

# The Green Patch

## Spring Is On It's Way

By Jane Jensen , Pierce County Master Gardener

April 1, 2013

Volume 5, Issue 2

Spring is on its way with warmer temps and sunny skies. We do so hope there will be rain clouds for the farmers' spring planting and for our enjoyment of our yards and gardens. With Easter so early this year I wonder if it will be an early spring. Always in the back of our minds we have the fear of another dry, hot summer. While it doesn't deter many backyard gardeners, there are things to consider.

Conserving water and finding plants that can meet the tough growing conditions of a summer on the Plains of Nebraska are considerations. While checking out the garden catalogs that started arriving Christmas Eve Day, perennial flowers seem a good choice as they thrive in full sun and when grouped together to your liking can make watering easy. Another plus is their variety in color, height and texture. Once they are established they can be enjoyed for years with little maintenance. Just remember the old adage about perennials: First year they sleep, second year they creep, third year they leap.

I found this to be very true when I received a balloon flower from a friend. I had admired its lovely blue color and showy flower. I planted the section she gave me and I thought I had killed it. Knowing right where I'd planted it, nothing was there to see. Three more years went by and suddenly one day in early summer there was that same blue flower. I learned patience with that particular experience. The same happened with some peonies I moved. They would not bloom but three years after moving them, they are the most lovely white thing of beauty in my yard besides the roses.

Anyone can grow yarrow which comes in bright colors for anyone's liking. Blooming from late spring to fall is a great plus. Gaillardias bloom all summer right into fall. They have a wide color choice, make good cut flowers and love the sun. Sedums are very popular and once established, you just might find them in other places in your yard or flower beds. But I do like them since they come in so many different heights, textures and varieties. I've seen many instances where folks plant them in old boots, cooking pots or other vessels for a bit of whimsy. They seem to adapt to infrequent watering.

Black-eyed Susan, phlox, zinnia and cone flower are others to consider for the blazing sun of summer. Zinnias and bachelor buttons (cone flower) grow readily from seed, another cost saving feature.

Best wishes to my fellow gardeners anxious to get their hands in the soil again.



Gaillardia aristata

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## The Spring Garden I Left Behind

By Tom Surber, Madison County Master Gardener

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When we lived on Norfolk Avenue, we were fortunate to have over three feet of high quality loam soil. I enriched it some with leaves and other plant debris to make it more woodland/rock garden like.

Up by the back door to the house was a space about 20 x 25 feet with another area directly adjacent about 10 x 10. In the middle of the larger space was a black walnut tree. I was never aware of any Juglan problems there. Perhaps I was just lucky in my plant choices. The only plants I tried there that did poorly were hyacinths, both the grape and the giant varieties. We had 5 large boulders hauled in and placed in a semi-circle. And along with a front boarder of bricks to the patio, the other sides were a sidewalk and the house foundation.

Spring in this garden was fantastic. I hope I have the sequence right below, but these are my memories of that space.

The first flower up was a **march iris**. This little darling grew in a small patch, about a foot in diameter, right up close to the house foundation. In late March, green spikes came up out of the ground. These developed a typical light blue iris flower. They typically never exceeded 8 inches in height. The leaves remained a nearly round spike. They retreated back into the ground to await another spring. I tried to transplant them to our new house, but failed. I have since learned the march iris is very particular in when it is moved.

3 – 4 weeks later, the delicate, native **dutchman's britches** came up in front of one of the rocks. These never exceeded 4 inches in height, and were a dark green cluster with the typical pantaloons or heart

(Continued on page 4)

2013

# PLANT FAIR

Friday, May 3, 6:00 pm—8:00 pm and Saturday, May 4, 9:00 am—3:00 pm  
Northeast Community College—Cox Activity Center, 801 E. Benjamin Ave., Norfolk, Nebraska

**Educational Speakers and Other Events:**Saturday:

- 9:30 am **Kelly Feehan**, UNL Extension Educator  
"Just *WHAT* are Rain Gardens and Why Would I Want One?"
- 10:30 am **Terri James**, UNL Extension Assistant – Urban Gardening  
"Container Gardens"
- 11:00 am **Rod Ackerman**, Bluebird Nursery  
"Bringing Great Plains Natives into the Garden"
- 11:00 am **Youth Horticulture ID Contest**—details below
- 12:30 pm **Master Gardener Awards and Contest Awards**
- 1:00 pm **Mary Hamer**, Loess Hills Lavender Farm  
"Lavender: The Amazing Herb"
- 2:00 pm **Terri James**, UNL Extension Assistant – Urban Gardening  
"Container Gardens"

