

# Garden Report

Spring 2012

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SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE HOME GARDENER

## To Plant or Not to Plant

Ginger Pryor  
Penn State Extension, Master Gardener Coordinator

As we settle down for the winter we often spend time thinking about our gardens and landscapes. We take stock of what we enjoyed in the garden, what we would like to change, and can't wait for that first visit to the garden center to look for plants to add to our gardens and landscapes. If you are like me, you are an impulse buyer. You may see something that looks good in the pot and want to take it home. It does not matter where you will place it, if you have the correct growing conditions, or how big it will get, just that it looks nice in the pot. Today, I challenge you to think differently.

### First Challenge-Take stock

Plants are living things and as all living things they need specific conditions to

be happy. Walk around your garden and take note of your growing conditions. How many hours of sunlight does each area get? Is there potential for standing water? Is your soil sandy or clay and what is the pH? A soil test kit may be purchased from your local Penn State Extension Office; the results will help you answer some of these questions.

Look at the area you want to plant. How tall and wide can your plant grow? Are there other plants in the area and are they doing well?

### Second Challenge-Think outside the box

The environment we develop in our landscapes should consider not only our needs but the needs of nature's creatures. Butterflies need host plants to raise their young, bees need pollen and nectar to feed themselves, and we all need food that is a result from their visits. Are the plants you choose friendly to pollinators, birds, and wildlife?

Consider that pollinators are three times more likely to visit a native plant than a non-native. Consider that some of the most common



landscape plants can also be invasive in our woodland, wetlands and meadows and which cost taxpayers millions in eradication programs. Visit the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/plants/invasiveplants/index.htm> to review a list of invasive trees and shrubs, many of which can still be purchased at nurseries, like Norway Maple and Japanese Barberry.

Third Challenge-Consider the uncommon  
There are many underused wonderful

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plants that can provide you with many years of enjoyment. Here are a few of my favorites you may want to consider.

Small Tree: *Oxydendrum arboretum*, commonly known as Sourwood, is truly a four season tree. It has flowers in the spring, fruit through the summer, a pinkish red fall color, and unusual bark that can be enjoyed in the winter. It can be a challenge to produce in the nursery, so it can be hard to find, but I have seen it become more available in the last couple of years. It is a slow grower and can grow to 30' in height and 20' in spread.

Large Shrub: *Physocarpus opulifolius*, commonly known as Ninebark, is a very hardy shrub that would make a good replacement for the invasive *Euonymus alatus*, commonly known as Winged Euonymus or Burning-bush. It flowers in the early summer with white to pink blooms, has leaves that are green to purple, has yellow to bronze fall color, and has peeling bark for winter interest. I've had this plant over winter in large landscape pots here in Central PA for several years. This shrub likes full sun.

Small Shrub: *Fothergilla gardenia*, Dwarf Fothergilla, has a height of 2-3 feet with a similar spread. This multi-stemmed shrub is native. It has white flowers that resemble bottle brushes in spring, dark green to bluish summer leaf color, and a wide array of spectacular fall color, that ranges from brilliant yellow to orange to scarlet. This shrub does well in semi-shade.

Ground Cover: *Pachysandra procumbens*, Allegheny Pachysandra, is the native pachysandra and should not be confused with *Pachysandra terminalis*, Japanese Pachysandra. This groundcover does well in full shade, with moist, humus, acidic conditions. It is semi-evergreen but don't let that discourage you. The leaves are green to bluish green, often mottled, and

stay nice throughout the winter. In early spring they die back with the emergence of white fragrant blooms that seem to burst from the center of the plant.

We do not want to forget our fruits, vegetables and herbs, here are a few that Master Gardeners feel are underused:

**Fruit:** Andrew Weidman's, Penn State Extension Master Gardener and active in the PA Backyard Fruit Growers, vote for underutilized fruit is the gooseberry, especially the variety Poorman. Gooseberries require moderate to full sun, well drained soil with plenty of organic matter, and most importantly, good air flow. Birds ignore them, deer avoid them, and there are very few insects which target them, although I must confess that I have to fight the squirrels for them. The berries are delicious in pies and preserves, and Poorman especially makes a wonderful fresh snack in the garden. They fruit heavily and ripen in late June, bridging the gap between strawberries and raspberries very nicely. One word of caution: they bear wicked thorns, and care must be exercised when pruning and picking them; but, oh, they're worth it!

