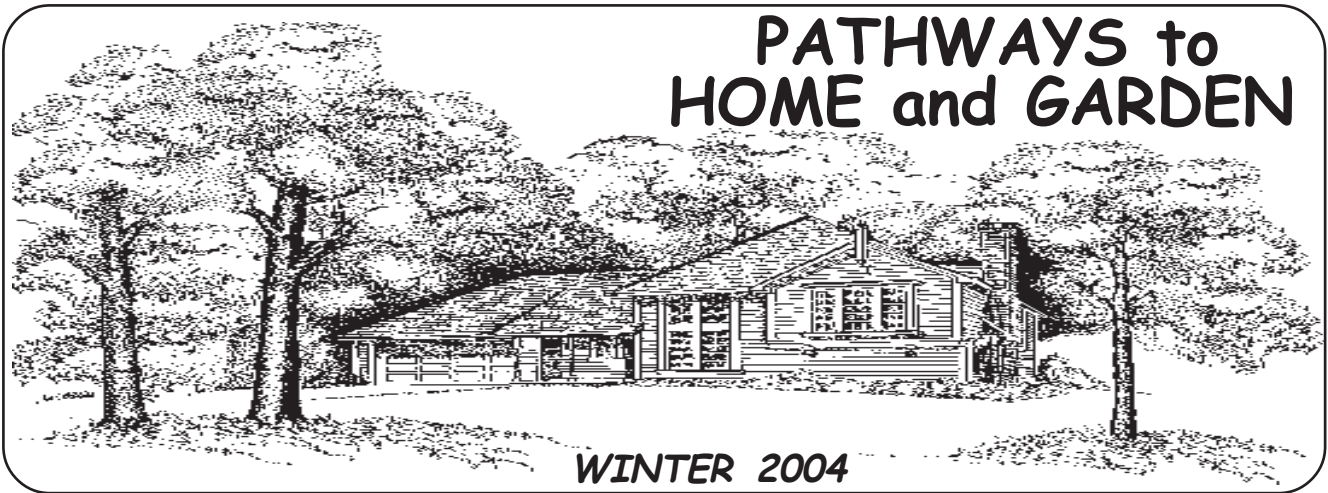


# PATHWAYS to HOME and GARDEN



WINTER 2004



## Gardener's Calendar



### **Mid to Late December**

- Seeds from fresh citrus sown in a well drained, sandy soil will soon produce attractive green leaved plants.
- Purchase Christmas gift plants such as Cyclamens, Norfolk Pine, Poinsettia, Azalea, Christmas Pepper, and Christmas Cactus.
- Keep bird feeders full throughout the winter.
- Prune selectively when cutting greens for Christmas decorations.
- Keep gift plants away from drafts and water adequately.
- Early flowering Tulips can be forced after 13 weeks of cool treatment.
- Don't keep Christmas tree around too long; it becomes a fire hazard.

### **Early January**

- Skating rinks should be located where you don't care if the grass is killed.
- Keep Christmas Poinsettia and other gift plants watered out of drafts and away from heat outlets.
- Use discarded Christmas tree for a bird feeding station. Branches also can be used to mulch bulbs and perennials.
- Replace mulches that may have blown away.
- Order Tuberous Rooted Begonias and Caladiums.
- Check ornamentals and fruit trees to see if rabbits and mice are working on them.
- Check stored bulbs for rot.
- Service lawn mower, change blades.

### **Mid to Late January**

- Cut scions of new wood of fruit trees for grafting. Tie in bundle and store in cool place so they won't dry out before spring.
- Bring spring indoors early by forcing branches of Pussy Willow, Forsythia, Spirea, Quince, or fruit trees for indoor bloom.
- Brush snow off evergreens before it freezes into solid mass.
- Watch cold frames carefully to see if they need ventilation.
- Watch mail for seed catalogs and order seeds if not available locally.
- Feed birds suet as well as seeds.
- House plants can use more light now.
- Remove growing points of geranium shoots when they are six to eight inches long.
- Observe beauty of winter, take a hike.