Sponsored by:

**Plant Fair features include:**

- \* **Free Admission!**
- \* **Demonstrations:** Your Path to Health and Harmony! Red Road Herbs
- \* **Lunch Stand** provided by Master Gardeners!
- \* **New perennials and annuals** on hand for sale!
- \* **Door Prizes** drawn hourly!
- \* **Delivery assistance** to your vehicle!
- \* **Plant Sitter Area:** Place to keep your purchases until you have completed shopping and listening to speakers!
- \* **Children's Garden:** Special activities for children to learn a love of gardening!
- \* **Great Vendors** selling flowers, herbs & plants as well as mulch, garden décor, sculptures, home décor, garden tools, etc!
- \* **Ask The Master Gardener** booth will feature a Master Gardener member on hand to answer your gardening questions!
- \* **Locally grown houseplants** for sale, grown by Master Gardener members!
- \* **Youth Horticulture ID Contest:** Youth ages 8-18 years old (by January 1, 2013) are encouraged to participate.

Participation is free. *Pre-register by April 25* by contacting the UNL Extension—Madison County 402-370-4040. Three age brackets will receive prizes for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place finishers.

- Prizes:** 1<sup>st</sup> Place - \$25 cash + \$25 gift certificate to the Master Gardener Plant Booths  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place - \$10 cash + \$15 gift certificate to the Master Gardener Plant Booths  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place - \$10 gift certificate to the Master Gardener Plant Booths

Contestants will be required to sight ID horticulture plants to the accepted common name. Plant list and study guides available on registration. Competition begins May 4 at 11:00 am and awards presented at 12:30 pm.

**Saturday, May 4**  
**We have some outstanding speakers lined up to educate everyone on various topics.**  
**Be sure to attend and learn from the experts.**

## MEET THE 2013 SPEAKERS



### **9:30 AM — Just What are Rain Gardens and Why Would I Want One?**

If you care about conserving water, consider a rain garden. If you like flowering perennials and ornamental grasses, plant a rain garden. If you wish to attract pollinators like butterflies and bees, use a rain garden. If you want to help protect streams, rivers and lakes from pollution, install a rain garden.

Attend to learn what a rain garden is, why there should be one in every landscape, how to install a rain garden, and which plants are good to use in rain gardens.

**Kelly Feehan**, is a UNL Extension Educator for Horticulture in Platte County for the past 30 years. She has a BS in arboriculture from NDSU and a MA in Adult Education from UNL. Her current focus is landscape design, planting, and maintenance for water conservation and protection.

**10:30 AM AND 2:00 PM — Container Gardening** Do you have limited space for a garden? Do you want to simplify your gardening? Terri will present simple show and tell ideas for container gardening.

**Terri James** is an Extension Assistant with a horticulture focus who works with the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Extension. Terri received her Bachelor's Degree in Horticulture with a landscape design emphasis from the University of Nebraska—Lincoln, and is working on Master's Degree in Public Horticulture. She provides support for the State Extension Master Gardener program, NET's Backyard Farmer program, and is involved with the International Master Gardener Conference Committee and the Extension Master Gardener Coordinators National Committee.



**11:00 AM — Bringing Great Plains Natives into the Garden** The talk will highlight some of Rod's favorite plants native to the Great Plains, both the rare and readily available. Their advantages and drawbacks when grown in the garden, as with any long lived plant in the garden, placement is key. Rod will also discuss a little about some of the new cultivars that are coming out of the breeding programs that are using native wildflowers as the foundation plants.

**Rod Ackerman**, is originally from Norfolk and has been actively growing and collecting plants in one form or another for over 40 years. During the last 20 years, he has been working at Bluebird Nursery in Clarkson, NE as an Area Manager/Grower. While at Bluebird, Rod has had the opportunity to be involved in nearly every aspect of perennial production from seed collection, cuttings, tissue culture, new cultivar development, to finished plants ready for the garden center. Rod also oversees the pest and disease control program. In addition to working with over 2,000 different varieties of plants at Bluebird Nursery, he also maintains over an acre of private garden that contains a wide range of plant material from trees, shrubs, dwarf conifers, intermixed with herbaceous perennials; including both woodland and prairie wildflowers. Prior to arriving at Bluebird Nursery, Rod was actively involved in orchid hybridizing and propagation while working at A & P Orchids in Swansea, MA and while working on his Master's degree in Biology at Ball State Univ. in Muncie, IN.

