

THE GARDEN PATH , MAY 2015

A publication of Kerr Lake Extension Master Gardeners

PLANT OF THE MONTH - MAY By Marty Finkel



Chinese Fringe tree, *Chionanthus retusa*
JCRA photo collection

American Fringe tree, *Chionanthus virginicus*
JCRA photo collection

There are two fringe trees, fairly widely available, both equally beautiful, that bloom May-June with panicles of delicate white small blooms that give the tree a cloud-like appearance that is fantastic and unique.

Here is a quote from the article *Chionanthus*, on the JCRA website (no author attribution):

“Fleecy, snowy, billowy, and beautiful are all descriptions that fit the Fringe trees. In the Southall Garden at the NCSU Arboretum (now the JC Raulston Arboretum) the Chinese and American Fringe trees stand side by side and offer a rare opportunity to Fringe tree lovers to closely compare their spectacular shows. Plant a Fringe tree, either native or exotic, to bring clouds of loveliness to any spring landscape.”

The American Fringe Tree, *Chionanthus virginicus*, generally can be found along the banks of streams and ponds or in other areas with moist, rich soil. It can be seen, as well, in the edges of woods along highways. Common names are Grancy Gray Beard and Old Man’s Beard.

The Chinese Fringe Tree, *Chionanthus retusa*, is a native of China, Japan, Korea and Taiwan and was introduced to this country in the 1800’s. It blooms a littler later than the native one.

Both trees are similar in height and shape, which is about 15- 20/25 feet but can get to 35’. The native one has a more open, gangly habit whereas the Chinese has a more regular branching pattern which gives it a more orderly and compact appearance. The bark of the latter begins to peel as the plant matures. The bark of the American Fringe tree is an attractive light gray which becomes ridged as it matures. Both trees have male and female flowers on separate trees and the females produce showy dark blue fruit. The males of both trees flower more profusely and have slightly longer flowers than the females. Both are easy, stress tolerant trees for sunny sites, have no disease or pest problems, and they will thrive in most landscapes. They are grown from seed but have double dormancy requirements – this means they need to have several different treatments before they will germinate. In nature, this usually requires two years. Since the trees are seed-produced, they will have variability in

performance and appearance. Propagation from cuttings is practically impossible: Chinese Fringe tree can be propagated with difficulty from rooted cuttings but American Fringe tree cannot be propagated from cuttings at all.

CHECKLIST FOR MAY By Mary Jane Bosworth

Planting season is now...what fun.

- ✓ Get your houseplants and tropicals used to being outside again. Fertilize and groom them and start them off in a shady area until they are happy.
- ✓ Fencing and critter repellents may be necessary to keep some of those 'cute' little buggers away from your treasured plants. Check labels carefully and follow directions.
- ✓ After the flowers fade on spring flowering shrubs add the correct amount of slow release fertilizer...again, read labels...also a good time for trimming and shaping these bushes.
- ✓ Mulch flower and shrub gardens for weed control and to preserve moisture.
- ✓ Don't be in a hurry to pull out plants that seem damaged by the winter's cold. Give them some time and they may surprise you.
- ✓ Frost sensitive bedding plants may be planted the first week of May
- ✓ Divide cannas every 3-4 years to encourage flowering. Set root sections 5-6 inches deep and 15" apart.
- ✓ Time to put those hummingbird feeders out.

GARDEN TO DO – MAY By Carl Shafer

Check previous TO DO lists as many items continue to be relevant. Note spray and thinning recommendations.* Also see extension publication *Disease and Insect Control Programs for Homegrown Fruit in Kentucky Including Organic Alternative*, (www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id21/id21.pdf).

Prune out fire blight damaged wood on your fruit trees. Sterilize your pruners between cuts.

All the warm and hot weather vegetables can be planted now.

Get *Strawberries in the Home Garden*, HIL 8205, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8205.html) to find the needed steps to renovate your strawberry bed.

When cool season crops (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and green, sugar snap, and snow peas) begin to mature, harvest every couple of days for best quality. Hot weather can cause these crops to be over mature very quickly.

Mulch tomatoes and peppers, and keep them evenly moist to reduce blossom end rot.

Extend your sweet corn harvest by successive plantings every two to three weeks or by planting early, mid, and late maturing varieties all at the same time. Make repeated plantings of vegetables based on space availability and your likes.

Control annual weeds by mulching and hand-weeding.

For information on fertilizing, both preplanting and side dressing, get *Home Vegetable Gardening* booklet AG-06 from the internet or the Extension Service center.* Also see, *Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky*, (www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf) and *Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens – 2013*, (www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id133/id133.pdf).

Check your garden every day or two to spot and solve problems early.

