

THE GARDEN PATH , FEBRUARY 2014

A publication of Kerr Lake Extension
Master Gardeners



PLANT OF THE MONTH - FEBRUARY

By Marty Finkel

Fritillaria verticillata



Flowers



Seed pods

Photos are from the JC Raulston Arboretum.

The grass-like leaves come up the last of January/first of February in a welcome fresh green while most of the garden still looks like winter. The flowers are pale yellow or pale green with a faint checkerboard pattern inside the petals and are in bloom February – March. The leaves along the bloom stalk are narrow, and the ones near the top taper into tendrils. The plant grows to 12-15” tall, and it slowly multiplies by fleshy bulbs, which can be purchased from the mail order bulb/perennials catalogs that stock them. If ordering, they should be received in early fall, and the shipper should make sure they don’t dry out during shipping. Plant as soon as received, 4 – 6” deep in full sun or light shade in well-drained soil.

CHECKLIST FOR FEBRUARY

By Mary Jane Bosworth

It's freezing out there today and the last thing I want to think about is gardening. Do I really need to garden in the winter? What do I need to do?

- Keep in mind that newly set plants need water and that cold winds are very drying. If there is a dry spell, it might be necessary to water some of your new plants.
- Check any bulbs you have in storage and throw out any with rot.

- Fertilize spring flowering bulbs when 1” of growth appears above ground.
- General pruning may be done in late February/early March. Remove diseased and dead wood. Shearing should be confined to hedges. Keep the natural form of shrubs by cutting limbs at different lengths.
- Ornamental grasses and monkey grass (*Liriope*) should be cut back before new growth starts.
- Fescue lawns should be fertilized around Valentines Day.

GARDEN TO DO – FEBRUARY

By Carl Shafer

During warm spells, dormant sprays can be applied to fruit trees and vines this month. For specific recommendations, check the NC Chemical Manual, <http://ipm.ncsu.edu/agchem/agchem.html>, and always follow label directions. For additional information see: Fruit Disease Fact Sheets, **Disease and Insect Management in the Home Orchard**, www.cals.ncsu.edu/plantpath/extension/clinic/fact_sheets/index.php?do=disease&id=7. For the dormant spray only, dormant oil and lime-sulfur may be combined. When leaves are present this combination will burn the leaves.

Prune fruit trees in late Feb/early Mar. Peach trees and grape vines normally need the most pruning. Check at the Extension office for pruning bulletins, and watch for scheduled Extension pruning demonstrations. See *Training & Pruning Fruit Trees*, AG-29 (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag29.html). Also see *Producing Tree Fruit for Home Use*, AG-028 (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag28.html) and *Grapes & Berries for the Garden*, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/agpubs/grapesberries.pdf).

Get a copy of the Extension Services *Home*

Vegetable Gardening AG-06, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/ag-06.pdf) to use to plan your garden this year. Also see *Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs* (http://cals.ncsu.edu/hort_sci/extension/documents/AG-756.pdf). Notice that many cool season, direct seeded, vegetables can be planted starting in February, some even in January. These include: garden and edible-pod peas, beets, carrots, lettuce, onions (seeds, sets, and plants), radishes, Irish potatoes, and spinach. Note also that some of the cool season vegetables can be transplanted starting in February. These would require starting seeds in December/January or buying transplants. If you use the earliest dates, you will need to have row cover or other season extension products available if a hard freeze is predicted. Be careful to not work the soil when it is too wet. For planning purposes, note that the average last frost date (32°F) for the Henderson area is April 21 and average last 28°F date is April 6.

Start seeds early this month of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower for transplanting in mid to late March or sooner. Start seeds of eggplant, pepper, and tomato later this month for transplanting in late April and early May. See *Growing Vegetable Transplants for the Home Garden*, HIL 8104, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8104.pdf). Buying a bag or two of seed starting mix is preferable to trying to make your own mix. Buying a “Seed starting heat mat” to provide bottom heat will result in quicker and more complete germination. To provide the bright light that is needed to grow stocky transplants a 4 ft 2 tube shop fluorescent fixture works well. Use one “cool” and one “warm” bulb. A simple timer allows you to set the time for the light you want – 16 hours is usually recommended. I found the following extension plans for adjustable light stands: (www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/growlite/index.html) and (<http://umaine.edu/publications/2751e/>). I find that I need to start eggplants and peppers about two weeks before the tomatoes. If you are buying transplants, check local sources but note that organic and/or open-pollinated (heirloom) varieties may be harder to find.