### **Early February**

- Turn indoor plants weekly to develop shapely profile.
- Check Gladiolus corms and Dahlia tubes that are in storage.
- Check woody ornamentals for signs of mouse or rabbit damage.
- Start tuberous rooted begonia indoors.
- Draw a proposed plan for your flower border.
- Order annual flower and vegetable seeds. Look for disease resistant varieties and consider purchasing varieties that have earned All-American honors.
- Continue feeding Poinsettia as long as colored bracts are present.
- Warm spell may encourage spring bulbs to emerge from the soil outdoors. Protect against alternate



### **Early February (cont'd.)**

freezing and thawing by applying a coarse mulch.  
-Repair window boxes and planter units.

### **Mid to Late February**

-Prune grapes, apples, plums, and cherries on warm days.  
-Order raspberry and strawberry plants.  
-Draw a proposed plan for your flower garden.  
-Feed house plants every two or three weeks.  
-Start slow growing annuals (such as petunias) indoors if you have cold frame facilities or a place to grow them under artificial light until spring.  
-Force branches from early flowering shrubs.  
-Start Caladium; remember to put upside down forcing auxiliary buds to develop.

### **Early March**

-Do not remove mulch from perennials too early.  
-Feed house plants every two to three weeks.  
-Still time to plant Tuberous Begonias indoors.  
-Finish pruning fruit trees.  
-Plan your flower borders.  
-It's a good time to make cuttings of many house plants.

### **2005 All American Selections**

Each year new flower and vegetable cultivars are released for gardeners. It's always fun to try new seeds, and when the flower or vegetable is an All American Selection winner. A person will be able to order seeds from a number of mail-order or Internet catalogs. Some winners will also be available as young transplants in packs at local nurseries and garden centers.

Flowers: Gaillardia 'Arizona Sun,' also known as "blanket flower," is a neat, compact cultivar suitable for container growing. Blanket flowers are usually short-lived perennials in our climate. Should you hope to over-winter it, plant it in the ground rather than in a container.

Catharanthus 'First Kiss Blueberry,' usually called "vinca," is the bluest yet produced, but it's still a violet-blue rather than sky blue. Vincas have glossy, leathery leaves and can take sunny, hot, dry conditions. They also bloom in light shade, though not as well as in a sunny site.

Zinnia 'Magellan Coral' produces double flowers, five to six inches across! It blooms early - only six to nine weeks from seed - and, like other zinnias, grows best when seeded directly into the garden.

Vegetables: 'Fairy Tale' eggplant is pretty enough to categorize with the flowers instead of the vegetable winners. The petite plants produce small purple and white striped fruit that are tender and tasty when anywhere from one to four ounces in size.

'Sugary' tomato produces grape-like clusters of ultra sweet "cherry" tomatoes that are oval, with a little point on the end. They can be harvested about sixty days after transplanting, and may be grown in large containers or supported, directly in the ground.

'Bonbon' is a winter squash with an upright, semi-bush habit, requiring less garden space than most winter squash. The boxy, four pound fruits are said to have superior eating quality - sweet, with a creamy texture. They ripen roughly eighty-one days from planting.

### **Care of Amaryllis Bulbs**

Amaryllis plants provide spectacular blooms in the first year, but many gardeners run into trouble getting them to bloom following years. .

Amaryllis can spend the summer outdoors and the autumn in the basement or they can thrive indoors in a bright, sunny window year-round where they'll bloom each March or early April.

Many gardeners usually prefer allowing amaryllis bulbs to become dormant each fall so they can bring the pots up every few weeks, spreading bloom over a long period of time.

There are two keys to growing amaryllis bulbs successfully. The first is recognizing the plant's need for high light levels. Without adequate light amaryllis will only produce long, floppy leaves; no blooms beyond the first season.

The second is providing a deep container with soil that drains well, and planting each bulb so its upper half sits above the soil surface. Because they're so large and fleshy, amaryllis bulbs will rot easily when kept excessively moist.

