

Garden Report

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SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE HOME GARDENER

Plant a Meadow Garden

Connie Schmotzer
Consumer Horticulture Extension Educator

One of the best things you can do for the environment is to turn a patch of your lawn into a meadow garden. Meadow plants provide nectar for pollinators, seeds for **migrating birds and overwintering sites for beneficial insects**. They don't need fertilizer or pesticides; their deep roots will readily soak up rainwater, preventing runoff and erosion. Meadow gardens also add four season interest to your landscape and summer long butterfly watching.

Now is a great time to plan and prepare a meadow garden. Here are some tips to help you get started.

Prepare the site

Choose a site that gets at least 6 hours of sun. Kill all existing vegetation so that you start out weed free. Use sheet mulching to minimize preparation. Mow the area as short as possible. Water, then cover with cardboard or newspaper ten sheets thick. Make sure no light gets through this barrier. Water well. Cover with mulch. Leaves and grass clippings from the last fall mowing make an excellent mulch. The garden will be ready to plant in spring. Meanwhile, start thinking about which plants you will use.

Choose your plants

The plants you choose will depend on the site: Wet or dry? Well drained or soggy? Fertile soil or poor? (A Penn State soil test will give you information on fertility.) Most meadow plants do not do well in soil that is fertilized.



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Decide how tall you would like your meadow to be. If you want to use it as a screen you will choose plants that are 6 ft or more tall. If you are using it to replace lawn you may prefer shorter plants.

50% or more of a natural meadow is made up of native grasses. The remaining are flowering perennials; but you can increase the percentage of flowers to create more of a garden effect.

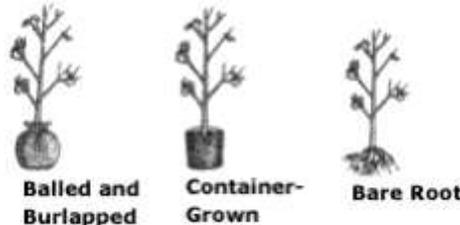
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Taking Stock of Nursery Stock

Annette MaCoy,
Consumer Horticulture Extension Educator

Planting a tree is an investment in the future, so it is worth your time to select carefully and plant properly. When you visit a nursery, search the web, or peruse a catalog, you will find that nursery stock is available in three forms, depending on how it has been grown or harvested: bare-root, balled and burlapped (B & B), or container-grown.

Each of these production methods has advantages and disadvantages which may influence your decision to select one form over another. The site conditions, the variety of plant, the time of planting, your budget, the number of plants to be planted, and the after-care you can provide, will all factor in to which type of nursery stock you choose.



On any plant you are considering, there are three areas you should examine carefully: the roots and root flare, the trunk, and the overall form. Look for defects such as kinked or girdling roots, multiple leaders, poor branching structure, or lopsided form; and injuries such as torn or crushed roots, bad pruning cuts, trunk wounds or cracks, or insect feeding. Sometimes, a problem can be corrected; but if it is too severe, you should reject that particular plant and look at another specimen.

Bare-root stock is often found in mail-order or online catalogs; it is less common at nurseries and garden centers. You may find bare-root fruit trees, brambles, roses, strawberries, and asparagus crowns, with the roots packed in damp wood shavings and plastic, at garden centers, while bare-root ornamental trees and shrubs are usually only available through mail-order or online catalogs.

Bare-root stock is the least expensive; it's light-weight and easy to move; the plants are smaller, and the roots adapt and establish more quickly in surrounding soil. It's easy to examine the roots at planting time and trim away damaged or defective ones. For large-scale plantings with less expense and work, bare-root is the way to go.

The disadvantages of bare-root are that the variety selection is more limited; generally you can't examine plants before purchasing; plants can be planted only during dormancy, usually in early spring; small plants are more vulnerable to animal damage; the roots must never be allowed to dry out (you can use hydro-gels to keep them moist until planting); and plants often need staking.

Balled and burlapped (B & B) trees and shrubs are field-grown plants that are dug while dormant. The roots are dug with an intact ball of soil which is then wrapped and tied in burlap and often enclosed in a wire basket. For large specimen trees, B & B is often the only form available; and with proper planting and aftercare, survival rates are good, particularly for evergreens.

