

Garden Variety News

A publication of the Morgan County Master Gardener Association, Inc

December 2007

www.mcmastergardeners.org



Nancy's Note

With the holidays right around the corner, we seem to be so busy with special meetings and programs. My Christmas wish for you is... just a few minutes... a few minutes to take a deep breath, relax, and let the spirit of this season fill you with good cheer and love for all.

Please plan to attend our Christmas Dinner at 6:00 pm on December 6. This year, along with all the good food, we will have a Garden Gift Exchange and Music to cheer us.

I have heard that Santa may even be there.....

My Best Wishes for Your Holiday Season,
Nancy

THE GREAT YAM SCAM

ARE SWEET POTATOES the same as yams? No ... and yes. Literally and botanically speaking, the two are not related. Yams are large, starchy, edible tuberous roots that belong to the genus *Dioscorea*. They grow in tropical and subtropical countries and require eight to ten months of warm weather to mature. Yams can grow two to three feet long and some can weigh as much as 80 pounds. According to horticulturist U. P. Hedrick, the word yam means "to eat" in the dialect of Guinea. In the United States today it is possible to find



true yams in some urban Hispanic markets. Both the yam and the sweet potato grow underground and have yellowish-orange flesh, but there the similarity ends. Yet the two became entwined in this country by household vernacular

in part through the work of a publicity campaign. Earlier this century, sweet potato promoters attached the word yam to the deep orange, moist-fleshed varieties of sweet potatoes and left the words sweet potato to the smaller, yellowish, and drier-fleshed varieties. The two types of sweet potato are interchangeable in cooking, but bring different tastes, textures, and colors to your plate. Centennial and Puerto Rico are two popular moist-fleshed (formerly called yam) varieties; Nemagold, New Jersey Orange, and Nugget have the lighter and drier (sweet potato) flesh. Today it is common to find either or both words used in supermarkets, although sweet potato promoters wish we would all stop saying yam. The North Carolina SweetPotato Commission currently urges the world to spell "sweetpotato" as one word. But it's an uphill battle. If your Mama called them yams, for certain you will, too.

***Congratulations to Deanna Skaggs
for achieving Advanced Master
Gardener Status!***



WEATHER FOLKLORE

November

- If the geese on St. Martin's Day (November 11) stand on ice, they will walk in mud at Christmas.
- If the first snow sticks to the trees, it foretells a bountiful harvest.
- If sheep feed facing downhill, watch for a snowstorm.
- If on All Saints Day the beech acorn is dry we will stick behind the stove in winter, but if it is wet and not light the winter will not be dry, but wet.
- Thunder in November indicates a fertile year to come.
- If there be ice in November that will bear a duck, there will be nothing thereafter but sleet and muck.
- As November 21st, so the winter.
- When the winter is early, it will not be late.

December



- Lengthened winter and tardy spring are both good for hay and grain, but bad for corn and garden.
- December changeable and mild, the whole winter will remain a child.
- A warm Christmas, a cold Easter.
- A green Christmas, a white Easter.
- December cold, with snow, brings rye everywhere.

Garden Tips for January

Send for seed catalogs for the garden.

Sketch your garden plans on paper, including what to grow, spacing, arrangement and number of plants needed.

Order seeds and plants as early as possible for best selection.

Wood ashes from the fireplace can be spread in the garden, but don't overdo it. Wood ashes increase soil pH, and excess application can make some nutrients unavailable for plant uptake. Have soil tested to be certain of the pH before adding wood ash.

Second week of January - Seed starting season will begin soon for some flowers and vegetables. If you've never produced your own transplants, give it a try this year. ([HO-14](#))

Greenhouse Tips for January

<http://flowers.hort.purdue.edu/web/beddingplts.htm>

Visit this Purdue website for information on growing bedding plants in mass production.

Basil - Of the herb crops sown, basil is usually the first to transplant. Plant the plugs immediately after a well developed root ball has formed in the plug tray. Stem rot diseases such as *Fusarium* may appear in the plug tray when finished plants begin to stretch and crowd. Thin basil if there are more than 2 seedlings per cell. Planting 3 or 4 seedlings per pot will cause the finished product to look uneven and unsightly. Basil will be ready to ship 2 to 3 weeks after transplanting. If shipping is delayed then pinch the plants to 3 to 4 nodes, which will require an additional 2.5 weeks for the plants to recover to saleable size. Growers should monitor thrips, caterpillars, and slugs weekly.

