

YARD & GARDEN REPORT

November 15, 2014

Vol. 2, No. 19

Better than gold

‘Yukon Gold’ is one of the most popular spuds in North Dakota. We love its distinctive yellow flesh. It is so flavorful that it seems like it already comes with butter! The thin golden skins of ‘Yukon Gold’ are perfect for cooking, and the potatoes are delicious any way you cook them: baked, grilled or boiled.

Gardeners like ‘Yukon Gold’ because it is one of the first potatoes to mature. You are guaranteed a harvest no matter how cool the summer is. However, its yields are lower than other varieties we grow.

Potato breeders have challenged themselves to increase the yields of ‘Yukon Gold’. Twenty years ago, breeders at North Dakota State University crossed it with the Scottish variety ‘Brodict’, creating ‘Yukon Gem’. After years of testing, ‘Yukon Gem’ is now appearing in catalogs.

Trials conducted in 47 gardens across the state this year showed ‘Yukon Gem’ is superior to ‘Yukon Gold’.

Sixty-eight percent of our team preferred ‘Yukon Gem’ over ‘Yukon Gold’. This is remarkable as ‘Yukon Gold’ entered the trial with a strong and positive reputation. Eighty-five percent of our team recommended ‘Yukon Gem’ to other gardeners.

‘Yukon Gem’ vines were healthier and its yields were greater (*Table 1*). Gardeners were not asked to weigh their harvest, but four families did. They reported an average yield of 50 pounds for ‘Yukon Gem’ in a 10-foot row, compared to 24 pounds for ‘Yukon Gold’.



Fig. 1. Tests in gardens across North Dakota show ‘Yukon Gem’ from NDSU to be more productive and superior overall to ‘Yukon Gold’.

‘Yukon Gem’ tubers were slightly smaller but more attractive and uniform. Taste was comparable—gardeners loved the flavor of both varieties. One gardener noted:

“I grow potatoes for flavor. ‘Yukon Gem’ is fabulous. Great texture; wonderful flavor.”

Table 1. Performance of potato varieties in side-by-side tests in North Dakota gardens (47 sites).

Trait	‘Yukon Gem’	‘Yukon Gold’	Same
Germinated best	30 %	18 %	52 %
Healthier plants	44	7	49
Higher yields	55	23	23
More attractive	45	27	27
Tasted better	26	17	57
<i>Preference</i>	68	32	
<i>Recommend to others</i>	85	66	
<i>Overall rating¹</i>	8.21	6.98	

¹Rated on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = poor and 10 = excellent.

Besides its greater productivity, ‘Yukon Gem’ shows greater resistance to scab and late blight. ‘Yukon Gem’ matures 10 days later than ‘Yukon Gold’, making it a mid-season potato.

The full report of this and 54 other trials will be posted at www.ag.ndsu.edu/home/gardenvarietytrials/ by December 20. This report includes data and comments from over 400 gardeners.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- ◆ ‘Yukon Gem’ potato 1
- ◆ Holiday gift ideas 2
- ◆ Birch: A winter wonder 3
- ◆ Crabapples for winter 4
- ◆ A warm winter? 4
- ◆ Survey of timely topics 5
- ◆ Caring for holiday trees 6
- ◆ Weather almanac 6

Great holiday gifts for gardeners

The holidays are right around the corner—you can feel the excitement in the stores. It seems like stores put up their Christmas decorations earlier and earlier every year.

Gardening is America's #1 hobby and you can bring a lot of smiles to others by giving gardening presents. Gardening gifts bring warmth to the heart—even when it is frigid outside.

Amaryllis is a great holiday gift. It is showy and one of the easiest plants to grow. Many stores offer amaryllis bulbs and that is fine. I encourage you to go online and look at the wide variety of flower colors and bulb sizes available. A quality bulb company can offer extra large bulbs that will grow not one, but two flower stalks. This will greatly prolong the bloom period, and the bulb will be more likely to bloom in future years. Always remember: the bigger the bulb, the better.

