

Plant Exchange

How To Grow Greens That Taste Good

BY BRENDA K JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

Bitter greens have predictable bad tastes that convince some gardeners not to grow them. But Beth Preheim of Yankton is a small space gardener that has found ways to grow greens worth your consideration. She gardens at the Yankton Community Gardens that close before the very end of the gardening season. A home gardener could use her ideas and start plants for a fall Cole crop of greens.

COOL SPRING DOESN'T HURT

"It's been a good season so far," Preheim said. End of June last season, we talked at her Yankton community garden plot.

Cole crops such as spinach, broccoli, kale, and mustard greens grow well in cool spring. By growing plants early or late in the season, she often avoids some insect pests.

"As soon as the community gardens opened (mid April last year) I had starts ready for under the shaded tunnel," she said. She grows transplants at home. She sets the plants in three feet square beds at the gardens, far enough apart to hand cultivate. As they grow, their leaves block weeds and keep soil cool and moist. She mulches with dry airy grass



clippings that help even more.

SHADE TUNNEL HELPS

Simple materials make the shade tunnel versatile for keeping the taste of greens mild and tender. Plastic hoops are tall enough for various plants she might want under cover for a while. Hoops that she pokes into the soil are easy to move from one bed to another.

Lightweight shade cloth

(row cover) that lays over the hoops is held in place with clips. She covers plants completely if she wants the interior a bit warmer in spring or fall so transplants can adjust and grow. Cover can be moved from side to side to protect from afternoon sun or drying winds.

If cabbage moths are active, she first checks the underside of leaves and removed eggs. Then she may cover the plants for a week



PHOTOS: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

Above: Swiss chard, two varieties of kale, and several other greens grow at Beth Preheim's garden in full sun. Left: Notice the simple materials to cover greens in hot sun and drying winds. The lightweight cloth lays on the windward side now and is easily repositioned to keep leaves tender in the shade tunnel.

and check to see if the cover discourages moths from laying eggs.

Plants that spend some time out of the harsh weather and under the cover tend to be more mild and tender plants to the taste.

Shade tunnel materials may be found locally. Small diameter PVC pipe makes a flexible hoop.

EAT UP

She features sautéed greens, as early and often as they want while leaves are young and tender. She eats

what is in season for the best quality. For the tastiest frozen greens, she processes the greens near the beginning of the season.

Preheim's transplants of greens such as kale, Swiss chard, and broccoli, are ready to plant early as possible at the community gardens. She wants to take advantage of these plants' favored cool growing weather. Sometimes spring is short in this region.

She looks for variety in her recipes that make use of fresh and abundant produce.

Among many sources are her fellow gardeners, participants at food tasting demos, and free recipes provided at the Yankton Hy-Vee grocery store. Many greens such as spinach or Swiss chard can be chopped and added to a recipe for nutrition without altering the taste.

By the end of June last season, she had harvested most leaf greens. While other vegetables are at their peak, she features them. For fall, she starts seeds of greens indoors ready to plant about August. For other information, she reads the seed packet or goes to the seed catalog website as she considers days to maturity.

Because she wants the nutritive value of greens she starts plants early and covers them for protection. Preheim finds her favorite tasting greens and stays on the lookout for new ways to cook them in peak season.

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or let us know what you enjoy most about these plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write P&D, 319 Walnut St, Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson. See "Plant Exchange" blog on Facebook or www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com/.

The Star Of Spring Time: Star Magnolia

BY MARY ANN KING
Master Gardner

Each spring I am privileged to have the "Aristocrat of Spring" (Magnolia stellata) bloom next to my front door. Royal Star Magnolia, discovered in the Orient, has graced modern landscapes for more than 300 years. Named for the 17th century botanist Pierre Magnol, this hearty tree blooms in early spring with white flowers before leafing out into shiny, waxy leaves.

The pussy willow-like casings set buds in the fall, waiting until spring to open into starburst blooms. The most fragrant blooms can last up to three weeks and will delight you and your neighbors.

An easy growing tree, Star Magnolia will grow in full sun to part shade with heights reaching 20 feet by 15 feet wide, so allow some room. Mine is neatly tucked in a protected northwest-facing corner, receives part sun-light and performs beautifully.

It is a great foundation plant and loves to be the star performer in its space.

Roots are not a problem in the garden bed, with under plantings sharing space and growing well. This tree does not like soggy feet, so the soil should drain well.

These multi-trunked specimens create a densely branched canopy that birds love for nesting; I have feathered tenants annually. If desired, this plant can be pruned into a single trunked tree. Remember to prune when dormant or after blooming to avoid sap "bleeding." I prefer to prune after blooming since this plant sets flowers during the summer growing season, much like a lilac tree. To keep the setting buds, I wait and prune just after blooming and just prior to the tree leafing out.

