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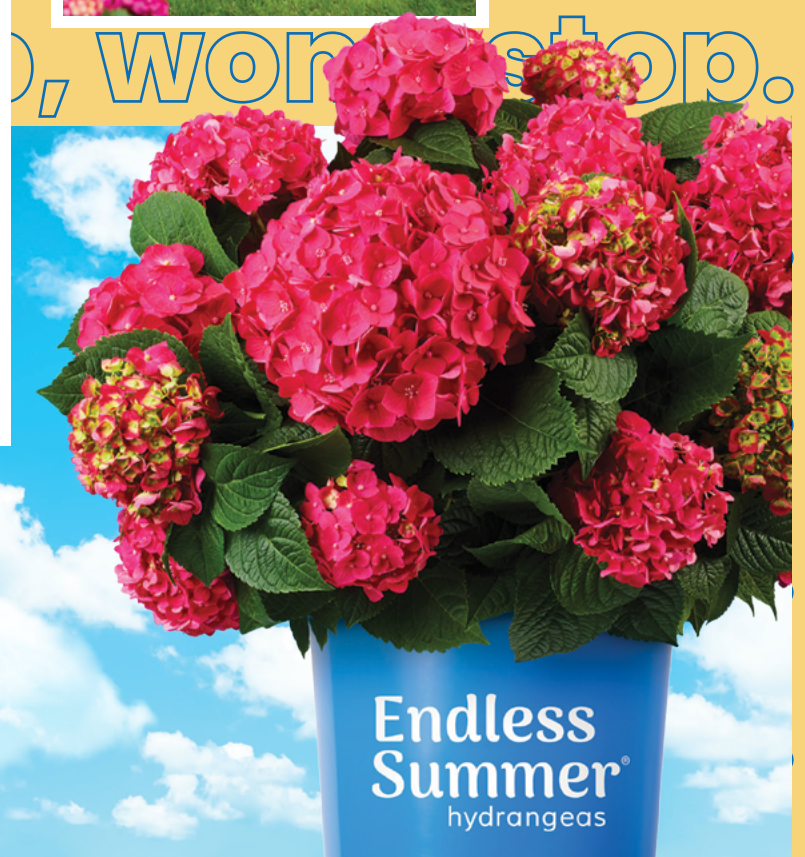
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Contents

SPRING 2025 / VOLUME 153 / NUMBER 1



38



53



56

SEASONAL GUIDE

- 10 Bloodroot**
A spring native to dye for.
- 12 Soil Blocking**
Give your seeds a strong start.
- 13 Hooray, Hori Hori**
Why this wildly popular garden tool is a northern gardener favorite.
- 14 Unlock a Keyhole Garden**
Create this African-inspired raised bed in your yard.
- 16 What to Prune Now**
Trees and shrubs are dormant and ready for shaping.
- 18 Vegetable Garden Plan**
Anyone can grow fresh, healthy food at home.
- 20 Hail the Hellebore**
The first flowers of spring are spectacular.
- 22 Hot Pots**
Cutting edge container garden trends.
- 24 Trollius**
Have a ball with globe-flowers.

GARDEN FOR GOOD

- 28 A Garden at the Heart of its Community**
Face to Face's school garden is growing strong.

GARDEN GREENER

- 32 Think Small**
Even the tiniest planting can delight pollinators and people.

GARDEN TO TABLE

- 53 A Passport to Flavor**
Cultivate exotic staples from around the world.

IN EVERY ISSUE

- 5 Editor's Letter**
- 61 Gardener's Market**
- 64 Growing Together**

SPOTLIGHT

- 35 Zone Defense**
Your garden's climate is more than a number.
- 38 Peony Country**
The Kubes family dream is in full bloom.
- 46 Global Gardens**
Growing crops from around the world in cold-climate gardens.
- 51 Chidi's Garden**
A Nigerian master gardener grows African and American food and flowers.
- 56 Framing a Masterpiece**
Landscaping a legendary property the 'Wright' way.

ON THE COVER:

Nigerian native and Fridley, Minn., resident Nnenna Osuagwu harvests African eggplant for a family event. The fruit is considered a token of goodwill, symbolizing blessings and fruitfulness. *Photo by Gail Hudson.*

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SPRING 2025 *Contributors*

Michelle Bruhn is a Minnesota gardener, writer, speaker, local food advocate and coauthor of *Small-Scale Homesteading*.
forksinthedirt.com | @forksinthedirt



Meg Cowden is a garden writer, speaker and author of *Plant Grow Harvest Repeat* based in Orono, Minn.
seedtofork.com | @seedtofork



Amy Grisak is a garden writer who loves conducting horticultural experiments at her home on the Montana prairie.
amygrisak.com | @amygrisak



Michael Heger owned niche perennial nursery Ambergate Gardens and now lectures, writes and consults on issues related to gardening in northern regions. He is the coauthor of *Growing Perennials in Cold Climates*.



Gail Hudson is a horticulturist, Emmy award-winning journalist, writer and video producer and avid gardener in Minneapolis.
@gailhudsonmedia



Eric Johnson is a longtime contributor to *Northern Gardener*, blogger and lifelong gardener in Roseville, Minn.
gardendrama.com | @gardendrama



Amy Kainz is an organic flower and vegetable gardener specializing in pollinator-friendly landscaping in central Minnesota.
@milkweed.and.daisies



Diane McGann is an award-winning writer who maintains perennial and shade gardens on 4 ½ acres in Stillwater, Minn.



Kathy Purdy is an award-winning writer gardening on 10 acres in upstate New York.
coldclimategardening.com | @kopurdy



Jennifer Rensenbrink grows a host of delicious treats in her south Minneapolis garden.
@jenniferrensenbrink



Madeline Riebe is a florist, forager and social media manager and creative services designer with trendy, Minneapolis-based TangleTown Gardens.
tangletowngardens.com | @madelinecreateswithplants



Mary Lahr Schier is a longtime Minnesota garden writer.
mynortherngarden.com | @mynortherngarden_mary



Beth Stetenfeld is a Wisconsin-based garden blogger and writer, native plant enthusiast and a master naturalist volunteer and instructor.
plantpostings.com | @plantposter



Taylor Tinkham is an editorial illustrator, Hennepin County master gardener volunteer and food preservation consultant living in south Minneapolis.
taylortinkham.com | @ttink.art



Tracy Walsh is a professional photographer. She has been photographing the plants and people of Bailey Nurseries since 2015.
tracywalshphoto.com | @tracywalshphoto



Delicate, red crocus stigmas double as a delicious cooking spice: saffron.



OUR SCHTICK IS NORTHERN GARDENING—it's been that way for 159 years. We know subzero temperatures, sticky summers and the secret to squeezing every last juicy drop out of an all-too-short growing season.

Our contributing writers and photographers all live and garden in USDA Hardiness Zones 3, 4 or 5. Our staff and office are rooted in Minnesota. In a sea of gardening information, we proudly stay in our trusted lane—we know cold-climate gardening inside and out and love sharing how you can successfully grow food and flowers in the North.

But it's time to buckle up because, in this issue, we're venturing beyond our usual geographic boundaries and traveling the globe, bringing the best of the planet back to our cold-climate gardens. We're excited to expand our minds and gardens this spring, inspired by innovative northern gardeners like Chidi Chidozie, Meg Cowden, Amy Grisak and countless others who are daring to find creative ways to grow unexpected spices, vegetables, fruits and flowers from our friends around the world.

Move over, petunias and potatoes. Fenugreek and flax are in town. And with some tips from the experts, gardeners of all skill levels can add these beautifully unique and delicious new plants to our home gardens this spring.

Rebecca Swee

Rebecca Swee, *Editor in Chief*
 editor@northerngardener.org



HEADSHOT: TRACY WALSH PHOTOGRAPHY | SAFFRON AND CHICKPEA PHOTOS: MEG COWDEN
 EGGPLANT PHOTO: GAIL HUDSON | KEYHOLE GARDEN PHOTO: AMY GRISAK

IN THIS Issue



« Global Gardens Initiative on the University of Minnesota campus shows how fluted pumpkin, lemongrass and other treasured African and Asian crops can thrive in the Upper Midwest. **PG. 46**

» Orono, Minn.-based Meg Cowden shares how we, like she, can grow fenugreek, flax, saffron and more global flavors in our own backyards. **PG. 53**



« Avid gardener Amy Grisak has found success growing basil in African-inspired keyhole gardens at her Montana home. **PG. 14**

Minnesota State Horticultural Society Spring Garden Gala

Friday, April 25th

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tinyurl.com/2025gardengala

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plant lists & be the first to hear
about next year's event.



Community Events Calendar

Find gardening-related events across the Upper Midwest. See a sampling of upcoming events below and bookmark the full calendar online—updated weekly!

[northerngardener.org/
community-events-calendar](https://northerngardener.org/community-events-calendar)



March 28
KNITTING NEAR NATURE
Eloise Butler Wildflower
Garden and Bird Sanctuary

April 12
HOME LANDSCAPE AND
GARDEN FAIR
Anoka County Extension
Master Gardeners

April 15
HOUSEPLANT LAB
Chisago County Master Gardeners

May 10
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May 13
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Anoka County Master Gardeners

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MSHS STAFF

Lara Lau-Schommer Executive Director
Rebecca Swee Lead Content Creator
Erik Bergstrom Marketing Manager + Digital Strategist
Anna Marhefke Programs + Outreach Manager
Mary Riehle Office Manager

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A note from the MINNESOTA STATE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

It all started with the apple. Back in 1866, we took on the challenge of growing this tasty fruit in our northern climate. Over time, we spread deep roots, championing not only fruit growing but also the many areas of horticulture in rural and urban Minnesota and beyond.

The longest running horticultural society in the United States, we're a trusted resource for thousands of northern gardeners. Serving all ages and skill levels across USDA Hardiness Zones 3, 4 and 5 (Minnesota, Wisconsin, the Dakotas, Michigan, Montana, Alaska, Canada and more), we offer cold-climate gardening resources to support our members, garden clubs, plant societies, program participants, the horticultural industry and anyone who wants to grow plants in our challenging northern climate and positively impact the environment.

Deeply rooted in our mission to cultivate a healthy, diverse, sustainable community of northern gardeners, we publish *Northern Gardener*® magazine and grow cold-climate gardeners through educational classes, events and two signature community outreach programs, Garden-in-a-Box and Minnesota Green. *Let's grow!*



A teaching garden at Relentless Academy in Brooklyn Center, Minn. Learn more on pg. 64



Lara Lau-Schommer
Lara Lau-Schommer,
 Executive Director



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 Farmington, MN

Spring At Last Greenhouse
 Duluth, MN

Terra Garden Center
 Lakeville, MN

The Garden By The Woods
 Chanhassen, MN

Wild Birds Unlimited
 Woodbury, MN

Winter Greenhouse
 Winter, WI

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Spring is here!

**Plants, projects and
tools for the season**



Soft, marshmallowy peony buds open to reveal big, beautiful blooms from May through June.

PHOTO: TRACY WALSH PHOTOGRAPHY

BLOODROOT

*A spring native
to dye for*

PG. 10

SOIL BLOCKING

*A worthwhile
garden practice*

PG. 12

HOORAY, HORI HORI

*Unearthing the hype around
this popular garden tool*

PG. 13

HAIL THE HELLEBORE

*One of spring's earliest-
blooming perennials*

PG. 20

A SPRING NATIVE TO DYE FOR

STORY AND PHOTO
JENNIFER RENSENBRINK

ILLUSTRATION
ADAM MILLER



Bloodroot is rabbit- and deer-proof, pollinator-supporting and one of the first flowers to bloom in spring. What's not to love?

IF YOU DON'T YET HAVE this easy-to-grow early spring native plant in your garden, you really should. While bloodroot might seem like a very goth name, this plant is anything but dark. Its cheerful white blooms are among the first to emerge each spring. It's technically not an ephemeral because its foliage lasts into mid-summer, but it blooms alongside ephemerals. The name comes from its red, tuber-like root, which can be used as a red dye for fabric.

Bloodroot is a slow-spreading, Minnesota-native perennial. Tuberous roots make it very drought-tolerant—once established, it requires no care whatsoever. Rabbits and deer don't touch it; the red tuber that gives the plant its name is also toxic to wildlife. Plant it under a tree, where it will receive sunlight first thing in the spring and shade thereafter. It prefers dry soil, so leave it out of wet beds and rain gardens.

Bloodroot can be tricky to start from seed, since it requires a double dormancy

(at least two cold periods with a warmer stint in the middle). You're better off purchasing the plants—most native plant nurseries stock them in spring. Keep your expectations low the first year, since bloodroot may not bloom at all and just go straight to dormancy. But your patience will be rewarded the following spring.

