

# Successful Gardener



Helping Carolinians Increase Their Knowledge of Gardening, Manage Their Landscape Investment & Protect the Environment

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE & LIFE SCIENCES

## JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

### Winter Iris Brings Color to the Cold

Just when the dark, dreary days of winter seem to drag us down, a small wonder of a plant springs forth to lift our spirits and punctuate the winter gray with a burst of cheerful color. The winter iris is underutilized in gardens yet absolutely beautiful. And it's the perfect remedy for winter malaise.

The splendid *Iris unguicularis*, also known as Algerian iris, blooms during any mild spell from December to February. Native to the eastern Mediterranean, Algerian iris provides a gorgeous splash of blue seldom seen in winter. It prefers a sunny location, is best left undisturbed and flowers better as the clump grows older.

Just as your Algerian blue-purple passion is winding down, prepare for another bright winter surprise! The Danford iris, *Iris danfordiae*, shows off its bright yellow flowers on 2- to 4-inch stems from February through March. Somewhat fragrant and low-growing, it multiplies rapidly and is excellent for borders or rock gardens. This species was introduced from Turkey in 1876.

Keep your spirits up with our next flowering favorite, *Iris reticulata*. Also known as dwarf iris or reticulate iris, the short flowers are blue, purple or dark lavender and typically bloom any time from late February through mid-March. They look almost like miniature orchids with lean petals. This bulb is a good companion plant to crocus and Lenten rose. Growing about 6 inches tall, it likes a sunny site with well-drained soil. These small plants have grasslike leaves. The cultivar 'Harmony' has intense blue flowers, a good companion to flowering quince, forsythia, winter jasmine, vinca and witch hazel.

There is something particularly lovely about any one of these irises lingering amidst a light covering of snow. And while we cannot guarantee the white stuff in Raleigh at the JC Raulston Arboretum, you'll certainly have the convenient opportunity to compare any number of plant species as well as discover excellent companion plants to build aesthetic, functional and diverse landscapes. The Garden of Winter Delights should be one of your first stops at this time of year.

Mike Wilder



*Iris reticulata*

Robert E. Lyons ©

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#### TOP AWARDS RECEIVED FROM:

International Association of Business Communicators

National Association of County Agricultural Agents

Southern Extension Forest Resource Specialists

N.C. Association of County Agricultural Agents

Mecklenburg County Priority Awards



*Iris danfordiae* Robert E. Lyons ©



*Iris reticulata* Robert E. Lyons ©



*Iris danfordiae* Robert E. Lyons ©



'Ring of Fire'



'Honey Select'



'Profusion White'



'Forever Blue'

### 2001 Perennial of the Year

'Karl Foerster'  
Ornamental Grass

## 2001 All-America Selections Promise Gardening Success

Most gardeners don't mind getting a head start to success, and you'll be well on your way by choosing the All-America Selections (AAS). The AAS program, which dates back to 1932, evaluates new varieties and flowers each year. It is the oldest, most established testing organization in North America. Plants designated AAS Winners have proven to be superior to others in some means such as drought tolerance, color retention, bloom period or disease and insect resistance.

A network of almost 2001 AAS Display Gardens in the U.S. and Canada affords the public the chance to view the most recent winners. Display Gardens in North Carolina are at the JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State University in Raleigh, Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton and Reynolda Gardens in Winston-Salem.

### Flowering & Bedding Plant Winners

'Profusion White' zinnia was named the AAS Gold Medal Winner for 2001 and is the only white zinnia with a 2½-inch, single daisy-like flower. 'Profusion White' is resistant to powdery mildew and flowers profusely through the growing season and into fall when most zinnias fade rapidly. The plant will spread 12 to 24 inches in a full sun setting. This selection is relatively care-free for the gardener, producing a mass of bloom all season with no pinching or pruning needed.

'Margarita Rosita' portulaca is different from other portulacas in that it has a compact, mounded habit more reminiscent of an alpine rock garden plant. The small, 3- to 4-inch leaves are covered with 1½-inch, semi-double rose flowers. 'Margarita Rosita' thrives in sunny, harsh conditions, reaching a spread of 12 to 14 inches. Consider this plant for container plantings since it flowers continuously with minimal care.

'Forever Blue' is an F1 hybrid eustoma that provides season-long, 2½-inch single flowers for gardeners with a penchant for blue. The distinctive branching habit of this plant results in a dense, flower-covered display. 'Forever Blue' will reach 12 inches when mature in a full sun garden. A proven, heat-tolerant plant, it will benefit from deadheading as with all eustoma (lisianthus) and performs well in patio containers.

