DONNA’S FAVORITE

When times get hard, whether its tough economic times or lousy growing conditions, there are some plants that make a name for themselves. These plants not only give a lot for the money spent on them but they laugh in the face of adverse weather and stand out as a great all around plant.

My pick for this year is the Knock Out Rose. The Knock Out is relatively new on the landscape scene but it has been out there for a while, and through each growing season it just gets better and better. It has withstood two years of terrible drought conditions and has continued to bloom prolifically throughout. The Japanese beetles don't like it and it is resistant to black spot. It blooms from early spring until frost and during mild winters, it doesn't even shed its leaves. Deadheading is not necessary with the Knock Out Rose as it is self cleaning.

The original Knock Outs have single flowers but with some of the newer additions to the Knock Out family a fully double flower is available. The original Knock Out is a cherry-red, single flowering selection named ‘Radrazz’. We planted several of these plants about three years ago at the Extension office. They've been beautiful since day one. We've not watered them in two years and they have bloomed their little heads off the entire time. In fact, as I write this article on October 24, all of our plants are in full bloom and look gorgeous.

Since the introduction of ‘Radrazz’, the Knock Out family has grown to include 'Radcon', medium pink rose with single flowers, ‘Radtko’ a double flowering red, ‘Radtkopink’, a double flowering bubblegum pink, ‘Radcor’, with single flowers that are coral pink with yellow centers, ‘Radyod, a light pink sister to the original Knock Out and finally 'Radsunny', the only fragrant Knock Out that starts out with bright yellow flowers and fades to cream.

For the gardener who wants to grow roses, the Knock Outs are a great choice. These are shrub roses and will not make long stem cutting roses but I'll trade a cutting rose for a no disease, no spray, drought and heat tolerant rose any day. If you would like to read more about the Knock Out Rose family go online to www.theknockoutrose.com and check them out.
VOLES .....  

It’s Time for Varmint Patrol

Rarely a day goes by when a call doesn’t come in to the office about voles. They’re tiny but destructive and any plant that you value is in danger. Pine voles work from under the ground and most times the damage is done before the homeowner even knows there is a problem. These small, field mouse-like rodents spend their entire lives in tunnels beneath the surface of the soil. They search out tender plant roots and stems and are active at all times of the year—no hibernation for these pests.

There are no poisons or baits available for homeowners to use on the pine vole. Valued plants can be planted in raised beds with a screen bottom. Some plants such as hostas (a vole delicacy) can be potted into plastic pots and the entire pot can then be planted. But, the controls are limited.

There is, however, a pretty good technique that can drastically diminish your vole population. Timing is the key to this solution. We know that voles feed year round. In the summer months, tender plants are plentiful but in the winter when plants are dormant, there is not nearly so much for the vole to choose from as most plants are dormant for the winter. So, from November until March voles can be tempted with a mouse trap that has been baited with fresh apples. Get several mouse traps and set them next to vole holes after baiting the trap with pieces of raw apples. Cover the hole and the trap with a bucket. The trap must be in the dark or the vole will not be tempted. Continue to trap voles all through the winter, moving traps to different holes. If you are vigilant, you can have your problem cleaned up by spring. Voles don’t travel far so you don’t have to worry about new voles taking over the yard from the neighbor’s yard.

If voles have been a problem in your landscape, now is time to take action. Get busy and get rid of next year’s problems now.

Community Garden Plots Available

With one growing season under its belt, the Master Gardener Community Garden is beginning to wind down for the winter. There are a good number of cool season crops still growing but many of the beds have been cleaned up and are waiting for next spring. There are some spots available for next year. These garden plots are 4’X16’ raised beds. They are ready for any gardener who needs a place to plant next year. The cost of the garden is $40.00, which goes toward maintenance of the beds. When the bed is cleaned up at the end of the season, $15.00 is returned to the gardener.

If you would like to come and look at the garden it is located at 130 Ammons Dr. in Morganton. If you would like to garden in one of our beds you can call our office at 439-4460 and request an application form.

Our Master Gardeners feel strongly that anyone who wants to garden should have a place to grow some vegetables and flowers. So, if you think you would enjoy gardening with us, come on by and check us out. We can guarantee that you’ll be pulling weeds with the prettiest view in Burke County.

Geometry Lesson

What do you get if you divide the circumference of a pumpkin by its diameter????

Pumpkin Pi
Master Gardeners -- Time To Sign Up

As the year end nears, it means that a new Master Gardener volunteer class is about to begin. The 2009 Master Gardener class will begin on Wednesday, January 14 at 9:00 a.m. at the Burke Agricultural Building and will run for thirteen weeks. The program here in Burke County is now six years old and has trained more than 100 Burke County residents to become Extension Master Gardeners.

These trained volunteers give their time to assist with the horticulture programs in Burke County. Activities are varied and can be anything from the Burke County Fair to helping build a community garden.

If you choose to become a Master Gardener you must agree to give forty hours of volunteer time to Extension horticulture programs. There are many ways to fulfill this obligation and Master Gardeners usually have no problem getting their hours.

The cost of this program is $75.00, which includes the cost of a large, information-packed notebook. Lessons will be a mixture of lecture, demonstration and hands-on activities.

If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener please complete the enclosed application and return it to our office by December 19, 2008. If you have questions about the program, feel free to call our office at 439-4460 for more information.

Control Wild Onions Now!

This is a reminder to anyone who has problems with wild onions and wild garlic in their landscape. Wild onions and garlic are perennial weeds that come up in the spring, form bulblets, die down in hot weather and reappear in late fall. They must be sprayed twice to give complete control.

An herbicide containing 2,4-D will get rid of these weeds when applied in March and again in November. Use a couple of drops of dishwashing liquid in the spray to help the herbicide stick to the waxy surface of the plant. It seems to help to mow the lawn just before applying the herbicide. It is time to make the fall application of 2,4-D. If you didn’t treat your wild onions last March, then plan to treat again in the spring. Mark it on the calendar because one application won’t fix the problem. Timing is the key to the successful control of wild onions and garlic in the lawn.

Easy Glazed Sweet Potatoes
Cook Time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:
* 2 pounds medium sweet potatoes, cooked, peeled, and cut up
* 1/4 cup butter
* 1/4 cup maple syrup
* 1/4 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed

Preparation:
Place cut up sweet potatoes in a buttered 2-quart baking dish. In a saucepan, combine remaining ingredients; cook until mixture boils. Pour over potatoes; bake at 350° for 30 minutes, or until hot and nicely glazed.
Easy glazed sweet potatoes recipe serves 6 to 8. This sweet potato recipe can be made even easier with canned sweet potatoes.
southernfood.about.com
The Real Meaning of Plant Catalog Terminology:

"A favorite of birds" means to avoid planting near cars, sidewalks, or clotheslines.

"Grows more beautiful each year" means looks like roadkill for the foreseeable future.

"Zone 5 with protection" is a variation on the phrase Russian Roulette.

"May require support" means your daughter's engineering degree will finally pay off.

"Moisture-loving" plants are ideal for landscaping all your bogs and swamps.

"Carefree" refers more to the plant's attitude than to your workload.

"Vigorous" is code for has a Napoleonic compulsion to take over the world.

"Grandma's Favorite" -- until she discovered free-flowering, disease-resistant hybrids.