Chive seedlings can be transplanted into 4-inch pots two weeks after sowing if sown at the rate of 12 or more seeds per cell. Chives, with 12 to 16 seedlings per pot gives the plant adequate size for sales after 4 weeks of growth from the transplant date. Chives require a slightly lower nutritional level of 125 ppm N than other herbs. Leaf tips will brown if dried down.

Cilantro, coriander, or Chinese parsley are all names given to the same plant, with use in the kitchen determining which name is used. Cilantro is prized for its leaves in Mexican and Moroccan cooking and coriander seeds are used in spice mixtures and pickling solutions. The seeds are large and seedlings should be ready to transplant in two weeks. Germination percentages are usually low in the plug tray; growers must be careful in monitoring the substrate temperature and managing irrigation. Sometimes growers will direct sow into 4-inch pots. Cilantro should be sold early in the springtime. In the southeastern climate, cilantro plants do poorly in the summer heat. Because cilantro is a long day plant, bolting will occur during the summer months.

Lavender requires 5 to 6 weeks of growing for the foliage to cover the pot. Fertilize plants once a week with 150 to 200 ppm N during periods of active growth. During the winter months, fertilize every other week with 150 ppm N. The substrate should be kept dry, but the plants should never be water stressed. If lavender plants become leggy, and airflow is reduced to the foliage, the chances for infection by crown rotting fungi may occur. Watering in the morning hours is suggested.

Peppermint has a long germination time and is highly sensitive to saturated soil in the germination plug tray. Peppermint seedlings initially grow slowly and will take 3 weeks to become established, but will then grow rapidly. Because seedlings are slow growing, some growers may choose to purchase vegetative cuttings. Lowering the night temperatures to 55 °F once roots reach the side of the pot is suggested. Transplanting peppermint one week before the other perennial type herbs and fertilizing with 200 ppm N will help in equaling out the shipping times with the other herb species. Whiteflies and thrips are attracted to peppermint.

Oregano requires night temperatures around 55 to 58 °F to remain compact. Fertilize oregano with 125 ppm N. Oregano is ready to ship a few days after thyme, while oregano and sweet marjoram are equal in growing time. If the plugs become stretched they can be pinched 1.5 inches in length which will promote lateral branching. Oregano attracts whiteflies.

Parsley is very sensitive to excessive water, especially in the plug tray. Keep the substrate semi-moist during the germination process. Seed



will rot under saturated conditions. Parsley will be ready to ship 4 weeks after transplanting. Fertilize parsley on a constant liquid feed program at 125 ppm N or once weekly at 200 ppm N.

Parsley is very sensitive to high EC. Lower leaves will brown if dried down. Watch for spider mites on parsley. Weekly sprays of Azatin and Botaniguard are suggested for parsley.

Rosemary is susceptible to *Rhizoctonia* and this fungus will cause unsightly scarring of the stems. Sometimes the presence of woody tissue on the stem is mistaken for the stem rot. The fungus has a deep brown appearance and the woody tissue is gray and light brown in color. Discard the plants if the symptoms are present. Rosemary plugs should be planted immediately upon arrival from the plug producer. Using two plugs in the 4-inch pot will increase water uptake. Be careful in terms of water management after transplanting. The substrate should remain dry, but the plants should never be water stressed. Plants can be lightly pinched to 5 or 6 nodes after roots have reached the bottom of the pot. This will create a fuller plant, but will add 1 or 2 more weeks to the production time.

Sage requires that the substrate be somewhat dry between irrigations. Light watering until root development reaches the outer edges of the pot is suggested. Fertilize sage at 200 ppm N once weekly. Flats are ready to ship in 4 weeks.

Sage requires night temperatures around 60 degrees F. Avoid cooler temperatures which create favorable environmental conditions for stem, root, and leaf rotting fungal pathogens.