Bloodroot is an important food source for emerging wild queen bees as they look to create their broods for the year. It has a cloak-like leaf that wraps itself around the flower bud at night to keep it from freezing. After blooming, ants are attracted to the nectar-covered seeds, which they carry to their nests, resulting in occasional plants popping up many feet from where you originally planted it.

Bloodroot also spreads by rhizomes, but not aggressively. It plays nicely with other native plants, with the large, umbrella-like leaves fading away just as summer heat really kicks in.



Bloodroot's Best Attributes

Deer-proof

Rabbit-proof

Low maintenance

Shade tolerant

Spreads slowly

Supports pollinators:

The flowers open during the day and close at night, protecting the pollen from freezing temperatures.



HOW TO MAKE

BLOODROOT DYE

The red sap in the roots of bloodroot was traditionally used by Native Americans to make dye for both clothing and baskets.

Fabrics dyed with bloodroot will tend to be a rich orange or brownish color.

Although results may vary quite a bit, you can create this dye from your own plants at home. Start with some yarn or fabric, such as natural cotton, wool or linen (not synthetic).

1

Gather 1-2 cups of small, fresh pieces of bloodroot and soak them in a large pot of water for at least 2 hours.

2

Bring the mixture to a boil, add fabric or yarn and simmer for 30 minutes.

3

Remove the fabric and stir alum or sodium sulfate in with the dye to help it adhere to the fabric.

4

Add the fabric back in and simmer for 30 more minutes. Allow to cool fully. Then remove and rinse the fabric with cool water.

Note:

Bloodroot sap is toxic and may irritate your skin—wear gloves.







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<p>Spring Plant Sale Saturday, May 17, 9am-2pm Hopkins Pavilion, 11000 Excelsior Blvd., Hopkins, MN</p> <p>Offering perennials, annuals, natives, vegetables, herbs & more!</p> <p>20,000+ Plants—More than ever before! One of the largest plant sales in Hennepin County. Bring your wagon!</p> <p>Fully staffed by Master Gardener Volunteers ready to answer all your gardening questions. Free parking!</p> <p>To learn more: Hennepinmastergardeners.org/events/spring-plant-sale/</p>	<p>Learning Garden Tour Saturday, July 12, 8:30am-4:30pm</p> <p>Explore 10 inspiring gardens!</p> <p>This year's self-guided tour showcases 10 gardens in the southwest suburbs of Hennepin County. Join us for inspiration, education, and garden-related shopping.</p> <p>Cost: \$15 in advance; \$20 day of tour.</p> <p>Discounts for groups of 10 or more. Children under 12 free with a paying adult. Tour held rain or shine.</p> <p>To buy tickets & learn more: Hennepinmastergardeners.org/events/learning-garden-tour/</p>
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MASTER GARDENER VOLUNTEER PROGRAM | HENNEPIN COUNTY

DIY

Think Outside the Pot *with Soil Blocks*

This is one of those crazy-looking garden practices that actually work.

STORY AND PHOTOS **MICHELLE BRUHN**

IF YOU START SOME OF YOUR GARDEN FROM SEED, there are endless reasons to give soil blocking a try. This practice creates an outstanding environment for seedling roots to emerge and thrive. Roots are air-pruned at the soil's edge, creating a more robust root mass closer to the main plant and reducing transplant shock and stunting. There's also no chance of roots circling and girdling themselves. The soil blocks also save space and handle overwatering much better than potted seedlings. It's one of the most eco-friendly ways to start seedlings indoors because you're eliminating individual plastic pots.

The process requires a saturated soil blend and a soil block press. Getting the soil blend right is the trickiest part. I prefer to mix my own, but I have had decent luck adding compost to premixed seed-starting blends to add the required stickiness to the soil.

Presses come in a few different sizes depending on what kind of seeds you're starting. For example, use the press that makes four 2-inch by 2-inch soil blocks to fit 36 soil blocks in a common 1020 seed starting tray. Different companies sell different sizes, and most of them nest into larger sizes because the presses also create different sized seed-planting divots called dibbles.



Pollinator Paks

Planting for pollinators made easy.

STORY **ERIK BERGSTROM**
PHOTO **GLACIAL RIDGE GROWERS**

PICK UP A SIX-PACK OF PLANTS for specific pollinators at your local garden center this spring. Monarch butterflies, rusty-patched bumblebees, ruby-throated hummingbirds... it seems we've been seeing fewer of each lately. Why? Loss of food and habitat is the main reason, though it's also important to connect gardens across urban and suburban areas to provide easier access for pollinators.

That's why the Minnesota State Horticultural Society partnered with Glacial Ridge Growers in Glenwood, Minn., to bring carefully selected native perennials to more home gardeners in a cost-conscious package. This spring, find four Pollinator Pak options—bee, butterfly, hummingbird and monarch—at participating garden centers and plant sales. A portion of every Pollinator Pak purchased is put right back into the Horticultural Society's valuable community outreach programs, bringing gardening resources and education to our neighbors throughout the Upper Midwest.



Getting the soil close to the consistency of wet cement allows you to adequately compress it into the blocks.



This leaves you with surprisingly strong soil blocks.



Soil blocking creates an outstanding environment for seedling roots to emerge and thrive.



The best part? The resulting seedlings will thrive in your garden.

➔ For soil blocking tips and a soil-blend recipe, visit northerngardener.org/soil-blocking

Hooray, Hori Hori

The increasingly popular Japanese soil blade is the Swiss Army knife of garden tools.

STORY AND PHOTO **SUSAN BARBIERI**



GARDENERS IN THE KNOW are digging a highly versatile hand tool first popularized in Japan: the hori hori knife. The word “hori” means “to dig” in Japanese. The blade is serrated on one side, sharp on the other and pointed at the end.

Leah Van Tassel, manager of Egg|Plant Urban Farm Supply in St. Paul, Minn., says the hori hori knife is her favorite tool because it is ergonomic, durable and endlessly versatile.

Hori hori knives come in different sizes to suit tasks ranging from delicate to difficult, and they are usually made of stainless steel or carbon steel. Leah notes that hand spades or shovels are often either too wide or too dull to get into the ground, but the pointy, sharp hori hori knife makes the work easy.

The bigger hori hori knives are useful

for dividing perennials or trimming plants back. Leah likes to use the small Nisaku knife for harvesting lettuce and other tender greens. “I’ve got my seed packet in my hand and this tool and I’m harvesting, planting and weeding all at the same time,” she says.

If you’re considering purchasing a hori hori knife, Leah recommends that you hold them to ensure a comfortable grip and feel the differences between materials. “If you need something really sturdy, you want the bigger one,” she says, adding that the larger stainless steel knives also have depth measurements on the blades. “You want this one if you’re planting bulbs or tubers and you want to be more precise.”

I like to be able to keep my tool in my hand as I’m doing everything from maybe planting some seeds but also dealing with some weeds or cutting something. The hori hori knife, to me, is the ultimate all-in-one because of the cutting edge plus the ability to dig.

— **LEAH VAN TASSEL**
MANAGER, EGGLANT
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UNLOCK A KEYHOLE GARDEN

A unique raised bed design with deep African roots has a place in northern gardens.

STORY AND PHOTOS **AMY GRISAK**

WHILE THERE MAY NOT BE A PERFECT GARDEN DESIGN FOR EVERYONE, a keyhole garden is a top contender. Years ago, a friend showed me pictures of her tall, circular stone garden that resembled a pie with a slice removed, and I immediately fell in love with the concept. After building my first keyhole garden, the greatest change I'd make is to have more of them.

People in sub-Saharan Africa initially created keyhole gardens as a means for families to grow their food despite the hot, dry conditions with little to no viable soil. These self-sustaining gardens are designed to hold onto precious moisture and are critical to food security because they utilize the materials at hand, including incorporating kitchen scraps that would otherwise go to waste. The good news is they work equally well for those of us who garden in northern regions and strive to grow as much as possible in our short season.

Ideally, a keyhole garden should be 6 feet in diameter, at the most, to allow access to the entire garden. Its circular design leaves a triangular-shaped section open and has a compost basket at the center. This provides adequate space for plants and permits nutrients from the compost to feed the entire system.

What you use to build the garden is entirely up to you. The original idea was to use materials on hand, such as bricks, logs, wooden planks, corrugated

metal or even sticks to create a wattle fence-type enclosure. But the concept can be easily adapted to a more artistic sensibility. For example, you can marry function and beauty by setting wine bottles on their sides and mortaring them in place to make a beautiful enclosure.

It took roughly a week to create my first keyhole garden, which was about 4 feet wide and 30 inches tall. I used my favorite building medium, rock. You could build the garden a few inches shorter, but you need space to hold enough organic matter to maintain the structure's water-holding qualities. Feel free to construct a taller bed if it's more convenient or comfortable for you.

For the compost basket, hardware fabric or chicken wire is easily formed into a 12- to 18-inch cylinder. Line the basket exterior with newspaper to prevent the soil from falling into the empty bucket before any kitchen scraps have been added. The paper eventually breaks down and is no longer needed once organic materials fill the basket.

Because of its height, a keyhole garden would require a fair amount of soil to fill it completely. But one of the best parts of this design is the ability to create your own healthy,



productive soil through a combination of sheet mulching with a hügelkultur spin. Hügelkultur is a permaculture technique that involves burying chunky organic materials, such as branches or logs, and planting on top of it. These materials slowly break down, holding onto precious moisture in the process.

A keyhole garden shares a similar concept, although on a smaller scale. Because there is a significant amount of space to fill in the tall bed, I added branches to the bottom, then continued to fill the circle with layers of green and brown materials, such as kitchen waste, garden debris and leaves, similar to sheet mulching. The goal is to fill the space with organic matter.

Once the bed is close to full, add 6 inches of a combination of soil and compost on top to provide a planting medium.

If you make this garden between the late fall to early spring months, the contents will settle, requiring you to add a few more inches of soil and compost before planting.

Part of the keyhole garden's magic is the composting basket that feeds the plants in the garden. Add kitchen scraps



Top: Kale and other greens surround a keyhole garden full of heat-loving pepper and basil plants thriving with the bed's rich soil and consistent moisture. **Middle:** Kitchen scraps, added to the basket nightly, break down quickly. What feeds us also feeds the soil. **Bottom:** Planted in late spring, this keyhole garden is ready for a bountiful season.


and brown materials, such as shredded newspaper, as soon as you create the basket, and continue to add throughout the season. One thing that I noticed is that during the height of the summer, the compost broke down rapidly, utilizing almost daily kitchen scraps, particularly when there are worms added to the system.

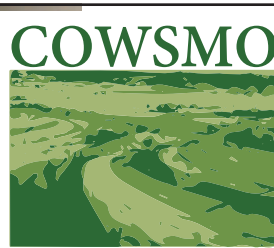
Retaining water is a critical function of a keyhole garden, yet it's also an important aspect of ensuring that the compost breaks down efficiently. Where I live in Great Falls, Montana, we receive less than 15 inches of precipitation on average, but I am terrible about watering the keyhole garden. Fortunately, if I can keep the compost basket moist as well as the layers of organic material below it, the entire garden benefits.

Keyhole gardens are not only a conversation piece, but they are also a self-sustaining system that nurtures a bounty of healthy plants in a small, productive kitchen garden at your fingertips.



How to build a keyhole garden: northerngardener.org/keyholegarden






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Q & A

What should I prune this time of year?

The late winter and early spring dormant period is ideal for pruning trees and shrubs. Look for dead or diseased branches, those rubbing against each other and any oddballs taking away from the plant's form.

WHAT TO PRUNE

Trees that can be pruned in late winter include maple, oak, elm, hawthorn, mountain ash, butternut, walnut, birch, beech, ironwood and linden. A word of caution: To prevent oak wilt, don't prune oaks after April 1. Shrubs that benefit from a late-winter pruning include alpine currant, barberry, buffaloberry, burning bush, dogwood, honeysuckle, panicle and smooth hydrangeas, ninebark, purple-leaf sand cherry, smoke bush and sumac.

HOW TO PRUNE

I still remember words of advice given to me years ago at a pruning workshop: "Prune so that a bird can fly through it." I've followed that mantra ever since and it's served me well. So don't be shy—prune energetically. That shrub or tree will quickly fill in and look better than ever. Washington County master gardener and pruning expert Paul Richtman also recommends that you "cut off stubs; leaving a stub is the number one mistake beginners make."

SHRUBS

Assess each shrub for form and note any damaged branches. If it looks pleasing and its size is appropriate, leave it alone. For others, prune out any wayward stems and then thin them out to create a pleasing structure. For overgrown shrubs, follow the rule of thirds. First, remove the top third of the outer branches and then cut one-third of the branches down to the ground, choosing the thickest ones. Do this each year and then, over a three-year period, you will have rejuvenated your shrub.



YOUNG TREES

Watch for co-leaders (two or more branches both seeking dominance). Cut off the weaker or shorter of these. Doing this will help prevent your tree from failing when it reaches maturity. Then remove any dead wood, sprouts and crowded branches.