**1:00 PM — Lavender: The Amazing Herb** Have you wondered how you can cook with it, clean with it and heal with it...and of course just enjoy it? Mary will answer these questions. Also learn how a small farm town Iowa girl took a leap of faith and started an alternative crop as a hobby and turned it into a business...that has grown into quite an adventure!!!

**Mary Hamer**, was born and raised in the Loess Hills of Iowa. After marrying her high school sweetheart, they lived in Norfolk and Wayne Nebraska for 27 years, then southern Iowa for another 12 years until finally coming home to the hills in 2009.

In 2005, after visiting the lavender fields of Sequim, WA, during the Sequim Lavender Festival, it was love at first sight. Cutting bundles of fresh lavender and inhaling the aroma, she knew she had to learn more about this amazing herb. Mary was in awe and resolved to bring that same beauty to her home in the Loess Hills of Iowa.

In 2009, they broke ground with 1200 Lavender plants. Since then, more plants have been added. Currently there are over 2000 plants boasting 10 different varieties with lavender growing in two of the nine farmable acres. Mary and her husband strive to make the grounds a place of natural beauty integrating native grasses and flowers to enhance the property spring, summer, or fall.



## Youth Horticulture ID Contest

The Northeast Nebraska Master Gardeners will be hosting a Youth Horticulture ID Contest at their annual Plant Fair. All youth ages 8-18 years old (by January 1, 2013) are encouraged to participate. Participation is free. *Pre-register by April 25* by contacting the UNL Extension—Madison County 402-370-4040. Prizes will be given for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place finishers in each of the age brackets. Contestants will be required to sight ID horticultural plants to the accepted common name. Plant list and study guides available on registration.

### Contest Details:

Date: May 4, 2013

Time: Competition begins 11:00 AM, Awards Presented 12:30 PM

Location: Cox Activities Center, Northeast Community College, Norfolk

### The ages for brackets are broken down as follows:

Junior – 8-11 years old by January 1, 2013

Intermediate – 12-14 years old by January 1, 2013

Senior – 15-18 years old by January 1, 2013

### Prizes:

1<sup>st</sup> Place - \$25 cash + \$25 gift certificate at the Master Gardener Plant Booths

2<sup>nd</sup> Place - \$10 cash + \$15 gift certificate at the Master Gardener Plant Booths

3<sup>rd</sup> Place - \$10 gift certificate at the Master Gardener Plant Booths



(Continued from page 1) *The Spring Garden I Left Behind*

shaped white flower. They are a close relative of the bleeding hearts, and the flower is similar.

The following weeks, the few native **blood root** plants came up just south of the dutchman's britches, in front of the same rock. They had large lobed leaves with the single stemmed white flower. They always seemed larger and stronger than the dutchman's britches.

Meanwhile the native **jack in the pulpits** were starting to sprout along another part of the foundation. This well named all green plant and flower had 3 large leaves with the hooded pulpit with speaker inside. They actually flowered later. The ferns began to grow, but were slow in the spring to come in. The **daffodils** sprouted and heralded that the spring had arrived with their bright yellow trumpet flowers. Across the driveway were patches of an early blooming **dwarf miniature bearded iris** of royal purple color in patches. There were a few of the smaller varieties of native **Solomon's seal** with their zigzag stems up close to the house. I had started some wild ginger before we moved, but it did not have time to settle in before we moved.

The native **prairie columbine** came in next. I planted three plants, and shortly had the whole area covered, and it reached out into the more distant beds. These elegant red and yellow, narrow vertical flowers on tall loose racemes, formed like the Colorado Columbine, but not fat, were all over. They looked like lanterns hanging in small trees. Actually they are a biennial and self-seeded themselves very successfully. Between the columbines were the **darwin tulips**. I had selected early, middle and late blooming varieties. Thus we had tulips from early May into June. The few tall bearded irises came through in early June. Mrs. Ferguson had lived there before us, and had left several unusual varieties planted there.

