

Master Gardener Update

September 2021

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Forcing Bulbs for Winter Blossoms

Bulbs for fall planting have begun to appear in the stores. Now--when the selection is greatest and the bulbs are the freshest—is a good time to pot some up and tuck them away so you can have flowers in the dead of winter.

As fall rushes toward us, our blossoms become more and more precious. While the warmth of Wisconsin's summer will soon fade away we don't have to settle for doing without flowers in our homes. How? We can force bulbs for winter bloom. There are dozens of bulbs that can be forced to bloom indoors during the winter. All you will need are conditions that are cold and dark. These conditions will allow the bulbs to break dormancy, develop roots, and while snow and gusts of frigid wind whip around your house, offer you winter beauty.

There is a wide range of bulbs, corms, and rhizomes which can be forced into winter bloom. If you have a shelf or a drawer in your refrigerator that is bare—or any other dark space with 35-45 degree temperatures—you can use it for hyacinths, narcissus, tulips, crocus, or other spring-flowering plants.



Websites

For Rock County

MGV info:

rock.extension.wisc.edu/

OR

fyi.extension.wisc.edu/

mgvrockco/

MGV Hours Reporting:

mastergardener.

extension.wisc.edu/

report-your-hours/

RPMGA Blog:

rpmga.blogspot.com

RPMGA on Facebook:

Hit control/click on this link:

[RPMGA on Facebook](#)

Rotary Gardens:

rotarybotanicalgardens.org

Wisconsin Master Gardener Program:

mastergardener.

extension.wisc.edu

Wisconsin Master Gardener Association (WIMGA):

wimga.org



Left: Hyacinths, tulips and narcissus forced into winter bloom indoors.

How should I select my bulbs? Sometimes different varieties of a bulb force better than others. Some tulips, for example, do better than others. So look for varieties that are recommended for forcing. Select top quality bulbs that are clean and firm, with no soft spots. Pass over any bulbs that are damaged. Keep in mind that late-blooming varieties need longer cold treatments than early-blooming varieties.

Remember that taller varieties may need to be staked and so may not be suitable for all settings.

How do I plant my bulbs? Forcing indoor bulbs begins in September and goes through November. The preferred containers for forcing are clay pots. However, pretty pots in pleasing shapes can be very successful for forcing. Be sure your pots have proper drainage. This is crucial.

Mix a three part potting soil made of equal parts potting soil, sharp builder's sand and peat moss. Another attractive option is pea gravel, or glass stones. Partially fill the containers with either potting mix or stones, then, arrange bulbs so that their necks will be at or just below the surface. When using your potting mix, gently add more around the bulbs.

Amaryllis bulbs can be planted with the top 1/3 of the bulb above the level of the potting mix. Smaller bulbs like grape hyacinth and crocus may be covered by one half to one inch of the potting mix.

Separate the bulbs by about half a bulb width. A container that is six inches wide and six inches deep will hold roughly 10 to 12 crocus, five tulips, four hyacinths, or three to five narcissus bulbs. Plant bulbs that have one flat side (e.g., tulips) with the flat side facing the outside of the pot. This will yield a display of large leaves towards the outside of the pot, surrounding the flower stalks. It isn't necessary to fertilize bulbs, but be sure to water them if your potting mixture is very dry and add more as needed if settling occurs. Bulbs require some moisture during their cold treatment, but too much moisture can promote fungal rot. If the potting mix in your pots is overly wet, allow it to dry a bit before beginning the cold treatment.

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RPMGA Incorporation Update

The unanimous decision on incorporation for RPMGA from the August 5 meeting—pending legal advice—was to go ahead and file under Wisconsin Chapter 181. Once the papers are turned in (hopefully by the end of the month), RPMGA will become a non-stock, non-profit corporation, able to apply for a sales tax exemption from the state. Incorporation limits liability for all our members and gives us some legitimacy as a non-profit, which should make it easier to secure outside grants (if we choose to apply for any).