BE CAREFUL

Leave the tall trees to experts. After watching several videos of tree mishaps at industry conferences, I'm a firm believer in saving my gardening dollars for the pros who can shape my trees and stay safe in the process. Please do the same.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Do not prune spring-flowering shrubs and trees now. This includes lilacs, magnolias, forsythias, azaleas, crabapples, redbuds, cherries and pears. You don't want to cut off their flower buds and miss the upcoming show.

Not everything needs pruning. Look at the structure—is it open and balanced, an appropriate height and width with no unruly branches? If so, leave it alone.

It's spring! Isn't it nice to finally get out into the garden and have a rewarding task to do? Look over your trees and shrubs, prune what is needed, and take pride in getting the gardening season off to a good start.

ASK THE EXPERT

Have a burning gardening question? Send it to editor@notherngardener.org for a chance to be featured here. Diane McGann is a University of Minnesota Tree Care Advisor, master gardener and Ask Extension panelist.



Get more pruning tips at notherngardener.org/quick-pruning-tips



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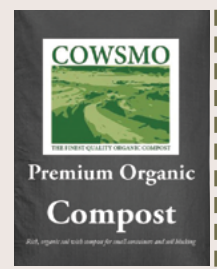


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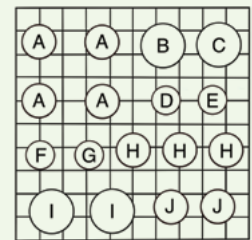
STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS **AMY KAINZ**



This simple, approachable 5-foot by 5-foot bed is perfect for both beginners and seasoned gardeners ready to grow their own fresh food. With this straightforward design, anyone can grow a mix of flavorful produce and fresh herbs with minimal effort in the North. Beginners will appreciate this design's ease of use, while experienced gardeners can customize it to suit individual taste. Whether you're growing crisp greens, hearty vegetables or delicious herbs, this setup easily delivers bountiful harvests.

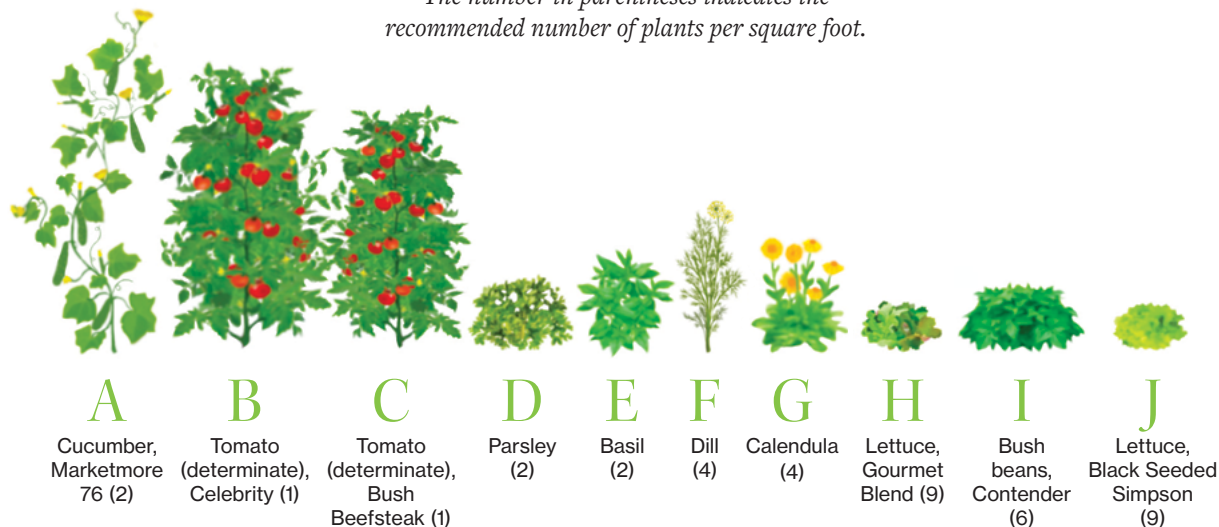
The Plan

Planted in the ground or a raised bed, this layout works well in a variety of gardening spaces, making it an excellent choice for small backyards or community plots. Thoughtful design maximizes space, allowing you to grow a wide range of produce and herbs effortlessly. As the weather warms, this garden setup provides an inviting way to nurture your food-growing skills and enjoy the rewards of spring and summer gardening.



The Plants

The number in parentheses indicates the recommended number of plants per square foot.



EASY PICKINGS

Homegrown food is tasty and nutritious. Some crops are easier than others, however. For nearly guaranteed vegetable garden success, try these five.

STORY AND PHOTOS **MARY LAHR SCHIER**

CUCUMBERS

Cucumbers need a climbing structure—something as simple as a tomato cage or wooden frame with strings or chicken wire on it. Cukes need fertilizer, so give them a good dose of compost at planting and liquid fertilizer every couple weeks as they grow. They produce a lot of foliage, so look carefully as you start harvesting. Cucumbers tend to hide among the leaves until they are huge.

Best varieties: Marketmore 76 for salad cucumbers or Parisian gherkin for pickling.



TOMATOES

Tomatoes are a first-time garden must. Consider bush (determinate) varieties over climbing (indeterminate) ones. Bush varieties reach their full height, anywhere from 2 to 5 feet, set their fruit and are done. Enjoy big harvests using a tomato cage or simple pole for support. Many grow well in large containers. Tomatoes take a long time to start from seed, so purchase plants at a local garden center or farmers' market. Don't plant them outside until June, and choose your sunniest spot.

Favorite cherry varieties: Cherry Falls, Zebra Cherry and Tumbler.

Best slicers: Celebrity, Marglobe Improved and Bush Beefsteak.



GREEN BEANS

With a single packet of bean seeds, you will be picking from late July until September. Beans need warm soil to grow so wait to plant seeds until night-time temperatures are in the mid-60s or higher, generally mid-June. Seeds will germinate in 10 days or less. If you have rabbits in your area, fence your seedlings because bunnies love nothing more than chomping off the top of a young bean plant. Beans will be ready to harvest in 50 to 70 days. For easiest harvests, grow reliable bush bean varieties, such as Provider, French Filet or Contender. If space is limited, grow pole bean varieties. These require a trellis to climb, but they will continue to produce beans until frost.

Best pole options: Blue Lake, Ideal Market or Rattlesnake.

HERBS

Parsley, basil, mint, oregano, dill and chives are all easy to grow and add complex flavor to your cooking. Buy them as plants and put them in containers in a sunny spot near your kitchen door for easy access. Mint, oregano and chives tend to spread and are best grown in containers. Other herbs can go in your garden or raised beds. Herbs need sun but otherwise do well in so-so soil and dry conditions. Many herbs are larval host plants for butterflies and pollinators—an extra benefit.

LETTUCE

In late April or early May, plant starts (mini plants) or spread lettuce seeds on the top of the soil and cover with a light sprinkling of soil. Lettuce likes cool (but not cold) weather. Keep seedlings moist and plant more seeds or plants every couple of weeks from May to mid-June. Then start up again in mid-August for fall salads.



 **More vegetable garden tips at northerngardener.org/6-veggie-tips**



Hail *the* Hellebore

This mighty perennial pierces through in early spring to serve up some of the season's first flowers.

STORY **MICHAEL HEGER**

IN AN ARTICLE I WROTE FOR THIS VERY PUBLICATION NEARLY 35 YEARS AGO, I described Christmas Rose (*Helleborus niger*) as “the most reliable and dependable member of this genus for northern gardens.” Since then, climate patterns have dramatically changed, our winters have become far less severe, and we’ve seen many breeding advances in these perennials that have expanded the list of options suitable for colder regions. Today, these highly desirable plants are suitable for all but the coldest gardening areas.

Hellebore species are native to south central Europe and western Asia. They are often found growing alongside woody plants that provide some degree of shade, suggesting that they will relish cool, moist, partially shaded locations in our cultivated landscapes. They perform very well in neutral to alkaline soils, especially if improved with organic matter. Though slow to establish, plants are long-lived and resent disturbance. Mature clumps tend to self-sow in the landscape. For northern gardeners, spring planting is strongly advised as that allows a full growing season for plants to settle in. Though described as evergreen, the reality in northern regions is that hellebore foliage is often negatively altered by our winters if not protected by snow cover or mulch. Many northern gardeners remove last year’s foliage prior to the bloom period in early spring.

Looking for hellebores that will thrive in northern regions? Christmas Rose and its derivatives are great candidates. They will not bloom during the holiday season like they do further south, but they will be among the first perennials to bloom in spring. Modern Lenten rose (*Helleborus x hybridus*) varieties

offer a wide range of flower colors in single, semi-double and full-double flower forms. The blooms on many of these are borne side- to up-facing, as opposed to the down-facing blooms of older varieties. It is much easier to fully appreciate the exquisite blooms when you don’t have to lay on your belly to get a good view! Among the good performers are hybrids from the following groups: Helleborus Gold Collection®, Honeymoon® Series, Wedding Party® Series and Winter Jewels® Series. The Frostkiss® and Winter Angel® Series are impressive, recent complex hybrids from breeding work in Europe. These varieties are recognized for their rich flower colors, generous floral displays and stunning, marbled foliage that adds interest throughout the growing season. No matter which varieties you choose to grow, always try to plant hellebores in a sheltered location offering some protection from winter winds. In locations without winter-long snow protection, some other form of winter mulch is advised. In northern climates, a very limited selection of hybrid hellebores, other than the Honeymoon® and Wedding Party® Series, are generally available in retail outlets. Therefore, some of these gems might have to be acquired via the mail order nursery trade.

NOTE: All hellebore plant parts are poisonous, with the rhizomes being most toxic. Bear this in mind if animals and children frequent your garden. In addition to their knockout spring show in outdoor landscapes, hellebore blossoms serve as long-lasting cut flowers, whether added to a spring arrangement or simply floated in a shallow dish or bowl. What a delight to have these in your home during the wild weather patterns that early spring often brings.



SHARE YOUR STORY

We’d love to hear the results of your hellebore growing efforts. Share your experience on Instagram and tag @mnhort.



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STORY **MADELINE RIEBE**

A

S THE FIRST CRABAPPLE

BLOSSOMS BEGIN TO SWELL and mornings fill with melodious robin songs, I know my inbox will soon fill with requests from clients eager to get a head start on their container installations. With such fleeting summers, we northerners know how to pack in and savor every moment spent outdoors during the season. As a container designer at TangleTown Gardens in Minneapolis, I have the pleasure of working with a variety of residential and commercial clients looking for custom botanical designs that meet both their practical needs and personal style. My job is to ensure their outdoor space serves as a cohesive extension of their home and lifestyle.

Just as trends in landscape design often mirror architectural movements, I like to think container design is similar to aesthetic shifts in interior design and fashion. Like a fabulous purse or a patterned throw pillow, trying out and switching up different combinations of plants and pottery requires relatively low commitment and offers lots of opportunities for personal expression and style evolution throughout the seasons. From effortless Mediterranean vibes to bold tone-on-tone color palettes and textural, free-spirited arrangements, I've noticed a few common themes shaping how we utilize our outdoor living spaces and create powerful first impressions with our doorstep planters.



Mediterranean moments

If the last few summers are any indication of how our climate is changing, it seems we had better get used to hot, sunny days and little rainfall being the norm. Still, most of us aren't ready to embrace full-on desert vibes. Not only does a Mediterranean garden style mirror the effortlessly chic, no-fuss interiors full of neutral textures and rustic finishes flooding our Instagram feeds lately, but it also offers a heat-loving and low-maintenance option that still looks lush and doesn't require you to be attached to a hose all summer long. Try adding an olive tree or bougainvillea vine as a drought-tolerant anchor plant paired with a colorful ground covering of succulents. Add culinary herbs such as rosemary, lavender and thyme to replace the fragrance typically provided by heavy-feeding flowers and to reinforce that calm, carefree lifestyle of sunny, seaside towns.



Wild-ish at heart

There are two environments that speak to every Midwesterner’s soul: a lush, conifer forest on a secluded lake and a prairie full of wildflowers and grass plumes swaying in the wind. Using trees, shrubs and other perennials as anchors in containers helps evoke a sense of place for apartment and condo dwellers who don’t have everyday access to the wild. It’s kind of like having a landscape in the sky and a reminder of and connection to familiar ecosystems rooted in your region. Finer textures, delicate flower heads and fast-growing vines give a sense of movement, mystery and romanticism that can’t be achieved with bold, rigid tropicals.



Color drenching

Color theory suggests that opposites on the color wheel usually complement each other well in design. While this remains true, a popular ask of the past few seasons involves using various tints and shades of just one or two colors to create a bold and cohesive look, rather than a rainbow of many different flowers. To enhance your home’s design, consider matching the color of your front door or trim with a harmonious palette of plants and pottery to make it really stand out. Don’t forget that green is a color and pops fabulously en masse against more urban, industrial settings.



