



Bear Creek Press

'Heart of the Garden'

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Time in the Garden

In the olden days, you know, before iPads & iPods, smart phones and apps (will there be an app that can grow tomatoes?) – there was a time when there was time for a garden. In those days the heart of the garden was the vegetable patch. At that point, the vegetable patch was a necessity, more of a requirement than a past time. There were mouths to feed and much food to put up for the winter. Without an abundance of vegetables, there would be nothing to eat for the rest of the year. Crops were kept in a cellar or dried or canned to store for the lean months. Can you imagine the labor and the heat of canning before electricity was common?

Today there is more pleasure and less pressure to the vegetable garden. We can start with widely available seeds or purchase healthy starts. Water is more accessible and soil is easier to mix and improve. Putting up food is certainly easier, as the repetitive and hot chores can be done in the comfort of an air conditioned kitchen.

Either way, there is an immense satisfaction in growing one's own food, picking the first peppers or tomatoes and drying, canning or freezing the excess. All of this is possible due to a dedication to the humble plot of vegetables out back, the patch that is still the heart of the garden.

Ideas from the Vegetable Garden

Mild Jalapenos

Do you like the flavor of the jalapeno pepper but can't take the heat? Neither can we. This year we have planted plenty of the 'mock hot' jalapenos. Called 'Fooled You' and sometimes sold as TAM or Pizza Pepper, these beefy peppers retain lots of jalapeno flavor but lose the burn. Use these fresh in salads or for stuffing your favorite pepper popper.

Late Basil

If you are like me and try to make a years' worth of pesto two days before a killing frost, you may like to try a couple of different varieties of basil. It seems the old fashioned green Italian basil tends to seed heavily by late summer. By that time, the slower bolting varieties of Red Rubin and Purple Ruffles are perfect for picking. The red leaf types have plenty of flavor and are easier to harvest. Try a pesto with lemon basil in mid-summer for an added zing. Holy Pesto, that's yummy!

Drying Peppers

Dried pepper is one of the easiest gifts to make in the kitchen. As the peppers ripen, slice them into ¼" by 1 ½" pieces and dry them in the oven at 170 degrees. They will smell pleasant while taking about 14 hours to dry. Make sure they are crispy dry before grinding the pieces to flakes or powder. We like to use Anaheim or Pablano peppers for some warmth and lots of flavor. Jalapeno or cayenne can be added for those of you who like to hurt yourselves. We have stored the powder in the freezer for over a year and still enjoy the flavorful essence.

Epsom Salts

Epsom salts, or magnesium sulfate, is one of the best kept fertilizer secrets. It is inexpensive (buy it at a variety store) easy to use (apply the crystals or dilute in water) and effective (more fruit, more tomatoes!). Epsom salts provide micro nutrients to all vegetable plants to help increase fruit set. We usually add some crystals in a prepared hole (along with Go-Grow Compost & Nitron Vegetable or Tomato Meal) as we plant each tomato or pepper. You can also dilute some salts in water and apply weekly through summer. Imagine, you can soak your feet & water your vegetables with one handy product.

New Peppers

In our new "Fun with Peppers" category, we would like to introduce a few new members of the chili family this year. Peppers are an easy-to-grow crop available in flavors ranging from mild and sweet to a few in the 'burn down the house' group. The yummy candy-like bells are favorites so we could not resist the chocolate bell, 'Choco'. A smaller thick walled sweet pepper is the Ashe County Pimento, tasty in salads or stuffed in an olive. Aji Dulce also caught our eye. This warmer paprika pepper is good for a flavorful dried powder. Whatever your heat tolerance, there is a pepper that will fit in your garden and entertain your taste buds.

Man's 2nd Best Friend

Next to dogs, perhaps, the allium is man's best friend. Our love for onions is so deep we must often count the ways. Deer resistant, somewhat drought tolerant and simple to grow, alliums come in flowering and many special, gastronomically pleasing forms. The onions themselves, sweet and mild, red and bold, flat cipollini and young spring onions, can be planted as sprigs or sets. Shallots, scallions, garlic and leeks are a few relatives that are welcome in the kitchen. They are all easy to grow from seed, adding to the thrill of seed-to-table food production. Hmmm... I think I'll go plant some right now.

Seeing Red in the Garden

Sometimes a vegetable garden is just a little too green. There are a few ways to add color. The obvious choice is to add flowers- zinnias, marigolds, cosmos and sunflowers all pack a color punch and increase pollinators visiting the plot.

