

TOMATOES & PEPPERS, OH JOY! **By Poppy Irwin, Isanti County MG**

Seed catalogs have arrived and nurseries are putting out seed packets, so why not start planning your 2017 garden? Dig out last year's garden vegetable map; you do keep one don't you? Plan your plant rotation as you buy seeds or when you plant. I use graph paper and take it out to the garden with me as I plant, marking each row with the plant name. Plant rotation is very important for healthy plants as it helps prevent disease. Plants from different families use different nutrients from the soil. If you have a small garden spot and cannot move your plantings around consider doing some container gardening to let the soil recover for a season or two.

As I peruse my seed catalogs I always look for a new variety to try, although I plant almost all heirloom vegetables, there are many varieties I have not grown. I try one different tomato variety each year and look for different hot pepper varieties along with the standard vegetable seeds I purchase. A few years ago I started growing Ghost (Bhut Jolokia) peppers with a 970,000 Scoville unit rating. Continuing with the hunt for the hottest pepper, I found seeds for Carolina Reapers, 1,500,000+ Scovilles. I use them in salsa with other milder cultivars. One cultivar I always plant is Chinese Five Color, which is still hot but also ornamental, pictured to the right. When handling the super-hot cultivars of peppers I always wear gloves and never touch my face. Last year I actually had to wear glasses and a painter's mask when cutting up the peppers to put in the food dryer. Do I put them in salads or eat them as a snack? Absolutely not! Only the boldest of the bold or someone who wants to be on YouTube would do this.

My favorite cherry type tomato is Blondköpfchen (aka Little Blonde Girl) an East German heirloom variety. They are small golden yellow fruits about 1 inch, grow in giant clusters and have an excellent sweet taste. It is like eating candy in the garden. Riesentraube, also from Germany, is a delicious red cherry type tomato. It is also a high-yielding plant with 1" fruits grown in clusters; excellent flavor. One plant of these cherry type tomatoes will produce an abundance of tomatoes. I made the mistake of putting in two of each one year and had more tomatoes than I could use or give away.

Not only is gardening a great way to enjoy the Minnesota summer but it is also an excellent way to have fresh vegetables for salads, meals and snacks, not to mention preserving for the winter months.

EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS

February & March – No education portion for the Isanti Co. MGs
Burst Into Spring Event, Saturday, March 11.

Spring Series classes presented by Chisago Co. MG. All classes start at 6 pm at the North Branch Sr. Center. Contact the Chisago Co. MGs for registration information.

- Feb 14, Berries 101
- Feb 28, Pruning Apple Trees

- March 14, Butterfly Boot Camp
- March 28, Adapting to a Changing World
- April 11, Vertical Gardening
- April 25, Hugelkultur

Saturday, Feb. 18, 9 am – Noon. “Berry Growing for the Home Garden” presented by UMN Graduate Students in the Applies Plant Sciences program, Seth Wannemuehler and Nathan Hecht. Learn how to grow blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and honeyberries at this Kanabec Co. MG sponsored event. Located at Trailview School, Commons Area, 200 9th St. Mora. There is no fee for this class but free will offering will help cover expenses. Pre-registration is requested by Feb 15: Call Mandi Yoder at Mora Community Ed Office 320.679.6200 or email myoder@moraschools.org OR call Kim Pautsch at Kanabec Co. Ext office 320.679.6440 or email kim.pautsch@co.kanabec.mn.us.

Thursday, March 30, 7 pm. Seed Starting Community Education Class at the Hinckley-Finlayson High School, Hinckley. Small fee for supplies. Register at Hinckley-Finlayson High School Community Ed office at 320.384.7325 or email commed@hf.k12.mn.us.

Monday, April 3, 7 pm – Seed Starting Community Education Class at Willow River High School, Willow River. Fee: \$5. Register at Willow River Comm. Ed office 218.372.3131, press # for the directory and type in ext. 373735 or email bdresel@willowriver.k12.mn.us. Pine County MGs will present both hands-on seminars where you will learn all you need to know for successful germination.