A Norfolk Island pine is another fun plant to give. It looks like a tiny Christmas tree. Decorate it with some ornaments and perhaps slip it inside an attractive pot. Solar illuminated LED pots are a popular gift this year—they glow at night!

Lightweight gardening hoses are getting popular. They coil up easily, making storage a snap.

Good pruning tools are always appreciated. A pocket knife is a handy gift. This year a popular gift is a watering can in the shape of a mouse. Fun!

A new shovel, spading fork or quality hoe may seem like a simple gift, but it will be appreciated by a true gardener.

Nitrile garden gloves are very popular this year. They are lightweight, colorful, washable and reported to be as tough as leather.



Fig. 2. *Amaryllis* literally means "lily of love." Get a big bulb for best results.

Hand scrubbing lotions will clean and moisturize our hands (the most important gardening tools).

An avid gardener would love a garden cart to help them move plants and tools around the yard.

We all need to eat more vegetables and fruits. A juicing machine can help us to get all the servings we need for a healthy diet.

Herb drying racks, scissors that mince herbs, and pickling crocks are thoughtful gifts. A dehydrator can convert our garden produce into nutritious snacks.

Thermometers, soil thermometers, and rain gauges provide valuable information to a gardener. A heating mat can get their transplants off to a strong start this spring.

Bird feeders attract the beauty and curious movements of wildlife to our surroundings. Make sure you include some bird seed to go with it.

Gnomes and other garden statuary are risky gifts, but sometimes these gifts bring the biggest smiles! Remember to include the gift receipt.

When all else fails, a gift certificate to a local garden center or a gardening catalog will put a smile on your friend's face.

Happy holidays!



Figs. 3, 4. New lighting technology has led to the development of glowing pots. Give a juicing machine and your friend will live a happier and healthier life. Ho, ho, ho!

A winter wonder

Our winters in North Dakota are long—almost half the year. So when it comes to landscaping our yard, it makes sense to consider how our landscapes look during winter.

That is why birch trees are so valuable. Their peeling bark stands out in landscapes all winter long. As for the rest of the year, birches have lustrous green leaves in summer and bright yellow foliage in fall. Nice!

Birch trees are not the easiest of trees to grow. They demand cool, shaded soils to do well. The healthiest stands of birch in nature are found in cool, moist soils and in groups of hundreds of trees.

Unfortunately, we often plant birches as a solitary clump in the sunny front yard. This can be a stressful place since birches are sensitive to heat. Borers can detect this stress and will kill these trees.

Keep birches out of the harsh afternoon sun. A north or east facing location is best. Keep its soil cool with shredded bark mulching. Understory plantings of ground covers or low-growing shrubs will also keep the birch cool.

Never use rock mulching around a birch. That is pure cruelty! Rock mulches trap heat and inflict deadly pain. Birches can't take it.

Place your birch where you can appreciate its beauty, especially in winter. The light color of its bark will stand out even more with evergreen trees in the background (Fig. 7).

Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) is one of the best white-bark birches for home landscapes. Prairie Dream®, an introduction from NDSU, tolerates the stresses of our climate and resists bronze birch borer (Fig. 6). Keep in mind that no birch is totally immune to borers. Renaissance Reflection® is another



Figs. 5–7. The beauty of birch bark is fully revealed during the long, leafless winter. Prairie Dream® paper birch (bottom left) is outstanding for home landscapes. Heritage® river birch (bottom right) has spectacular cinnamon-brown bark, but it cannot tolerate alkaline soil.

fine paper birch, noted for its fast growth and pyramidal habit.

The most popular white-bark birch in the Midwest is 'Whitespire' gray birch (*B. populifolia*). Its tolerance to heat makes it resistant to borers. Its bark does not peel much.

