

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners Newsletter



Paperwhites. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

Forcing Bulbs for the Holidays and Early Spring

by Wendy Wilson

In Europe having blooming amaryllis, paperwhites, daffodils, tulips, and other bulbs indoors is a winter tradition. Enjoy the charm and fragrance of this tradition in your own home by forcing spring-blooming bulbs.

Selecting healthy, large bulbs is as important to forcing bulbs inside as it is to planting bulbs in the ground. Large, firm bulbs will generate bigger, stronger blooms. I prefer to order bulbs from companies that import directly from Holland, but I've also had success with bulbs from local distributors. Bulbs are planted with the pointed end up. With some bulbs you will not see the roots plate.

Amaryllis and paperwhites are the easiest bulbs to force. They come pre-chilled and ready to pot and grow and will bloom in three to five weeks. Daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, grape hyacinths, crocuses, and other small bulbs, on the other hand, need to be potted and chilled at 35 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit for 10 to 12 weeks. A cold garage or basement or a refrigerator is ideal. If you are storing the bulbs outside a refrigerator, cover them with cardboard or a tarp to provide darkness. A shed, cold frame, or anywhere that could freeze is not good: frozen bulbs turn to mush.

cont. on page 2



Forcing Bulbs for the Holidays and Early Spring—cont. from page 1

When potting bulbs, use damp potting soil. Do not use garden soil. There is no need to add fertilizer; bulbs come ready to grow, with all the nutrition they need. You can grow one layer of bulbs or two for a fuller display.

If you choose to plant one layer, a shallow pot (four to five inches) is ideal. Plant large bulbs (tulips, daffodils) at about two and a half inches. Small bulbs (crocuses, grape hyacinths) get planted at about one inch. When the bulbs are covered with soil, their tips should be just at the dirt surface. When planting tulips, face the flat side of the bulb toward the outside of the pot. The first (lowest) leaf produced by the flowering shoot is always produced toward the flat side of the bulb. Large or small, bulbs should be tightly packed, even touching.

To layer bulbs, select a pot with greater depth (seven to eight inches). Place large bulbs below a layer of smaller bulbs: for example, tulips below, crocuses above. Place the lowest layer on four inches of potting soil, add an additional inch of soil and then the next layer of bulbs. Cover with soil.

During the cooling period, keep the pots cool, dark, and damp. Check the pots every week so they don't dry out. After the cooling period you should see half-inch to one-inch sprouts. At this point, place the pots in a cool spot (60 to 65 degrees) until you see blooms. This should take about three weeks. The flowers will last longer if they are not in direct sun. Some flowers (paperwhites and amaryllis in particular) may grow so enthusiastically that they flop. They can be supported with stakes.

Forced bulbs are a great way to enjoy spring flowers in the depths of winter.

In This Issue

Forcing Bulbs for the Holidays and Early Spring	1
From the Board	3
Contemporary Applications of Colonial Gardens	4
Silky Thread Grass <i>(Nassella [syn. Stipa] tenuissima)</i>	6
Ask A Master Gardener	7
New & Noteworthy	8
Backyard Bugs	8
The Garden Journal Radio Show	9
Membership Report	10
Calendar of Events	11

.....

Editor: Sarah Baldwin
Art Director: Jannine Cabossel



From the Board

by Holly Henry, member-at-large

Fall in Northern New Mexico is a spirited season. Golden aspens, distinctive blue skies, cooler nights, and shorter days, along with celebrations with family and friends, make this my favorite time of year. I also enjoy the harvest of cool-weather crops, especially Brussels sprouts.

A cultivar of wild cabbage, Brussels sprouts (*Brassica oleracea* var. *gemmifera*) originated in, yes, Brussels, Belgium. The buds, which resemble miniature cabbages, grow on stalks of a tall, leafy plant. When the sprouts are an inch in diameter, the top inch or two of the stalk can be removed to encourage the buds at the top to enlarge. Freezes do not harm Brussels sprouts; in fact, they taste even sweeter after a frost. Once temperatures are in the mid- to high-20s, harvest during the next few weeks. Stalks with the leaves removed can be hung upright in a cool cellar. Sprouts cut from the stalks and stored in bags in the refrigerator will keep for two weeks.



