

YARD & GARDEN REPORT

November 2013

Vol. 1, No. 19

The lily of love

Do you have trouble growing houseplants? Don't worry; I know a plant that is foolproof.

Amaryllis is a spectacular bulb. *Amaryllis* literally means "lily of love" and you will quickly fall in love with it!

Plant the bulb in a pot, setting the bulb so that half of it is above the soil line. I like to use a pot with a broad base, sometimes called an "azalea" pot, to prevent the plant from tipping over.

After planting, water the bulb and put it in a bright cool room. Keep it away from direct sunlight and water sparingly until it sprouts.

Once it starts to grow, move the pot to a sunny window. Rotate the plant every week for symmetrical growth. If the plant gets top heavy, you'll have to stake it.

You'll swear it grows so quickly you can actually "hear" it grow. And wait until you see the blooms—they are magnificent!

You will see huge blooms in about six weeks. Plant the bulb now and you will have a gorgeous plant during the Christmas holidays!

Here's a secret for success: find a huge bulb (30+ cm in circumference is best). Shop online if you need to (expect to pay \$12–18). Big bulbs will send up more than one flower stalk and your plant will bloom for weeks! Less expensive bulbs sold at big box stores are good, but will likely send up only one flower stalk.



Fig. 1. Amaryllis is fabulous and foolproof. This photo was taken 35 years ago and remembered fondly by the photographer and his daughters.

You can prolong the life of each bloom by clipping off the stamens (their pollen grains damage the petals) and moving the plant out of direct sunlight.

Once all the flowers have faded, you have the challenge of getting the bulb to bloom again for next winter. It's not easy, especially if you start with a bargain bulb.

Trim away the old flower stalk down to the base. Place your amaryllis near a sunny window and fertilize it monthly with a houseplant fertilizer. You want to keep the plant growing well to refill the bulb for next year's flowers.

In June, set the plant outdoors. You can keep it in the pot or transplant it in the garden. Water it regularly and continue fertilizing through summer. When the foliage begins to

turn yellow in early fall, cut back on feeding and watering; the bulb has been refilled and wants to rest.

Wash the soil from the roots and place it in a cool, dark spot for at least six weeks. A refrigerator works well, but make sure no apples are in the refrigerator (this will prevent the bulb from blooming again).

Repot the bulb in early November. If you're lucky, you should see beautiful flowers next Christmas!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- ◆ Amazing amaryllis 1
- ◆ Deer repellents 2
- ◆ Attracting songbirds 3
- ◆ Forcing tulips 3
- ◆ Garden tips 4

Deer repellents

Beware! Now is when deer cause much of their damage to landscape plants.

Bucks scrape young trees to remove the velvet from their antlers. They do this to mark their territory for breeding and to intimidate fellow bucks. Such scraping can mutilate tree bark and expose the inner wood to diseases. The rings in the sapwood are damaged, disrupting the flow of water and nutrients in the tree. This damage can be fatal.

Besides scraping trees, deer can feed on limbs, especially now as berries, grass and other food sources in nature decline.

The most reliable strategy to prevent damage from deer (and other wildlife) is to kill it. The second best option is a physical barrier. In the case of deer, an 8-foot tall fence is recommended, preferably electrified. Both of these options are impractical in most cases.

That leads many gardeners to repellents. Sometimes repellents work and sometimes they don't. Sometimes we *think they work* and they don't; that's why university research trials are much more useful than anecdotal stories.



Fig. 3. Deer damage.



Fig. 2. This deer is licking its lips and can't wait to nibble on your apple tree.

For example, let's say a deer munches on your favorite apple tree one night. Your friend tells you that if you hang bars of soap on the tree, the deer will go away. Sure enough, after you hang bars of soap on your tree, you never see damage again. You think the soap did the trick. What you don't know is the deer that munched on your apple tree last night got ran over by a truck a few hours later. The soap never made a difference, but you swear by it and share your success with all of your friends.

Repellents will not stop a starving deer. Put yourself in their shoes, or should I say their hooves. Personally, when I was a kid I hated the smell of canned tuna. But if my only choice was eating canned tuna or starving to death, pass me the can opener! Likewise, it doesn't matter how much habanero sauce, rotten eggs, or cow guts you spray on a tree limb. A starving deer will eat it.

Deer repellents will only work if they are applied according to the instructions on the product's label. Deer repellents have a limited time of effectiveness. In most cases, repellents need to be applied on a regular basis and when new plant growth appears (ICWDM, 2008).

Numerous studies have been conducted to develop strategies to repel deer. In general, the most effective repellents are sprayed *directly on the plants* to be protected. Sprays applied on the ground along the perimeter of a site are less effective.

Repellents that induce fear in deer and generate a sulfurous odor are effective. This includes products containing decaying animal proteins such as egg or slaughterhouse waste. Deer readily sense this odor and may fear a predator is nearby. Such products include Deer Away, Liquid Fence, and Plantskydd (Swift and Gross, 2013; Trent et al., 2001).

Repellents that cause pain, such as hot pepper sprays, are effective at maximum levels of concentration.