If you are planning to raise your own transplants for a fall garden, you need to start seeds in June to have plants ready to set out in late July and early August. Plants to try include Brussel Sprouts, Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Cabbage.* See below.

For more information on planning a fall garden, see *Growing a Fall Vegetable Garden*, HIL 8001, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001.html). For information on fall-winter gardening with variety suggestions, visit the websites of seed companies. Check for growing guides and library listings as well as individual recommendations. Note that some of the recommended varieties are not commonly available at local seed sources so you will need to seek internet or mail order sources for these. Note the Central NC Planting Calendar has fall garden planting dates and the Planting and Harvesting Guide for Piedmont Vegetables and Herbs has both planting and expected harvesting dates.

If you are interested in extended gardening, check out the book "The Year-Round Vegetable Garden" by Niki Jabbour.

*See the Feb. 15 and Mar. 15 issues of, *The Garden Path*, Garden To Do for more web links. If link does not work, try doing a web search using the name given.

The Garden Professors (<http://blogs.extension.org/gardenprofessors/>) has a four part blog on *Building healthy soils in vegetable gardens using cover crops*. Part I-Mar 19, Part II- Mar 26, Part III-Apr 2 and Part IV-Apr 9.

THE TYROS' CORNER -MAY By Eileen Novak

When we first bought the land, before the house was built, I had grand ideas of living off the land, gathering a la Euell Gibbons, in fact, I bought his book *Stalking the Wild Asparagus*. He did seem enamored of his lifestyle, and I thought I could make a go of it. But let me tell you, it's not easy. First you have to learn what the plants are, and there are an awful lot of them, and some of them are sneaky. The sneaky ones look like good ones, but for a few small points. One mistaken identification and it's the stomach pump for you – if you live that long. So today, I'm going to tell you about things to make you wary.

One thing jumped right out at me from my research: Poke Weed. We have a lot of it, especially where we recently cleared a couple of openings for my husband's hunting avocation. Some of the things I've seen say "to be able to eat it, you boil it in water for a few minutes, change out the water, boil it some more, up to 5 times!!! I cannot imagine what nutrients it would have or what it would taste like because I could not see myself boiling leaves in 5 changes of water when right down the road is a store with nice, fresh bags of baby spinach. Really! Of course the deer and the birds just love pokeweed. Especially the berries. The birds leave evidence of how much they like the berries on my car all summer. Really, a few good reasons to eliminate pokeweed from your intended diet. The next thing I thought I could use was acorns, since the woods are full of oak trees. Then I read the instructions for dealing with red oak vice white oak. Really? Seriously? Soak the red oak acorns in 5 changes of water to get rid of the tannins that make the flour bitter? I know the folks that wrote these instructions did not have wells that required them to drop down the bucket and haul it up because they would truly not have bothered. I picked up a half a bucket of acorns and there were 2 trees, side by side, of course red and white oaks, so I would have had to climb the tree to determine the characteristics of the acorn from the source. Forget it! I donated the acorns to the squirrels. I can find perfectly good flour in the store and I bake some pretty tasty bread with my sourdough cultures.

Then in the late summer and autumn, I saw a dizzying variety of interesting-looking mushrooms on the land! I told my mother about it – She and my dad once took pictures of mushrooms and identified them. She did not encourage me at all. She gave me a book which outlined all the steps to be taken while collecting and then subsequently identifying the mushrooms prior to cooking and eating them. The big recommendation was to join a group and learn from others. Then the book directed the reader to the (rather distressingly large) section on "Symptoms of mushroom poisoning". You can forget that idea. My steps to get mushrooms: 1. Drive to store. 2. Pick package of fresh mushrooms. 3. Cook and eat them without fear.

I guess I am not nearly as adventurous as I thought I could be. But I have successfully stayed out of ambulances and hospitals so I guess that's a good thing.

HERB OF THE MONTH MAY By Edna Gaston

Another fun way to group herbs, either in a container or in the garden, is to create a Zodiac garden. According to astrology, those who fall under this sign (Taurus) aim high as well as being tactful and dutiful. This sign is governed by the planet Venus which means tenacity. This is a good sign for gardeners as we keep trying! Each sign of the zodiac has certain plants associated with it and here are a few along with the symbolism:

Burdock - persistence

Mugwort - happiness

Peppermint – warmth of feeling

Sage – domestic virtue

Sweet Woodruff - keep the ladies lovely

Tansy – life everlasting

Thyme - activity

Yarrow – health

So plant some herbs while telling a story. In future articles I will address other signs of the zodiac.