Several cultivars trace their roots back to Asia. Some of these trees (*B. platyphylla*) tolerate dry soils and heat, making them less attractive to borers. The Asian white birch Dakota Pinnacle® is popular for its narrow, columnar habit. It grows 30 feet tall and only 8 feet wide, making it useful as a specimen in the garden or for use in screening or boulevards. This NDSU introduction tolerates alkaline soils.

First Editions Parkland Pillar® is a selection of Dakota Pinnacle® discovered at Parkland Nursery in Alberta. It is more narrow (only 6 feet wide) and dense in habit.

River birch (*B. nigra*) is another handsome birch, but its adaptability is limited. River birch has a rich cinnamon-brown bark that peels beautifully (Fig. 7). It is more tolerant to drought than white-bark birches and is not attacked by bronze birch borer—great! However, the leaves of river birch will turn yellow if grown in alkaline soils, which dominate our state (this is iron chlorosis). River birches are hardy to Zone 4.

Updated November 18, 2014

Sparkling jewels

Crabapple trees have dropped their leaves and most have dropped their fruit, too. This litter creates a mess. That's unfortunate. These fruitless trees will look unremarkable all winter long. That's *really unfortunate*.

Why not select a variety with persistent fruit? Some crabs hold onto their fruits through much of the winter, adding sparkles of red and gold in the landscape. These fruits will also attract songbirds, adding another dimension of life and color to your home surroundings.

Red Jewel™ is renowned for its display of bright red fruits during winter. 'Donald Wyman', Sugar Tyme®, 'Prairifire' and Sargent are other outstanding red-fruited types.

If you are looking for something different, 'Snowdrift' and 'Professor Sprenger' have orange fruits and the yellow fruits of Harvest Gold® are absolutely fascinating.

The next time you look for a crab, don't focus on its spring flowers—these last for a *couple weeks*. In-



Figs. 8, 9. Crabapple fruits add sparkling color to the winter landscape.

stead, consider how the tree looks during winter—this lasts for five

months. Consider a crabapple with persistent fruit.

A warm winter?

Our warm, pleasant fall was terminated by a harsh dose of winter reality this week. Temps plunged from the 50s last week to single digits (or below zero) today. It's too early to see how our plants adapt to this sudden blast of cold weather. A blanket of snow fortunately fell before the coldest temps arrived; this will help to insulate our plants.

Winter is not going away—the “fun” has just begun. Colder-than-normal temperatures are expected for the next week.

In the long term, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) cites a 58% chance of an El Niño, leading to unusually warm ocean waters in the Equato-



Fig. 10. Chances of a warmer-than-normal winter in North Dakota are >33%.

rial Pacific and warmer than normal temperatures for us. Any El Niño effect will likely be weak.

The NOAA predicts a 33% chance of a warmer-than-normal

winter for us (Fig. 10). Not enough climate signals are available to predict any changes in precipitation. An updated forecast is available on Nov. 20 at www.noaanews.noaa.gov.

Survey of timely topics for gardeners in North Dakota:

LAST-MINUTE CHORES



F11. Plant tulips and daffodils

Bulbs are on sale. It sounds crazy, but you can plant until the ground is frozen solid. The flower bud is already inside the bulb. Irrigate and mulch.



F12. Protect young trees

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



F13. Mulch tender flowers

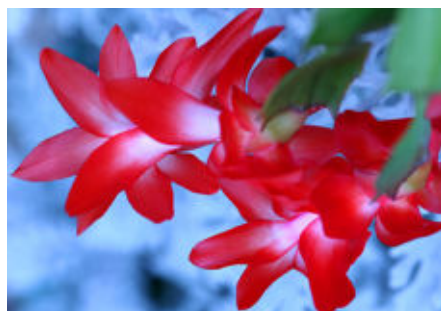
If you have not already done so (shame on you!), apply 4–6 inches of straw or hay. Mulch insulates plants from extreme temps, prevents premature sprouting, and keeps soil stable during freezing/thawing cycles.