Taste repellents that contain bittering agents (denatorium benzoate, for example) are less effective. Ropel is one such product. These products have to be tasted to work, which means the plants must be at least slightly damaged to prevent greater damage.

Repellents such as bars of soap or bags of human hair are much less effective.

Attracting songbirds

It's cold outside and birds need some food to keep them warm. Now is the perfect time to attract them to your home for winter.

Bird feeding grows in popularity every year and it is easy to understand why. Songbirds provide us with entertaining sounds, bright flashes of color, and curious movements that are enjoyable to watch. For example, the nuthatch shown at right can walk upside down. Cool!

Select the Best Feeder. A sturdy, comfortable perch is important for many birds. A traditional wooden feeder mounted on a post will work well. If you can only afford one feeder, this is the one to choose.

Hanging feeders are preferred by nimble birds, such as chickadees and goldfinches.

Some birds prefer to eat insects and meat, rather than seeds. Nylon-covered wire cages filled with suet will attract woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees.

A combination of all these feeders will give you the most bird feeding activity.

Select a Good Location. Place your feeder where you can comfortably watch the birds. Feeders should be placed fairly close to trees or shrubs. This will provide birds with nesting sites, sanctuary from predators, and protection from winter winds.

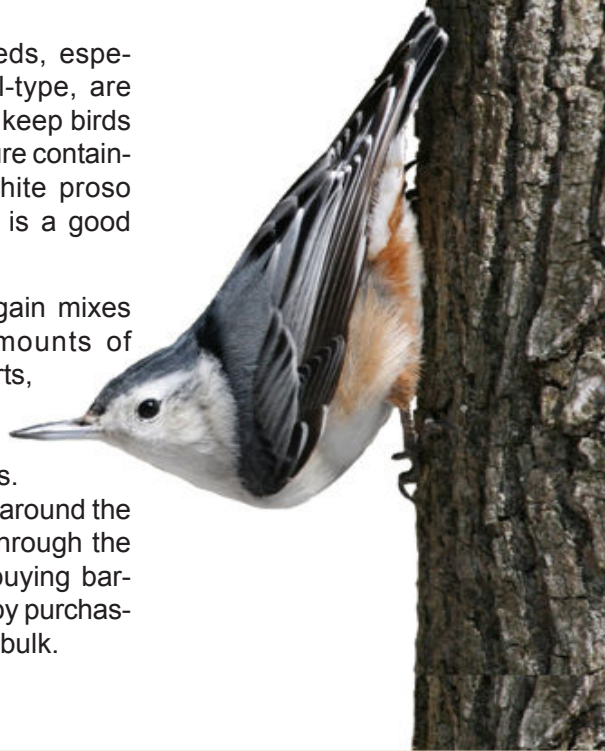
The feeder should be at least five feet high to discourage cats and squirrels. Place your feeder at least ten feet away from steps, rooftops, or sturdy tree limbs. Cats use these objects as launching pads to get at birds.

Provide Good Food. Sunflower seeds are the favorite food of cardinals and several other popu-

lar birds. Sunflower seeds, especially the solid black oil-type, are loaded with calories that keep birds warm over winter. A mixture containing sunflower seeds, white proso millet and cracked corn is a good economical value.

Don't be cheap. Bargain mixes often contain large amounts of wheat, milo, peanut hearts, hulled oats, and rice. Bargain mixes are not attractive to popular birds.

They also create a mess around the feeder since birds pick through the seed mix. Rather than buying bargain mixes, save money by purchasing good quality seed in bulk.



Growing tulips indoors

Tulips can be grown in pots. It's a fun project! You'll have a chance to enjoy the bright and cheerful colors of spring during the snowy days of winter.

Getting bulbs to bloom indoors is a process we call *forcing*. We are forcing the bulbs to bloom under unnatural conditions.

Selecting the biggest bulbs you can find. Look for bulbs specifically labeled for indoor forcing.

Partially fill the pots with potting soil and set bulbs no more than two inches apart. Fill the pot with soil so that the tips of the bulbs are exposed at the soil surface.

Each tulip bulb has a curved side and a flat side. The largest leaves grow from the flat side so place this side of the bulb against the rim of the pot. The large leaves will arch over the rim and give you an attractive potted plant.

The bulbs need to be kept in darkness at around 40 degrees;



they cannot dry out or freeze. A basement refrigerator, cool cellar or unheated garage is suitable.

After 14–15 weeks, begin taking the pots out of their cold treatment. Place them in a bright spot and watch the sprouts grow. In a few weeks you will be rewarded with sparkling blooms.

Gardening tips for November

TREES AND SHRUBS



F6. Protect young trees

Place tree guards or wrap Kraft paper around trunks of young trees. This prevents cracking and protects against wildlife. Linden, maple, mountain ash, and fruit trees are very sensitive.



F7. Irrigate evergreens?

Wet weather this fall has reduced the need for irrigating evergreens before the ground freezes. Irrigate only if the soil is dry. Young, wind-exposed trees are most sensitive.