Once sprouted, place amaryllis in a sunny location. As buds expand, one can pull the pot out of direct sunlight into a slightly cooler place so flowers will last longer. Nip off blooms as soon as petals begin to fade, so no energy is lost in seed production. The flower stalk should not be cut off until it

yellow and withers; it continues to gather energy as long as it remains green.

After flowering place amaryllis in full sunlight. Once frost-danger has passed, a person can set the pot of amaryllis outdoors for the summer. Start off in a shaded place, but move them gradually to full sun.

Fertilize two or three times with a liquid plant food meant for bulbs or flowers, checking often to see if they need to water. Set containers on stones so rainwater flows freely out their drain holes.

In September, before frost, move the bulbs to a cool, dark place in the basement. Stop watering entirely; remove foliage as it dries and browns. After two or three months in storage, begin bringing pots of amaryllis upstairs. By adding a little fresh potting soil, if needed, and watering the container thoroughly, one will start the cycle over again. Six to eight weeks later the amaryllis should bloom.

### ***Recycle Your Christmas Tree***

Once the holiday season is over your Christmas tree can provide for additional benefits outside in the landscape

Christmas trees can provide valuable cover for the birds during stormy or cold weather. A person can lay the Christmas tree on its side or stick it upright in the snow near the bird feeders. Birds are more likely to patronize feeders if they have cover nearby.

Pile up several trees, or stand them up in a grove near a bird feeder to provide cover for many more birds. A person can hang suet balls filled with seed and other feed to make the feeding station attractive to more species.

Christmas tree boughs are great for protecting perennial flower and fruit plants. Cut the branches from the tree, and place them over strawberry plants, spring-flowering bulbs and perennials. They may have to be anchored in windy places. Branches make good mulches themselves or can be used to help hold your mulches in place. The branches also help catch and hold snow over the plants. Snow is a great insulator and helps protect plants over winter.

A person does not have to worry about the dry needles hurting the soil—as these break down;

they add organic matter and nutrients to the soil beneath. They do not make the soil too acidic.

Some people will save the tree until spring, and then chip it up for mulch. Wood and bark chips make excellent mulches for all the plants in your garden and landscape.

***Fond du Lac County Natural Beauty Council*** Plaques will be presented to the following Beautification Award Recipients on December 21:

- \*Maurice and Carol Degroot - Country Aire Bed and Breakfast, Rosendale
- \*American Bank - Fond du Lac
- \*James and Kathy Geelan (Farm) - Irish Acres, Fond du Lac
- \*Belle Reynolds School - Oakfield Community Woodlands
- \*Grant Law Office, Waupun - James Grant
- \*John and Carl Salter, Eden - Farmstead
- \*Our Lady of Mount Carmel Convent, Mt. Calvary - 150th Anniversary 1852-2002
- \*Aetna No. 5 Fire Station, Fond du Lac - Historic 1874
- \*Bill and Connie Volkert, Campbellsport - Kettle Moraine Natural Landscaping
- \*Free SPIRIT Riders, Inc. - Fond du Lac

Weeping Willow 4-H Club - Waupun, Taft 23 4-H Club and Forest Hills 4-H Club, Dotyville for their flower plantings and Green Thumb Garden Club (Butterfly Gardens - Lakeside Park) each received a gift certificate. ***Congratulations!***

### ***Using Shredded Tires as Garden or Landscape Mulch***

Here's some information to tuck away for next spring, when you go shopping for mulch to use around trees and shrubs or in your garden:

Bags of shredded rubber tires are appearing in "big box" building supply stores, discount centers, and garden centers for use as mulch in gardens, landscapes, and play areas. There's some controversy about the safety of those different applications, particularly when the tire chips are used to mulch edible crops. Not all of these products are marketed for use in gardens, however.

It's really not possible to generalize about the safety of shredded rubber products as they vary in composition, even though they're all made from tires. Since about 1970, many automobile tires have been manufactured with steel belted rein-

forcements. Those steel wires are coated with zinc, to prevent rust.