HOLIDAY PLANTS



F14. Norfolk Island pine

These miniature Christmas trees thrive indoors but are not hardy for outdoor planting. They are native to the South Pacific, growing up to 200 feet tall.



F15. Holiday cactus

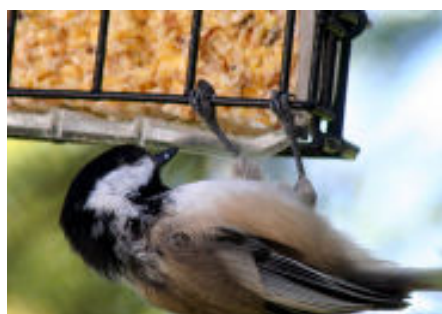
Blooms drop easily; handle carefully. Keep out of drafts. Native to rainforests (not deserts), so they like humidity. Allow soil to dry slightly between waterings (like most houseplants).



F16. Poinsettia

Give them bright light; otherwise they lose luster. Room temps are best. Keep away from cool drafts of windows and warm drafts of vents. Avoid over-watering; don't let plants sit in water.

FEEDING BIRDS



F17. Variety of feeders

The traditional feeder on a pole with a perch will attract most birds. Hanging feeders attract nimble birds like finches and chickadees. Nylon-covered wire cages filled with suet attract woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees.



F18. Safe location

Mount feeders at least 5 feet high to discourage squirrels and predators. Trees, shrubs or other cover should be within 5 feet to provide protection from wind and a place of retreat from predators.



F19. Good food

Black, oil-type sunflower and white proso millet seeds provide best value. Niger thistle, safflower and cracked corn are useful. Avoid mixes with wheat, peanut hearts, oats and rice. Birds pick through these mixes, making a mess.



Real Christmas magic

Four out of five homes in America will put up a Christmas tree this year and 20% of these homes will use a natural tree.

To find a fresh tree in the tree lot, grasp a branch near the trunk and run your hand back towards the tip of the branch. Shake the tree or pound its trunk to the ground a couple times. Avoid trees that drop needles.

Now that you found a fresh tree, protect it for the way home. Wrap the tree securely in a tarp to prevent the needles from drying in the wind.

Once you get the tree home, re-cut the trunk an inch or more up from the original cut and put into water immediately. Set the tree in a cool place away from heating vents.

Check the water level in the tree stand every day. You do not need to add preservatives to the water.

Credits

Sources:

American Christmas Tree Association. 2014. Most American households will celebrate Christmas with a Christmas tree. www.christmastreeassociation.org. Accessed November 15. W. Hollywood, CA.

Craven, S., D. Drake and J. Nack. 2007. Bird feeding: Tips for beginners and veterans. Pub. G3176. Univ. of Wisconsin: Madison.

Gardeners Supply Company. 2014. Gifts for gardeners. www.gardeners.com/buy/gardeners-gift-ideas/gifts-for-gardeners/. Accessed November 13. Burlington, VT.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 2014. Another warm winter likely for western U.S., South may see colder weather. www.noaa.gov/news/another-warm-winter-likely-for-western-us-south-may-see-colder-weather. Accessed November 14. Wash. D.C.

Potato Variety Management Institute. Yukon Gem: Yellow flesh with better yields. Bend, OR.

Photos were made available under Creative Commons licenses specified by the photographers: 1. Potato Variety Management Institute (potatoes) and PattyV, www.flickr.com/photos/pattyv/2852195444/ (burlap sack); 2. Susanne Nilsson, www.flickr.com/photos/infomastern/12235597856/; 3. Led Furniture Supplier In..., <https://www.flickr.com/photos/gointek/8534717076/>; 4. Food Thinkers, www.flickr.com/photos/foodthinkers/4149611896/; 5. Marillyle Soveran,

