

## Garden Update

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator in Dodge County

### Straw Foxglove

Unlike foxglove that are biennial, straw foxglove (*Digitalis lutea*) is a true perennial. The light yellow bell-shaped downward-facing flowers are smaller than their biennial relatives, but what is lost in flower size, straw foxglove makes up for in reliability and ease of growth.

Straw foxglove does best in average garden soil in a site that receives about 2-5 hours of direct sunlight daily. Planted at the edge of tree lines, in woodlands, or where the neighbor's garage shades your yard, this foxglove excels in challenging sunlight conditions. Its short stature, at 18-24 inches in height, makes it a good choice for the front of a shady border. Water during dry spells and mulch with a 2-4 inch layer of woodchips to keep soil evenly moist. Spent flowers may be deadheaded or left in place to allow seeds to fall around the parent plant.

Sources list straw foxglove as a short-lived plant and winter hardy to 5° F. My clump of straw foxglove is 10 years old now, with no attention given to providing protection from winter winds. Maybe this plant hasn't read the literature because it's survived a house move, has, at times, competed against taller weeds, and withstands the winters Mother Nature sends its way. After all that, it blooms its head off, producing 18 inch stalks of delightful flowers in late spring and early summer.

Straw foxglove is pollinated by long tongued bees, like the carder bee. Both the nectar and pollen are food for pollinators and their offspring. The plant is toxic to mammals, so both deer and rabbits stay away.

Straw foxglove plants can be hard to find. Ask your local nursery or garden center if they can order them in. The seeds of straw foxglove, which is how I started my plants, can be ordered online and through catalogs.