More container gardening tips and inspiration at northerngardener.org/patio-and-deck-gardening-with-no-limits

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Trollius

Have a Ball with Globeflowers



One of the paler cultivars, *Trollius* × *cultorum* 'Cheddar' grows 2 1/2 to 3 feet tall, blooms later in the globeflower season and will rebloom if pruned back after the first flush of flowers.

This sphere- or cup-shaped buttercup cousin offers something a little different for the perennial garden. ►

STORY AND PHOTOS **KATHY PURDY**

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If you like buttercups, you'll want to grow globeflowers (*Trollius* sp.) in your garden. While both are part of the *Ranunculus* family, globeflowers look like buttercups on steroids, with taller and larger flowers. They come in a greater range of colors, from creamy yellow to golden orange, and unlike buttercups, they don't spread.

Hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 3 to 6, globeflowers do better in cooler climates. Most are native to moist mountain meadows. They prefer full sun, especially with abundant moisture, but will grow in half-day sun. Globeflowers grow in any decent garden soil, especially if mulched. They thrive in clay soil that typically doesn't get parched or beside an in-ground water feature. If planting near a body of water, plant one foot from the high-water mark.

Globeflowers bloom as the daffodils are finishing, and pair well with *Camassia*, which also enjoys moist soil. Hostas, ferns, primroses, Siberian irises, ligularia, astilbe and astrantia are other moisture-loving plants that make good garden bedfellows with globeflowers. Their bright globes create a pleasing color contrast with blue and purple flowers.

Some sources recommend cutting spent blooms back to basal foliage, fertilizing and watering well to get a second flush of bloom. I have never done this. In my experience the

foliage dies down by midsummer. This is not a problem because other perennials fill in the space. Before I realized this was normal, I thought all my plants had died! The only other problem I have had is confusing globeflower foliage with overzealously reseeding cranesbill foliage and pulling out a globeflower by mistake.

Spreading globeflower (*Trollius laxus*) is the only native globeflower available for purchase. It grows in similar conditions to the cultivated globeflowers but requires alkaline soil. Its common name indicates that it spreads; however, none of my sources confirm this and I haven't grown it myself.

Divide them in spring before the plants reach 4 inches tall or in late summer or early fall. Because globeflowers are slow-growing, it will take them a year to recover. Likewise, when you buy plants don't be surprised if the first year's bloom is underwhelming.

Most globeflowers are difficult to grow from seed, with only a 40 percent germination rate at best, and that percentage is even lower for old seed. Exceptions are 'Golden Queen,' 'Lemon Supreme,' and 'New Moon,' all seed strains offered by Jelitto Perennial Seeds.

SOURCES

Daffodils and More
daffodilsandmore.com

Digging Dog Nursery
diggingdog.com

Fieldstone Gardens
fieldstonegardens.com

Jelitto Perennial Seeds
(Gold Nugget Seed®)
jelitto.com

Left to right: 'Prichard's Giant' globeflower grows well with Hosta 'Island Breeze', Allium 'Purple Sensation', *Camassia*, forget-me-nots and violas. 'Be Mine' often has a second flush of bloom. 'Golden Monarch' blooms during the short gap between the finish of the early hybrids and the start of the creamy white varieties. 'Alabaster' is slower growing than many cultivars.



CULTIVARS

Zone 3

'Be Mine' – Golden orange with an orange center, mid-May in my garden.

'Earliest of All' – Orange yellow, early, excellent for cutting.

'Empire Day' – Lemon yellow, mid to late May in my garden.

'Golden Monarch' – Soft golden orange, mid-season.

'Golden Queen' – Golden orange, late spring through midsummer.

'Harbinger' – Yellowy orange, early May in my garden.

'Miss Mary Russell' – Golden yellow, mid-May in my garden.

'New Moon' – Similar to 'Alabaster' and 'Cheddar', but blooms earlier. Seed grown strain.

'Orange Princess' – Vibrant orange, good cut flower.

'Prichard's Giant' – Tall, orange and long blooming.

'Superbus' – Lemon yellow, short.

'T. Smith' – Lemon yellow, short, mid-May in my garden.

Zone 4

'Alabaster' – Pale yellow at first, maturing to creamy white.

'Cheddar' – Butter yellow (think white cheddar).

'Commander in Chief' – Golden yellow, very early.

'Lemon Supreme' – Lemon yellow, good cut flower. Seed grown strain.

'Lemon Queen' – Bright lemon yellow, blooms mid-May in my garden.

'Orange Crest' – Orange flowers with a tangerine center.

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A Garden *at the Heart* of its Community

Face to Face's school garden reaps the benefits of support from both the Minnesota State Horticultural Society's Garden-in-a-Box program and a Community Foods Project grant.

STORY AND PHOTOS **MICHELLE BRUHN**



WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR FAVORITE PART ABOUT THE GARDENS at Face to Face Academy in St. Paul, Minn., the students engage in a healthy debate.

“The strawberries.”

“Cherry tomatoes.”

“Watching the bumblebees.”

“The raspberries. No, wait. The grapes.”

“These flowers I just cut.”

This charter high school has been educating and empowering at-risk youth since 1998. The garden started in 2017, when a small adjacent lot became available, and the school was able to expand outdoor teaching space. The students, some of whom deal with the daily reality of food insecurity, became deeply involved with the gardens, so when another next-door lot became available in 2023, they worked to purchase and fence it in. Academy staff and students are currently working with landscape architects to make the most out of this new space.

Alisa Hoven, the garden coordinator and educational assistant, develops ways for students to become true stewards of the garden. Carving out time to envision, plan and reflect upon what they enjoyed (and didn't) each season is another way students gain valuable skills that will stick with them through adulthood.

Alisa sees students' high level of interest flowing from the natural throughline that plants provide us all: starting the seed, tending its growth over the season and enjoying the harvest. They see the literal growth and impact their actions have on the overall site and individual plants.

The research is clear—gardens give us endless benefits. From the planet's overall health to our physical and mental health to the health of local economies and beyond.

But as any gardener knows, there is something that transcends research—the joy that floods our bodies, minds and souls when we taste what we've grown. That joy deepens our love for nature, the food we're eating and those who helped us grow it in the garden.



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Face to Face Academy recently dedicated more staff time to gardening and making more healthy foods with freshly harvested produce. From salsa to pickles, students experience garden-to-table dining in real time, often with a side order of biology.

It's still a real garden with inevitable challenges, and the students work hard to attract more pollinators, keep squirrels away and stay on top of watering and weeding. The Academy's unique school calendar runs year-round with a maximum three-week break at any time, which allows for more time to work in the garden during the actual growing season.

In 2022, a section of the school's outdoor space was converted to a memorial garden to honor students and graduates who have been killed by gun violence. The memorials continue to grow, sadly, but students find peace in tending the space.

This special garden is the epitome of what a growing plot can be—a source of healing for mind, body and soul and a treasured place, right at the heart of its community.

 **Learn more about the Face to Face Academy at face-to-face-academy.square.site**

TIPS FOR STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

- 1** Get involved with your community and survey neighbors to gauge interest.
- 2** Find a long-term partner to help with funding and/or communication.
- 3** Look for or create a growing space accessible to all ages—families, young kids, seniors.
- 4** Determine what kind of community garden you envision. Individual plots for rent or one big communal garden? Where will food go once harvested?
- 5** Find your site, preferably with existing water and electricity. Look for a location that's within walking or driving distance of interested neighbors.
- 6** Create a “garden management group” to help organize and stay on track with regular communications.
- 7** Schedule time to revisit the garden plan and reflect on the garden each season.

If you'd rather join an existing community garden, you can apply for a plot through many city websites, at Parks and Recreation centers or by visiting northerngardener.org/map-of-community-gardens.



The Community Foods Project

The Minnesota State Horticultural Society is excited to collaborate with Face to Face as one of the key partners in the Community Foods Project (CFP) grant. The school's history of helping close the achievement gap, outdoor programming, environmental sustainability practices, along with their well-loved existing garden made them a perfect fit for the CFP grant.

CFP grants are funded by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) of the USDA. This specific three-year grant targets Minneapolis and St. Paul, aiming to bolster food security in communities that need it most.

The Twin Cities experienced a sharp rise in food insecurity in 2020. Plus, approximately 1.6 million Minnesotans, nearly 30 percent of the state's population, lack access to healthy food, according to the Minnesota Department of Health. This CFP project aims to empower community members to grow their own food within a self-sustaining system.

The grant will combine the existing momentum of MSHS programs like Garden-in-a-Box, which reaches over 17,000 low-income community members, and Minnesota Green, which has distributed over 100,000 food plants in the last two years with new educational programming. A newly developed nine-module "Veggie Gardening 101" video series will be translated into Karen, Somali, Spanish and Hmong languages to reach the communities that can benefit from this the most.

The grant will also help establish five new community garden sites, which will forge long-lasting impacts on the future of food access.



More about starting your own community garden at:
[northerngardener.org/
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Think Small

Planting out even the tiniest city plot can make a big difference to pollinators and people alike.



STORY AND PHOTOS
BETH STETENFELD

THREE-FOURTHS OF THE WORLD'S FLOWERING PLANTS and about 35 percent of the world's food crops depend on pollinators to reproduce. In fact, one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of hard-working pollinators, including bees, butterflies, moths, beetles and other insects, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Unfortunately, pollinator populations are declining, partly because they can't find enough pollinator-friendly plantings for nourishment and habitat. The good news? If every household in the United States planted just one pollinator plant, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that we could provide more than 120 million additional plants to support these amazing and important creatures.

Are you interested in helping pollinators and/or growing plants for the fun of it, but you only have a small space? Just a few plants can improve your health and that of the critters around you. Whether you live on a small property or in a big city high-rise, even one pot or window box of blooming plants can help beautify a tiny corner and attract beneficial visitors.



2025 Plant Sale and Garden Expo

Saturday, May 17, 2025 • 9 am - 1pm
Washington County Fairgrounds, Building A

• Diagnostic Clinic & Educational Displays

• Annuals and perennials, native and prairie plants, monarch and pollinator plants, rain garden plants, grasses, shade plants, heirloom tomatoes, herbs and vegetables!

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For more information please visit our website: www.washingtoncountymg.org

Washington County Master Gardener Volunteer Program





Mix + Match

To get started, think about using a mix of plants that will bloom throughout the growing season. Combinations of flower sizes, shapes, colors, plant heights and growth habits look artful and can support a greater number and diversity of pollinators. Also, edible plants like herbs and flowering fruits give you snacks and help the pollinators, too. Just a few examples that work well in pots include:

Native perennials such as cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohiensis*) and nodding onions (*Allium cernuum*).

Annuals such as zinnias (*Z. elegans*), dwarf varieties of sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*), impatiens (*I. walleriana*) and sweet alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*).

Tiny Space, Big Impact

As you garden greener, you can make a big impact—even in a tiny space. In addition to benefiting pollinators, container gardening:

- **Allows mobility.** Pots and containers can be moved around as desired and with changing weather and seasonal shifts.
- **Facilitates optimum soil health.** By combining the right ingredients, you can produce a soil mix with high fertility that holds water well and provides adequate draining.
- **Creates attractive displays.** Whether you grow annuals, perennials, fruits and vegetables or other edibles, your containers will brighten your location.
- **Beautifies your space,** which benefits the mental health and pleasure of you, your visitors, and others in your neighborhood.

GETTING STARTED

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommendations:

Choose your location. While sunny spots support the most pollinator favorites, some pollinator plants grow well in partial or mostly shade.

Determine the size. Even a single pot or window box can make a big difference. A larger garden requires more watering, pruning and maintenance. *Remember:* Pots need drainage, and they dry out faster than soil in the ground.

Choose the plants. Think about your growing space and select plants of different heights and widths to fit.

Gather materials. In addition to the vessel(s), you'll want high-quality garden soil, a watering can and trowel. Garden gloves, a kneeling pad, pruners, trellis and twine (to train vining plants) may also be useful.

Plant and enjoy. Place taller plants in the back and shorter varieties in the front. Water new plantings well.