Still time to check seed catalogs/web sites for the “Newest”, “Best”, Exclusive, All-American Selections, or just different varieties to try this year.

For a listing of NCSU Extension Publications for Lawn and Garden, see www.ces.ncsu.edu/Publications/lawngarden.php. For latest Plant Hardiness Zone Map (2012), see: (<http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>). Most outside gardening activities will be finished by now. Trees and shrubs can still be planted as long as the ground is not frozen. If you are adventuresome, try a cold frame in a sunny area to grow radishes, lettuce, spinach, and other greens.

Still time to apply lime, if needed and the ground is not frozen.

Most pruning can be put off until late winter or early spring when the weather is more comfortable. You can do fruit trees and grapes in Jan if the weather allows, otherwise do it in Feb. See the Feb 13 issue of this publication for pruning information web sites.

Inventory your left over seeds. Do a germination test if you are uncertain of their viability.

A recent “Season Extension” posting can be found at: (www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/seasonextension2012.html). Also see “Resource List for Season Extension” at: (www.ces.ncsu.edu/chatham/ag/SustAg/seasonextensionlist.html).

For the latest research results, see www.sciencedaily.com News & articles in Science, Health, Environment & Technology. Most interesting results will be found in the Plants & Animal section under: Agriculture and Food or Botany. The Garden Professors have a new web address:

<http://blogs.extension.org/gardenprofessors/>

HERB OF THE MONTH- FEBRUARY

By Edna Lovelace Gaston

Pulmonaria officinalis

Height: 6 – 12”, spreading via rhizomes

Flowers: pink changing to blue, blooming late spring

Propagation: division, seeds (can be a

challenge to collect and usually don't grow true to the mother plant)

Growing conditions: moist soil, shady locations

HISTORY

Among the many common names for this plant, Lungwort is one most frequently used. According to the Doctrine of Signatures ancient herbalists believed that if a part of a plant resembled a part of the body then it would likely heal an ailment affecting that part of the body. This is a very attractive, low-growing plant. Its spotted leaves (supposedly resembling diseased lungs and hence the source for its common name) are a striking feature in the garden.

While definitely not recommending its traditional use, this is still a great plant for the garden. With its colorful leaves and spreading habit, Lungwort is a good "spiller" in a container. Once established it is fairly drought resistance and supposedly not a favorite of deer. It is also a host plant for some species of butterfly larvae. This low-growing plant would do well in the front of a shady garden flower bed.

There are many species of Pulmonaria and some other common names are Cowslip, Bethlehem Sage and Jerusalem Sage. From its Mediterranean origins then on to England and now America there are many species, cultivars and hybrids, some articles saying as many as 200 different plants available. As an interesting conversation piece and attractive perennial, it deserves a place in our gardens. It is hardy, free from most pests and diseases. What more could a gardener want!

Get ready for spring,
Ladybug

THE TYROS' CORNER -FEBRUARY

By Eileen Novak

You know, I'm not a whiner, but I think plants should be sold with warning labels. You know, all those labels that tell you not to let your child play with a plastic bag, not to put your toy poodle in the microwave to dry his hair, not to use your hair dryer while still sitting in the bathtub, things like that. Because some of us don't

appreciate "invasive" until we see it, and see it, and see it.

Let's talk about mint. Lovely stuff, absolutely lovely. And about to take over my entire front yard. When we moved in, I had so many rocks that I decided to use them in a rock garden. And I thought that a few varieties of mint would be a nice addition to the other herbals I was planting – lemon balm, chamomile, Echinacea, thyme and rosemary. A nice, aromatic, themed herbal tea garden. (yes, I know I read too many "Gardinista" articles)

The first year, all went well, the neighbors got along with each other, each plant growing happily in its own corner. The thyme spread a bit, but it was supposed to. Then winter sort of put them all to sleep. What I didn't realize is that mint sleepwalks. This spring, I was elated to see the first sprig of mint pop up, but it was nowhere near the label that survived the winter. In fact it had left the rock garden and moved into the builders' landscaping, coming out at the edge of a camellia bush, right where there is a hole in the heavy black plastic mulch. A week later, almost every plant that had been put down by the contractor had a mint-scented companion. And then I looked through the rest of the garden, and found that the citrus mint had taken the words of Horace Greely to heart and improved on them. Instead of "going west, young plant", the citrus mint went north, south, east AND west, infiltrating the recumbent rosemary and playing peekaboo in the thyme. And then the chocolate mint decided it wanted more sunlight so it crept to the front of the garden, which gets sun for more of the day.