**Vegetable:** Linda Siegel, Penn State Extension Master Gardener and chairman of the Backyard Gardeners in Lebanon County, nominates soybeans for the home garden, also known as edamame in stores and restaurants, as an underused vegetable. They are very easy to grow and can be planted sequentially so you have a continuous harvest. Plant small blocks of beans every one-two weeks from May 20 (usually when the soil is warm enough for beans in our area) until early to mid July. They take 75 days or longer to mature. Two varieties planted at the same time will allow two different harvest times. Harvest beans when the pods are green and full. I pull out the whole plant when I

harvest as there are very few if any undeveloped pods; the whole plant matures at the same time. They are easy to prepare- DO NOT SHELL, wash (that is the chore, actually, because the pods are hairy and require several washes), steam for 8 minutes, and serve. Some people add salt to the water. When looking for a variety to plant, be sure to purchase the soybeans for home gardens, not the agronomic soybeans which are not as large or as sweet as the horticultural soybeans.

**Herb:** Debbie Hartman, Penn State Extension Master Gardener and chairman of the Amateur Herbalist in Lebanon County, votes for Lemongrass, botanical name: *Cymbopogon citrates*, as an underused herb. It is a tender perennial grass that grows to about 3-4 feet tall in a clumping fashion. It requires full sun and can be grown in a container as well as the garden. The plant has a nice lemon flavor that is traditionally used in Vietnamese and Thai dishes. It is very nice in a stuffed herbal chicken (try it with all lemon herbs...yum), or vegetables, pretty much any dish you would like to enhance with a lemon flavor. To harvest you remove a section at the edge of the plant. You will see a scallion like base, remove the tough outer edge and you will find a tender interior. What is so nice about the plant, other than the lemon flavor, which I am partial to, is that it grows large. So you can dig sections out and share with your friends. In the fall, pot up a section to grow indoors for the next growing season.



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## A Splash of Color

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Connie Schmotzer  
Consumer Horticulture Extension Educator

Winter! While some plants rest during this season, others put on their best cloaks and seem to be transformed by the glistening snow.



Winterberry holly, *Ilex verticillata*, is one of these winter standouts. Its bright-red berries light up the dreariest of gray, winter days. And when there is a snowfall, the berries stand out on the white canvas, creating a gorgeous splash of color.

Unlike the evergreen American Holly, *Ilex opaca*, winterberry holly is a deciduous holly. Its pretty green foliage turns burgundy with the first hard frost and soon falls to the ground, leaving a crop of gorgeous berries that remain throughout the fall and early winter. In January and February, birds looking for an emergency source of winter food find and devour the berries in short order. In our yard it is mockingbirds that stake claim to the bounty.

Winterberry holly is an easy to grow native shrub that fits easily into most yards. In Pennsylvania's natural areas it is most often found in wet woods or bogs. Its tolerance for flooding makes it a good choice to use in a troublesome wet spot or a rain garden. **Don't have a wet spot? No problem.** Because it is comfortable growing in low oxygen soil, winterberry holly translates well into our Pennsylvania clay. It will grow in any soil that **doesn't become really droughty.** While winterberry is tolerant of a fairly

wide range of pH, it does best in acidic soils and may become chlorotic in alkaline soils. It is equally tolerant of shade and sun, although you will find the best berry crop on plants growing in full sun.

Speaking of berries, like all hollies, Winterberry is dioecious. This means that the male and female flowers are on separate plants. In order to produce

berries you need both male and female plants. To assure pollination, they should be planted within 50 feet of each other. In our yard we have one male and five females. Three of the females are in the front yard, the other two in the backyard. All seem to be pollinated just fine and bear a beautiful crop of berries.