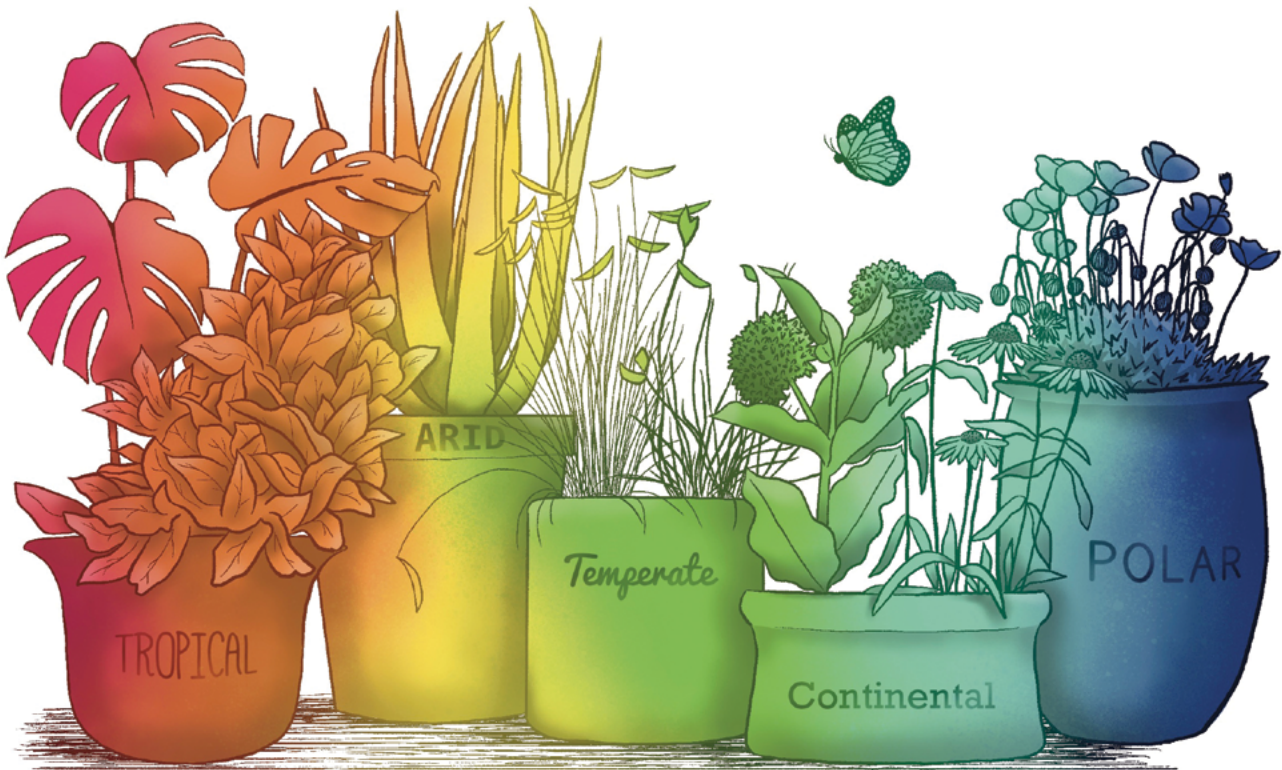


Learn more at northerngardener.org/planting-for-pollinators

Zone Defense

Your garden's climate is more than a number.

STORY **MARY LAHR SCHIER** ILLUSTRATIONS **TAYLOR TINKHAM**



Recent changes in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's cold hardiness zone map left many gardeners confused. Nearly half the United States shifted a half zone warmer between maps released in 2012 and 2023, making a significant part of Minnesota now USDA Zone 5. Is it time to break out the palms and banana plants?

Maybe, but what northern gardeners can grow, whether it thrives and what you may want to grow in the future depends on much more than the zone rating. Understanding the purpose and limitations of hardiness zones and other factors that affect climate will help you pick the best plants for your garden. ▶

What zones *measure*

Since the early 20th century, plant breeders have used cold hardiness rating to indicate whether a plant will survive winter in a particular area. The United States is divided into 13 zones, from the coldest (zone 1a, -60 degrees Fahrenheit) to the warmest (zone 13b, 65 degrees) based on the lowest average low temperature in a year.

For the most recent map, Oregon State University scientists collected measurements over 30 years from more than 13,000 weather stations, nearly doubling the number of data points from previous maps. The great detail in the map is one reason that much of the Twin Cities moved to zone 5, while pockets of zone 4 can be found scattered throughout. For example, Shoreview, a northern Twin Cities suburb, is zone 5 except for an area near Highway 10. Similar pockets of cold or warmth can be found in many areas, both in urban and rural areas. Temperatures are getting warmer overall, especially low temperatures, but the new zone map's detail also captures the heat island effects of parking lots, roofs and other urban features.

Other than Alaska, only Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana and mountainous areas of Maine and Wyoming now have zone 3 growing areas. In contrast, in the zone map from 1990, half of Minnesota was rated zone 3 with a sliver of zone 2 on the northern border with Manitoba.

While cold hardiness zones are useful, they measure only one climate factor in plant survival. Additional factors, such as day length, snow cover, humidity, wind, drought, soil moisture and even how long a cold snap lasts can determine whether a plant thrives or dies.

Canada has its own cold hardiness map with a different numbering system. Europe also has its own cold hardiness map, with 11 zones from the frigid Arctic to the temperate Mediterranean. The American Horticultural Society has ratings for heat zones as well, which are based on how many days of the year have high temperatures above 86 degrees.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

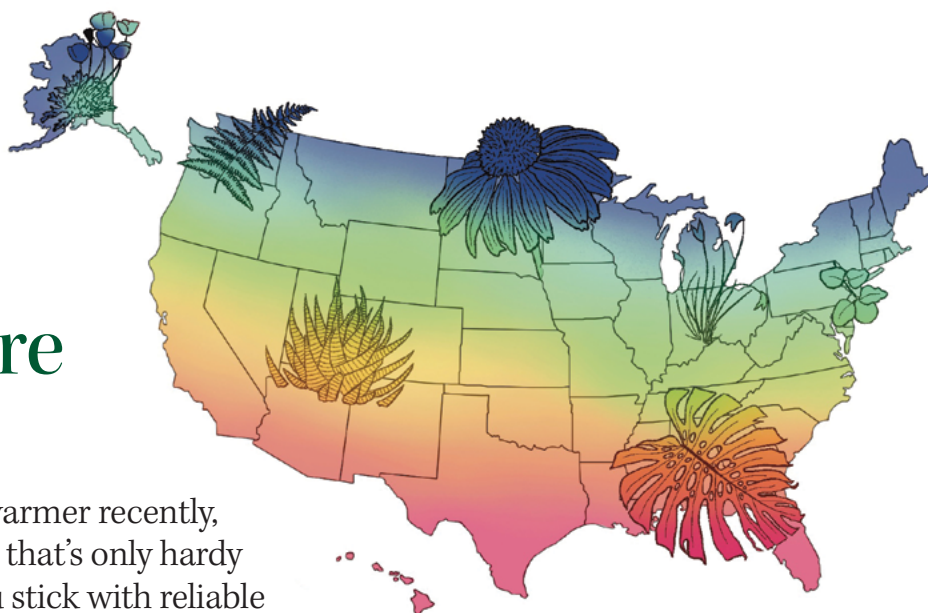
The Köppen climate classification system was developed a century ago and still has value today. It divides climates into five basic types: tropical, arid, temperate, continental and polar, with subdivisions in each type. The Upper Midwest has a humid continental climate with four distinct seasons including very cold, snowy winters and hot, humid summers with precipitation evenly distributed throughout the year. Similar climates can be found in eastern Europe, Russia and northern China, which is why many plants native to those areas grow well here. Consider peonies, which are native to large swaths of eastern Europe and north Asia but flourish in the plains of the Upper Midwest. Cotonestee, a hedge plant that thrives in our northern climate, is native to vast areas of Europe and Asia, but not to North America. It's our distinct climate that helps those plants thrive here.

Ecoregions, another climate classification system, are useful for choosing native plants. Developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, ecoregions define areas with similar topography, soil and climate that tend to support similar plant and animal life.



Gardening here and now

If your garden moved one zone warmer recently, does it make sense to buy a plant that's only hardy to your new zone? Or, should you stick with reliable choices? A few things to remember:



1 Plants are generally rated for the middle of the zone. If you are new to zone 5a, but folks on the next block are still zone 4b, be cautious.

2 Know your microclimates. If your garden has areas that are warmer or colder than your zone rating (low spots or protected areas), choose plants based on the microclimate.

3 Some zone ratings for plants are conservative. Plant companies don't want their plants to have a bad reputation, so some zone ratings may be a bit conservative. If you're on the fence about a plant, ask a knowledgeable garden center employee how well it performs in your area.

4 If you are choosing non-native plants, look for hints that they may come from climates compatible to ours, such as Korean spice bush or Russian sage. Sometimes the botanical name will tell you the plant's origin, such as *Iris sibirica*, or Siberian iris.

5 Native plants should thrive here, of course. But if you want to pick the most valuable native plants for pollinators in your area, check the website of the National Wildlife Federation, which offers a ZIP code search for best native plant choices.

6 Monitor your garden. An inexpensive rain gauge, thermometer and notebook or garden journal app can go a long way toward helping you understand your garden's climate, or at least the weather that affects it.

WHAT'S MY ZONE?

To find your cold hardiness zone, go to planthardiness.ars.usda.gov and use the ZIP code search function. You can zoom in or out on the map to see how close you are to the zone lines. Sometimes you can go down to the street level to find your zone.

RESOURCES

More on ecoregions:
wildones.org/resources/ecoregions-explained

ZIP code search for native plants:
nativeplantfinder.nwf.org

HOW TO ADAPT

As northern gardeners, we're used to volatile weather and can adapt to it. Changes in your hardiness zone don't change your garden, but a warmer rating might give you extra permission to try something new in your garden.

Laura Kubes and her family offer peony plants, bouquets and gorgeous views at Hidden Springs Peony Farm.



The tall, early-blooming 'Peony Flame' catches the afternoon sun.



PEONY COUNTRY

The Kubes family's dream is in full bloom
in Southeastern Minnesota.

STORY **ERIC JOHNSON** PHOTOS **TRACY WALSH**



"They're family heirlooms. They live for 100-plus years, so you can divide them and pass them down through generations."



LAURA KUBES, A LONGTIME METEOROLOGIST with the Twin Cities-based KARE 11 TV weather team, could never have forecasted the turn her life took a couple years ago. Craving change and itching to move out of the city, her family sold their house in Plymouth, Minn., and moved to southeastern Minnesota's stunning driftless area to take over a 54-acre peony farm. To those of us who love to dig in the dirt, this is the stuff of dreams.

The Kubes family wasn't specifically looking to grow peonies. Laura is a seasoned plant person (she still co-hosts Kare 11's Grow with Kare segment) and her husband, Bryan, is in the agricultural industry, so a farm of some type seemed like a match made in heaven. They were looking to farm a specialty crop. Plus, they had a call to a specific part of the state. "We wanted to be in the driftless area because we love the topography."

A real estate search turned up an existing peony farm near Spring Grove, Minn., in the southeastern corner of Minnesota. The farm belonged to local plant legend Harvey Buchite and his wife, Brigitte. The Buchites nurtured the farm from an empty field and were looking to sell to someone who would carry on the peony lineage. The Kubes family signed on and Hidden Springs Peony Farm was theirs. They soon fell under the spell of the flower that has charmed so many for centuries.

Laura quickly discovered how much people really love peonies. "They're so big and bold, and they shine so early in the season. They stand out when nothing else is blooming," she says. After our hard winters and finicky springs, we need peonies. And just about everyone has a peony memory. "Yes, they're beautiful, but to me peonies are so much more than that," Laura adds. "They're family heirlooms. They live for 100-plus years, so you can divide them and pass them down through generations. My favorites are the ones that have been passed down by my great grandma. They're

all double blooms and very fragrant, good old-fashioned varieties."

Even when surrounded by such beauty, becoming a farm family was no small feat. "The first season, there was a lot of feeling overwhelmed and learning hard lessons," Laura says. "The second season was much more enjoyable."

The Kubes are gearing up for a third season of tending more than 600 varieties and shipping them, bare root, across the United States. Their peonies include a world-class selection of highly collectible and sought-after varieties as well as all the reliable standards, many of which are heirlooms. They also sell potted peonies on site, along with other perennials, annuals, shrubs and fruit trees.

The farm is a destination for those who love to grow peonies as well as for those who simply appreciate viewing them. Visitors flock to the farm to take in the splendor. When the fields are in full bloom, they are the southern Minnesota version of the tulip fields in Holland. It's a feast for the senses. "When people come here, they're welcome to walk through the field, take pictures, smell and enjoy you-pick opportunities," Laura says. Ready-cut stems are also available for purchase. The farm is a favorite destination for brides-to-be.

Laura has become a peony pro. You can't live and work among this many of them without learning what makes them tick. "They're this magical combination of a plant," Laura says. "Peonies are beautiful and fragrant and they're practically pest-free. Deer and rabbits don't eat them. They don't need to be fertilized. And they're drought resistant." Stunning and easy to grow. What more could we ask for in a plant?

Farm life suits the family well. "Bryan and I say almost daily, 'We can't believe we live here,'" Laura says. "We can't believe this is our life." Peony lovers are thankful, too, for the peony paradise nestled among the hills and streams of southeastern Minnesota.

