

Garden Update

Week of February 15, 202

Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Educator in Dodge County

Annual and Perennial Flowers

Growing a vegetable garden versus growing a flower garden can be hotly debated. Vegetable gardeners ask, “What good is it if you can’t eat it?” Flower growers think if it is not pretty, what’s the point? For me, growing both vegetables and flowers are necessary—vegetables nourish my body while flowers feed my soul.

As the calendar pulls us towards March, gardeners can be assembling the seeds and materials to start their own annual flowers. The variety and number of plants are as wide as the array of available seed and is not limited by the ready-to-plant cell packs at garden centers. Keep in mind, too, that the garden industry itself caters to the newest introductions, bypassing beloved past introductions and heirloom types to foster excitement. This means some older varieties are only available as seed and your purchasing dollar provides the “votes” needed to incentivize growers to continue to offer them. All-America Selections is a trialing organization that releases plant introductions exhibiting outstanding performance. Their webpage lists current introductions as well as those going all the way back to 1933! [www.http://all-americanselections.org](http://all-americanselections.org) .

Saved seed provides gardeners with more opportunities to grow favorite plants. While the seed may be harvested from hybrids, gardeners can still try them out, looking for surprises in flower color, disease and insect resistance, and plant form.

Don’t be too anxious to remove mulch around perennial flowers and plants. Some warm days may push sprouting, but this is the Midwest and more deep freezes are ahead. Removing mulch too early exposes plant crowns to possible freeze damage. Wait until April, when frosts won’t pose a problem for perennial flowers like a hard freeze would.

And if you’ve held off growing flowers because of the whole vegetables versus flowers debate, remember there are edible flowers you can grow. Not only are they nutritious but they really pretty-up a plate. I’ll never forget the gorgeous plate of daylily flowers stuffed with chicken salad. Who new daylily flowers were edible? An excellent list of edible flowers is found on the University of Minnesota’s Extension website: <https://extension.umn.edu/flowers/edible-flowers> .