



The Garden Spade

February 2019

“Reliable, Responsive and Relevant Information for the Missouri Gardener”

Azaleas and Rhododendrons

Katie Kammler, MU Extension Field Specialist in Horticulture

Many think about azaleas and rhododendrons only in the spring when they are in full bloom but they are actually a great addition to the landscape year round. Some are evergreen, some have fall leaf color, and the beautiful spring flowers.



Azalea is typically the term used for the native deciduous species and some evergreen Asian types. Rhododendron generally refers to the species with large, evergreen, leathery leaves. Both azaleas and rhododendrons are classified as Rhododendron by plant taxonomists. Whichever plant you chose, both have the same cultural requirements, very similar to blueberries.

Most azaleas and rhododendrons prefer mild, humid climates. Selecting a good site is important since Missouri’s climate doesn’t meet those requirements. A sloping site to the north

or east helps protect the plant from drying south and west winds and they are less subjected to rapid temperature changes in the late fall or early spring. Wind protection is important. Buildings, slopes, evergreen shrubs or temporary barriers in the winter can help prevent leaf scorch or splitting of the bark. Filtered sunlight is best or morning sun and afternoon shade.

The number one requirement of azaleas and rhododendrons in acidic soil. They need a pH of 5.0 to 5.5. Many of Missouri soils meet that requirement but always soil test first to find out what the pH is and if a sulfur application is needed to lower the pH. Good drainage and organic matter is important. Clay soils mixed with 50% ground pine bark or leaf mold can help with the organic matter and drainage. Avoid using peat moss as it can hold

Continued to page 2

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In This Issue

- Azaleas and Rhododendrons
- At a Glance: Parsley
- Plants with Winter Interest
- Herbal Teas
- Heucheras for the Shade Garden
- Unique Plant: Bear’s Breeches
- Black Gum
- Dandelion Trivia

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Azaleas and Rhododendrons

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Continued from page 1 too much moisture and lead to root rots.

Plants are typically come potted or balled and burlapped. Plant according to the instructions on label and do not plant too deep where the plant stem is covered deeper than it had been growing. Water and mulch after planting. Mulch is important because the plants are shallow rooted and heavy mulch helps conserve moisture and reduce winter injury. Choosing northern varieties also help reduce winter problems. There are many varieties to choose from with options on size, flower color, deciduous or evergreen. Missouri has a pink azalea native to eastern Ozark counties.

Once established, azaleas and rhododendrons are long lived plants. Continue to apply mulch as it decomposes. Fertilize with specialty fertilizer formulated for acid-loving plants. Pruning typically is not needed. Temporary winter protection might be needed depending on the type of plant and location in the landscape. Screens of burlap, snowfence, or evergreen branches provide protection but still allow airflow to the plant.

Problems with azaleas and rhododendrons are few. Sunscald and scorch can be a problem on evergreen varieties in the winter if the plants didn't receive ample moisture in the fall before freezing. Stem bark splitting is caused by rapid temperature changing and freezing. Iron chlorosis is where the leaves turn yellow in sections between the veins while the veins remain green. This is caused by an iron deficiency, typically caused by too high of a soil pH, poor drainage, or injury.

For more information: <https://extension2.missouri.edu/g6825>



At a Glance: Parsley

Donna Aufdenberg, MU Extension Field Specialist in Horticulture

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)

Uses: Culinary; Curly parsley (garnish); Flat-leaved parsley (cooking)

Type: Biennial but can be used as an annual

Size: Grow 1 to 2 feet tall and 8 to 10 inches wide

Light: Full sun to partial shade

Soil: rich, moist but well-drained

Pests: aphids, attracts black swallowtail butterflies

How to use it: Mince fresh, frozen or dried leaves into sauces soups, stews or egg dishes. Good for Italian and Middle Eastern dishes.



Italian Seasoning

Use on pizzas, pasta, herb bread

1/2 cup dried oregano

1/2 cup dried basil

1/4 cup dried parsley

1 Tbl fennel seeds, crushed

2 Tbl dried sage

1 Tbl hot red pepper flakes

Mix well and store in a jar.

February Gardening Calendar

Donna Aufdenberg, MU Extension Field Specialist in Horticulture

Outdoor Flowering Plants and Ornamentals

- Seeds of slow-growing annuals like ageratum, verbena, petunias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and salvia may be started indoors now.
- Start seeds with a pre-chilling period. Seeds can be planted in trays and refrigerated for designated times.
- Dormant sprays can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs now. Do this on a mild day while temperatures are above freezing.