Top left: A peony 'Coral Charm' bud begins to bloom. **Top right:** Boasting some of the brightest pink peony blossoms, 'Paula Fay' glows in the growing field. **Middle left:** New farm sign made locally in Preston, Minn. **Middle center:** Laura, Bryan and their children in the peony field, sandwiched between peony 'Coral Charm' in front and 'Golden Glow' behind them. **Middle right:** Peony 'Athena' is one of the earliest varieties to bloom each season. **Bottom left:** Ruffled red petals stand out against lush, green foliage. **Bottom right:** The Kubes family lives on the farm nestled among the peonies in a home designed by an Austrian architect.

Q&A

with Laura Kubes



Why aren't my peonies blooming?

Some varieties take up to three years to bloom. If you move a plant, it can take up to three years. Also, your peony might be planted too deep. In our neck of the woods, the eyes or the top of the root should be about 2 inches below the soil. If it's deeper, it will eventually bloom but needs to work at developing enough crown tissue to get to the surface before it blooms. Stick your finger down into the soil—if you sink down 2 inches and still can't feel the root, stick a garden fork around the base, gently lift it up and push some soil underneath to raise the plant.

How much sun do peonies need?

Ten hours of full sun is best. At least eight hours is non-negotiable. Any less than that and you will see fewer blooms. I tell people to double-check the sun exposure. Trees grow. Shrubs grow. Houses are built. What used to be a sunny spot might not be so sunny anymore. And well-drained soil is a must.

Do I need to fertilize?

Generally, peonies don't need fertilizer. But if your plant isn't performing well, it's a good thing to try. Use a bulb fertilizer (we use Bulb-tone) and apply after the petals fall. Fertilizing on the 4th of July and again on Labor Day are good benchmarks. You can also mix some in with the soil when you plant and you may get a bloom the first year.

How about watering?

Water well in the early spring and again in fall until the ground freezes. Treat your peonies really well in the fall. Most people have forgotten about them by then, but they need that fall water to build their eyes for next year's blooms and stems.



When should I cut them back?

If the leaves are green, the plant is still engaging in photosynthesis and bringing in nutrients. When the leaves are no longer green, then you can cut them to the ground and burn them, if possible. Peonies have a high fungal rate if they're crowded or not in full sun. Powdery mildew, leaf spot and botrytis are the common issues. Copper fungicide and the whole milk home remedy are both helpful. For the home milk remedy, mix one part milk into three parts water and spray on the affected plant. People report that it works.

What can I do about flopping?

There has been a lot of breeding in recent years to build strong stems. The Itoh peonies are very good for this because they have that woody stem. Peony cages are stronger, wider and sturdier than tomato cages and work well. We recently learned the Hildene star technique where you take five stakes, such as bamboo stakes, and weave jute twine around and up to make a star. It visually disappears more than a cage. In the end, I see the flopping as part of the charm, and it only really happens if it rains. The biggest floppers are the large, old-fashioned varieties and they are the most fragrant.



Should I cut off the buds the first year?

Yes. As hard as this is to do, it really does help the roots get a good year of development before they need to put out all the energy for flowers. You can try compromising with Mother Nature by cutting off all but one of the flower buds.

What if I've never grown a peony?

Peonies are a good plant for beginners. They don't take a lot of special treatment. Find a full-sun spot that drains, don't plant too deep and have fun.

Do ants help to open the buds?

In a word, no, they're going after the nectar. They're working like soldiers to keep away any bugs that want to eat the buds.

How is it pronounced? PEE-oh-nee or pee-OH-nee?

I hear it both ways. It seems Iowa is a lot more PEE-oh-nee, and Minnesota is more pee-OH-nee. I think it just depends on where you grew up and how your grandma pronounced it.

Left page: Top left: Red and coral varieties bloom earliest in the season and make up the farm's first big bouquets.

Top right: A true red variety, 'Red Charm' is a highly recommended, award-winning bomb type with huge blooms.

Middle: One of the farm's most popular sellers, peony 'Coral Charm' has an unpleasant smell. **Bottom:** Flatter blooms tend to better withstand a hard rain. **Right page: Top:**

More than 200 'Coral Charm' plants at the farm make quite a statement when in bloom. **Bottom:** The bright salmon-pink bud of 'Coral Charm' fades to a pure cream as it opens in a truly spectacular transformation.



A 'Coral Charm' bud shows its initial bright salmon pink color.

ORIGINS

Peonies are native to Asia-Pacific (Eastern Russia and East and Southeast Asia), where they were cultivated beginning in the seventh century. They found their way to Europe in the 1700s and gained popularity in England during the Victorian era. Introduced to the U.S. in the 19th century, they have grown steadily in popularity, thanks to the floral and landscape nursery trades.

Peony Types

Peonies are classified into three basic types, and all three serve up many varieties.



« **Herbaceous varieties** are probably the ones you are most familiar with and include the old garden varieties as well as Fernleaf peonies which are, as Laura says, “having a moment.”

» **Woody peonies**, often called tree peonies, are small shrubs that do not die back to the ground in winter.



» **Intersectional varieties** are a cross between the two. Developed by Dr. Toichi Itoh in Japan in the 1940s, Itoh peonies are a popular intersectional. They are a blend of the best of herbaceous and woody peonies with large flowers and sturdy stems.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jamie Rae Miller, master gardener and self-taught painter, created the backgrounds used throughout this article. Her warm, genuine painting style and custom frames from repurposed wood attract clients who value personal storytelling in art. Learn more about her work at limestcreative.com. Hidden Springs Peony Farm welcomes artists to visit for inspiration and even paint in the peony fields.



Explore the fields at our family-owned farm where we grow more than **600 varieties of peonies**. Shop at the farm or online.

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HIDDEN SPRINGS **Peony** FARM

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Global



Gardens

Minnesota master gardeners and researchers experiment with growing foods typically found in Africa.

STORY AND PHOTOS **GAIL HUDSON**

ON A PERFECT EVENING LAST AUGUST, the air in a garden on the University of Minnesota-St. Paul campus was filled with exclamations of discovery and utter delight.

“I feel like I’m home right now—this is my first time seeing Ugo [an African leafy vegetable] after how many years in this place,” says John Ogbonne Agbai, a native of Nigeria. “It’s a miracle seeing it here. I’m so much pleased, this is a treasure to us.” Minneapolis resident and Nigerian native Angel Uzoechi looked excitedly at several of the garden’s okra plants. “It’s really good, and it’s fresh,” she said. “It’s been a long time. We don’t get this here.”

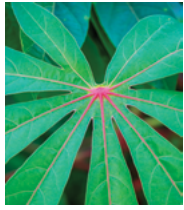
Their enthusiastic reactions during this community open house are everything Hennepin County Master Gardener Chidi Chidozie had hoped for. With the help of master gardeners from Hennepin, Ramsey and, soon, Anoka counties, Chidozie is collaborating with researchers at the U’s Plant Breeding Center to create a “global garden” with culturally diverse plants that thrive in Minnesota’s short growing season.

Their goal is to encourage and help emerging farmers and residents to grow them—not only African immigrants but also immigrants from many other countries who now call Minnesota home. The immigrant community here is large. Nearly a half million people (or one in 12) immigrated to the North, and about 7 percent of Minnesota residents are Americans with at least one immigrant parent. “We want to grow vegetables you can’t buy in the grocery store,” Chidozie says.

For the past three years, Chidozie has been working closely with center director Rex Bernardo, a native of the Philippines, who was surprised to learn in a local news report that immigrants as far as Seattle and Oklahoma would drive to Twin Cities farmers markets to buy the few fresh African vegetables grown by Hmong-American farmers. It was all he needed to hear to start his research project. “Being an immigrant myself, I can relate to this, that the foods we grew up with—they are a strong draw,” he said.



Opposite page: (Inset) Cinderella Ndlovu, visiting from Zimbabwe, looks at amaranth during the open house. (Full page) A lush crop of African eggplant, Big Anara, thrives in the Twin Cities. **This page top to bottom:** Chidi Chidozie harvests fluted pumpkin last August for Igbo Fest in Brooklyn Park, Minn. Amaranth, fluted pumpkin, okra, African eggplant, African basil. Fluted pumpkin is grown for its leaves and edible seeds.



Growing challenges

Finding basic information about growing these new-to-Minnesota plants has been a challenge. “We had no idea what the plants looked like, how they’re grown, how they’re consumed,” Bernardo says. “So, it was starting from scratch, starting from ground zero.” Immigrants from different parts of Africa and the world call these vegetables many different names, so communicating and building relationships with immigrant groups is difficult, too. “The breeding should be simple—in theory,” he says with a laugh.

“I became the expert because I know a lot about these vegetables,” Chidozie says. He’s been growing them for years in his own home garden (see page 51) in Eden Prairie, Minn.

With a new grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Bernardo is establishing a collection of traditional African vegetables, including jute mallow also known as West African sorrel or Ewedu (*Corchorus olitorius*), Ethiopian cabbage also known as Gomen (*Brassica carinata*), spider wisp also known as Chinsaga (*Cleome gynandra*) and amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp.), also known as Callaloo or Efo Tete, which will be grown and evaluated in Minnesota field trials. His team of graduate and post-doctorate students will obtain vegetable seeds from different parts of the world to help them identify the best varieties that will thrive in Minnesota.

Sought-after vegetables

Next to the trial plots, Chidozie and other master gardeners planted a community garden with more than 30 different African vegetables and some Asian ones, too, many of which have great nutritional and health value. The plants include waterleaf (*Talinum fruticosum*), cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), bitter leaf (*Vernonia amygdalina*), sour leaf known as sorrel or Yekuwu (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), several varieties of eggplant called Afufa, Anara and Bitterball (*Solanum* spp.), okra or okro (*Abelmoschus caillei*), sugar cane, African basil called Nchanwu (*Ocimum gratissimum*), lemongrass and a red onion used by Asian immigrant groups. Eventually, Chidozie says more vegetables from other cultures will be added.

The king of vegetables for Africans is the fluted pumpkin, also called Ugo (*Telfairia occidentalis*). This popular tropical vine is mainly grown for its leaves and seeds (ground into a powder) by millions of people living in southeastern Nigeria, but is extremely scarce here. Africans use it primarily in soups and medicines. When Chidozie talks to immigrants about learning how to grow Ugo or waterleaf, he says, “Now they’re interested, they want to garden. They go 360 right there—boom!”

Chidozie says demand for Ugo is great. Cars line up on Saturday mornings in the summer to buy the day’s harvest of leaves from one farmer who grows it in Stillwater, Minn. The seeds are hard to come by in the U.S. and are expensive. Chidozie buys as much as he can afford from a source in Texas for 15 dollars a seed. Minnesota’s growing season isn’t long enough to produce the gourd (and the seed) or to find out whether the plant is male or female (a fruit producer).

Left to right:

The roots and leaves of cassava offer many health benefits. The flowers, leaves and pods of the hyacinth bean or Lablab (*Lablab purpureus*) are eaten in many countries. Ima Umana grows waterleaf in Minneapolis, too. Newly planted fluted pumpkin. Chidi and his cousin, Nnenna Osuagwu, harvest veggies for a family gathering. Waterleaf plants with magenta flowers. African eggplant varieties on a Nigerian placemat.

“Being an immigrant myself, I can relate to this, that the foods we grew up with—they are a strong draw.”

—REX BERNARDO



The future for global gardening

The garden produces a lot of vegetables, which are given away for free at local events and to people who stop by the field. Chidozie helped his cousin Nnenna Osuagwu of Fridley as she harvested a bag full of African eggplant varieties, including Bitterball, Anara and Afufa. They'll be given to guests as they arrive at her parents' upcoming retirement party. The eggplants are eaten raw like an apple. “We call [this tradition] ‘kola,’” she says. “You present it to people before you start eating for goodwill.”

Chidozie hopes the initiative will inspire Minnesota gardeners to grow these vegetables in community gardens and at home. In the next few years, Bernardo plans to begin releasing the varieties that are adaptive to Minnesota to the public and making the seeds widely available at low cost. “Even among non-immigrants and native-born Americans, I think there's an interest in food in general in the Twin Cities,” he says, “and learning about food from different cultures.”

Chidozie agrees. “The more we try what each other is eating, the more we'll see them in a different light. I'd never tried Ethiopian mustard cabbage until two years ago. But I tried it, and I love it!”

DIY AT HOME

GROW A GLOBAL GARDEN

Adventurous Minnesota gardeners can grow and sample some of the vegetables on the Global Garden Initiative’s plant list. Try these easy entry plants to bring African flavors to your garden and table.



Amaranth

Can be direct-seeded or transplanted when soil warms to 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Barely cover seeds with soil. Leaves can be continually harvested when the plant is 8 inches tall and eaten raw in salads when young and tender (tastes like spinach). Seeds mature around 90 to 100 days and are treated like a grain. Toast the seeds and add to yogurt, smoothies or trail mix. Also, you can make cereal with it, cooking it like oatmeal.