Some shredded tires are just that: tires that have been shredded and bagged, "as is." They may even have been dyed a more attractive color, but they contain shredded steel belt reinforcement wires. Though there's been little research, some people - particularly those who read or write for "organic" publications - are concerned that as the tire chips wear, these metals will leach out and contaminate the soil.

Leaching is reportedly worse when the mulch is on acidic soils. It's thought to be less a problem on neutral or alkaline soils, like we have in most of the state. (The primary exception is the Iron Range and Arrowhead region in northeast Minnesota.) Additionally, soils that are high in organic content are able to quickly bind any zinc, manganese, iron, or copper that leaches into them, rendering it unavailable to plants.

Some manufacturers claim to have removed a very high percentage - or even all - of the steel wire and threads from the shredded mulch. Naturally, these products are more costly. If want to try shredded tire mulch in a garden and you're concerned about metals leaching from the rubber, it's probably worth paying the extra money. Or, you might try one of the cheaper mulches around trees and shrubs, where potential leaching would be less concern.

Shredded tire mulch should last for 10 - 15 years. No doubt, we'll be hearing more about them. (Source: Deborah Brown, Extension Horticulturist Yard & Garden Line News University of Minnesota Extension Service)

### ***Gardeners are Always Looking for Something New to Grow: Try Different Vegetables***

When a person visits the Fond du Lac Community Gardens, an individual will see different types of vegetables growing. The community gardens are composed of a diverse culture of gardeners, with a diverse vegetable crops growing. A person might want to try growing oriental vegetables which have been previously unknown to us, as well as many unusual varieties of vegetables more familiar to us.

An ideal local for growing vegetables is in a sunny location for about five or six hours of mid-day and afternoon sun. It is important to work plenty of organic matter such as composted leaves and grass

clippings, baled peat or well-rotted manure into the garden. It helps improve the condition of clay and compacted soils which will drain better, but yet will hold moisture and nutrients in light, sandy soil. Organic matter does not add much nutrient content to the soil, so it is important to have your soil tested to see how much fertilizer to apply.

If a person wants to try growing asparagus beans, bitter melons, edible gourds or other oriental vine crops it's best to construct a support system to grow them vertically rather than letting them sprawl on the ground. This will save garden space and make it easier to harvest the crop. Even more important, it keeps the fruit clean and allows for good air circulation, which means less disease.

Vertical supports should be located on the north end of the garden if the garden area receives direct sunlight all day. That way they won't shade shorter plants as the sun moves from east to west across the sky. If the garden area receives mostly afternoon sun, then place them on the east side so they get sunlight from the south and west.

Here's a sample of some intriguing oriental seeds one could try growing:

***Red Beard Bunching Onion*** - These onion plants grow 2 1/2 feet tall, with long red stalks for slicing (no bulbs).

***White & Long Radish*** - White skinned radishes, 2 inches in diameter, 16 inches long. Slice them as you would cucumbers.

***Seedling Sugar Pea*** - Grow this pea for its tender young shoots; pick them when they're only 4 or 5 inches tall.

***Chinese Fuzzy Gourd*** - Pick these squash-like vegetables while they're still small and immature.

***Extra Long Eggplant*** - These eggplants grow about 1 foot long and are 1 1/2 inches in diameter, with light purple skin and delicate flavor.

***Garland Chrysanthemum*** - Harvest these stems and leaves when they're 15 inches tall; use them in soups or stir fry.

### ***Apple Tree Rootstocks***

When a person plants an apple tree, there are two genetically different plants grafted together. The 'scion' is the upper portion of the tree, the part that provides a person with the type of fruit such as 'Honeycrisp' which is an example of scion cultivar name. The scion is what people normally pay attention to when buying an apple tree.

The scion is grafted to another genetic individual—the rootstock. A person needs to pay as much attention to what rootstock they purchase as they do to the scion. The rootstock contributes to mature tree size, anchorage, hardiness, adaptability to different soil types, the number of years required before fruit is produced, and ease of care.