Just a word of caution when purchasing your male and female plants. You can buy the straight species at a native plant nursery. At a garden center you are most likely to find cultivars that have been produced by the horticulture industry. Both males and females have been given names such as 'Winter Red' and 'Southern Gentleman'. You need to purchase a male and female that bloom at the same time in order to have fruit set. Garden center personnel will be able to guide you in your

choice. Also let the nursery person know if you are looking for winterberries that are native to our area. Some cultivars, such as 'Sparkleberry', have been crossed with Japanese hollies. If, like us, you choose plants to benefit wildlife, try to choose a cultivar with berries most similar to the straight species. Some of the newer cultivars of winterberry have been bred for larger, showier berries that birds cannot swallow.

There are many ways to use this medium size, slow growing shrub in your yard. Use a single female plant as a focal point near a lamppost or mailbox, or group a mass of plants to form a more natural looking "thicket". Winterberries will sucker, so they can be used to cover a large area at the edge of your property or by a pond or stream. Some of its natural associates are red maple, river birch, native willows, red osier dogwood, buttonbush, black chokeberry, ninebark, and highbush blueberry. Winterberry not only looks great planted with its "friends", but as a community they will all thrive.

So, consider adding a couple of these terrific plants to your yard this year. Next winter you, too, can sit back and enjoy a splash of color.



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## A Rose by Any Other Name...

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Annette MaCoy  
Consumer Horticulture Extension Educator, Cumberland County

The Rose Bowl, the Tournament of Roses Parade, Valentine's Day roses – everyone is familiar with roses, the “Queen of Flowers,” for beauty and fragrance. But as an herb?

Each year since 1995, the International Herb Association has designated an “Herb of the Year”. In 2011, it was horseradish; for 2012, the rose has been selected – a surprising and unexpected choice.

Nowadays, we generally grow roses as an ornamental plant in the landscape; so why would the rose be considered an herb? To answer that, you need to define what an herb is. We are all familiar with culinary herbs such as parsley and sage used to add flavor to our food, but historically herbs have been utilized for much more than cooking.

Herbs are plants grown and harvested for their essential oils, aromatic compounds found in foliage, flowers and stems that serve the plant as attractants or protectants. Herbs have been used for thousands of years in every human civilization. In addition to cooking, herbs were used for medicine, cosmetics and fragrances; for arts and crafts such as dyeing fabric; for pest control and home cleanliness; and for their ornamental value. One plant could serve as food, flavor, tea, medicine, and insecticide; dose and preparation determined use.

Historically, of course, the healing properties of herbs were a primary reason these plants were grown. Today, we rely on modern medicine to provide healing care. So-called “medicinal” herbs contain potent compounds which can be dangerous if misused or overused, so it is best to enjoy herbs for all the other benefits they bestow.

So, long before it was admired for the beauty of its flowers, the rose was grown primarily for medicine, fragrance, and cooking. Roses used historically were naturally occurring species or ancient hybrids, such as gallicas, albas, damasks, and centifolias, that are still grown today.

Rose flowers contain up to eleven different essential oils, in varying combinations and concentrations, which give different varieties their distinctive fragrances. In general, the most fragrant flowers are darker in color, or have more petals, or have thick, velvety petals.

Petals were harvested, soaked, heated, dried, macerated; mixed with oil, honey, wine, vinegar or water; made into syrups, conserves or jellies; or distilled to create rose water or rose oil (attar) that was then used in myriad ways. Rosehips (the fruit of the rose) and buds were also harvested and used.

Early Greek and Roman physicians and herbalists noted numerous uses for roses: curing irritations of the eyes, ears, mouth, stomach, intestines; soothing headaches, toothaches, female “hysteria,” wounds, boils, and tumors; and relieving hemorrhages and hemorrhoids. One species of rose, *Rosa canina*, called the dog rose, was even purported to be a cure for hydrophobia (rabies).

The popularity of roses for feasts and festivals threatened to undermine the production of more essential grain in foreign countries such as Egypt from whence Rome imported both crops. They held a yearly feast, the Rosalia, celebrating the rose; and a

rose hung above a dining couch meant that any conversation held “sub rosa” (under the rose) was considered strictly confidential.