Brussels sprouts are ornamental and packed with health benefits. In addition to being high in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, they decrease inflammation and help control blood-sugar levels.

These tangy horseradish-cream Brussels sprouts are best served alongside a holiday ham or turkey. Look for sprouts with tight, firm, small deep-green heads; if they're still on the stalk, so much the better. To prepare them, peel off their outer leaves and trim the stems.

Ingredients:

1½ pounds Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
4 strips crisp-cooked bacon, finely chopped
¼ cup reduced-fat sour cream
3 teaspoons prepared horseradish
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Directions:

Place a steamer basket in a large saucepan, add 1 inch of water, and bring to a boil. Put Brussels sprouts in the basket and steam until tender, 6 to 8 minutes. Mix bacon, sour cream, horseradish, salt, and pepper in a medium bowl. Add the Brussels sprouts and toss to coat. Serves 6.

Wishing you joys of the harvest and the season.



Garden in Colonial Williamsburg. Photo by Ken Lund (Flickr).

Contemporary Applications of Colonial Gardens

by Márta Gyeviki

With rapid environmental changes disturbingly apparent to us all, many people are looking at their properties from a new perspective. How can our personal outdoor spaces make a difference? We already know how important it is to increase urban green areas. We also know the value of using drought-tolerant and native plants. But there are other opportunities.

We can create gardens not only to be aesthetically pleasing and to support wildlife but also to enhance self-sufficiency—places where beauty and usefulness coexist. Even if the vegetables and fruits produced in home gardens don't cover all household needs, they can make a real dent in environmental pollution from large-scale food production and transport.

cont. on page 5

Looking to colonial gardens can help us understand how to grow edible plants while maintaining the ornamental function of our gardens. The colonial period ranged from 1600 to 1775. Gardeners of this era were constrained by small lots, little leisure time and money, limited plant availability, and sometimes scarce water sources. Most of these factors are more relevant than ever to garden design today.

The gardens of early settlers were varied, reflecting the traditions of the European countries where the immigrants came from. Colonists and Europeans frequently exchanged plant material. New World species were shipped across the Atlantic, while Asian and European species made their way to America. Exotic fruit trees, vegetables, herbs, and flowering bulbs were interplanted with natives, including tobacco, corn, and other vegetables, as well as indigenous trees, flowering shrubs, vines, and wildflowers.

Though different regions adopted different styles, some typical features of colonial gardens can be described. Ordinary village houses were built behind tiny front yards on narrow lots, often a mere 40 to 50 feet wide, with meticulously defined edges separating properties from sidewalks and neighbors. These small front areas had to be functional above all, but they might include herbs and veggies or colorful perennials to enliven the scene. Sometimes there were longer spaces behind these village houses to work fields, keep livestock, and maintain gardens. Square- and rectangular-shaped raised beds allowed gardeners easy access to all the plants. Smaller vegetables and herbs might be situated nearer the kitchen, while larger vegetables such as beans, corn, and pumpkins would be grown in outlying fields.

A straight central walkway might lead to a focal point, usually a well or another stone feature. Planks covered gravel or swept-dirt paths to make walking easier in rain or snow. When available, other regional paving materials, such as bricks, cobblestones, shells, and bark, might be added to dress up pathways. In rural areas, fruit trees sometimes lined property edges. In addition to providing fruit, the trees served as hedges to protect plants from animals and wind.

Let's embrace the challenge of creating yards that are respectful of the environment and other species while in tune with our own gardening and aesthetic interests. Plant in empty lots and bare patches of dirt. Start small, with just one or two beds of various greens, and fill the rest of the space with ornamental drought-tolerant and native plants.

References:

Old House Journal, [Creating a Colonial Garden](#), by Lucinda Brockway
Penn State Extension, [Creating a Colonial Garden](#), by Kathleen M. Kelley



Silky Thread Grass

(*Nassella* [syn. *Stipa*] *tenuissima*)

by Stephanie Burns

In *The Plant Finder's Guide to Ornamental Grasses*, Roger Grounds describes silky thread grass—also known as Mexican feather grass—as “an indispensable grass that contributes grace and elegance to the garden from spring until the depths of winter.” A fine-textured grass that’s characterized by striking color changes, it is mostly green from late spring to late summer, turning to pale buff in fall and winter. Delicate, slender leaves and airy flower heads catch the slightest breeze and play with the light, especially when backlit. The plant forms a dense fountain of cascading green or golden threads with feathery awns. Native to sage scrub and piñon-juniper woodlands, this cool-season grass reseeds readily, making it a good choice for naturalizing in meadows or on slopes. But be forewarned: in the garden it may spread into gravel mulches and patios.



