

THE GARDEN PATH , FEBRUARY 2015
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PLANT OF THE MONTH - FEBRUARY By Marty Finkel



Aspidistra elatior
'Lennon's Song'



A. guangxiensis
'Kunming Scarlet'



A. elatior
'Asahai'

Photos courtesy of Plant Delights Nursery, Inc. <http://www.plantdelights.com/>

Who would have thought that the mostly overlooked, often neglected plant on the table in the darkest corner of Grandma's house, leaves gathering dust, had so many beautiful species and cultivars, and that it is hardy outdoors in climate zones 7-11? Its common name is cast iron plant because it can grow with little attention, its light requirements are low, it's slow-growing (as a houseplant this means infrequent repotting), and it is very long-lived (anecdotal reports of 50 and more years). The most common species offered in garden centers is *Aspidistra elatior*, which has dark green strap-like leaves. This species has several showy cultivars – see photos for a couple of them. Aspidistras are native to China and Japan and are in the lily family. They grow in the dappled to full shade of forests in their natural habitat in almost any type of soil. Planting in nutrient-poor soil at the base of nutrient-hungry trees simulates this habitat.

In fact, low nutrient soil produces showier whites, creams, and yellows on variegated types. Plant in a site sheltered from the wind, because exposure to the cold, drying winter wind can cause "winterburn," which strips the moisture from the leaves and turns the edges and tips brown. These brown parts can be trimmed off. Cast iron plant mature heights vary from 10" to 3', depending on the species, with the leaves of *A. elatior* attaining a width of 5" wide and becoming 3' long in 20 years. The size of the clumps increases slowly as the rhizomes (underground stems) spread and put up leaves as they grow. Each rhizome can be divided and planted. And cast iron plant even flowers! The flowers poke out of the ground and stay at soil level so they can be pollinated by slugs and snails. Usually one flower at a time appears and will last a few weeks; only mature plants will flower. Leaf variegation can be quite striking, ranging from leaves with white tips (*A. 'Asahai'*, photo) to those with white or cream streaking along their length (*A. 'Lennon's Song'*, photo) to white specks or dots, and to pale yellow variegation.

CHECKLIST FOR FEBRUARY By Mary Jane Bosworth

- ✓ Anxious to get out in the garden, then this is the time to trim and prune. Most trees and ornamentals prefer to be shaped at this time of year. Remove diseased and dead limbs. Shape, keeping in mind that there will be growth in the spring. Do not shear...meaning cutting all branches to one length; but instead, cut branches at various lengths for a natural look.
- ✓ Remember, in your enthusiasm to trim, that you must not cut any spring flowering plants that bloom on last year's wood, such as azaleas, rhododendrons, forsythia, spirea, flowering quince, pieris and others.
- ✓ Ornamental grasses should be cut back before new growth appears.

- ✓ Control wild onion with 2,4-D Amine. Add a few drops of dishwashing detergent to act as surfactant to cling to narrow leaves.
- ✓ Clean up garden debris.
- ✓ Add mulch to gardens.
- ✓ Plan for warmer months by spending time with gardening books and seed catalogs. Get new ideas and purchase something that will make you happy.

GARDEN TO DO – FEBRUARY By Carl Shafer

*-Web links for these topics can be found at: www.ces.ncsu.edu/lawn-and-garden-publications/

During warm spells, dormant sprays can be applied to fruit trees and vines this month. For specific recommendations, check the NC Chemical Manual, (<http://ipm.ncsu.edu/agchem/agchem.html>), and always follow label directions. For additional information see: Fruit Disease Fact Sheets, **Disease and Insect**

Management in the Home Orchard,

www.cals.ncsu.edu/plantpath/extension/clinic/fact_sheets/index.php?do=disease&id=7. For the dormant spray only, dormant oil and lime-sulfur may be combined. When leaves are present this combination will burn the leaves.