Since this was my first experience with mint, I thought I would let it grow so I could have enough to enjoy fresh, as well as dry for the winter. You think 4 pint jars of leaves of each type of mint will carry me through????? I did have mint iced tea every week through the summer, except for that small stretch of time when the pines were flowering – every leaf in the garden was rimed with yellow pollen and not so appealing. And then summer came, bringing with it a myriad of butterflies to my great delight. Autumn arrived, and the migrant birds came back, perched on the mint and are contentedly eating seeds. Hopefully, a lot of seeds. I guess that really, it wasn't ALL bad.

So if you beginning gardeners are contemplating planting mint, figure out some polite way of barricading it. I have read that you can cut the bottom out of a plastic pot (the ones that all our plants come home in) and that lets the roots get water and nourishment, but keeps the runners from taking over the world. I'll try it next spring and report back. In the meantime, does anyone need some dried mint?????

FLAMING WEEDS

By Marty Finkel

Get out your flame throwers and prepare to KILL THOSE WEEDS! Not really, but there is an approved heat method for destroying weeds in seed beds, raised garden beds, paths between the beds, etc. In the paper "Flaming Stale Seedbeds for Weed Control," Vern Grubinger, Vegetable and Berry Specialist at the University of Vermont Extension, explains that a carefully controlled and directed flame briefly passing over weeds kills them by causing the cell sap to expand and disrupt cell walls. Within a few hours or days they wilt and die. It's most effective when used on small plants or seedlings, ideally less than 2" tall. Before rushing out to get the equipment, however, keep in mind that grasses are harder to kill than broadleaf weeds and may require repeated flaming a few days or weeks apart. Also, for control of many perennial weeds, cultivation will be needed in addition to or instead of flaming.

What is a "stale seedbed?" It's the bed or ground into which seeds are sowed directly (or that transplants will go into) after it has been dug or plowed – but delaying sowing (or transplanting) until after the weed seeds germinate and are killed. The flaming technique for such beds or ground has been used for years, especially as an alternative to the use of non-selective herbicides, to kill the first flush of weed growth. It's appealing to organic growers for this reason. Seed and/or transplant beds can be prepared well ahead of time, if conditions are right for weeds to come up, and kept clean by regular flaming until you are ready to sow or plant.

If you plan to use the flaming technique, get the soil ready for planting by applying nutrients according to soil tests, thoroughly incorporate fertilizer and organic material, and

rake smooth. If the surface is uneven, some weed seedlings may escape contact when the flame passes over. If the weed seeds don't come up soon after preparation, encourage them by using a floating row cover and/or watering the beds. You can even flame weed seedlings after your crop has been planted but before it comes up if the weeds are continuing to emerge.

There are flame weeder models for human and for tractor power. A hand-held single torch model probably would do the job for the family garden, especially if you grow vegetables in raised beds and they are covered in winter weeds. For market farming, equipment comes in hand-held single torch models as well as push-wheeled multiple torch flammers mounted under a flame hood. Tractor-powered flaming kits are available in multiple-row models with or without between-row mechanical cultivation options. Farmers experienced in using flame weeding in stale seedbeds have been positive about the results.

Safety is a serious concern, especially with tractor-mounted units. The user should be aware of conditions such as wind, areas with dry plant material or other residue, dry hedgerows, etc.

INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR FEBRUARY

By Marty Finkel

Where do earthworms go in the winter? They don't – they die. At least our common red wigglers do. Not to worry, though, because they lay eggs that are encased and protected by small cocoons. At winter's end, they emerge as baby worms. Worldwide, there are about 6,000 earthworm species with about 30 species found in the U.S. Red wigglers are our most commonly found worms in the garden in the upper layers of soil and in leaf debris, and they don't burrow deeply enough to avoid freezing in winter. The ones that do survive do so by burrowing below the frost line, and they are night crawlers. Another help in surviving the winter is the way worms breathe, which is through their skin – as long as it stays moist by releasing fluid and mucous that coats their bodies for as long as needed. "Under ideal conditions, scientists estimate the average lifespan of earthworms that survive winter at 4 to 8 years, while the most common garden varieties live one 1 or 2 years." Information source and

quote: Joe Lamp'1 in an article in the 1-4-14 *News and Observer* newspaper.