Horticultural professionals recognize at least three rootstock categories: standard, semi-dwarf and dwarf. 'Standard' trees reach their full size potential, depending upon the vigor of the scion cultivar and the environment in which the tree is grown; mature size can be highly variable between different trees and locations. Standard rootstock results in an apple tree that grows to 16 or more feet tall.

A semi-dwarfing rootstock produces a tree between about 10 to 15 feet tall, again dependent upon the vigor of the scion cultivar and the environment in which the tree is grown. Trees grafted using semi-dwarfing rootstocks are often sold in nurseries as 'dwarfing rootstocks.' However, a true dwarfing rootstock generally restricts tree height to ten feet or less.

Planting an apple tree grafted to a dwarfing rootstock has many advantages. Because tree size is so much smaller, a gardener can more easily fit four dwarf trees in an area where only one standard tree would fit, plus one can then enjoy many different apple tastes and textures from your yard instead of just one.

Because a dwarf apple tree only grows six to ten feet tall, pruning, pest control and harvest are much easier. And finally, a dwarf tree takes only three to four years to bear fruit in most cases.

Advantages to standard sized apple trees include usually a longer lived than a dwarf tree, rootstocks also are generally more winter hardy, more tolerant to wetter and drier soils and are better anchored than dwarfing rootstocks.

Many times a person may not know what type of rootstock one is getting from the nurseries. Some nurseries only mark their trees "standard" or "dwarf; many nurseries, do list the specific rootstock used in grafting. Following is a list of the different types of rootstocks; some are commonly available from nurseries, while others will require some seeking out.

**SEEDLING:** A 'seedling' rootstock is actually grown from the seed of an apple, often McIntosh or another common, hardy cultivar. Although one doesn't know exactly what one is getting with a seedling rootstock—every single seed is a genetically different individual—hardiness, anchorage and adaptability to different soil types are generally excellent.

**MM.111:** This rootstock, sometimes termed 'semi-dwarfing,' other times 'semi-standard,' produces a tree about 80 percent the height of a standard tree, roughly a 14-foot tree. MM.111 is an extremely hardy, well-anchored rootstock that can withstand drier soil conditions.

**M.7a:** (also: EMLA 7) Semi-dwarfing rootstock produces a tree 10-12 feet in height. Trees planted on M.7a generally do not require staking, except on windy sites. M.7a is one of the least hardy of the rootstocks and has a tendency to sucker profusely.

**M.26:** (also: EMLA 26) Dwarfing rootstock produces a tree 8-10 feet in height. Trees planted on M.26 generally require staking for the first few years of growth, or on windy sites, for the life of the tree. M.26 is reliably hardy, does not sucker as much as M.7a, but is especially susceptible to fire blight, a disease that can shorten the life of the tree if not carefully managed. Fruit is produced very early in the tree's life, within two to three years from planting.

**M.9:** (also: EMLA 9) Producing a tree 6-8 feet tall, this rootstock requires staking for the life of the tree. Fruit is produced within two to three years. Although hardier than M.7a, this rootstock is as prone to suckering as its larger cousin and is as susceptible to fireblight as M26.

**Bud.9:** Short for Budagovsky 9, this rootstock from the former Soviet Union holds promise for use in the upper Midwest. Trees grafted to Bud.9 grow to 6-8 feet tall, produce fruit early and generate few suckers. Hardiness thus far has been excellent, although further testing is needed. Trees on Bud.9 require staking for the life of the tree.

A person may find apple trees available on other hardy rootstocks as well, including Antonovka (100% standard size) and the "Polish series" of rootstocks, including P. 2 (35-40% s.s.) and P. 22 (25-30% s.s.).

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## PATHWAYS to Home and Garden Winter 2004



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**8 A.M. TO 4:30 P.M.**  
**MONDAY - FRIDAY**

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Jim Hovland - Community Resource Agent  
Irv Possin - Dairy and Livestock Agent  
Mike Rankin - Crops and Soils Agent  
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*Distributed from the office of James Hovland, Community Resource Agent, UW-Extension, Fond du Lac County.*