For legal advice, we consulted Wyatt Jackson of the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin, who has experience helping non-profits incorporate. He was able to confirm that Chapter 181 was a good choice for us, and had helpful advice on completing the required forms. He was also able to suggest procedures we can adopt that will help make the required recordkeeping and financial governance as easy as possible.

Board Election Results

At the August 5 meeting, we also elected the following people to serve as the initial board of directors:

Deb Grams, Treasurer

Susan Wood, Secretary

Mary Kay Thompson, Vice President

Ruth Flescher, President



Merrill Community Sharing Garden Tour This Friday, September 3, 10 a.m.

Come see all the different things going on at this urban community garden in Beloit. Host and garden manager Kaelyb Lokrantz will explain how all three parts of the name—Community, Sharing and Garden—work together to accomplish their mission and vision:

- To transform a vacant lot into something of greater beauty and purpose.
- To create opportunities for broader community engagement in the Merrill Neighborhood.
- To provide fresh produce to our neighbors.
- To preserve, respect, and enjoy the natural biodiversity of the garden.

Meet at the Garden: 1320 Porter Ave, Beloit, WI



Congratulations to Rotary Gardens—Best of the Best!

This just in: In the 2021 Best of the Best Community Choice Awards, Rotary Gardens was voted “Best Event Venue,” “Best Wedding Venue” and “Best Tourist Attraction.” Volunteers are a big part of keeping the gardens beautiful and growing, so congrats to you as well!

And speaking of volunteers, Rotary is looking for people to staff the two fundraisers below, plus daily gardening duties. Thanks in advance for your help! The link to sign up for gardening activities and watering: <https://signup.com/go/PfKXtDt>

Fundraisers at Rotary:

Fall Plant Sale, First Two Weekends of September

The Fall Plant Sale at Rotary takes place over two weekends. Saturday, 9/4 offers mums and mulch only, from 9 a.m. till noon. The full sale begins on Thursday, September 9 with the members-only pre-sale from 4-7 p.m., then is open to anyone on Friday and Saturday, September 10 & 11 from 9 a.m to 5 p.m. and Sunday, September 12 from 9 a.m. to noon. Bring a friend and come and check out the goodies! Volunteer sign up link: <https://signup.com/go/xZwnPKZ>

Curious Caterpillars Garden Art Auction, Thursday, September 29, 5:30-7:30 p.m., live at Rotary Gardens

If you’ve been out to Rotary Gardens at all this summer, you’ve seen what local artists have done with this year’s garden art project, Curious Caterpillars. Here’s your chance to view them all and bid on the ones you like best to take home and adorn your own garden. Doors open at 5:30. The auction begins at 6. Bids will be accepted online as well, if you aren’t comfortable being there in person. Volunteer sign-up link:

<https://signup.com/go/QWnCdxg>



Education at Rotary:

Botanical Talk: Merrill Community Sharing Gardens, Wednesday, September 8, 6:30-7:30

If you aren't able to make the in-person tour of Merrill Community Sharing Gardens for MGVs on September 3, you can still learn about the garden through the eyes of the garden manager, Kaelyb Lokrantz, by attending this presentation at Rotary Gardens. The Merrill Community Sharing Garden is just under an acre in urban Beloit. Kaelyb will be discussing the garden's history, mission, and future, accompanied with stories from the garden and many photos! Fee is \$7 for Rotary members and \$10 for non-members. Call Rotary to register (608) 752-3885. Or print the registration form from Rotary's website, then mail or deliver in person to the gardens. Link to registration form is available at <https://rotarybotanicalgardens.org/event/merrill-community-sharing-gardens/>



What's In Bloom Tour, Wednesday, September 29, 5:30-6:30 p.m., live at Rotary Gardens

This last monthly tour for the season features RBG Director of Horticulture, Michael Jesiowski. Mike will guide participants around the gardens and describe what is in bloom. Limited to 20 people, so registration is required. Fee: \$0 for RBG members, \$10 for non-members. Register online, by phone (608-752-3885) or at the Gardens.