Silky thread grass catching the late-spring light.
Photo by Stephanie Falzone (Flickr).

Planting and care: Plant in well-drained soil. Potted transplants establish more quickly when soil temperatures are warm. Take care not to bury crowns too deeply. Fertilizer is unnecessary. Cut established grasses close to the ground in spring to rejuvenate, and eliminate any that have more gray than gold leaves. Large plants may be divided in spring or summer. When seed heads begin to tangle and clump, comb or rake them off once or twice during the growing season to maintain a more groomed appearance and to control volunteer seedlings. Silky thread grass is disease- and pest-resistant.

Landscape use: Striking planted alone or in large masses or drifts. Grown among other drought-tolerant and heat-resistant perennials, silky thread grass contributes interesting texture and color combinations. Provides excellent erosion control on slopes. Also good in containers.

Propagation: In late spring, sow seeds on tilled soil by rolling or pressing the seeds into the soil rather than raking. Expect germination when soil has warmed to 70 degrees.

cont. on page 7

Silky Thread Grass (Nassella [syn. Stipa] tenuissima)—cont. from page 6

Plant type: ornamental grass

Bloom time: late spring to early summer

Size: 18 inches high x 12 inches wide

Sun: full sun, part shade

Water: low once established

Soil: well-drained

USDA zones: 5–10

References:

Grounds, Roger. *The Plantfinder's Guide to Ornamental Grasses* (Timber, 2003)

Miller, George Oxford. *Landscaping with Native Plants of the Southwest* (Voyageur, 2007)

Native Plant Society of New Mexico, [Central New Mexico Gardens: A Native Plant Selection Guide](#), rev. ed. (NPSNM, 2017)

Phillips, Judith. *New Mexico Gardener's Guide*, rev. ed. (Cool Springs, 2005)



Fall/winter aspect.
Photo by Stephanie Burns.



We Are Here to Help!

If you have a gardening question, Santa Fe Master Gardeners are available to help. Go to our [website](#), click on the Garden Questions? link in the bar below the photo, and pose your question. Someone will do research and get back to you.

The lesson I have thoroughly learned, and wish to pass on to others, is to know the enduring happiness that the love of a garden gives.

—Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932)

New & Noteworthy

Have you recently read a plant-related article or book, visited a horticultural website or blog, listened to a podcast, or seen a nature show or documentary you think other gardeners would enjoy or find useful? Send a link to the newsletter (news.sfemg@gmail.com) and we'll include the information in the next issue. **Note that some of these sources have paywalls.**

Botany One, [How fire may burn forests into scrubland](#), by Dale Maylea

Desert Blooms (NMSU), [Comparing Apples to Apples: The Variety Game](#), by Marisa Thompson

Desert Blooms (NMSU), [Why Frost Damages Some Plants and Not Others](#), by Marisa Thompson

Garden Rant, [Gardening When You Really Don't Wanna](#), by Scott Beuerlein

The Guardian, [The 'blob': zoo showcases slime mold with 720 sexes that can heal itself in minutes](#)

New York Times, [How the Butterfly Discovered Daylight](#), by Nicholas Wade

Santa Fe New Mexican, [Report: 48 percent of New Mexico's birds at risk of extinction from climate change](#), by Robert Nott

Smithsonian, [How Thousand-Year-Old Trees Became the New Ivory](#), by Lyndsie Bourgon

Washington Post, [Gone in a Generation: Farms](#) (featuring Rio Grande pecan farm), by Zoëann Murphy and Chris Mooney

Backyard Bugs

A praying mantis, disguised as aster, awaits its prey. The Greek word *mantis* translates as “soothsayer, prophet.” The order Mantodea contains more than 2,400 species in 430 genera in 15 families distributed worldwide. Mantids are generalists that eat any living thing their own size or smaller. Famously, the female will eat her mate, and often a hatchling's first meal is a sibling. This is the only insect that can rotate its head 180 degrees. There are species native to the Southwest, but the Chinese mantid familiar to most gardeners was introduced and is now widespread due to catalog and nursery sales of the egg cases.