Finish pruning fruits if needed before spraying. Peach trees and grape vines normally need the most pruning. Check at the Extension office for pruning bulletins, and watch for scheduled Extension pruning demonstrations. See *Training & Pruning Fruit Trees*, AG-29*. Also see *Producing Tree Fruit for Home Use*, AG-028*. Information for small fruits is also available in 6th Fruits and Nuts section.*

Get a copy of the Extension Services *Home Vegetable Gardening* AG-06* to use to plan your garden this year. Also see *Central North Carolina Planting Calendar for Annual Vegetables, Fruits, and Herbs**. Notice that many cool season, direct seeded, vegetables can be planted starting in February, some even in January. These include: garden and edible-pod peas, beets, carrots, lettuce, onions (seeds, sets, and plants), radishes, Irish potatoes, and spinach. Note also that some of the cool season vegetables can be transplanted starting in February. These would require starting seeds in December/January or buying transplants. If you use the earliest dates, you will need to have row cover or other season extension products available if a hard freeze is predicted. Be careful to not work the soil when it is too wet. For planning purposes, note that the average last frost date (32°F) for the Henderson area is April 21 and average last 28°F date is April 6.

Start seeds early this month of broccoli, cabbage, and cauliflower for transplanting in mid to late March or sooner. Start seeds of eggplant, pepper, and tomato later this month for transplanting in late April and early May. See *Growing Vegetable Transplants for the Home Garden*, HIL 8104, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/pdf/hil-8104.pdf). Buying a bag or two of seed starting mix is preferable to trying to make your own mix. Buying a “Seed starting heat mat” to provide bottom heat will result in quicker and more complete germination. To provide the bright light that is needed to grow stocky transplants a 4 ft 2 tube shop fluorescent fixture works well. Use one “cool” and one “warm” bulb. A simple timer allows you to set the time for the light you want – 16 hours is usually recommended. I found the following extension plans for adjustable light stands:

(www.gardening.cornell.edu/factsheets/growlite/index.html) and

(<http://umaine.edu/publications/2751e/>) . I find that I need to start eggplants and peppers about two weeks before the tomatoes.

Still time to check seed catalogs/web sites for the “Newest”, “Best”, Exclusive, All-American Selections, or just different varieties to try this year.

The 2015 Winter Issue of Extension Gardener is available. www.successfulgardener.org

THE TYROS' CORNER -FEBRUARY By Eileen Novak

As gardeners, we have many things to be thankful for: the fresh air, the sunshine, the rain, the earthworms, and the timing of New Years’ Resolutions. Think about it. My husband has seen folks at the gym every January that he hadn’t ever noticed before. Then by March those new folks are gone, for the most part. When gardeners make New Years’ resolutions, we don’t BEGIN to break them until well after that.

For example:

- I resolve to plan out my garden more fully. Won't be breaking that in January because I don't normally plan it till end of February.
- I resolve to start my seeds on time. Last frost date is around the 20th of April so I have until mid-march to miss that one too.
- I resolve to water more often. Dry days don't start until June most years to that's covered for almost 5 months.
- I resolve to weed more often. Hmmm, I'm using the weeds in every garden now as "green manure". I just have to remember to till them in before they go to seed.
- I resolve to inventory my seeds and not buy more than I need for the year. Ummmmm here we're getting a little sticky. Does the inventory I did last year count? I didn't plant that many seeds since I bought plants at most of the big and little box stores. And do the seeds I bought last week count because I only bought them to get the order up to the "free shipping" level? Must get a ruling on that one.

See what I mean? Gardening gives us a minimum 2 month guilt-free zone to help us lower our collective stress. What a good thing!

INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR FEBRUARY By Marty Finkel

This month, when we're all planning what's new to try in our vegetable and ornamentals gardens as soon as we can start seeds and work the ground, the Tidbits section features the 2015 All-America Selections.

The mission statement of the AAS is: "To promote new garden seed varieties with superior performance as judged in impartial trials in North America." The entries were trialed in the 2013-14 growing season side by side with two other similar varieties currently on the market, and the judges made analyses of growth habit, taste, disease resistance and more to determine if the entries were truly better than those already available. Only those vegetables with superior taste and garden performance are given the AAS stamp of approval. At the end of the trial season, scores and evaluations are sent to the AAS Office and an independent accounting firm for tabulation. That vegetables outnumbered flowers attests to the continuing interest of consumers in vegetable gardening. The trial garden at the JC Raulston Arboretum at NCSU is for ornamentals.

Regional (listed for southeast) AAS vegetable winners are:

- **Brussels sprouts 'Hestia'**: Only the second Brussels sprouts ever to be an AAS winner. Excellent flavor and noticeably more uniform than the comparison varieties. It has potential for a second season as it tolerates both warm & cool weather. Other varieties require cooler temperatures for sweetness.
- **Pepper 'Sweet Sunset'**: Sets large amount of banana type fruit on compact, upright plants that don't require staking and can be grown in containers. It has high yields and produces early, often, and late into the season.
- **Pepper 'Hot Sunset'**: Banana type, thick-walled with great taste, not just heat (650 Scoville units). Disease free, large, vigorous plants.
- **Tomato 'Chef's Choice Pink'**: Indeterminate with 12-14 oz. pink beefsteak fruits on potato-leaf plants with resistance to many diseases.