Weather Almanac for Oct. 13–Nov. 12, 2014

Site	TEMPERATURE				RAINFALL ¹			
	10/13–11/12				10/13–11/12		2014	
	Avg	Norm	Max	Min	Total	Norm	Total	Norm
Bottineau	38	36	75	8	0.45	1.16	17.78	16.80
Bowman	41	38	81	-5	0.03	1.07	17.50	14.85
Carrington	41	38	74	10	0.17	1.54	12.95	19.33
Crosby	39	35	76	6	0.09	0.92	14.08	14.37
Dickinson	41	38	80	-4	0.01	1.05	16.76	16.05
Fargo	43	39	77	11	0.24	1.65	15.70	21.20
Grafton	40	38	72	10	0.05	1.39	19.17	19.05
Grand Forks	41	37	76	11	0.05	1.61	18.24	19.72
Hazen	41	40	79	7	0.23	1.19	18.33	16.26
Hillsboro	41	39	77	12	0.23	1.61	17.29	20.50
Jamestown	42	38	76	10	0.08	1.26	15.32	18.77
Langdon	38	34	72	6	0.04	1.18	11.88	18.54
Mandan	42	39	80	5	0.04	1.13	14.10	17.19
Minot	41	37	74	7	0.11	1.23	18.17	17.28
Mott	40	39	80	-7	0.06	0.95	17.28	15.73
Rugby	40	36	78	9	0.26	1.08	14.30	18.54
Wahpeton	42	41	76	9	0.22	1.54	17.02	21.42
Watford City	42	37	77	0	0.21	0.93	11.04	13.92
Williston	42	40	78	1	0.08	0.83	10.83	13.64
Wishek	42	38	80	4	0.29	1.14	14.04	19.91

DAYLENGTH (November 12, McClusky)³

Sunrise: 7:41 AM | Daylength: 9h 29m

Sunset: 5:10 PM | Change since Oct. 13: -1h 37m

LONG-TERM OUTLOOKS⁴

6–10 Day (Nov. 21–25): Temp: Normal; Precipitation: Above Normal

8–14 Day (Nov. 23–29): Temp: Above Normal; Precipitation: Above Normal

¹ Measured from April through October. Gauges cannot measure snowfall.

^{2,3,4} Sources: North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network, www.sunrisesunset.com, and National Weather Service, respectively.

www.flickr.com/photos/86953562@N00/293097694/; 6. Dale Herman, North Dakota State University; 7. John Cutrell, www.flickr.com/photos/newparis/5294361715/; 8. Leah Grunzke, www.flickr.com/photos/28977572@N07/2763385544/; 9. Roger Lynn, www.flickr.com/photos/rogerlynn/310803235/; 10. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, www.noaa.gov/news/another-warm-winter-likely-for-western-us-south-may-see-colder-weather; 11. Juan Rubiano, www.flickr.com/photos/juanflauta/6938517996/; 12. Tom Kalb, NDSU; 13. Steven Lybeck, www.flickr.com/photos/slybeck/3484900281/; 14. Toby Oxborrow, www.flickr.com/photos/oxborrow/85636371/; 15. Alden Chadwick, www.flickr.com/photos/aldenchadwick/2066831034/; 16. RedTail_Panther, www.flickr.com/photos/redtailpanther/5288867950/; 17. Robert Taylor, www.flickr.com/photos/bobolink/4990595201/; 18. Fran, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/nhpanda/4788140839/>; 19. oatsy40, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/oatsy40/8923459422/>.

Written by Tom Kalb, North Dakota State University.

The information given herein is for educational purposes only. References to a commercial product or trade name are made with the understanding that no discrimination is intended and no endorsement by the North Dakota Extension Service is implied.

NDSU Extension Service, North Dakota State University of Agriculture and Applied Science, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Chris Boerboom, Director, Fargo, North Dakota. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. We offer our programs and facilities to all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, age, Vietnam era veterans status, or sexual orientation; and are an equal opportunity employer. This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request (701) 231-7881.