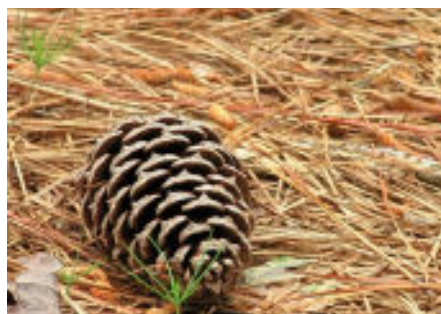
F8. Plant trees?

Soil temps are approximately 40 degrees and root growth is stopping. Plant trees only if given a guarantee from the nursery. Evergreens are most sensitive to winter damage.



F9. Starting nut trees

Nuts collected from the wild may be planted in the garden. Sow nuts 2 inches deep. Place wire mesh over the soil to protect against squirrels.



F10. Let needles lie

It is usually best to allow fallen needles to lie below the tree. These needles nourish and mulch the tree.



F11. Rake infected leaves

Leaves infected with leaf blight, scab, anthracnose, or other fungal diseases should be raked and removed to prevent infection next spring.

LAWNS



F12. Last mowing

A tall turf is bad over winter. It attracts rodents and is subject to mold. Cut your turf at normal height or slightly lower (1.5–2.0 inches).



F13. Dormant seeding

Now is a good time to fill in bare spots. Scratch the ground, sow seed, and rake it in. The seed will germinate in spring before weeds arrive.



F14. Spray herbicide?

Herbicides must be applied when weeds are actively growing. It is too late to get a good kill. Let's wait until spring.

More gardening tips for November

VEGETABLES



F15. Save vegetable seed?

Most seed will germinate well for at least 3 years. Store in a cool location. Onion, okra, parsley, parsnip, sweet corn and pepper seed are short-lived; use fresh seed every year if possible.



F16. Still time to plant garlic?

This should have been planted a few weeks ago to let roots get established before winter, but can be planted until soil freezes. Expect slow growth in spring and fair yields in summer.



F17. Prepare garden for 2014

Incorporate 1–2 inches of peat moss, compost or rotted manure to improve soil structure, drainage and fertility. Soil testing materials are available at local Extension offices.



F18. Clean debris

Remove or deeply bury any diseased plants or fruits in the garden. This will reduce the likelihood of infection next year.



F19. Protect garden hose

Hose may crack if left outdoors over winter. Drain the hose and bring indoors. Warm the hose to room temperature before coiling for storage.



F20. Leftover pumpkins

Pumpkins can be composted or used for an authentic Thanksgiving meal. A Pilgrim once wrote: "We have pumpkin at morning and pumpkin at noon, if not for pumpkin we should be undone."

FRUITS



F21. Mulch strawberries

Mulch when the soil freezes in mid November. Apply 4–6 inches of straw or hay. Avoid using tree leaves since they smother strawberry plants.



F22. Prune raspberries

Remove canes that bore fruit this summer; these are old and brittle. Thin remaining canes to stand 3–4 inches apart. Cut canes at ground level.



F23. Clean under apple trees

Pick up fallen fruit and leaves to reduce infestations of apple maggot (shown above) and fungal diseases such as scab.

More gardening tips for November

FLOWERS AND HOUSEPLANTS



F24. Plant bulbs

Daffodils and tulips add dazzling beauty in spring. Select big, firm bulbs. Bulbs can be planted in well-drained soil until the ground freezes. Plant as soon as possible.



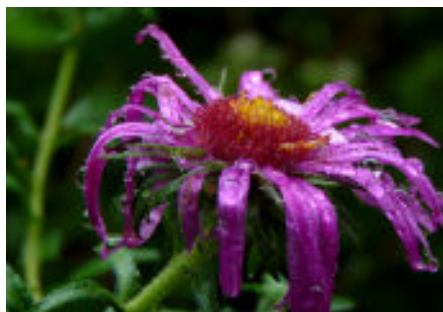
F25. Clean rose beds

Black spot disease was a common problem due to wet weather this year. Rake and remove these infected leaves to prevent infection next year.



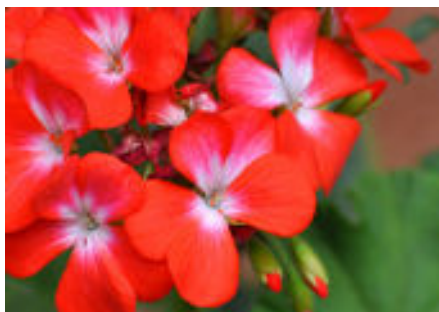
F26. Protect tender roses

Loosely tie canes together with twine. Place an 8-inch mound of soil over crown. Mulch with 4–6 inches of clean straw after the ground freezes. Trim canes back in early spring.



F27. Prevent wet spots in beds

This autumn has been rainy. Standing water in perennial flower beds will freeze and may damage plants. Dig trenches to drain excess water.



F28. Overwinter geraniums

Place into 8-inch pots. Cut back to 1/3 height to keep plants compact. Set near a bright sunny window. Cool temps are best. Water sparingly.



F29. Baby spiders

The short daylength is causing mature spider plants to produce flower stalks and babies. The babies can easily be rooted in water.

Credits

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