Disadvantages are the size and weight of the root ball can be very difficult to handle; and a high percentage of the roots (up to 95%) may be lost or severed when the tree is dug, so that the plant suffers a longer period of transplant shock, often several years. It is critical with B & B stock to remove all twine, wires, and

Continued from page 1, Meadow

Some grasses to consider for a short meadow include Prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*), Sideoats grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), or Little Bluestem (*Schizachryium scoparius*). There are many native flowering perennials to choose. For a dry site, Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a must. Add some Nodding onion (*Allium cernuum*), Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*), Penstemon (*Penstemon digitalis*), Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida var. fulgida*) and some asters, and you will have a meadow that will be in bloom from spring to fall. If your site is constantly moist, try Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*), White Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), or Helen's Flower (*Helenium autumnale*). Your local Penn State Extension office can provide more options and a list of places where you can purchase plants.

Planting your meadow garden

For a small meadow of 50 to 100 square feet, purchase plants in quart pots and space them 12" to 18" apart depending on the mature size of the plant. Plant directly through the mulch bed you prepared in the fall. Remember to free the roots on each plant and water well. You may need to water several more times before the plants are established. The mulch will help hold in moisture and keep down weeds for the first growing season.

Maintaining your meadow garden

Until the plants are mature (typically eighteen months) you will need to pull weeds, particularly at the edges. Yearly maintenance involves cutting the plants down at the end of March. Plants debris can be shredded and used in other beds, on paths, or can be composted.

You will be surprised how quickly your meadow garden grows and becomes a haven for butterflies, birds and other pollinators. Next summer you can sit back and enjoy the parade of colorful visitors!

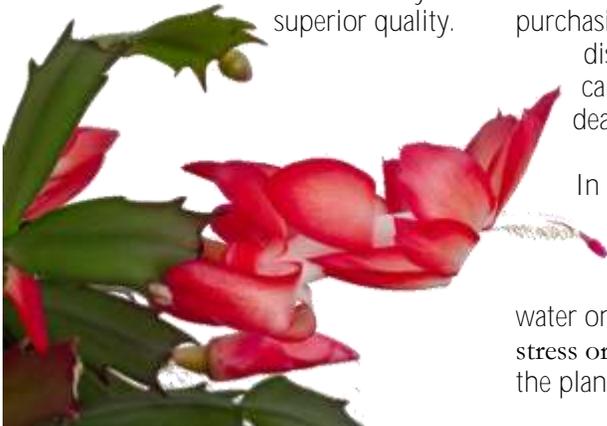
Growing Houseplants

Mary Ann Ryan
Consumer Horticulture Extension Educator

This time of year, as the weather freezes and gardening outside stops, we begin to look inside to satisfy our need for growing plants. Poinsettias, cyclamen, and Christmas cactus are often the plants chosen for indoor color, but have you considered other options?

Growing houseplants can be an easy proposition if all, or most, requirements are met. Knowing what kind of environment you can offer your plant is a good first step. Before entering a greenhouse, study the areas you wish to grow plants. What kind of sunlight is the area getting? Is it near a window and what direction does that window face – north, south, east or west? Are there any air vents where heat or air conditioning will be blowing? What kind of heat do you have? Is it wood stove, electric, or gas? You need to know the answers to all these questions before selecting your plants. Be sure the plant variety that you are selecting is going to grow well in the conditions you are providing. Light, temperature and humidity are very important when selecting a plant.

Select plants that are insect free. Always inspect the underside of the foliage as well as at the leaf axils. If the **leaves look yellow, or chlorotic, don't buy them.** Look out for brown leaf margins or weak growth. Plants that have young, new growth and healthy buds are usually of superior quality.



Note the environment that the plants are now growing. Be aware of the kind of care the plant is getting before you purchase it. For instance, if it is a plant that requires high light conditions, such as a croton, and is living in a low light situation in a store, when you get it home it will probably drop many leaves. You will be nursing it back to health for quite a long while. Likewise, if you take a low-light plant, growing in a florescent light situation, take it home, and put it in a window that is getting all day sun, it will likely have leaf burn and lose those leaves.

Take notice as to the watering conditions of the plant. Too dry too frequently can cause much stress to the plant, allowing insect and disease problems to take over, as well as leaf drop. Too wet can cause rotting of the roots.