In late May, early June, as the columbine began to die down, the **Virginia Bluebells** popped up through them. Again, I had planted about three plants, but had the entire area filled with the pretty racemes of blue flowers on wonderful arched stems and broad dark leaves. At about the same time as the bluebells, the bright **red stemless tulips** with the striped leaves started across the driveway.

Meanwhile, in mid June, the **hostas** were starting to come in. The various varieties all popped out of the ground at different times. Every spring I swore that the Francis Williams had died, but up it came, later than all the others. Beside it were **bleeding hearts**, one red and one white. The tardiness of the Francis Williams Hosta left a space for the bleeding hearts. Slowly, the hosta took the bluebells down. Slowly they conquered the darwin tulips and the tall bearded iris. I had to cut the bleeding hearts back as the hosta devoured them. The flowering stems of the bleeding hearts looked like hands of a corpus twisting up between the hosta. By mid June, this was a hosta bed with over 20 varieties from a 2-3" miniature boarding the patio to 2 or 3 giant varieties standing 30 – 36 inches tall and over 6 feet in diameter with ferns in the dark corner.

I should add that all the natives above I was fortunate enough to actually transplant in from various river bottom lands in the area. With the soil and the dappled shade/sun in the river bottom lands being similar to the rich loam and dappled shade/sun of the garden, they succeeded.

# Adding the "Wow" Factor to the Shade Garden

By Janelle McIntyre, Platte County Master Gardener

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We all want that special "wow" factor in our flower beds. Many feel the shade garden can be a bit boring. It isn't so. A few plants with colorful foliage put in the right place can provide drama the whole season. Blooms are secondary. Colorful and variegated foliage provides the interest. Several plants can fill this bill.

One of my favorite plants is coleus. They can be any color we care to purchase: purple, variegated, chartreuse or all three. As an annual, they can be added to our gardens or put in containers. Cutting them back a little will make them bushier and more compact. Now, there are sun coleuses, they can be used to liven up sunny areas, too. A word of caution, if used in the sun they must be kept well watered.



Another favorite shade plant with contrasting foliage is the hosta. There are so many variations it can get a bit confusing. Obtain a good hosta catalog (or go online) and pick out the ones that tickle your fancy. I will add that the ones that stress not only color but vigor can add to your success. Some hostas are a bit slow and some are extremely vigorous. As a rule of thumb, if it was chosen as Hosta of the Year, it has both color and vigor.

'Golden Tiara' not only has a nice variegation but grows fast. I use it as a hedge on the north side of our house. 'Regal Splendor' is a vigorous, large, vase shaped, variegated, hosta that is a "show stopper". My favorite, if there can be just one.

Another colorful plant in the perennial family is the Coral Bells. Plant breeders have been putting out so many new ones it can be hard to keep up with; one can only try. "Purple Palace" is one of my favorites. It not only has shiny purple foliage but has good vigor. It will sometimes reseed. Coral Bells can be purple, orange, chartreuse and anything in between. They can have ruffled leaves with colorful veining. As a whole, Coral Bells are a tidy and neat plant that can be easily added to our gardens and containers. They can take full sun with plenty of water, but really prefer some shade. I recently moved one called "Ruffled Petticoats" from full sun where it wasn't doing so well. I hope the shade will make it happy. A garden isn't complete without these long lived, hard working plants.



What better thing is there to do but spend the spring picking out pretty flowers to add the "wow" factor to your gardens?

## Horseradish

By Tammy Furstenau, Stanton County Master Gardener in Training

**HORSERADISH**...bitter and spicy flavor, almost has a hot taste. Horseradish is a perennial herb that is part of the Brassicaceae family, which includes things as broccoli and cabbages. Generally the roots which are long and fleshy are used to make a condiment for beef, and the leaves can be eaten as a salad.

**Growing**... a horseradish plant can grow up to two (2) feet tall and is a cold hardy plant. We are able to choose from two widely available varieties of common horseradish, which is fairly disease resistant. Horseradish can also take most types of soil, but once its planted you want to leave it alone. You can sometimes find horseradish roots at farmers markets or mail order magazines, and if you have family or friend that will part with part of their plants.

**Harvesting**...do not harvest from your horseradish plant the first year, it needs to be established. My Mom always says that you want to harvest horseradish in the months ending in (er), such as September, October, you get the idea, usually the first frost has hit by then.