Okra

Start indoors with seeds four to six weeks before the last frost, and plant out in full sun and warm, well-drained soil. Harvest when 2 to 3 inches long. A signature ingredient in southern dishes like gumbo. Can also be stir fried, roasted, baked or pickled.



SEED SOURCES

Many companies sell the seeds of traditional African vegetables and plants online. The University of Minnesota Extension put together this list:

- Carter Brothers Seed
- TrueLove Seeds
- Southern Exposure Seed
- Sistah Seeds
- Ujamaa Seeds
- Kitazawa Seeds

LEARN MORE

For more basic growing, cooking and nutritional information: extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-staple-vegetables-around-world-minnesota



Bitterball (African eggplant)

A variety of eggplant grown for its round, immature fruit and leaves, it becomes more bitter as it ripens. Start seeds indoors eight weeks, planting ¼ inch deep, before the last frost. Full sun. Use in African stews or eat raw.

Ethiopian cabbage (Gomen)

Pale purple stems, bluish leaves. Start indoors six to eight weeks before the last frost. Full sun, well-drained soil. Fast growing. Plant in succession multiple times a season. Similar to kale.

Chidi's Garden

A Nigerian master gardener fills his home landscape with African and American vegetables and flowers.

STORY AND PHOTOS **GAIL HUDSON**



Top to bottom: Chidi pinches flowers off an African basil plant growing in a straw bale. He surrounds his house with trumpet flower (*Brugmansia*), one of his favorite flowers.

GARDENING IS SECOND NATURE TO CHIDI CHIDOZIE OF EDEN PRAIRIE, MINN. “Growing up [in Nigeria], every family had a garden in their backyard,” he says. Chidi recalls learning gardening and farming skills from his father, a school headmaster who made certain every student spent an hour each day learning them, too. Three acres of well-tended crops behind the school ensured the students’ families wouldn’t go hungry, either.

Today, Chidi’s home landscape is a testament to that heritage. A member of the Igbo tribe in Nigeria (you can sample the food and culture at the annual IgboFest in Brooklyn Park, Minn., in August), he has been gardening in the United States for 26 years, using containers, hydroponic tubs, straw bales and raised beds made of recycled wood with the goal of growing American and African flowers and vegetables side by side. An avid Hennepin County master gardener, he’s happy to share his knowledge with everyone.



Ugo with seed casing

THE MOST LOVED VEGETABLE

“I like to grow the vegetables I can eat, something like lettuce, kale, basil and parsley,” he says. “I’m growing them inside, outside. When I get the opportunity, I’m growing them.” He gardens with organic methods and mixes up a compost of spent hops, woodchips and garden waste to enrich the soil around his plants.

In early summer, a rare sight greets visitors. Fluted pumpkin plants or Ugo (*Telfairia occidentalis*) are lined up on Chidi’s driveway with the promise of many edible leaves to come. The large, light-colored seed casing which, he says, “is as big as a small chocolate chip cookie,” is visible at the base of this tropical plant. Fifteen of the expensive seeds Chidi had purchased did not germinate, and he guessed it was due to exposure to cold. This is his tribe’s most loved vegetable. “We use it for practically everything,” he says. “When we come here, it’s not available and we have to substitute it with spinach, which doesn’t do the same job.”

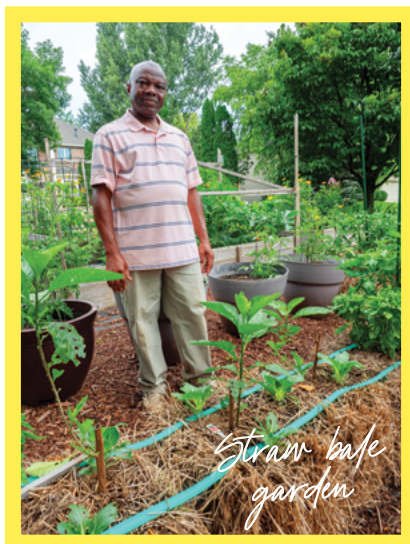
Chidi points to three other leafy plants in pots, which he says are the only Oha plants (*Pterocarpus mildraedii*) in the Twin Cities. The precious potted cuttings herald the beginnings of this evergreen tree, which is another highly prized African vegetable among the Igbo people. “I can make a special soup with it,” Chidi says, “I don’t think there’s any store that sells it here.” Six cuttings a friend brought back from Nigeria have died. He says his family will do everything they can to keep the rest alive. “Once it gets tall enough, I can take cuttings to make more babies,” he says.

African basil



A BALE EXPERIMENT

A straw bale garden in one corner of the yard supports everything from tomatoes to bitter leaf to African eggplant varieties and the sought-after African basil known as Nchanwu. “It’s like growing mint,” Chidi warns. “Once you get started you have to control it.” He restricts the plants by growing them in a bale or a container.



Straw bale garden

Last summer was the second year of Chidi’s attempts to grow vegetables on top of the bales. “I call myself an experimenter,” he says. “I try to go against the norm—that’s why you can see I planted many different things.” He says using the bales allowed him to garden on a slope where he couldn’t have otherwise.

One downside of bale gardening, he discovered, is having to water daily. A soaker hose runs across the tops of the bales to provide a late morning drink for his plants. “The tomatoes did wonderfully. There was so much fruit on them that I decided to do it again,” he says.

Chidi has a particular soft spot for Angel Trumpet (*Brugmansia* spp.), an exotic tropical tree with fragrant, trumpet-shaped white, yellow and soft pink flowers. “Oh,” he says, “they are very beautiful. They are gorgeous.” The pendulous flowers are a native of

South America, particularly the Andes Mountains.

While these plants can grow up to 30 feet tall in much warmer climates, Chidi restricts their size to 5 or 6 feet by growing them outside in containers. He overwinters them indoors, taking softwood or dormant cuttings to propagate them for the next growing season. “Usually, I will use [the trumpet flowers] to surround the whole house,” he says. “That’s why you see so many of them.”

Many other flowers, such as zinnias (which he loves), phlox, bee balm, coneflowers and Asiatic lilies add a splash of color to the yard, too.

SPREADING GARDENING JOY

In the winter, he tends some 4,000 plants, mostly vegetables, in his basement. By spring, he’ll give them away to community gardens and the University of Minnesota’s Global Garden Initiative. He also donates a few to non-profit organizations, which sell the produce to restaurants to raise funds.

For Chidi, gardening has become a more than full-time job: It’s an opportunity to expand and grow personally. “The more I get into it from what I used to do, the happier I get,” he says. “And I just take it to the next level.”



Rudbeckia hirta
Gloriosa Daisy



Garden
to Table



A Passport *to Flavor*

Carve out a section of your garden to cultivate the exotic staples of other cultures.

STORY AND PHOTOS **MEG COWDEN**

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF GROWING A GARDEN FOR A MEAL? Of planning a planting to align with your favorite international vegetarian dish? Be it kimchi, lentil soup, hummus or herbed pickles, starting a meal in the garden is a fun way to create a culinary-forward bed full of the gifts of the garden and steeped in human history.

This is, to be sure, next-level gardening. And something that didn't cross my mind in the early years of gardening when a modest-sized onion for fresh eating was enough to nourish my pride. As the years drifted on, my yearning for a more complex relationship with dry goods and exotic foods naturally grew.

Stake out a small area in your summer garden and bring global cuisines and human history closer to home this year. Grow delicious flavors as well as your understanding of your food's journey to your plates and let yourself be humbled by the intimacy of processing your own harvest. I promise, a garden and culinary adventure awaits you.



A joy to grow, chickpea plants are just 12 inches tall with charming, tiny flowers. Each blossom produces only one or two seeds.

A SEEDY START

I've been on a spice kick lately. It started innocently, growing my own paprika, chipotle and gochugaru powders. I recently started venturing into the world of seed spices, including fenugreek, fennel, saffron, black cumin, mustard and cumin seed. While I haven't successfully grown all of them (yet), fenugreek was surprisingly easy to grow.



FENUGREEK

A stunning and distinctive legume, fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) produces three oblong leaflets and a charming pea flower. A long, slender pod on 10-inch tall plants fills with seeds. The entire plant is edible and often used in Indian and Ethiopian cuisine, adding a complex sweetness and balance to curries. The best part? This seemingly exotic annual spice easily grows when direct-seeded, maturing in under 90 days.



The author's seed pantry.

MUSTARD

An equally simple spice to grow is mustard seed. Mustard belongs to the diverse brassica family (related to broccoli, radish and kale) and is an ancient food, dating back to 3000 BCE. A symbol of faith, black mustard (*Brassica nigra*) hails from ancient Egypt, while brown mustard (*Brassica juncea*) is from the Himalayas and white mustard (*Sinapis alba*) is from the Mediterranean. Known to be aggressive and invasive, mustard overtakes native species, so grow it with attention and care.

Direct seeding in spring will yield dried pods by late summer. Black mustard grows up to 6 feet tall and spreads like a shrub. Brown (Dijon) mustard tops out under 24 inches.



FLAX

Flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) was domesticated around the Fertile Crescent in ancient times, notably as a fiber. Linen dates to 5,000 BCE, largely symbolizing wealth. The seed is a superfood, high in fiber and omega-3 fatty acids. I grew some last year as a joke, hoping for a single serving (1/4 cup ground) out of a modest planting. Cornered by sprawling winter squash vines to the west and eggplants to the east, these petite, airy plants didn't have a fighting chance.

Paper-thin flax blossoms unfurl delicately. They enchanted me throughout July and August, so flax will continue to be a part of my flower garden. And if I ever harvest that 1/4 cup of seed, I'll do a cartwheel in the garden.



HARVESTING PROTEIN

Healthy legumes are a protein-rich treat. You might enjoy growing a variety of green beans to can, freeze or eat fresh. Perhaps you've dabbled in dry beans for winter soups and stews. That's how I happily gardened, until I craved more variety.

Pulses, legumes harvested for their (bean) seed, are a culinary wonder often infused with international flavors. Lentils and chickpeas, along with wheat, barley and other founder crops, were the heart of meals in emerging agricultural communities.

CHICKPEAS

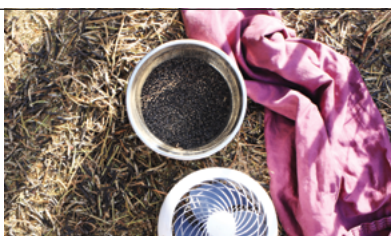
Whether in hummus, falafel or pasta e ceci, chickpeas are growing in popularity as a star ingredient in plant-based meals. There are two main types of chickpeas (*Cicer arietinum*). Kabuli is the larger, tan variety also known as garbanzo beans. Desi-type chickpeas, or Bengal gram, are smaller, resemble the wild chickpea from Turkey and can be light brown, black, green or speckled. Anthropologists discovered them in French caves dating back to 7,000 BCE, demonstrating their early favorability as a food crop.

MUNG BEAN

To further my bean education, I tried growing a mung bean (*Vigna mungo*) called a Kali Black Gram. This protein-rich legume can be used in Indian or Nepalese recipes for dals, cooking down much like a lentil. Its bright yellow flowers give way to erect, furry black pea pods later in summer that are filled with very small seeds.

HOW TO

Process your harvest



1

Remove the mature pod from the plant. You can do this in the garden, or if time gets away from you, cut the plants at the base and invert in a large paper bag.

2

Strip pods off plant and place in pillowcase. Gently step on pillowcase or lightly hit the bag against a wall to crack pods open. Transfer to bowl or colander, removing empty pods.

3

Pour contents into an empty bowl in front of a fan on low speed outdoors. Gently blow the chaff out of the bowl, repeating several times until just seeds remain.

An unusually late bloomer, saffron (*Crocus sativus*) flowers in October and November, when you can harvest its edible petals and stigmas.



STEMS AND STIGMAS

Both functional and delicious, these plant parts pack a powerful punch. Underground turmeric and ginger stems are a culinary delight, and delicate, red, thread-like crocus stigmas become saffron.

TURMERIC AND GINGER

These tropical rhizomes (underground stems) are as medicinal as they are culinary. Growing them can be a rewarding and delicious adventure, bringing intense flavor to your dishes. A staple of Asian cuisine, these plants have been cultivated for thousands of years. Sprout your seed indoors in early spring in a very warm, sunny spot with a heat mat and modest humidity. Once summer arrives, they'll flourish outdoors in the humid summer air.

SAFFRON

Although saffron is a highly unusual spice to grow in cold climates, I've had success harvesting saffron from first year bulbs. Like other crocus, it's propagated by corms. My saffron is tucked into our cold frame in the hopes of establishing a perennial patch. Saffron is purported to be cold hardy to zone 5, so you might try growing this in a warm corner of your garden.