'Avalon Bright Pink' is an improved F1 hybrid dwarf nicotiana providing a multitude of star-shaped blooms of an unusual shade of bright pastel pink throughout the season. These heat-tolerant plants will reach a height and spread of 10 to 12 inches. This plant is maintenance-free, requiring no dead-heading. Easy to grow, 'Avalon Bright Pink' should have a place in annual beds as well as a season-long color plant in perennial borders. It also lends itself well to containers.

'Ring of Fire' sunflower stands out in a crowd. This five-inch sunflower boasts golden petal edges and a ring of red that surrounds a chocolate brown center. This is a late-season bloomer that needs full sun and space. It may reach a height of 4 to 5 feet, spreading 2 to 3 feet. The long stems make this a great cut flower.

### Vegetable Award Winners

'Honey Select' sweet corn is an F1 hybrid and is a winner when it comes to its delicious sweet honey flavor. Unlike other supersweet types, 'Honey Select' does not require isolation from other corn pollen. The ears grow to about 8 inches long and mature in about 79 days.

'Jolly' is a delicious, new pink tomato F1 hybrid. Its vines produce high-quality, peach-shaped fruit in abundant clusters, with 9 to 14 tomatoes per cluster. The plant yields fruit in about 70 to 75 days from transplanting, offering meaty, sweet, pink tomatoes fresh from your garden.

'Giant Marconi', an F1 hybrid, is an Italian pepper that's excellent raw but is best when grilled for a sweet, smoky flavor. About 6 to 8 inches long, the tapered green pepper will mature to red on the 30-inch plant. It was judged best in its class for earliness, yield, pepper size and flavor. Green peppers can be harvested in about 72 days from transplanting.

'Super Star' is an improved F1 hybrid white sweet onion that you'll want in your spring garden. If the seed is sown and transplanted early, 'Super Star' onions weigh one pound or more when mature in about 100 days. This onion is mild and sweet, perfect for sandwiches or salads.

*Royce Hardin*

Many hybrid plants with the F1 label are recognized for their quality and display of superior, uniform characteristics.

## Q&A Do I need to use an anti-transpirant on my shrubs this winter?

I certainly hope not.

If we have a Montana-style winter here in the sunny South, a few desiccated leaves will be the least of our worries. Anti-transpirants block the loss of water through the leaves. A wide variety of products have been sold as anti-transpirants including resins, waxes, acrylic polymers and kaolin clay. In more northern climates and the highest elevations of North Carolina, anti-transpirant sprays are recommended on shrubbery during the winter when the ground is frozen and the plants can't get

water. Anti-transpirants are also useful on cut greenery. They will extend the life of evergreen wreaths and swags. In theory, the anti-transpirants would reduce water stress of shrubs and trees after transplanting. However, I don't know of any professional who uses them for that purpose. They are obviously not critical for gardening success. Transpiration is necessary for normal plant growth so you wouldn't want to use an effective anti-transpirant when you are expecting a plant to grow.

*David Goforth*

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Remove Ice Without Harming Plants

For safety's sake, it is important to keep driving and walking surfaces on your property free of ice and snow. However, some ice removal products can harm vegetation. Before applying a product for ice control, consider these points.

The key is being prepared before a storm occurs. All of the following products work well to prevent the formation of ice by lowering the freezing point of water. However, applying these materials after ice has formed will provide marginal relief at best. Once melted, though, these products will prevent or discourage refreezing. Sand applied to an already frozen surface may slightly improve traction.

#### What's Safe and What's Not?

- Rock salt is safe to handle and won't harm your skin, carpets or floors, but it will harm vegetation.
- Using fertilizers or ice control agents containing urea generally do not harm vegetation, but they do contribute additional

nitrogen and phosphorus pollutants to our rivers and streams.

- Calcium chloride is effective for ice control, but unsafe for vegetation and requires skin protection to apply.
- Ammonium sulfate is not practical as it disintegrates concrete, bricks and masonry.
- Potassium/sodium chloride blends are safe to handle and do not harm vegetation.

Any ice control agent is potentially harmful to humans, vegetation, property and pets if used incorrectly. Most problems that occur usually are due to incorrect application, overuse of the product (more application of the product doesn't mean that it will work better or faster) and improper disposal of the leftover product. Piling up of removed snow and ice promotes concentration of potentially dangerous chemicals. The most enviro-friendly approach is to allow the sun and temperature to loosen the ice, then physically remove it. Is it the safest for you?

That, you'll have to decide!

*Mike Wilder*



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### gardentalk

"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant."