Text and photo by Pam Wolfe



The Garden Journal Radio Show

Every Saturday

10–10:30 a.m.

Live from the Farmers Market



Tune in to KSFR 101.1 FM on Saturday mornings from 10 to 10:30 to listen to a lively, entertaining, and informative gardening show.

- Nov 02 Santa Fe Botanical Garden edition with Lindsay Taylor and guest Atherton Phelger from CAVU (Climate Advocates/Voces Unidas)
- Nov 09 SFEMG edition with Christine Salem and guest [Thor Hanson](#), author of *The Triumph of Seeds: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, and Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History* (repeat)
- Nov 16 Santa Fe Farmers Market Institute edition with Carrie Core
- Nov 23 SFEMG edition with Christine Salem and guest Rob Herring, director of the film *The Need to Grow*
- Nov 30 Home Grown New Mexico edition with Jannine Cabossel, the Tomato Lady, offering tips and techniques for next month's veggie garden; more info at [Giant Veggie Gardener](#)

Schedule subject to change. For updates and to listen to previous broadcasts, visit [this section](#) of our website.

2019 MASTER GARDENER HOURS



2019
Goal: 10,000 hours
Total to date: 7,537 hrs

2,200
HOURS

JANUARY thru
MARCH

3,019
HOURS

APRIL thru
JUNE

1,519
HOURS
JULY thru
SEPTEMBER

HOURS
OCTOBER thru
DECEMBER

Membership Report Third Quarter 2019

Current Membership:

- Total members: 168
- Interns, 63 (51 Track I, 12 Track II)

Volunteer Hours:

3rd quarter (07/01/2019–09/30/2019):

- CE 208.25
- OS 893
- PE 418

Total = 1,519.25

Year-to-date (01/01/19–09/30/19):

- CE 1,298.75
- OS 4,920.5
- PE 1,318

Total = 7,537.25

We're just over 75 percent of our yearly goal of 10,000 volunteer hours. Don't forget to log all of your hours by November 30th. Great job to all of the SFEMG members for your hard work and commitment to our community!

Tammy McLellan
Membership Coordinator

Calendar of Events

All events are open to the public. Visit the [events calendar](#) on our website for a complete list of garden-related activities and classes with times, locations, and registration information.

DATES	EVENTS	CREDITS
Nov 02	Ecology of the Piñon and Juniper Woodlands, 8 a.m.–5 p.m. (SFCC)	3 CE
Nov 02	Lecture: Common Southwestern Native Plants, 2–3 p.m. (SFBG)	1 CE
Nov 05	Xeriscape Gardens, 7–9 p.m. (SFCC)	2 CE
Nov 07	Lecture: AI & Robotics in Agriculture, 3–4:30 p.m. (SFBG)	1.5 CE
Nov 09	Growing without Soil: Hydroponics and Aquaponics 9 a.m.–2 p.m. (SFCC)	3 CE
Nov 10	Manage and Build a Soilless Growing System, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. (SFCC)	3 CE
Nov 12	Botanical Book Club, 1–2:30 p.m. (SFBG)	NA
Nov 14	Lecture: African Blues: My Life in Indigo, 3–4:30 p.m. (SFBG)	1.5 CE

SFBG: [Santa Fe Botanical Garden](#), 715 Camino Lejo, 505-471-9103

SFCC: [Santa Fe Community College](#), 6401 Richards Ave., 505-428-1676

Members Only: For a complete list of Master Gardener projects and to sign up, please visit Sign Up Genius, a link to which is in the [Members Only](#) section of the website. To log hours worked and to see year-to-date totals, visit Track It Forward in the same location.



Mission Statement:

Santa Fe Extension Master Gardeners is a non-profit volunteer organization whose mission is to learn, teach, and promote locally sustainable gardening through reliable, current research-based practices

New Mexico State University is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educator