National vegetable winners:

- **Lettuce 'Sandy'**: The first lettuce winner since 1985, an oakleaf type with exceptional disease resistance, slow to bolt, and typically not bitter when heat stressed
- **Basil 'Dolce Fresca'**: Genovese type. Outshone comparison varieties. Maintains attractive compact shape even after harvesting, excellent flavor, perfect for containers, borders, garden use.
- **Pepper 'Emerald Fire'**: Extra large, tasty jalopena fruits (2,500 Scoville units) are prolific on compact plants. Better disease resistance.

- **Pepper ‘Flaming Flare’:** Fresno type; sweeter tasting than other Fresno types. When used in sauces, heat will increase depending on how late in the season it is harvested.
- **Pepper ‘Pretty N Sweet’:** Multi-purpose, as it is both ornamental and edible. Multi-colored peppers on 18” plants have sweeter taste, are earlier, and more prolific than the comparisons.
- **Squash ‘Bossa Nova’:** Zucchini judged to have smooth flesh texture and sweet, mild flavor much improved over other summer squash. Compact plants produce fruits earlier in the season and continue production for 3 weeks longer than comparison varieties.
- **Squash ‘Butterscotch’:** Small fruited with exceptionally sweet taste perfect for 1 or 2 servings. Compact vines are space-saving; good for container growing. Resistant to later season powdery mildew.

National flower awards

Bedding Plant award:

- **Petunia ‘Trilogy’:** Bright red for beds, baskets, containers. Heat, rain resistant.
- **Salvia ‘Sun Jewel White’:** Dwarf, compact, prolific bloomer; attracts pollinators & hummingbird

Flower award:

- **Impatiens ‘Bounce Pink Flame’:** Sun or shade; completely downy mildew resistant
- **Impatiens ‘Spreading Shell Pink’:** Vigorous, spreading, thrives under high heat, rain, humidity. Full sun or shade.

GARDENING FOR THE BIRDS AND THE BEES PLUS BUTTERFLIES AND ME By Edna Gaston

Ah, ‘tis the season to dream! Gardening catalogs galore are magically appearing in my mailbox. So build a nice fire, grab a cup of hot chocolate and let’s plan our gardens.

One of my favorite birds is the Cedar Waxwing. Growing up they would appear in a large flock, usually on a cloudy winter day, and devour the berries in the bushes surrounding my backyard. What a treat to watch these birds. They are so beautiful - they remind me of Oriental figurines. So this morning I opened an email from Birds & Blooms. To my delight there is a picture of a waxwing devouring a bright, red berry. The article lists plants to attract this and other berry loving birds. So here it is!

Strawberry, *Fragaria* – this is our good, old yummy jam plant. Perfect as a ground cover or in a container or hanging basket. I have plants but rarely get to eat them. My feathered friends are quicker than I. HOWEVER, some of my plants are wintering over in the greenhouse and I now have small green strawberries!

Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata* – great plant for the landscape. So versatile and attractive.

Juniper, *Juniperus* – another multi-use plant. Good ground cover, nice color for the winter, perfect habitat for bird winter protection. It’s fun to see birds going into our plants at dusk.

Serviceberry, *Amelanchier* – as the article states, this is a four season plant – flowers, fruit, fall color and attractive bark in winter.

Hawthorn, *Crataegus* – another plant with spectacular red berries and great as a border plant.

Crabapple, *Malus* – another plant from my childhood yard, I enjoyed climbing it during the summer and the birds liked it in the winter.

Madrone, *Arbutus menziesii* – this one is unfamiliar to me. But the article says it could have “berry clusters may include red, orange and yellow fruit at the same time.”

Elderberry, *Sambucus* – an all-time southern favorite.

Raspberry, *Rubus* – another fruit that has landscape uses along with being absolutely delicious. Some for us and some for the birds!

For more information:

- <http://ncsu.edu/goingnative/>
- <http://www.birdsandblooms.com/birding/attracting-birds/plants-and-trees-that-attract-birds/top-10-plants-attract-waxwing-birds/#ixzz3OLJlc1I7>

Have fun planning! And happy birdwatching, Ladybug

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