More Training Coming Up in September and Beyond

*Looking for Level 2 MGV training--The Plants Plus modules? You can find them in the online classroom, Canvas, which you access with your UW NetID. They are currently also available under the "Learn" tab at mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu—but only until the end of **this month**. After that they will **ONLY** be available in Canvas. There's a new unit out on Phenology.*

WI Horticulture Updates, Fridays, 9:30-10:30 a.m., September 10, 17 and 24 online

September is the last month for the 2021 season of Wisconsin Horticulture Updates. In addition to the usual discussion of emerging pests and problems that occur in our gardens and landscapes across the state, each program usually has a special topic. Though the September 10 program is open, Mark Renz will discuss weeds on Sept. 17, and the 24th will be dedicated to a year-end review and critique. Each

program counts as 1 hour of continuing education, and you can view past discussions online. Sign into Canvas using your UW NetID for connection links or go to this address: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/11hrLji9hsJBWSl0SWjR4aqU2VFRE-Fy4pvlxKD4CyXk/view>

Olbrich Botanical Gardens, Madison, WI

Classes are in person at the Gardens unless otherwise noted. Fees listed are for Olbrich Members/General Public. For more info, copy and paste this address: <http://www.olbrich.org/education/classes.cfm>

The deadline to register for this class has passed, but you could call and inquire if space is still available: 608-245-3648
September 8, Better Soil, Better Plants and Happier Gardeners, 6:30-8:30, \$16/\$20. Registration deadline: August 29.

Registration is now open for these classes. Some may already be filled but try anyway--cancellations do occur.

September 15, Fall for Native Grasses and Sedges Walk, 5:30-7:00 p.m., \$12/\$15. Registration deadline: September 6.

September 22, Putting Your Garden to Bed Walk, 5:30-7:00 p.m., \$18/\$22. Registration deadline: September 12.

September 29, Drainage Concerns Around Your House, 6:30-8:00 p.m., \$12/\$15. Registration deadline: September 19.

October 6, Blooms and Bouquets Fall Walk, 6-7:30 p.m., \$28/\$35. Registration deadline: September 26.

October 12, Rain Gardens: Designing for Function and Beauty, 6:30-8 p.m., \$12/\$15. Registration deadline: October 3.

October 15, Seeds of Olbrich: Seed Saving Workshop, 1-2:30 p.m., \$17/\$22. Registration deadline: October 5.

Vineyard Walk, West Madison Ag Research Station, Thursday, September 2, 1-3 p.m.

Attendees will take a walk through the station's vineyards with UW-Madison experts and learn about cold-hardy table grape varieties, the Petite Pearl wine grape variety, disease resistance evaluations, insect monitoring efforts, and general vineyard management. Free. No registration required. The West Madison Agricultural Research Station is located at 8502 Mineral Point Road, Verona, WI

Nature Hike, UW Arboretum, Sunday, September 5 OR Sunday, September 19, 1-2:30 p.m.

Learn about the land; plants, animals, and fungi; phenology; and ecological practices and concepts. Geared for adults, these longer walks may cover some sloping terrain. Wear sturdy closed-toe shoes and come prepared for weather and insects. Walks take place rain or shine, except in unsafe weather. Free, no registration required. Event capacity is limited. Meet at the Visitor Center.



Soil, Climate and Carbon Webinar, Univ. of IL Extension, Thursday, September 9, 1-2 p.m.

Carbon storage is a hot topic these days. Some soils contain huge amounts of carbon, mostly in the form of organic matter. Soils also have the ability to store additional amounts of carbon quickly, but can just as easily lose it. Join us to learn about why Midwest soils contain large amounts of organic matter, changes that have occurred over the last 150 years, and ways that carbon, in the form of organic matter, can be increased in these soils. Presenter: [Duane Friend](#). Free. Register at <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=23570>



Fungi Festival, UW Kemp Natural Resources Station, Woodruff WI, Saturday, September 11, 8:45 a.m.-3:45 p.m.