Fall season brings another show time for the Magnolia tree. It produces small, 2-inch capsules filled



PHOTO: MARY ANN KING

The King family has a 20-year-old Star Magnolia tree that blooms in early spring with fragrant blossoms.

with orange-red seeds. These seeds are very petite but high in fat content, and are a favorite songbird feast. As the fall season deepens, the leaves turn butternut yellow before dropping, leaving behind buds for wintertime rest.

This tree's biggest nemesis is frost. After wintering in freezing conditions, the buds become susceptible to frost damage when beginning to open. Thankfully unopened buds exposed to frost will still bloom. In the 20 years that I have grown this tree, I remember only two times that I lost flowers early to spring freezes.

So, if you are looking for spring

drama and summer beauty, combined with nesting, fall feasting birds, and finally, a winter sculpture showpiece, add Magnolia Stella to your garden bed. Plant it near where you can enjoy its blooms, fragrance and lovely canopy. I promise you will love this tree for many years. It is the "Star of Spring Time."

APRIL PLANT TIPS

Thanks to Diane Dickes, owner and designer at Diane's Greenhouse near Fordyce, Nebraska (402.357.3754) for her suggestions as you continue spring outdoor preparation.

- April is a good time to prepare your garden bed. Incorporate compost as soon as the soil can be worked.
- You can plant the "early" crops. Radishes, spinach, lettuce, potato, broccoli, peas, etc. If you plant in cooler months, you may avoid using pesticide on these crops. Also, they will be sweeter, if you plant them early.
- Spring is a good time to divide perennials before they start growing. Dig up the clump, split it with a shovel and replant. Make sure to water it well.
- You can plant trees and shrubs earlier than other plants; usually around mid-April, weather permitting.
- Do not remove mulch too early from your perennials. Purpose of mulch such as compost or shredded bark is to keep the ground cold until it's safe for them to start growing. A hard frost, under 28 degrees, is hard on perennials.

DIBBLES AND BITS

- Houseplants may have less than optimal growing conditions after winter with lowered natural light and low humidity. Some care tips include: Check your plant leaves. If all leaves have brown tips, it is likely from low humidity. Water plant in the shower so that leaves are thoroughly wet. That also removes dust buildup, another problem for plants. You can place the plant pot in a saucer of pebbles with a little water to add moisture. Remove dead or diseased foliage. Tiny flying insects near plants or fuzzy white web-like material on plants may indicate unwanted pests. Because insects may cycle in the pot soil, one step is to remove and discard about an inch of soil and replace it with fresh potting soil. Organic and chemical sprays are available locally to treat the plant. If insects come back, discard the plant because insects will infect other

houseplants. More tips available from the source: February *Martha Stewart Living* magazine, available at the Yankton Community Library.

• Plants for clay soil and steps to garden in it are topics in the April *GardenGate* magazine, found at the Yankton Community Library. Native plants cultivars that tolerate clay soil include Poppy mallow, Cup plant, and Mullein varieties.

• Potted citrus such as 'Meyer' lemons, limes, and oranges are available in dwarf varieties to grow as a patio plant in temperatures greater than 40 degrees F.

Indoors, potted citrus require a south-facing window in winter. As with other shrub like plants grown in pots, citrus plants benefit from hosing the leaves when you water them outdoors. Check soil and water when the top three inches of soil is dry. Water thoroughly and allow water to drain out the bottom of the pot. Use citrus fertilizer monthly because watering containers tends to leech fertilizer. For more care tips, see March/April *Horticulture Magazine*.

• Brunneras are easy care perennial shade plants grown for their foliage. The also have modest flowers. 'Jack Frost' is a commonly planted brunnera in this region. Many other leaf patterns and colors and variegated leaves are available. Deer and rabbits often skip brunneras. Plants can be divided in fall to increase their mass. More care information is found in the April *Fine Gardening* magazine.

• Grafted tomatoes have been grown in Europe where soil disease is a problem year after year. Grafted varieties appear to out produce non-grafted plants when soil is given little care. Those were findings in April *Fine Gardening* magazine. With moderate plant care, plant rotations year to year, and soil amended over time, the benefits did not favor grafted over non-grafted plants. More considerations are in the article.

Blooming Flowers



PHOTO: BRENDA K. JOHNSON
Flowers that bloom here include Hellebores or Lenten Rose. It's an early blooming perennial that appears about the same time as daffodils growing in shade. Upright hellebore blossoms are showier than nodding varieties. Mulch and they overwinter and last several years. Some local gardeners they are of low interest to deer and rabbits. One way to display them is to float them in water.

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