During the Middle Ages, “ages before chicken soup attained cure-all status, nature’s wonder drug was a rose.” The most widely used rose during this era was the Apothecary’s Rose, *Rosa gallica* ‘Officinalis’. Its astringent petals were often concocted with other herbs, in recipes listed in herbals and stillroom “receipt books”, to make potions or lotions used for just about every imaginable ailment; but its fragrance also helped to disguise the bitter tastes of other herbs. Roses were used in toothpaste (a “rubber for the teeth”), laundry soaps, and supposedly youth-restoring cosmetics, as well as to freshen the air inside homes before people finally understood that outside air was not fatal.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rose water was still widely used as a flavoring and a fragrance, but less so as a medicine, although rosehips were valued as a nutritious fruit during long winters. Rosehips have since been found to be one of the richest sources of vitamin C of any fruit; during World War II, when citrus fruit was impossible to get, the English harvested and processed tons of rosehips from their own gardens to provide a reliable source of vitamin C.



Today, we enjoy roses by the thousands on parade floats, in bouquets, in perfumes, or in our gardens; and although its use for health has dwindled, the lore of the alluring rose extends much wider and farther into the mists of time.

## Calendar of Events



Contact each county extension office for more information.

### Adams County, 334-6271

For information, go to Adams County website: <http://extension.psu.edu/adams>

Edible Gardening In Your Environment, Thursdays, March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, 2012, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., \$40.00 for the five week course.

Backyard Fruit Care, April 14, 9:00 a.m.—Noon

Master Gardener Bus Trip, Tuesday, May 29, Tour of Temple-Ambler, Ambler, Pa in the morning then to Meadowbrook Farm in Meadowbrook, PA. Cost: \$70 Early Bird by May 1. May 1-15, \$75.00

### Dauphin County, 921-8803

For information go to Dauphin County website <http://extension.psu.edu/dauphin>

Spring Workshops, Saturday, February 25, March 3, 10, 17, 24, 2012, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. Cost: \$30.00 for five week series, \$7.00 per workshops, or \$10.00 for walk – ins. Dauphin County Agriculture & Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018.

Vegetable Gardening Classes, Part I, Tuesday, March 20 and Part II, Tuesday, March 27, 2012, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., Cost: \$20.00. Dauphin County Agriculture & Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018.

### Franklin County, 263-9226

For information, Contact the Franklin County Extension Office.

Hands-on Proper Pruning Workshop, Saturday, March 3

Series on Backyard Fruit, March 10, 17, 24

Turf Renovation., March 29

Master Gardener Bus Trip to Temple Arboretum at Ambler and Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, May 5

Master Gardener Plant Sale, May 19

Vegetable Plant Sale, May 11

All workshops are \$10 each and the Bus Trip is \$60 per person.

### Cumberland County, 240-6500

Contact Cumberland County Extension or <http://extension.psu.edu/cumberland>

Ready, Set, GROW! Workshop, Saturday, March 24 – 8:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Cumberland County Extension office, 310 Allen Road, Carlisle. \$5.00 registration fee.

Sustainable Gardening Series, Wednesdays, April 4, 11, 18, 25 – 7:00-9:00 p.m.,

Cumberland County Extension office, 310 Allen Road, Carlisle. Fee charged.

Plant Fest, Saturday, May 19 – 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

### Perry County, 582-5150

For information contact Perry County Extension or <http://extension.psu.edu/perry>

Native Bees for the Home Gardener, Thursday, February 23 – 7:00 p.m. – , Perry County Extension office, New Bloomfield.

Plant Sale and Open Garden, Saturday, May 26 – 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

### York County, 840-7408

GardenWise – a one day garden school, Saturday, March 10, 8am to 3:30 pm, York County School of Technology, York, PA. Contact: Kelly Folcomer, 717-840-7408, [kfs13@psu.edu](mailto:kfs13@psu.edu)

Native Plant Fest & Sale, May 19, 9am to 2pm, York County Annex, 112 Pleasant Acres Rd, York, PA 17402. Contact: Connie Schmotzer, 717-840-7408, [cxs51@psu.edu](mailto:cxs51@psu.edu)

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