If you'll be in the area around Woodruff, here's an education opportunity to consider. Join a morning foray to gather fungi in the forest at Kemp Station. Bring your own lunch and beverage. After lunch, each of our fungi experts will staff a learning station where they will share information and greater detail on identifications, and other topics fungi related. A detailed schedule can be found at <https://kemp.wisc.edu/outreach/> Lodging is available for visitors coming a distance at a rate of \$18 per person, per night. Contact Karla for more information: karla.ortman@wisc.edu.

Garden Tool Maintenance Webinar, Univ. of IL Extension, Tuesday, September 14, 1:30 p.m.

Make gardening less of a chore by maintaining your equipment. Sharp, rust-free tools are easier on the body and make whatever task is at hand quicker to finish. Horticulture Educator Richard Hentschel will cover care for hand tools and small engine equipment commonly used in the garden and home landscape. Free. Register at <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=23879>

Falling into the Autumn Vegetable Garden, Univ. of IL Extension, Wednesday, September 22, noon, via Zoom

As your vegetable garden begins to wind down for the season, you might be thinking about what tasks you should or could be doing to ensure that next year is ready for growing. In this program, Grant McCarty, Local Foods and Small Farms Educator, will help you determine what tasks you should do right now, what you should do soon, and what you should do later. The tasks will include planting garlic and cover crops, overwintering perennial vegetables, getting a soil test, orchard management, and many others. Free, but donation is appreciated. Register by September 21 at <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=24062>

Outdoor Garden Tour, Nicholas Conservatory and Gardens, Rockford, IL, Thursday, September 23, 10:30 a.m.-noon

Join a volunteer docent on a tour of the outdoor gardens at Nicholas Conservatory & Gardens. Learn about native and exotic plants, shade and sun loving plants, and NCG and Sinnissippi history and fun facts. Walking shoes and a bottle of water are recommended. Meet in the lobby of Nicholas Conservatory. Free, but registration required. Call or email for registration info: 815-987-1654 or lynditoohill@rockford-parkdistrict.org

Ten Plant Diseases NOT to Compost, Tuesday, September 28, 6-7:30 p.m., online

Certain plant diseases are so horrible or so deadly that composting is not an appropriate way to get rid of affected plants. Come learn about some of these diseases and their proper management. This program will be presented by Dr. Brian Hudelson. Free, but registration required. Sign up at https://uwmadison.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_gs1wkqj4QReD6v0bngKyAg



Mark Dwyer Online Fall Workshops through UW-Whitewater, Saturdays in late September and October, 9-10:30 a.m., online via WebEx

Landscape consultant and Rotary Gardens former Director of Horticulture Mark Dwyer is offering a trio of online courses this fall through the UW-Whitewater. Dates and topics are listed below. And though the classes run for an hour and a half, they're certified for only .5 hours of continuing education credit for Master Gardener Volunteers. Fee: \$25/session. Limited to 75 participants. To register, go to <https://www.uww.edu/ce/gardenlandscape/onlineworkshop> and click on the session you want to register for.



Using Conifers for Garden Structure Saturday, September 25, 2021. Register by noon, September 23.

A Focus on Sustainability in the Landscape Saturday, October 9, 2021. Register by noon, October 7.

Cool New Plants to Look for Next Spring Saturday, October 23, 2021. Register by noon, October 21.

Note: If you don't already have WebEx software, it's free to download. A link to the correct site can be found if you scroll down the registration page (address in blue, above). It's about three-quarters of the way down.

Forcing Bulbs for Winter Blossoms, continued

Some bulbs can be grown without potting mix. Hyacinths and paperwhites can be grown in specially shaped vases made to hold a single bulb. However, any container with a neck narrow enough to suspend a bulb over water will work. Paperwhites can also be grown in sand, gravel, pebbles or glass marbles. Place the material around the bulbs deep enough to support them and keep them upright. Space the bulbs as described earlier. For both hyacinths and paperwhites that are being grown without potting mix, add water to the container, keeping the water level just below the bottom of the bulbs. Be sure the bulbs don't touch the water or they will rot.