Another method is to introduce red vegetables. Red lettuce, red okra, purple podded beans and peas and the aforementioned red basil all add to the warm palette. The Chinese Red Noodle Bean is a fun climber with skinny bright red pods over two feet long. The hyacinth bean has purple leaves, dark pink flowers and deep red seed pods. Blooming through the first frost, this is an aggressive, showy ornamental that is an eye catcher in the heat of the summer.

New Additions

Miscanthus 'Gold Bar' and 'Gold Breeze'. Gee whiz, Gordon over ordered again! These two similar maiden grasses are handsome examples of the gold banding seen on porcupine and zebra grass. The difference and delight of Gold Bar and Gold Breeze is heavier and showier banding. Broad yellow striations show up as the plant matures. A little sun on these gems is all they need to light up your day.

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'. The golden form of Japanese Forest Grass is a shade loving diminutive wonder. Growing to about 16 inches tall and about as wide, this glowing grass stands out in a woodland garden. Easy to site under trees, even walnuts, next to paths or in containers, this grass pulls its own weight occasionally able bench press twice its mass in foliage. Even though every picture you have seen of this plant is of a 12 year specimen, be patient and let it grow.

Maris's Maidenhair Fern. With dark stems and bright green foliage, this fern combines the best features of the native northern and southern maidenhair species. Place this beauty in full shade and enjoy its size- up to two feet tall on a mature plant. Maris's Maidenhair is deceiving- once established it is more drought tolerant than its delicate foliage suggests. As a foil in the shade garden or in a container on the porch, this fine leaved fern will capture your eye.

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New Annuals

Along with all the fun new perennials, grasses, ferns and trees, there are a number of new annuals and tropicals for the summer garden. These can go anywhere- in a pot on the porch or patio, in the beds with the traditional annuals, or to spice up the vegetable garden. A banana, new caladiums, new hues of fancy annuals, it's time to think bold, think colorful and think of the Bear when you want to be different.

Banana 'Dwarf Cavendish' & 'Thai Black'. These heat loving gems will add a tropical flair to the pond, porch or patio. Dwarf Cavendish is a stout grower that can actually produce bananas. Growing to about six feet tall, Cavendish will winter well indoors or in a greenhouse. Thai Black is a bit taller and sleeker in its habit. A dark stem is the stunning feature on this beauty. This handsome banana is very cold tolerant, able to winter outdoors with an ample mulching.

Caladium 'Green Pearl', 'Mini White', 'Siam Moon', 'Thai Beauty'. These are not your ordinary caladiums. Devel-

oped in Thailand, the colorful new look in these popular tropicals is bold and beautiful. The thick glossy leaves cause the pigments to jump off the leaves (warning- sunglasses required). Bright colors and dark veining create an eye popping display that will make your other plants smile.

Tricolor Moses in the Cradle. For those who like to combine house plants and garden plants, the Tricolor Moses is a perfect choice. Bold green, pink & white stripes and a purple backside make for a lovely combination. One plant will quickly fill a pot for a solo showing. Cascading annuals used in combination with these complimentary hues will make a stunning container.

Geraniums. Simply put, there are too many of these garden workhorses to describe them all here. Multicolor leaves, scented leaves, and unusual forms highlight a quick growing and popular annual. With names like 'Crystal Palace', 'Wilhelm Languth', 'Occold Shield', 'Happy Thought', 'Summer Twist' and 'Amarillo Purple Eye' we are attempting to pique your

curiosity to levels not seen in a very long time. This leaves us with only one choice- to invite you once again to please come see for yourself.

Anagallis 'Wildcat Blue' and 'Mandarin'. The common name of this delightful annual is scarlet pimpernel, an amusing mouthful of a moniker. A spreading groundcover, growing to 6-12 inches tall, Wildcat Blue and Mandarin are decidedly not scarlet, but hold their own in a container or flowerbed. Also known as Poor Man's Weatherglass, its flowers open in the morning and close in the afternoon in an attempt to tell time without using a wristwatch.

Fire Fern Oxalis. The tiniest of shamrocks has dark maroon leaves on a refined plant that reminds one of a fern. Tiny yellow flowers enhance the delicate display. This South American native grows to about eight inches tall and is happy in part shade to part sun conditions. While outdoors, Fire Fern will delight butterflies and hummers. Bring it inside and the Fire Fern will surely delight you.

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