Indoor Plants

- To extend the life of Valentine flowers, recut the stems underwater with a sharp knife and remove any stem foliage that would be underwater. Use a flower preservative.
- Late February is a good time to air-layer house plants such as dieffenbachia, rubber tree, and dracaena or corn plant.
- Check all five growing factors if your house plants are not growing well. Light, temperature, nutrients, moisture, and humidity must be favorable to provide good growth.

Vegetable Gardening

- Before working an area in the garden for early spring planting, check the soil. It should be dry enough to crumble in your hand before you work it.
- Season extending devices such as cold frames, hot beds, cloches and floating row covers will allow for an early start to the growing season.
- Check any vegetables you have in storage. Use or dispose of any that show signs of shriveling or rotting.
- Weather permitting, planting greens and spinach around Valentine's day.
- Soil testing done now allows time for amendments to be applied before the gardening season.

Fruits and Nuts

- Begin pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears first. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- If you want to raise fruit in your garden, try grapes, raspberries or strawberries. It is much less difficult to succeed with them than with tree fruits, and you will get much faster results.
- Grapevine prunings can be made into attractive wreaths. Decorate them with cut-out hearts, dried flowers, or bird nests, or shape them into a heart over a wire frame for use as Valentine gifts.
- Fertilize fruit trees as soon as possible after the ground thaws, but before blossoming begins. Grape and bramble fruit may be pruned.
- Practice Sanitation. Remove any mummies and diseased plant parts on plants.

Plants with Winter Interest

Outside:

Deciduous Holly
American Holly
Witch Hazel
Bittersweet
Pines
Juniper
Spruce
Arborvitae
Boxwood
Viburnum
Mahonia
Ornamental Grasses
Lenten Rose

Bark Texture:

River Birch
Sycamore
Japanese Maple
Shrub Dogwood
Shagbark Hickory
Kentucky Coffee Tree

Cherry

Sweet Gum

Weeping Willow

Indoors:

Amaryllis

African Violet

Holiday Cactus

Herbs

Herbal Teas

Megan Franke, Cape Girardeau County Master Gardener

Here is a little project you can start during these cold months: Growing Herbs for Tea. The demand for herbal tea has risen as people have discovered their curative value. Of course, you can buy herbal teas but growing your own means that you have your own tea garden with an endless supply of pesticide, chemical-free tea leaves fresh off the plant. You can grow herbs from seed or get pre-started ones. Herbs do not take up much space to grow; put them in three- or four-inch clay pots with a gritty, well-drained soil. Water them well and place them near a window that gets a good amount of sunlight.

Technically, tea is only made from the leaves of the tea plant. All other herbal water infusions are tisanes. That said, let's get back to herbs. Herb tea is made either of all herbs or part herbs and part black tea. The first introduction to herb tea is perhaps best as a blend. Herb teas are light in color; steeping them longer will not darken the color from its natural amber or green hues.

Here are some herb combinations often used:

- lemon verbena and borage
- anise, chamomile, and costmary
- marjoram, anise, and lemon verbena
- lemongrass, rosemary, and thyme
- basil, lemon verbena, lemongrass, and lemon thyme.



Herbal teas serve different purposes. For example, to achieve a sweet and tasty flavor, use Lemon Verbena (served iced?) or Mint (chocolate mint is especially nice, and orange or ginger mint add a hint of spice). On the other hand, Lemon Balm, Catnip, and Lavender (use the flower to make tea not the leaves) promote relaxation and sleep. Herbs yield more when you do mini-harvests throughout the growing season. Harvest in the morning when the aromatic oils are at their peak.

One last thing, let's review the tea making process. All you need is hot water and a cup! Sure, you can get fancy with tea balls, special slotted spoons, or tea baskets, but they don't change the taste. While the water is heating, clip some fresh herbs into a cloth tea bag (see below). Use about two teaspoons of fresh herbs (one teaspoon of dried herbs) for each cup of water. Steep to taste; steeping can take anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes. If you want to sweeten your tea, add honey or a "sweet" herb, such as Mint or Stevia.

Easy to sew reusable tea bags:

3.5 x 9 in. piece of cotton muslin, unbleached

2 pieces of cotton string, each 6 in long

Thread, needle, and iron

Fold down ½ in. of fabric on 3.5 in side. Iron. Then open the fold and lay one piece of string across. Fold back down and stitch across to hold. Repeat on opposite 3.5 end.

Fold the bag in half, matching 2 finished edges. Sew sides, stopping at drawstrings. Tie the drawstrings together. Turn bag right side out and pull strings from one side to close.