MN Landscape Arboretum - go to the website to register for classes.

Pruning Young Trees: Success Stories Start at Planting!

Saturday, February 4, 9:30– noon. Chad Giblin, Research Fellow and ISA Certified Arborist in the Department of Forest Resources at the University of Minnesota. Timely pruning of young trees is critical to their long-term success! Weather permitting, you will spend time out in the Arboretum collections for demonstration and on-site instruction.

Plant Selection for the Winter Garden

Saturday, February 25, 9 - 11:30 a.m.

Jim Calkins, landscape and production horticulturist, Research Information Director at Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association and former University of Minnesota instructor. As much as we love our gardens in the summer, there is an undeniably long winter season in which we still wish to enjoy them. You will leave with inspiration, plant lists, and a renewed motivation to enjoy your winter garden. Dress for the weather!

Sponsored by the **MN Horticultural Society** - go to the website to register.

Thursday, Feb. 9, 7 – 8:15 pm. Webinar: “Attracting Pollinator & Beneficial Insects to your Vegetable Garden. Learn about which garden vegetables are dependent upon pollination by bees and how to plant for, and attract bees to your garden. Heather Holm is a landscape designer and consultant specializing in pollinator landscapes and native landscape restorations. She is the author of Pollinators of Native Plants.

Thursday, March 16, 7 - 8:00 pm. “Bees, An Identification and Native Plant Forage Guide”, Book release event and presentation. Lakewood Cemetery's Mausoleum and Reception Center, 3600 Hennepin Avenue South Minneapolis, MN 55408.

Tuesday, March 28, 7 - 8:00 pm. Webinar: “Sowing Vegetable Seeds Outdoors in Early Spring”. Try the mini-greenhouse, winter-sowing method to get a jump on spring vegetable

planting. Instead of planting seeds into the ground, you will learn to construct recyclables using plastic milk containers to make mini-greenhouses. Instructor, Michelle Mero Riedel, is a professional photographer, master gardener, and has been teaching gardening classes for 16 years

2017 Horticulture Days

March 4, Garden Expo, Chisago Co. MG. Keynote speakers Jan & Bob Welch, MN DNR present “How to Attract the Wildlife you Love and How to Get Rid of the Wildlife you Don’t”. North Branch High School

March 4, Let’s Get Growing, Dakota Co. MG. Keynote: Joe Barten, Research Conservationist, Dakota Co. Soil & Water Conservation District presents “Landscaping for Clean Water”. Rosemount Community Center.

March 11, Burst Into Spring, Isanti Co. MG, Armed Forces Reserve & Community Center in Cambridge, 8 am – 3:30 pm. Keynote speaker: Joel Karsten presents “Straw Bale Gardens – Breaking New Ground!”

March 25, Let’s Get Growing, Pine Co. MG – Keynote: Sam Bauer “Low Maintenance & Bee Friendly Lawns”. Pine City High School

March 25, Learn & Grow Garden Expo, Sherburne Co. MG. Big Lake High School

April 8, Home Landscape & Garden Fair, Anoka Co. MG. Opening Session: Betty Ann Addison, Gardens of Rice Creek presents “Fascinating Rock Gardens & Alpine Plants”. Bunker Hills Activity Center

Check local nursery websites for classes: Green Barn (www.greenbarngardencenter.com); Nelson Nursery (www.nelsonnursery.com) Mickman Brothers Nursery (<http://www.mickman.com>); MN State Horticultural Society (www.northerngardener.org); MN Landscape Arboretum (www.arboretum.umn.edu)

Poppy Irwin, Editor

“The mission of the University of Minnesota Master Gardener program is to support Extension by providing volunteers trained in horticulture to educate the public with research based information on the best practices in consumer horticulture and environmental stewardship.”