**Preparing**...when you are going to prepare the horseradish be sure that you are in a well ventilated area. Peel the horseradish as you would a carrot and process in a food processor. If you like your horseradish on the mild side, add 2 to 3 TBS of vinegar and about a 1/2 tsp of salt right away. If you would rather have it hotter wait a few minutes and then add the vinegar and salt. TIP: the longer you wait to add the vinegar and salt the hotter the horseradish will get.

Horseradish is an easy to grow perennial that offers a spicy flavor. Try this recipe provided by TASTE OF HOME and enjoy on your next side of beef.

### Ingredients

- 1 Cup sour cream
- 3 to 4 TBS prepared horseradish
- 1 tsp coarsely ground pepper
- 1/8 tsp Worcestershire Sauce

### Directions

- Brush roast with oil; rub with pepper. Place roast, fat side up, on a rack in a shallow roasting pan. Bake, uncovered, at 450° for 15 minutes.
- Reduce heat to 325°. Bake for 2-3/4 hours or until meat reaches desired doneness (for medium-rare, a meat thermometer should read 145°; medium, 160°; well-done, 170°), basting with pan drippings every 30 minutes.
- Let stand for 10-15 minutes before slicing. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine the sauce ingredients. Serve with beef. **Yield:** 6-8 servings.

Reference: <http://herbs-treatandtaste.blogspot.com/2011/01/horseradish-health-benefits-uses-and.html>



As spring approaches, one day at a time, I'm looking forward to green sprouts popping up in the garden. The crocus and daffodils are already coming up. The one I'm waiting for is the asparagus.

Asparagus is a member of the lily family. They can be delicate and thin or thick and stubby. There are about 300 species native from Siberia to southern Africa. Several African species are grown as ornamental plants with feathery sprays of branchlets or lacy foliage used in corsages and in plant arrangements.



Garden asparagus is cultivated in most temperate and subtropical parts of the world. Asparagus is grown extensively in France, Italy, and the United States where climate is favorable. An asparagus plantation may be productive for 10 to 15 years. The shoots become more spindling and less vigorous each year. Best soil types for asparagus are deep loose, light clays with much organic matter and light clays with much organic matter, and light sandy loams. Asparagus will thrive in soils too salty for other crops, but acidic soils are to be avoided. The asparagus cutting season varies from 2 to 12 weeks, depending on the age of the crop and on climate.

As a vegetable, it can be eaten raw or stored upright in water for 2 to 3 days. It's easy and quick to fix. The stubby ones can be peeled and cooked, but don't over cook them. It's mostly steamed, but can be roasted or grilled and served with truffle mayonnaise, balsamic vinegar, hollandaise sauce, or lemon butter. If you're looking to plant some asparagus, I've found three main types; [1] Martha Washington with its green tender spears, with tight tips and it is rust tolerant, [2] purple passion or sweet [turns green when cooked], a sweeter, less fibrous spear with a mild nutty taste, and [3] Jersey [supreme, knight, or giant] predominantly all-male [female plants produce red berries] does well in heavier clay soil, highly resistant to rust, fusarium root rot and crown rot.



Plants are 2 year roots. Spears can be harvested the following spring. Hardy in zones 3-9 [2 with protection].

## Celebrate Spring Gardening

Friday , April 19, 2013, 4:00—7:15 pm  
West Education Center, Central Community College, Columbus

*A splendid event for the inquisitive gardener who may tend a precious, petite container garden to those who care for a beautiful spring luscious abundant garden. The entire event is rooted in a relaxing and fun atmosphere for you to enjoy. We hope you can join us.*

*Karen Mroczek, Columbus Campus and Marilyn Schmit, Master Gardener.*

- 4:00-4:30 pm Registration
- 4:00 pm The Garden Market, Vendors open for your shopping enjoyment.
- 5:00-5:30 pm Garden Session 1 (choose one of four sessions)
- 5:30-6:00 pm A Sandwich & a Stroll, Engage in a conversation with other gardeners, browse the Garden Market, and enjoy a box lunch provided for you.
- 6:00-6:30 pm Garden Session 2 (choose one of four sessions)
- 6:45-7:15 pm Garden Session 3 (choose one of three sessions)

Registration form (with session choices) can be found at [madison.unl.edu/mgupcomingevents](http://madison.unl.edu/mgupcomingevents). Register by filling out the form and sending with \$20. Register by April 11, 2013. Questions? Please call Karen Mroczek at 402-562-1249.