Heucheras for the Shade Garden

Beth Bliese, Cape Girardeau County Master Gardener

I spend a lot of my winter days researching and planning my next year's garden and landscape. The last and most difficult garden for me to complete is the shade garden. I like color and green foliage plants just doesn't appeal to me. In search for the plants that offer some color and will tolerate dry shade, I often find myself



Heuchera 'Caramel',
Picture Courtesy of
Missouri Botanical Garden

looking at Heucheras. I have found choosing a Heuchera (Hew'-ker-uh) to be a daunting and confusing task. There are so many to choose from, but which ones will survive, no which ones will excel in my zone 6 heat and humidity?

Through my research, I discovered Heuchera is in the Family of Saxifragaceae. Some of its relatives are Astilbe, Bergenia, Saxifraga, and Tiarella. Most of the Heuchera species originated in the northwestern United States and a smaller percentage originated from the eastern area. The Heuchera found its way into Europe, and some hybridizers began crossing *H. americana*, *H. villosa* and *H. sanguinea*. Thus, the barrage of Heuchera hybrids began. The *villosa* species originated in the

southeastern part of the United States, and it matches most closely my environment. Therefore, if a Heuchera has *villosa* in its lineage, it may be a better choice for this area (Heuchera, 2015). While reading various Heuchera articles, George Combs, a research horticulturist of Mt Cuba Center in Delaware, trialed 83 varieties of Heucheras for three years. He explains, "I say to people, "I'm doing Consumer Reports for plants." He stated with Heucheras; there was a lot of sameness. "The main reason to do this ... was to address the glut of cultivars in the market. It can be confusing for



Heuchera 'Berry Smoothie', Picture
Courtesy of Missouri Botanical Garden

a nursery professional, so to get the average homeowner to choose is an incredible feat" (as cited by Higgins, 2015). He stated while many Heucheras have various colored leaves in the spring, by mid-summer, you couldn't tell one from another. Many of them were a variant green color. However, he did list a few Heucheras that were stars (Higgins, 2015).

Another gardener, a professor at Georgia University, recommended several Heucheras after growing many at the university garden. Ken Wood, a nursery manager of Shawnee, Kansas, had a list of his favorites also (Armitage, n.d.)

Although there were other gardeners, professors, and

Continued to page 8

Heucheras Honorable Mention

Apple Crisp
Bronze Wave
Cajun Fire
Caramel
Citronelle
Color Dream
Frosted Violet
Southern Comfort
Spellbound
Autumn Bride
Sparkling Burgundy
Silver Scrolls
Blackberry Wine
Creme Brule'
Hollywood
Mocha
Brownie
Rave
Steel City
Purple Petticoats
Black out
Berry Smoothie
Ga. Peach
Beaujoles
Venus
Encore
Electra
Ebony

This is in-put from Alan Armitage from Ga. and Mr Combs from Kansas as well as personal experience.

Unique Plant: Bear's Breeches

Donna Aufdenberg, MU Extension Field Specialist in Horticulture

One plant that I have always been fascinated with is Bear's Breeches (*Acanthus spinosus*). I find that it is not commonly planted in Missouri and is not offered for sale at local garden centers. Several gardeners locally say that the plant will survive just fine in Missouri gardens (hardy to USDA zone 5) but the plants can be aggressive and spread in more fertile, loose soils. They can be slow to establish but once established, they can be hard to eradicate.

Bear's Breeches is a clump-forming perennial that is grown as much for its attractive foliage as for its bold flower spikes. The leaves are deeply lobed, glossy and dark green with soft spines. The leaves can be up to 2 feet long and tend to be mostly evergreen if temperatures don't drop much below 20 degrees. Flower spikes can be 3 to 5 feet tall. The flowers resemble white snapdragon-like blossoms hooded by a reddish-purple bracts. The combination is striking. It blooms from late-spring to mid-summer.

No serious insects or disease problems exist.



As a bold, stately plant, it can be used as a specimen planting



Pictures courtesy Missouri Department of Conservation

Native Plant of the Month:

Black Gum

Nyssa sylvatica

Deciduous Tree

Height: up to 100 feet tall

Flower: Male and female flowers, greenish, in clusters on separate trees

Comments: Beautiful scarlet fall foliage, one of the first trees to turn. Found in acid soils of dry, rocky, wooded slopes, ridges, ravines and lowland forests in southeast Missouri. Horizontal branches with a flat-topped crown. Alternate simple leaves, 2-6 inches long, 1-3 inches wide.

Information sources: Trees of Missouri by Don Kurz

Upcoming Events

The following Master Gardener meetings are held each month. All are welcome to attend. Please contact your local extension office to confirm location if you did not attend the previous meeting.