How do I get my bulbs to bloom? Now comes the process by which forcing occurs. Most bulbs need 3-4 months of cold and dark conditions, which simulate winter, in order to bloom. (Note that amaryllis and paperwhites don't require ANY cold treatment). The recommended cold periods are shown below.

Recommended Cold Periods for Forcing Bulbs	
Amaryllis (<i>Hippeastrum</i>)	None
Crocus (<i>Crocus</i>)	15-17 weeks
Daffodil (<i>Narcissus</i>)	15-17 weeks
Dwarf Iris (<i>Iris reticulata/Iris danfordiae</i>)	15-16 weeks
Glory of the Snow (<i>Chionodoxa</i>)	15 weeks
Grape Hyacinth (<i>Muscari</i>)	15-17 weeks
Hyacinth (<i>Hyacinthus</i>)	12-15 weeks
Lily-Of-The-Valley (<i>Convallaria</i>)	14-15 weeks
Paperwhite Narcissus (<i>Narcissus</i>)	None
Squill (<i>Scilla</i>)	15-16 weeks
Tulip (<i>Tulipa</i>)	15-17 weeks

Ideally, you would start the cold process by decreasing the temperature gradually. Bulbs should spend the first three to five weeks developing roots at 45 to 50°F, followed by about three weeks at 38 to 42°F, and the remainder of their cold period at about 35°F. These kinds of temperature settings are established in large horticultural refrigerators when blossoms are being forced for sale. But you can be successful using just the constant temperature of a home refrigerator (typically between 35 and 45°F). Be sure not to store fruit (particularly apples) in the refrigerator while forcing bulbs. Fruits emit ethylene gas which impairs flower development. Check moisture every few weeks. If the potting mix is very dry, add a small amount of water. Be sure to shield the bulbs from light. When the cold period is complete, the bulbs should have shoots that are one to two inches tall. Bring sprouted bulbs out of refrigeration into a sunny spot where the temperature is between 55 and 60°F. The shoots will initially be white, but will turn green when the bulbs are brought into the light. If you place



the bulbs by a window for light, turn the pots as needed to keep the leaves and stems growing straight. Most bulbs will bloom about three to four weeks after they are removed from the cold. Amaryllis bulbs like those shown at left, will bloom six to eight weeks after planting. At warmer temperatures, bulbs may grow faster, but flowers will not last as long. Keep bulbs moist, but not overly wet. Bulbs will require more water as leaves begin to grow rapidly.

What do I do with my bulbs after they have bloomed? Hyacinths (below), narcissus, tulips, and crocus cannot be forced two years in a row. However, bulbs that have been grown indoors in potting mix can be planted in the garden. Keep the bulbs in pots through the spring and summer, watering and fertilizing them regularly until they naturally die back. In the autumn, plant the bulbs in your garden at the recommended depth. The bulbs may bloom the following spring, but most likely will need a year of leaf growth before they re-bloom. Bulbs grown without potting mix exhaust their resources and often won't bloom again, even in the garden.

To get an amaryllis (left) to bloom again, it is important to allow the bulb to store food during its growing season and then give it a dry dormant period. After bloom, remove the flowers, give the plant plenty of sunlight, and fertilize it. Stop watering in early September and allow the plant to dry out completely. The foliage will die back. If taken outside during the summer, bring the plant inside before frost. Starting in November or December, begin to water the

bulb again to repeat the blooming cycle. You may want to consider repotting your amaryllis bulb every few years, but only into a pot no more than one to two inches wider than the diameter of the bulb.

Keep a plant journal. Detailed information about forcing specific varieties—especially of tulips and daffodils—can be hard to find, so make your own record. Write down which varieties you try, when you start them, the length of time and the temperature of cold treatment they get, how tall they grow, how many weeks it takes them to bloom after cold treatment and any other notes you think will be useful in the future. Your journal can be a valuable reference for the future and can help you plan when and what to start to keep yourself in flowers all winter long.



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