After you have taken much care in selecting the healthy plant that is appropriate for your growing conditions, be sure you protect it when leaving the greenhouse or store. Wrap the plant in paper or plastic bags, and be sure to transport it in the front of the car that is heated, not the **trunk.** **Don't make lots of stops after purchasing your plants.** Just short distances in low temperatures can cause severe damage or death to a houseplant.

In my experience, watering has often been the object of blame when it comes to plant fatality. Too much water or too little water can cause **stress or even death.** **It's best to grow the plant in a container that has good**

drainage. Place a saucer underneath the container so the water runs through. After 15 minutes, dump the excess water out of the saucer. If the soil medium continues to be wet for a long period of time, the roots of the plants will rot.

Knowing what kind of environment you have is key in choosing the appropriate plant for your growing conditions.

Just as important is not allowing the plant to dry out. If the soil medium is **dry to the touch, it's time to water.** A good rule of thumb is to check the plants twice a week. If it is dry, water it, if **it isn't, let it alone until next time.** It is good to get your watering on a schedule like every Wednesday and Saturday. That way the plant is not forgotten. Plant care then becomes habit.

Humidity is important to a plant's survival. Dry heat from a wood stove can be deadly to a houseplant. To create more humidity for a houseplant, group plants together or put a humidity tray under them. Misting plants has very little effect. Locate your houseplant in a room that has good ventilation, but not drafty.

During the plant's active growing time, typically March through September, fertilize every two to four weeks. Use a well-balanced fertilizer. A typical analysis of a fertilizer is 10-10-10 or 20-20-20. The analysis tells you the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium that is in the fertilizer.

If you are transplanting your houseplant, use a potting mix that is formulated for houseplants. When transplanting your plants, loosen up the roots before planting it in new soil. Transplant the plant in a container that is slightly larger than the one it is now growing in. Water it well and your plant is ready for another year or so of healthy living!

Continued from page 2, Nursery Stock

synthetic burlap at planting; and to find the root flare to ensure it is planted at soil grade.

Container-grown plants are the most readily available form of nursery stock and can be planted throughout the growing season. They are grown in the container, so that all of the roots are present, which is an advantage over B & B, but also a major disadvantage if left too long in the pot, forming circling or girdling roots or root-bound plants. These problems have to be corrected, by loosening and slicing into the root ball from top to bottom, if you want the plant to survive and thrive.

Other advantages of container stock are its lighter weight than B & B, and has a better survival rate than bare-root if planted properly. The use of soilless, often peat-based, mix in the pot can be a problem; it is different than the surrounding soil and can be hard to keep moist. As with B & B stock, it is essential to identify the root flare and plant it at soil grade; it is often buried deep within the container mix, which you have to gently remove until you find it.

With nursery stock, bigger is not necessarily better. Smaller trees, by whichever production method they are grown, overcome transplant shock and establish new roots in surrounding soil much better and faster than larger trees; so much so that they will outgrow and overtake in size a larger tree still suffering from transplant shock several years after planting.

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Calendar of Events

Contact each county extension office for more information.



Adams County, 717-334-6271

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. This five week course will give you all tools you need to design and maintain a successful garden of fruits and vegetables. Check our website for more information: <http://extension.psu.edu/adams>.

← Dauphin County, 717-921-8803 →

Spring Workshops, Saturday, February 25, March 3, 10, 17, 24, 2012, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Dauphin County Agriculture & Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018

Cost: \$30.00 for five week series, \$7.00 per workshops, or \$10.00 for walk – ins
After January 3, 2012 check website <http://extension.psu.edu/dauphin> for brochure and more information

Vegetable Gardening Classes, Part I, Tuesday, March 20, 2012, and Part II, Tuesday, March 27, 2012, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., Dauphin County Agriculture & Natural Resources Center, 1451 Peters Mountain Road, Dauphin, PA 17018
More information to be posted on the Website after January 3, 2012

← York County, 717-840-7408 →

GardenWise – a one day garden school, Saturday, March 10, 8am to 3:30 pm
York County School of Technology, York, PA
Keynote Speaker: Susan Reed - author of the award winning book *Energy-Wise Landscaping Design*
Contact: Connie Schmotzer, 717-840-7408, cxs51@psu.edu

An OUTREACH program of the College of Agricultural Sciences

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