Parkland MGs - 1st Monday at 6:30pm, Farmington Library

Poplar Bluff MGs - 1st Tuesday at 6:00pm, Call 573-686-8064 for location.

Ste. Genevieve MGs - 2nd Thursday, at 6:30pm, Ste. Genevieve County Extension Center

Cape Girardeau MGs - 3rd Thursday at 7:00pm, Cape County Extension Center in Fall and Winter and Shawnee Park Center in Spring and Summer. Call 573-238-2420 for questions

Perry MGs - 4th Monday at 6:30pm, Perry County Extension Center

February 2019

11-12 Midwest Winter Production Conference at Lincoln University Carver Farm and local farms, Jefferson City, MO. <http://www.webbcityfarmersmarket.com/grower-training.html>

16 Perry County Master Gardener's Symposium at the Perryville Higher Education Center in Perryville, MO For more information, call 573-547-4504

22-23 Blueberry School in Springfield, MO at the MSU Darr Agriculture Center. For more information about registration and payment, see www.extension.missouri.edu/blueberry

March 2019

2 A Gardening Symposium at Mineral Area College, Technology Building in Park Hills, MO.

9 Native Plant and Garden Seminar at the Cape Girardeau Conservation Nature Center

19 Vegetable Gardening at the Shawnee Park Center from 6 to 8 p.m. Register by March 15 by calling Cape Girardeau Parks and Recreation at 573-339-6340

28 Fruit Tree Workshop at the Ellington City Hall located at 100 Tubbs Ave in Ellington, MO. Workshop from 2 to 4 p.m. Hands-on pruning demo at 4 p.m. Must pre-register by March 23 by calling 573-648-1035

Click on blue underlined link to be taken to a corresponding website...

Dandelion Trivia

Donna Aufdenberg, MU Extension Field Specialist in Horticulture

Dandelions have been known as pesky weeds in the American garden for many decades. At one point in American History, the dandelion was viewed as a very important household staple. Before pulling your next dandelion, step back and consider these points...

⇒ The origin distribution of dandelions has been hard to determine. The plants have been carried from place to place since before written history. Because of this, dandelions are found throughout the world.



⇒ Dandelions are believed to have been brought to the Americas by the Puritans as a source of medicine and as something that reminded them of home. Frontier healers credited the plants with saving the lives of pioneers in winter because of its high vitamin content.

⇒ The dandelion has countless health benefits are chocked full of nutrients. They can be tasty if prepared at the right stage and the right way. All parts of the plant can be eaten. They have a taste similar to chicory or endive with a bitter tinge.

⇒ Simple Recipes and information about harvesting can be found at <https://www.motherearthliving.com/food-and-recipes/about-dandelion-zl0z1306zsie>

Heucheras for the Shade Garden

Beth Bliese, Cape Girardeau County Master Gardener

Continued from page 5 nursery people who had their list of favorites, I was most interested in the professionals that had similar growing conditions as me. Some of the Heucheras were on all three of their lists. Twenty-eight Heuchera cultivars were mentioned amongst the three professionals. However, Heuchera villosa 'Citronelle' was one all three listed. Two of the three authors listed Heuchera villosa 'Caramel' and Heuchera villosa 'Southern Comfort'. One of Southern Comfort's parents is Caramel.

I have grown Heuchera from seed. It's great fun to watch these seeds sprout and eventually turn into little plants. Because there has been so much hybridization, it's always a surprise to see the color development.

Although many plant descriptions say full sun to part shade, it is best to grow these colorful foliage plants in part shade in our hot, humid, summer climates. In the winter, care must be taken, so the plants don't heave by placing a two-inch layer of mulch a couple of inches from the crown of the plant. Heucheras will also have crown rot hence, leaving a small space around the plant when mulched. It's a good idea to check your Heucheras in the winter to make sure they haven't heaved from the winter freeze - thaw cycles. If they have heaved, gently push them back into the ground and encircle the mulch closer to the plant.

In the spring, when plants awaken, pinch off the worn and tattered leaves so fresh, vibrantly colored leaves will take their place. Also, if the mulch is close to the stem of the plant, push it away. Heucheras of any choice and color offer much-needed variety and texture to the shade garden. As a bonus, they are mostly evergreen in the winter. My selection of the Heucheras I will try in my garden will be either Heuchera v. 'Citronelle' or Heuchera v. 'Southern Comfort'. Of course, it will depend on if a local nursery offers it this year. I will also continue to grow Heucheras from seed as I have lots of shady spots and semi-shady borders that would welcome a colorful Heuchera.



Heuchera 'Blackout' planted with other shade plants, picture courtesy of Missouri Botanical Garden



The Garden Spade

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