

THE OUTSIDER

Thoughts from Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator Emily Swihart



HALLOWEEN: SPOOKY PLANTS

Halloween is a holiday for those that love the spooky, scary and creepy. In addition to costumes and candy, plants of many kinds have become associated with the holiday. Pumpkins and gourds are carved. Corn stalks and straw bales are in porch displays. Tree leaves blanket the ground. But many plants could be considered scary or spooky all on their own.

GARDENER BEWARE

Doll's Eyes (*Actaea pachypoda*)

White clusters of flowers mature into pearl like berries in fall. The darkening of the flower stigma at the end of the berry produces a fruit that resemble porcelain doll eyes. Imagine walking in a mottled wood at sunset with dozens of doll's eyes following you. In addition to creepy, the fruits are poisonous to mammal species.



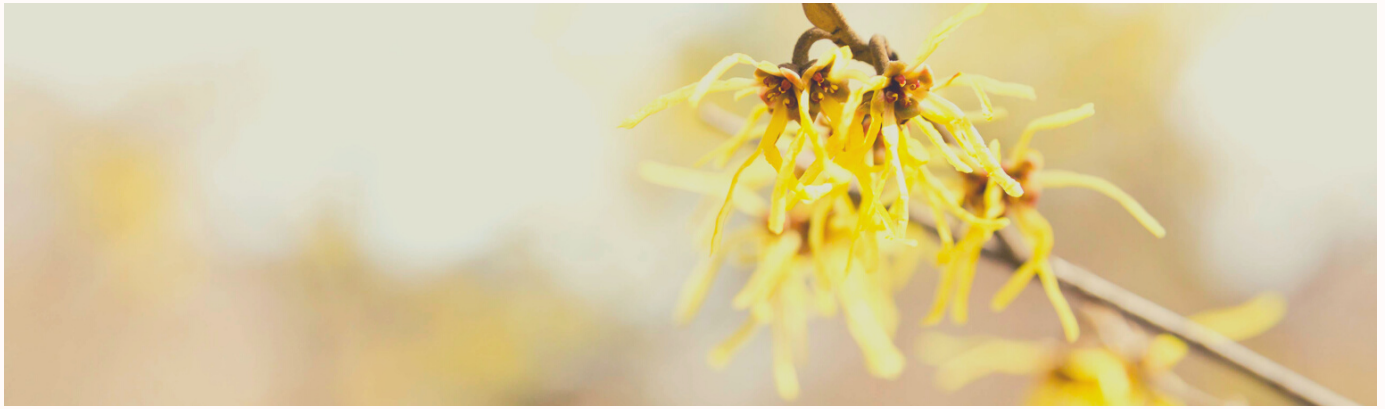
Chinese Lanterns (*Physalis alkekengi*)

Bright orange calyx protect a ripening fruit in late summer announce the coming arrival of autumn. As time passes, the orange calyx become skeletonized. Plants spread by underground stems and can become aggressive, so grower beware.

Cockscomb (*Celosia cristata*)

Celosia offer gardeners three types of flower heads: plume, wheat and cockscomb. Plant the cockscomb variety for a bloom that resembles a cranium. Easy to grow from seed, Celosia comes in many warm colors for extra interest while being a creepy addition to the landscape or flower vase.





SPOOKY PLANTS (CONTINUED)

Voodoo Lily (*Amorphophallus* spp)

Known by a variety of spooky common names such as Devil's tongue, dragon plant, corpse flower and snake palm, *Amorphophallus* could not be left off this list. A tender perennial in Illinois, this plant can be cultivated as a house plant. But beware, the singular, annual bloom emits a fragrance akin to rotten flesh. This evolutionary characteristic serves to attract insects that pollinate the species but can repel human admirers.

Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Native to North America, this shrub blooms in autumn while the leaves are turning bright yellow. Abundant flowers have long, slender petals that resemble yellow spiders. The common name derivative is from an old English word *wice* or *wych* meaning "bendable". Forked branches were used as a witching stick to locate underground water or mineral sources. However, there is no evidence that *H. virginiana* will fend off witches.

Black Blossoms and Foliage

Plants with black blooms or foliage can increase the spook-factor of any garden. Consider the dark leaves of 'Black Magic' Elephant Ears, 'Black Pearl' Coralbell, or 'Black Scallop' Bugleweed for lasting color. Although not true black, dark blossoms surprise garden visitors. Consider 'Black Mamba' Petunia, Queen of the Night Tulip, 'Zantedeschia Odessa' Calla Lily or 'Black Jack' Dahlia.

"Do not be too timid and squeamish... All life is an experiment.
The more experiments you make, the better."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

OUTSIDER ACTION

- Add some spooky plants to your landscape, if you dare!
- Learn about more Spooky Plants [here](#).



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