The reliable late spring and early summer red hot poker, *Kniphofia uvaria*, and its many yellow, peach, and coral hybrids, has a fall blooming cousin, *K. rooperi*. Its common names are Rooper's redhot poker, East Cape poker, and the fall-blooming torch lily, and it is cold-hardy to 0F degrees, perennial in zones 7-10. It is becoming more available since being given the Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. At the Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens, it starts blooming in October and this fall its 3-4' tall stalks of flaming orange and yellow flowers continued for 11 weeks. Look for it in many bulb and/or specialty catalogs. Its culture is the same as that for *K. uvaria* (full sun, well-drained soil).

Look at the cover of the January/February issue of Horticulture magazine and see in large letters: *Award for GARDEN EXCELLENCE*: Sarah P. Duke Gardens. How about that? It contains a very good article about Duke Gardens titled "Dazzling Duke," with lots of photographs, by Meghan Shinn, and one by Bobby Mottern, Director of Horticulture at Duke Gardens titled "Challenge: Winter Interest" featuring four winter-blooming shrubs used at the Gardens as sure bets for off-season color.

GARDENING FOR THE BIRDS AND THE BEES...PLUS BUTTERFLIES AND ME-FEBRUARY

By Edna Lovelace Gaston

Welcome to the first of a new series of articles. I plan to continue the Herb of the Month but, as some of you know, I have been an avid bird watcher for most of my life. The direction these articles take are open for discussion – it may be plants, houses or feeders, information about a particular species, who knows. Suggestions / requests will be appreciated.

Since this is winter, many people feed the birds. Their food supply is a little hard to find. So in this article I'll share some recipes.

- 1-1/2 cups quick-cooking oats (not instant)

- 2 cups boiling water
- 1/2 cup chunky peanut butter
- 3/4 cup suet (or vegetable shortening or lard)
- 1/2 cup birdseed
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup Cream of Wheat cereal (not instant)
- 1/3 cup dry cranberries, chopped

Cook rolled oats in boiling water in a large saucepan for about 2 minutes, stirring constantly until very thick. Remove from heat. Stir in peanut butter and suet until melted. Stir in remaining four ingredients. Cool and shape as desired. This can be spread on pine cones, shaped into balls, put into muffin tins, aluminum pie pans, and/or shaped into squares to put into a commercial suet feeder.

I also use trail mix, nuts, berries and even peanuts if I have them on hand because the birds love it. You can store this in the freezer and use as needed. (Don't worry about using metal – just read where birds have circulation in their feet so cold metal does not bother them.)

Another one of my favorites is the following:

- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup flour
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup birdseed
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup raisins

Mix everything together in a mixing bowl. Microwave on high for 3 minutes and then stir. Pour half of the mixture into a plastic container about the size of a square suet feeder. Press it down, put wax paper on top and then add the rest of the mixture. Put a lid on the container and freeze. The birds will love it!

There are many recipes and variations – experiment. So cook for the birds, place outside, sit back with a cup of hot chocolate before a roaring fire and enjoy!

**2014 KERR LAKE EXTENSION MASTER
GARDENERS SYMPOSIUM- BACK YARD
GARDENING GETTING DOWN TO
BASICS**

Beginning with 8:30 a.m. registration and coffee at First Presbyterian Church fellowship hall, 222 Young St in downtown Henderson, the symposium schedule includes four diverse topics and speakers. All presentations will be followed by a Q&A opportunity for the audience.

Optional Worm Bin Workshop (requires additional registration and fee for all materials to make bin, plus one pound of starter worms to at your garbage.)

Early Bird Registration for the basic symposium (including lunch, excluding workshop) is \$15 and ends March 1; afterwards, the registration fee is \$20.

Early registration for the symposium plus workshop is \$40; after March 1, the fee is \$50.

More information and registration forms may be downloaded online at

<http://go.ncsu.edu/vancegarden>

For more information, contact

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