— Anne Bradstreet



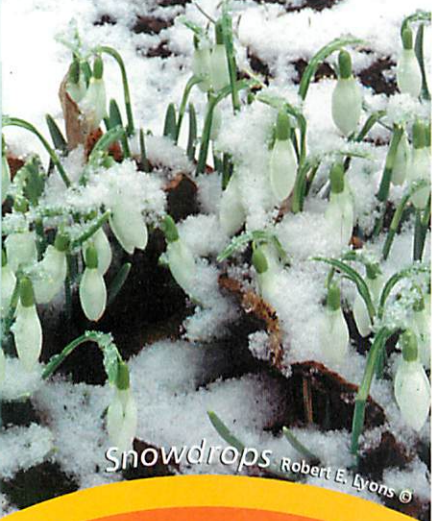
## Announcing Extension's



Learn about annuals, perennials, lawns, trees and more from Extension horticulture experts and guest lecturers!

- ▶ **Saturday, February 10**
  - 9 a.m. to Noon
  - Citizens Center, Lincolnton
  - Details: (704) 736-8452
- ▶ **Saturday, February 17**
  - 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
  - Forsyth Tech Swisher Center, Kernersville
  - Details: (336) 375-5876
- ▶ **Friday, March 2**
  - 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
  - Southern Spring Show
  - Charlotte Merchandise Mart, Charlotte
  - Details: (704) 336-2561
- ▶ **Saturday, March 10**
  - 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
  - Southern Ideal Home Show
  - Greensboro Coliseum, Greensboro
  - Details: (336) 375-5876
- ▶ **Thursday, March 29**
  - 9 a.m. to Noon
  - N.C. Arboretum, Asheville
  - Details: (828) 697-4891 or (828) 255-5522
- ▶ **Saturday, March 31 & Sunday, April 1**
  - 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Noon to 5 p.m., respectively
  - Currituck Flower & Garden Show, Currituck County High School, Barco
  - Details: (252) 232-2262
- ▶ **Saturday, April 21**
  - 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., various times
  - Southern Ideal Home Show
  - State Fairgrounds, Raleigh
  - Details: (919)560-0525

In addition to regional seminars, several counties offer Successful Gardener<sup>SM</sup> workshops. Check with your county Cooperative Extension Center for details.



## Gardening in January & February

### Lawns

February is a good time to evaluate your turf. Since recommendations differ depending on whether you have cool-season or warm-season grasses, consult your local Cooperative Extension Center for complete information on renovating turf areas.

### Ornamentals

■ Cut back ornamental grass tops to 2 feet or so on old, established clumps. With the younger plantings, simply tip back to remove the brown foliage.

■ If you have rose bushes, rake the fallen leaves and discard to reduce disease problems.

■ Deadhead pansies periodically to ensure more blooms. Fertilize them once a month during active growth in the spring.

■ Prune *Camellia japonica* when the blooms fade, about this time of year on many plants. Remove spent flowers to prevent seed formation. If possible, try to make pruning cuts just above the thickened, rough area on the stem.

■ Applying fertilizers in the slow-release form can supply nutrients to houseplants without raising salt levels enough to injure plant roots.

### Edibles

■ Plant early vegetables such as peas, sugar snaps, onion seeds, head lettuce and carrots.

■ Start tomato, eggplant, melon, okra, squash and cucumber plants in a greenhouse or cold frame. Be sure to use a good, sterilized greenhouse potting medium.

■ Purchase quality seed from reputable dealers or garden centers.

■ Purchase varieties that grow well in your region.

■ Plant fruit trees in the landscape.

**David Barkley**

### The Craggy Gardens,

located on the Blue Ridge Parkway almost a mile past highway marker 364 in the southern Appalachian Mountains, are a delight in early summer. The gardens become a blaze of color when the Catawba rhododendron, flame azaleas and native wildflowers are in bloom. The natural gardens weren't always gardens. In fact, early settlers once pastured their livestock on these mountainsides but all grazing was stopped in the 1950s when the land was acquired for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Removal of the domestic livestock allowed native flowers to return and flourish. There is a wonderful network of walking trails with one just north of the visitor center which takes you through a tunnel of rhododendron to the top where observation areas give great views of the Craggy Mountain area. The gardens, which are open daily from sunrise to sunset, have extremes in both elevation and terrain so wear suitable clothing and good walking shoes. For more details on the gardens or the parkway, call (828) 298-0398 or access <[www.nps.gov/blri/](http://www.nps.gov/blri/)>.

**Karen Neill**

Garden Spot



Tune in to "Making It Grow!" – a gardening show featuring Extension agents from the Carolinas. Saturdays, noon, WTVI 42, Charlotte

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