Learn more at northerngardener.org/growing-saffron

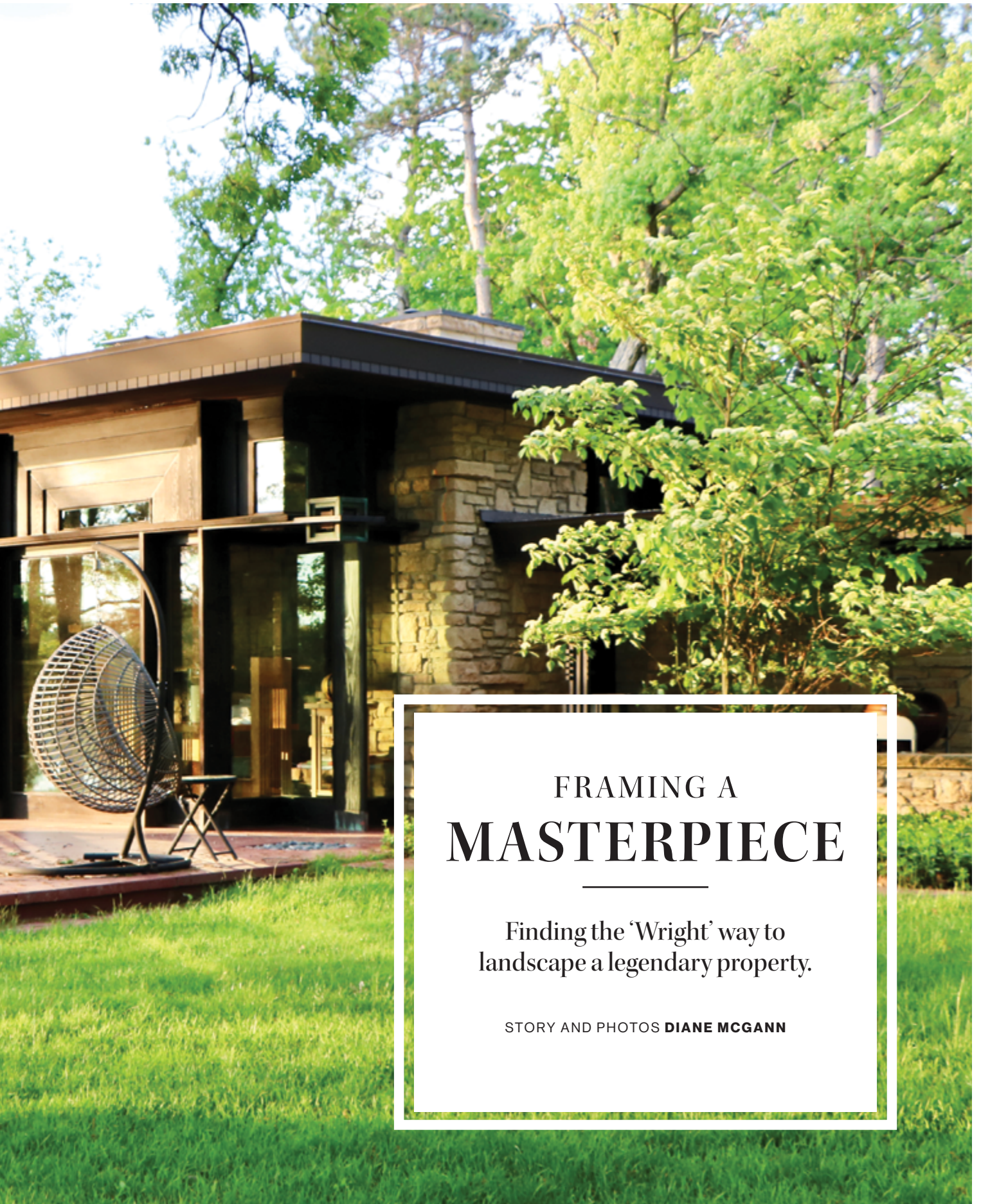


RECOMMENDED SEED SOURCES

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- Siskiyou Seeds



A Frank Lloyd Wright house in Stillwater, Minn., with a garden design by Jason Aune stays true to Wright's vision of merging the indoors and outdoors.



FRAMING A
MASTERPIECE

Finding the 'Wright' way to
landscape a legendary property.

STORY AND PHOTOS **DIANE MCGANN**



Wright used large windows to bring the outside in, framing views of the lake.
Photo by Troy Theis

HOW DO YOU LANDSCAPE A HOUSE DESIGNED BY AMERICA'S GREATEST ARCHITECT? Tasked with creating a master plan for Frank Lloyd Wright's Stillwater house, Jason Aune rose to the challenge. He meticulously researched Wright's landscape design concepts and then carefully implemented them, saying, "I was able to be part of history here, so wanted to do the best job I could." The American Society of Landscape Architects approved, presenting his firm with the 2018 Merit Award for Residential Design.

This 1950s Wright-designed home is situated on 20 wooded acres bordering a small lake just outside of Stillwater, Minn. Don and Virginia Lovness, the original owners, developed a close relationship with the famous architect, who drew up plans for five structures that could be built on the property. Short on experience but long on energy, Don and Virginia built the 1,600-foot house by hand, all by themselves. Twenty years later, they built another

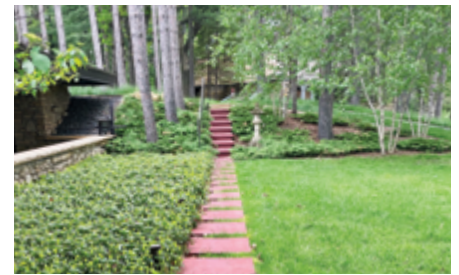
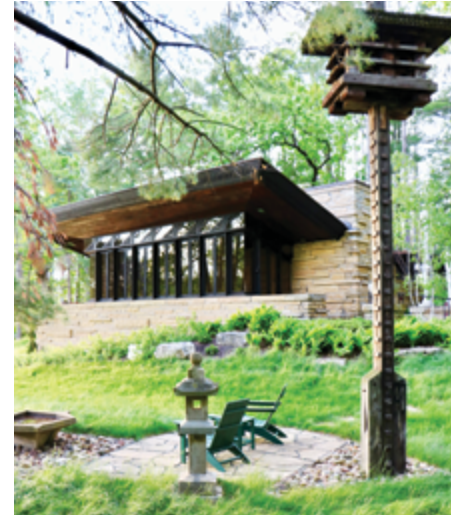
one of the designs, a 900-square-foot cottage with a soaring glass wall under a shed roof. The house and cottage are two of only 13 Wright-designed structures in the state. A third building, a combination office/garage, inspired by other Wright drawings, followed later.

In 2013, Ted and Debi Muntz became only the second owners of this architectural gem. They embarked on a restoration project, stabilizing portions of the house and collaborating with Aune to develop a landscape plan. While the land was studded with trees, many planted by the Lovnesses, it had never been professionally landscaped. The Muntzes wanted to enhance the lake view and create a flowing landscape worthy of the architect. Ted Muntz cleared out the buckthorn marring the property, making way for the first phase of the plan.

The landscape design honors Wright's principles and Muntz's and Aune's goals. It creates a seamless connection among the buildings, which

ABOUT *the* HOUSE

The Stillwater house is an example of Wright's Usonian design. He developed this style to extend his organic architecture philosophy to middle-income Americans and designed roughly 60 of these homes across the U.S. The term "Usonian" is derived from USONA, an acronym for the United States of North America. Usonian houses are single-story, have open floor plans and are designed to blend seamlessly with their surroundings.



before seemed to be unrelated. It also honors Wright's concept of unity of design by designating only 10 to 12 species through the entire property. Aune created Wright's favored vistas by strategically placing trees in alignment with paths. Shrubs that blocked views from the house were removed, creating an unending view of lake and trees. A large concrete patio was installed, punctuated by a planting oasis featuring an arrangement of large rocks and junipers, reflecting Wright's appreciation for Japanese aesthetics.

Wright's vision of merging indoors with the outdoors is evident in the numerous sculptural features dotting the landscape. Decorative railings, Japanese lanterns and a freeform pond extend architectural interest from the cottage interior to the outdoors. A stone wall separating the house from the vegetable garden incorporates copies of decorative concrete panels from Wright's Midway Gardens, a groundbreaking but short-lived Chicago entertainment complex designed by Wright and constructed in 1914.

Duplicates of Wright's famous garden sprite sculptures top several walls. On one of his many visits to Taliesin East, Don Lovness noticed pieces of the broken sprites lying in a ditch. Wright agreed to let him take

them back to Minnesota and try to reassemble them. Don successfully restored them and, during the process, made duplicate molds from which he produced copies, nineteen of which now accent the home. Wright's famous dish planters, often cradling trailing plants, sit atop several columns, again demonstrating his concept of fusing building architecture with the environment.

Wright favored using local, natural materials whenever possible. An exception to his rule is the widespread use of concrete painted Cherokee red, his favorite color. The concrete paves the patio as well, forming stepping stones leading from the home to the cottage. The architect characterized the color as growing out of "soft, warm, optimistic tones of earth and autumn leaves." When used alongside stone or wood, he believed the colored concrete complemented and enhanced natural elements and helped achieve his vision of merging buildings with their surroundings.

The house is now nestled among waves of ferns, grasses, daylilies and junipers, all reflecting its horizontal lines. Except for daylilies, which the Lovnesses had installed, Aune chose plants that the abundant wildlife would leave alone. Pachysandra edging the long walkway between

house and studio is Debi's favorite planting. Low-mow fescue provides a practical architectural element; it is mowed only once or twice each year. Long layers of native plants spill down the gentle slope behind the house. Two-track lanes of gravel unobtrusively intersect the waves, providing practical access to the vegetable garden and other parts of the property.

Approaching the house by way of a curving gravel road, visitors perceive a sense of calm and order. The house presents as just one more wave of the horizontal flow of native plantings. This is Ted Muntz's favorite part of the landscape and the delight of visitors. House and garden do merge. Wright would approve.

Clockwise from top left: The natural stone dish planter at the cottage's entrance reflects Wright's love of the Japanese aesthetic. A seating area and free-form pond bring structural elements outdoors. Cherokee-red stepping stones, also used in the house floor color, connect the home and cottage.

THE WRIGHT IDEAS

You can easily apply Wright's landscaping concepts to your own garden.



Clockwise from L to R: A carefully chosen rock and weeping juniper offer texture and form in a square patio opening. Horizontal house lines echo living layers of green surrounding it. Two whimsical sprites lead guests to the cottage entrance. Low-mow fescue is just one layer of the waves of green surrounding the house. A free-form pond, another Wright sculptural element, creates a vista enjoyed from the cottage windows. Practical and subtle, a two-track path intersects waves of vegetation, connecting buildings and allowing access to all parts of the property.

1 HARMONY WITH NATURE
Buildings and landscape should flow together seamlessly. Place trees and plants in natural groupings and use structural elements, such as urns, outdoors.

2 TEXTURE AND FORM
A focus on form and texture creates harmony between structures and their environment. Look at proportion, form and texture first and color second when choosing plants.

3 UNITY OF DESIGN
The entire landscape should present as one unified whole, a seamless integration of buildings with their natural surroundings. Use landscape materials and patterns similar to those in existing structures.

4 NATURAL MATERIALS
Wood and stone are best used in their natural state. Choose unaltered natural materials over manufactured products whenever possible.

5 MERGING OF INSIDE AND OUTSIDE
Large windows and the use of similar materials blends the indoors with the outdoors. Treat outdoor areas as natural extensions of interior rooms; emphasize views.

6 LOW-MAINTENANCE AND NATIVE PLANTS
Naturalistic informal gardens blur the distinction between architecture and environment. Incorporate native plants and use curving rather than straight lines.

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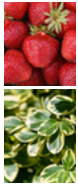
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STORY **ANNA MARHEFKE**
PHOTOS **BRENDA JOHNSON**

NESTLED IN BROOKLYN CENTER, MINN., a tiny gem of a teaching garden gives students of Relentless Academy a place to blossom as gardeners. Each summer, TOV Community Garden (short for mazel tov, a Jewish phrase wishing someone good luck) becomes an outdoor classroom, giving more than 80 students under age 18 opportunities to cultivate hands-on gardening skills and learn to grow fresh, healthy food.

As part of a free, summer-long STEM program offered at Brookdale Covenant Church, Academy students attend garden classes twice a week, getting their hands dirty as they learn about plant growth, biodiversity, pollination, composting, healthy food and cooking. A highlight? Eating fresh produce from the garden as much as possible.

Participants in Minnesota Green and Garden-in-a-Box, both signature community outreach programs of the Minnesota State Horticultural Society, TOV Community Garden and Relentless Academy reap the benefits of both. Plant donations, free soil, garden beds, compost, seeds and educational resources support the next generation of northern gardeners.

 To support community gardens like this, visit northerngardener.org/support



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— BRENDA JOHNSON



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