feet long. The abundant bright red tubular flowers are perfect for attracting hummingbirds.



Black-Eyed Susan vine

Hyacinth Bean (*Lablab purpureus*)

Purple-lovers, this plant is for you! The leaves are greenish-purple with deep purple veins and purple stems. Fragrant purple flowers turn to shiny red/purple pods when mature on the vine. The plant grows 10 to 15 feet long.

Black-Eyed Susan Vine (*Thunbergia alata*)

A less vigorous vine than others, it grows 4 to 8 feet long. Velvety, 3"-wide leaves form a dense canvas for the black-eyed Susan-like flowers. Blooms may be orange, yellow or white, all with dark centers.

Scarlet Runner Bean (*Phaseolus coccineus*)

The vine foliage may look similar to a garden pole bean, but the cluster of scarlet flowers and 3-5" red pods definitely set it apart. The vine can grow 8 to 12 feet long. The flowers attract hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees. The pods are edible as snap beans or shelled later.



Scarlet Runner Bean

For a fun addition to any garden, make a teepee out of poles and plant vines along the outside for a green summer hideout for the kids. Whether you have a newer garden that needs some maturity, or a mature garden that needs a pop of color or height, annual vines may just be the perfect plant for you.

2019 Perennial Plant of the Year

BY MARTHA SMITH

The Perennial Plant Association membership has selected *Stachys* ‘Hummelo’ as the 2019 Perennial Plant of the Year. Sometimes called Betony, this well behaved perennial offers a neat basal clump of glossy, dark green leaves and rose-lavender dense spikes atop mostly leafless flowering stems. The arrangement of the flowers are verticillasters (false whorls). Bloom time is July to September so ‘Hummelo’ offers lovely color in the heat of the summer. *Stachys* ‘Hummelo’ is an easy-to-grow perennial for moist, well drained soils in full sun to light shade. Deadhead spent flower spikes to regenerate foliage and plant vigor. It is relatively pest free and deer leave it alone. Also this perennial can be grown near walnut trees since it is not affected by Walnut Wilt. ‘Hummelo’ is hardy throughout Illinois and deserves a space in your sunny border.



One may be hard pressed to associate ‘Hummelo’s’ glossy, dark green scallop edged foliage with its silver/gray, fuzzy leaf relative *Stachys* byzantine, commonly called Lamb’s Ear. ‘Hummelo’ grows 18-24” tall and 18-24” wide. It is a relative of mint and eventually the clumps will spread by stolons – but not at all as aggressively as some mints we grow! Often listed as *Stachys officinalis* it also appears in print as *Stachys monieri*. Therefore the PPA decided on the name *Stachys* ‘Hummelo’. The genus name comes from the Greek *stachys* meaning ear of corn in probable reference to the verticillaster arrangement of flowers.

Stachys ‘Hummelo’ received the highest rating out of 22 *Stachys* studied in the Plant Evaluation Trials at the Chicago Botanic Garden. The trial ran from 1998 through 2004. It received this rating based on strong flower production, plant health, overall good growth habit and winter hardiness. The 22 varieties were grown in side-by-side plots for comparison. The evaluation site received 10 hours of full sun during the growing season with maintenance practices kept to a minimum to simulate home garden culture. Water was applied as needed and no fertilizer was applied. Prior to planting the well-drained clay-loam soil was amended with composted leaves and had a pH of 7.4 throughout the evaluation.

Good companion plants include coneflower (*Echinacea*), *Leucanthemum* ‘Becky’, sea holly (*Eryngium*), Russian sage (*Peroviskia*), catmint (*Nepeta*), hardy geranium (*Geranium*) and stonecrop (*Sedum*). Plant it against *Golden Arborvitae* for a striking contrast!

CONTRIBUTORS

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