Shared by Tammy Furstenau:

Here is a great **Rhubarb Marmalade** recipe found in the April 16, 2012 Farmers' Almanac.

### Ingredients:

- 6 Cups chopped rhubarb
- 6 Cups sugar
- 2 medium oranges

### Directions:

Combine rhubarb and sugar in a large saucepan. Grind the oranges, peels and all, in a food processor. Add to rhubarb mixture. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring often, until the marmalade sheets from a spoon, about 1 hour. Pour into hot jars, leaving 1/4" headspace. Adjust caps. Process in a boiling-water bath for 10 minutes.



## The Green Patch Contributors

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Articles and information for the July issue of *The Green Patch* are due to Pam Greunke (pam.greunke@unl.edu) by May 31, 2013.

## Garden Chores, for Better or Worse

Most gardeners want to spend time outdoors and prefer garden chores to indoor ones. But even the most hardcore gardeners have yard chores they, well, "enjoy" less than others. What are the worst chores, and what ones are most enjoyable? An informal survey revealed a surprising amount of consensus.

Maybe, with a little forethought for the year ahead, we can figure out ways to spend more time in the garden doing the things we love and less on the chores we dislike.

### Least Pleasurable Garden Chores

Weeding tops the list of the most-hated garden chores, or at least makes it into everyone's Top 10. Words like endless, never-ending and overwhelming were common adjectives. It's a matter of focus also; to go out and weed demands attention not to the beauty of the garden but to its bullies.

Dealing with other bullies in the form of pests and diseases isn't something we enjoy either. But more and more gardeners are allowing nature to take care of things on its own. With beneficial insects outnumbering true pests by something like 97 percent, that's not a bad choice.

Chores connected specifically to lawn or turf weren't highly enjoyed; mowing in particular, with raking taking a close second in the off-season. Edging, aerating and other lawn chores join their ranks. There appears to be a strong bias against "noisy" tasks, ones that require power equipment like mowers, edgers and chainsaws. Power-driven chores consistently ranked in the least-enjoyed category. Silence, it would appear, truly is golden to gardeners. Cleaning, sharpening and maintaining equipment is something we'd prefer to avoid too.

Fall clean-up isn't relished nearly as much as spring planting; and digging up dahlias, gladiolas or other non-hardy plants doesn't have the immediate gratification gardeners get from bringing live plants in for the winter.

Not surprisingly, jobs that are beyond the gardener's level of expertise are disliked. Testing soil was one of those things gardeners felt guilty about not doing, along with composting. One gardener wrote, "compost! (there, I said it. I used to. Too much work! Takes up space. I just throw compostable yard waste behind large plants, let it rot and forget about it.)" The truth is, if we're throwing waste back into the landscape, we are composting, and even if we're not testing our soil but are planting into it and adding organic material to it, it's going to improve. So maybe we can relax about some of these things.

### Most Enjoyable Garden Chores

There are unifying factors for the chores gardeners enjoy, too. They tend to be tasks that are less repetitive, less physically demanding, hand- rather than power-tooled and allow for a good bit of creativity.

Designing and deciding what to plant and then gathering the plants is highly pleasurable for most gardeners, a chance to think about color, texture and different seasons. It takes place in the imagination before the harsh realities of wind, heat and hard work tarnish the original vision. Doing the actual planting is enjoyable for most gardeners, too, whether in containers or in the landscape.

Deadheading is a task many gardeners enjoy. Unlike weeding, it focusses on successes, giving its caretaker a chance to pay attention to plants that have bloomed and borne and fulfilled their mission.

Watering lands on either end of the scale: hauling hoses and setting sprinklers is no fun but hand-watering containers, for many gardeners, is.

Laying stone walls or pathways is physical work but it can make an almost immediate difference. Pruning woody plants and cutting back ornamental grasses is another "could go either way" task. If these things haven't been done by late spring when everything needs attention all at once, they add to the duties. During winter months, though, they give gardeners a chance to be productive outdoors.

