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The Grapevine

Spring is in the Air

It's Valentine's Day week and that means love is in the air, everywhere. While I love to get flowers and other items as gifts, spring is in the air at my house because of the teeny tiny seedlings that are sprouting. I love this time of year because it brings beautiful seed catalogs, the promise of warmer weather, and the next gardening season.

Every year I like to experiment with something new in the garden whether that is a new vegetable variety or trying a new technique. This year I plan to do both. I've picked out a new variety of container cherry tomato to try along with some smaller sunflowers to grow in containers on my back patio. I'm also going to use a pea and oat blend of cover crop when I remove my garlic to add nitrogen to the soil while also providing mulch to cover the ground. I'm excited to see how these experiments will go.

If you haven't already, it's time to start cool-season vegetable seeds to transplant outside in March. So far this spring I have broccoli, celery, a lettuce bowl, and a few flower seedlings started under my plant lights. My son had fun helping me plant, which means I need to do some thinning or transplanting of some of my broccoli seedlings, but I think it's important to encourage him to help with all aspects of growing plants. Spring is coming and I can't wait to see your gardens this year. Happy Growing!!p





Making Valentine's Flowers Last

Every year for Valentine's Day, Americans spend approximately 26 billion dollars on gifts, meals, and flowers for their significant others. Of the spending for Valentine's Day, approximately \$2.6 billion will be spent on flowers and live plants. If you are one of the lucky ones who receive flowers or plants for Valentine's Day here are a few tips to help keep those looking beautiful longer. Several things can help get the longest life and enjoyment out of those flowers. Keep the vase filled with water or the floral foam soaked. Add fresh warm water daily. If the water turns cloudy dump it and replace it. It may also help to recut stems removing one to two inches with a sharp knife. You'll get some disagreement on this but I feel you can use sharp scissors or pruning shears also, just always cut on an angle. Keep your flowers in a cool spot, preferably between 65 and 72 degrees away from direct sun, away from heating vents, or out from under a ceiling fan. Let's

face it - someone spent good money on those flowers, so take a little time to keep them watered and maximize your enjoyment.

If you receive live plants, it's important to provide them with the amount of light that they need. Miniature roses need bright, direct light, and water when the top inch of soil dries out. When the weather has warmed up you can slowly acclimate your miniature rose outdoors and use it as a potted plant or plant it in your flower garden. Miniature roses are hardy in our area and make a beautiful outdoor plant. Azaleas are another common plant you could receive and their care is a little trickier. They prefer bright, indirect light and slightly cooler temperatures of 60-65 degrees. Water is important with azaleas and they should be watered with the soil surface becomes dry to the touch. The azalea plants sold by florists are typically not hardy in our area and can be kept as a houseplant but not planted outside. If you received flowering bulbs in a pot, water those bulbs with the top inch of soil dries out and provide bright, indirect light. Unfortunately, those bulbs likely won't rebloom in the future and should be composted rather than planted outdoors.

Flowers or plants are a wonderful gift to give or receive on Valentine's Day. With just a little care, we can help those items last as long as possible. Remember that no plant or flower likes to be in drafty or hot areas and the blooms will last longer if you keep them out of those conditions.

Winter Burn on Boxwood

If you have taken a look at your boxwood lately you might have noticed some bronzing or browning tips to the branches, especially those that were above the snow during that cold snap in January. This damage is called "Winter burn or Winter Injury" and is caused by cold, dry winds blowing on the leaves of evergreen plants. Since the ground is frozen the plant cannot take up enough water through its roots to replace the water lost by the leaves and they desiccate or dry out. The damage is starting to show up right now on our boxwood plants and while it is a bit unsightly, it's best to wait till spring when the plants start to break bud before doing any pruning.



Upcoming Events

Garden Hour Webinars:

March 6th- Selecting and Planting Fruit Trees

April 3rd- Companion Plants in the Garden

May 1st- Understanding Water Sources for the Garden

June 5th- Growing Cut Flowers for Home & Farmer's Markets

Upcoming Classes:

February 22nd at 6 pm- Starting Seeds, Augusta Public Library

February 27th at 6 pm- Preparing for the Growing Season, Bradford Memorial Library, El Dorado

March 2nd at 10 am- Preparing for the Growing Season, Rose Hill Public Library

March 12th from 5:30 to 7 Bring seeds to swap with other gardeners at the Andover Public Library



Soil Your Undies

Did you know that there are billions of microbes- bacteria, fungi, protozoa- in a teaspoon of soil? Healthy soils are hungry. These soil microbes need to eat and breathe just as humans do. But what do they eat? These microbes live on carbon. As they decompose carbon-based

matter, also known as organic matter, nutrients are released back into the soil for other plants to use. Humic acid is also created as a result of the decomposition process. Humic acid improves soil texture by “gluing” soil particles together to create good soil tilth and air space.

How do you know your soil is healthy? We can test it by checking how quickly soil microbes break down carbon matter in the soil. Carbon is a common element in all organic compounds- including cotton. When 100% cotton underwear is buried in the soil, the worms and other critters see it as food. The more decomposed the underwear, the healthier your soil is.

Supplies:

- One pair of cotton underwear
- Shovel
- Flag or stake

Instructions

1. Raid the underwear drawer or buy a brand new pair of 100% cotton underwear.
2. Dig a hole big enough to lay the underwear flat, about 3 to 4” deep. Take a “before” photo, then cover the hole. Be sure to mark where you buried the underwear with the flag or stake.
3. After 60 days, carefully dig up your undies to see what is left and see how active the critters are in your soil.