Sweet Marjoram requires night temperatures around 55 to 58 F to remain compact. The feeding schedule for sweet marjoram is 125 ppm N, constant liquid feed. If the plugs become stretched, they can be pinched to 1.5 inches in length, which will promote lateral branching. This will cause the plugs to become more vigorous. Sweet marjoram can become leggy at the 6th week of growth from the transplant date.

Tarragon - French Tarragon should be purchased as rooted cuttings from a reputable propagator. The plants are best grown at 55 to

60 F. Growers should pinch the plants to 1.5 to 2 inches of growth if the plants are leggy. Cuttings should be soft and non-woody for best establishment in the final container. Tarragon should be fertilized with 150 to 200 ppm N.

Thyme plugs may become stretched during the pre-transplant stage if temperatures are above 70 F. Pinching the plugs to 1.5 to 2 inches of growth before transplanting will result in bushier plants, but only cut them back if they are stretched. Plugs have to be watered in gently or the plugs will be covered with substrate. The seedlings are not strong enough to recover from being blasted with the initial watering. They do best with a constant feeding at 150 ppm N. Thyme prefers a drier substrate.

For further reading:

Laskey, M. 1991. *Herbs*, p. 577-58; *In Vic Ball; Ball Red Book; 15th Edition; Geo J. Ball Publishing, West Chicago, Illinois.*

Long, J., 1998. *Herbs*, p. 253-271. *In Vic Ball. Ball Red Book. 16th Edition. Ball Publishing, Batavia, Illinois.*

Nau, J. 1993. *The encyclopedia of seed germination. Ball Publishing, Batavia, Illinois.*

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CALENDAR

First Thursday of most months is the Business Meeting. It is open to all members and invited guests.

12/01/2007 – Victorian Christmas Planter project for Mooresville IN. Trena will report on this project at the November meeting for a volunteer opportunity, but it involves planting greenery in the permanent planters in town for the annual Victorian Christmas event.

12/3 & 4/2007 (Two Days) Wreath Making Workshop conducted by Trena Trusty – Open to the Public; we will make wreaths for the libraries and for other locations as needed. Cost to be determined. See Trena Trusty's article for more information and additional volunteer opportunities.

12/06/2007 – 6:00 p.m. **Christmas Party Potluck** at the Administration Building in downtown Martinsville; Spouse or Guest Welcome; White Elephant Garden Gift Exchange for voluntary participation; \$10.00 limit on gift. The **East Middle School Choir** will perform. The MCMG Association will make a small donation to the Music Department to show appreciation, and possibly make favors to hand out.

January, 2008 – No meeting

January 17, 2008 – The 2008 Master Gardeners Class Series

**Morgan County Administration
Building
in Martinsville
Thursday 9:00am - noon
Beginning Jan. 17, 2008
Cost \$85.00 per person/\$100 per
couple payable to the Morgan County
Extension Office
Contact: Chris Parker, 342-1010 or
cparker@purdue.edu**

**Class sessions will be held weekly
at the
Morgan County Administration
Building,
180 S. Main St.**

November Meeting Notes

A refresher class was given by Nancy Manly on what a Master Gardener is and isn't.

- Marion County Master Gardeners will be selling calendars for \$10 this year. See Nancy if you want to purchase a calendar.
- An eleven day trip to France will be in June 2008. The land package will cost \$3178. Air travel is extra.
- Morgan County is attempting to create their own solid waste recycling as per Theresa.
- Chris Parker awarded an Advanced Master Gardener badge to Deanna Skaggs. Chris discussed the upcoming morning master Gardener classes January 17 to March 27, 2008. Terry will list the class topics on the website and Pat Proctor will help with the classes. There will be an eight week "Forest Management for Private Woodlands" class being offered in January 2008.
- Nancy informed the members of updates from the State Conference she attended in Evansville. Nancy passed out a quiz for the members to complete. The quiz tested the member's knowledge of what constituted credit toward volunteer hours. Activities must have an educational component to be counted. Volunteer hours must be documented when writing for grants.
- Trena discussed the meeting of the By Law committee and said the revised By Laws should be ready early in 2008.