So give a little thought to the things you don't want to do: add more plants (pro) close together to avoid weeding (con); prune on a mild winter day (pro) rather than a busy, rainy spring day (con); and plant shrubs (pro) in patches of the lawn that are difficult to mow (con).



## What is an Heirloom Vegetable

By Jane Rhebb, Stanton County Master Gardener

Heirloom vegetables, especially tomatoes, have been widely featured in the last few years. There is some discussion on exactly what the qualifications of an Heirloom are. There is agreement on some basic points.

Heirlooms are non-hybrid, non-genetically modified, and open-pollinated. Open-pollinated means that if you plant a saved seed, it will come back "true to type" or the same as its parent. There has been increased interest in seed saving and seed banks so varieties can be preserved and we don't have to depend on large seed companies to control what varieties are available.

Heirlooms taste great. Heirlooms have been bred and selected for generations by gardeners based on flavor. Most varieties found in the grocery store are based on their ability to be packed and shipped. The best way to experience the taste and beauty of Heirlooms is to grow your own. A variety of transplants have become more available in retail and unlimited variety to order from seed catalogs.

Heirlooms come with history. Varieties are usually more than 50 years old and have been passed from generation to generation, often along with fascinating stories and heritage from years past. It was a custom in Nebraska to give tomato seeds to couples getting married as a gesture of future prosperity. The variety became known as Nebraska Wedding, an orange tomato variety.

I have personally been trying different heirloom varieties of tomatoes, eggplant and peppers. The seed catalogs designate what is an heirloom and when buying seeds it will be in the description. Many heirlooms are easy to grow but are not hybridized to resist specific diseases. I would recommend referring to the Neb-Guides for advice on good gardening practices to improve your results. Go to [ianrpubs.unl.edu](http://ianrpubs.unl.edu) and search the subject. I recommend Tomatoes in the Home Garden, G1650.

Last year I started from seed the variety, Black Krim, a Russian heirloom tomato almost black in color with green shoulders. We loved the unusual complex taste, a sweet-salty flavor, along with the beautiful color. It is March and I am again starting my seedlings. The heirloom tomato varieties that I will be growing again this year are: Brandywine, Cherokee Purple, San Marzano, Black Krim, Nebraska Wedding, and Amish Paste. The new ones I am going to try are Italian Heirloom, Dester and Kellogg's Breakfast. I would encourage you to try growing a tomato heirloom. You will experience the irresistible old-fashioned real tomato taste. Happy Gardening!

## Northeast Nebraska Master Gardeners

Meetings held at:  
UNL Extension - Madison County  
601 E Benjamin Ave, Suite 105  
Norfolk NE 68701



Phone:  
402-370-4040 Madison County  
402-329-4821 Pierce County  
402-563-4901 Platte County  
402-375-3310 Wayne County

Master Gardeners are people who love plants,  
gardening, landscaping, and teaching others.



UNL EXTENSION—WAYNE COUNTY  
510 N PEARL ST, STE C  
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*We're on the web at*

<http://madison.unl.edu/mastergardenerhome>

## What is It?? By Wayne Ohnesorg, Extension Educator

Vicki Wagner correctly identified the arthropod from the last *What is it?*. She correctly identified the arthropod as a milkweed longhorn beetle (*Tetraopes* sp.). They are quite common in patches of milkweed. There are 13 species of milkweed longhorn beetle found in the continental United States.



## Lawn Core Aeration By Kelly Feehan, Platte County Extension Educator

April is one time of the year for core aeration of lawns. I was recently asked if drought damaged lawns should or should not be aerated this year. Core aeration is one of the best practices to improve lawns. Because of drought damage, it is likely even more important to core aerate lawns this spring; and ideally next September as well. Core aeration is most successful when the soil is moist. Soils were hard and dry going into fall and winter, but recent snows may help increase soil moisture to improve success with core aeration in April. If you can aerate the lawn yourself or hire it done, go ahead and do so this spring. In contrast, power raking can be very damaging to lawns. This may be a practice to avoid this spring on drought damaged lawns. The only time power raking is needed is when the true thatch layer exceeds one-half inch; however, core aeration is a practice that is almost always beneficial. With lawns thinned from heat and drought stress, overseeding right after core aeration is a good practice to use. Select improved turfgrass cultivars, provide irrigation as needed for seed germination, and do not apply herbicides during the time seedlings are establishing.