Happy thoughts (Heartsease) for spring!
Ladybug

INTERESTING TID-BITS FOR MAY By Marty Finkel

- The continuing star status of kale in restaurants, food articles, nutrition letters is about to be eclipsed by the latest “discovery,” kohlrabi. In an article in Time magazine, the nation’s chefs are using kohlrabi as the vegetable to rival kale’s popularity. Kohlrabi is a relative of the cabbage family and grows better in the cool weather of spring and fall. It is fast-maturing, going from direct-seeded into the garden to harvest in 40 days. It has the flavor of a sweet turnip and can be pale green or purple, depending on the variety, but the interior is always white or pale green. It is both nutritious and filling, and a cup of raw kohlrabi has only 36 calories. Try green-skinned variety, All-American winner ‘Grand Duke’ and the large ‘Cossack.’ Peel them and eat like a radish, and/or thinly slice or shred to add to salads, or cube and steam, then toss with butter. The leaves are edible, much like cabbage.
- An old idea has finally come into its own: a plant that produces both tomatoes and potatoes. In the early 1900’s, Luther Burbank successfully grafted a potato top onto a tomato root – the catch is that it didn’t produce fruit. Since then, home gardeners have tried similar grafts with varying success. Now scientists at Thompson and Morgan in the UK have developed TomTatoes by grafting the top of a cherry tomato onto a white potato. Michael Perry, a product development manager with Thompson and Morgan, said it took 15 years to develop the winning combination: an early tomato grafted to a late-producing potato so that the two can be harvested throughout the season. The TomTato is being released in the U.S. this spring as ‘Ketchup ‘n’ Fries,’ and it has the potential to have up to 500 super-sweet fruits plus a “really good, all-around potato at the base.” Perry said the goal was to make a combination that was more than just a novelty plant. He reports that about 40,000 TomTatoes were sold last year in the U.K., and that it isn’t just Thompson and Morgan’s usual customers who were interested in this last year. It has sparked a new interest in gardening – “It was also teenagers and kids – people who wouldn’t have been interested before, so it kind of opened it to a wider audience,” said Perry. The company that’s licensing the variety for the U.S. market is SuperNaturals Grafted Vegetables. The information for this tidbit came from a February 15 NPR article by Sasa Woodruff.
- There’s still time to plant the spaghetti squash ‘Small Wonder,’ which takes 80 days to mature after direct seeding. It is a compact plant with the production of a squash requiring larger space. The 3-pound fruits have creamy yellow flesh and are perfect cut in half for a side-dish vegetable with a little butter and some fresh garlic. The squash is available from many seed sources, among which are Park Seed Co., Territorial Seed Co., J.W. Jung Seed Co., Harris Seeds, and others.
- Look for a completely new vegetable, BrusselKale, aka Kale Sprouts, developed by Tozer Seeds. It is the product of more than 10 years of breeding work with crosses between Brussels sprouts and kale. The flavor is a fresh fusion of sweet and nutty, combining the best traits of each of its parents. The plant looks and grows like a 3’ tall Brussels sprouts plant, but instead of tight balls all along the stem, it has open flower-like clusters of baby green and purple kale leaves! They are ready when approximately 2” in diameter. There are different varieties specifically slated for different harvest times. They are being marketed as Kalettes, and seeds are available from several seed catalogs. The vegetables themselves are being sold in some grocery stores in the Triangle area.

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

It’s spring so now it’s time to plan for our summer feathered friends. One of my favorites is the hummingbird. In my yard they are especially fond of my hanging baskets and containers. Hanging baskets easily brighten any space and if they will attract birds then so much the better.

So here are a few suggestions.

1.FLOWERS – red is the color usually associated with hummers. This is a color that can be seen from a distance but mine also go to white, yellow and other pale colors. But select plants with tubular flowers. Also hummers seem to like floppy, open form plants that produce numerous flowers. I’ve seen the birds visit five or six different

- flowers on one visit. Be certain the plants will bloom over a long period of time. More than one plant in the same basket or several baskets in the general vicinity provide a nice buffet. They don't have to be the same plant.
2. CONTAINER – some of my containers hang on shepherd's hooks, others from convenient tree limbs but some are sitting on posts, the well cover, tree trunks cut to "table" height, one on top of another inverted container, just about anywhere I can find to put them. While hummingbirds will visit my smaller containers, they seem to prefer the larger ones since these pots have more selection. Maintenance for these is the same as for any container.
 3. PLANTS – Go with what makes you happy, keeping in mind the location of the container / hanging basket (shade, sun, etc.), water requirements and the type of plants the hummers like. Go with the traditional container rule of "thriller, filler, spiller" if that strikes your fancy. Some of my favorites are Scarlet Sage (I usually plant red and white salvias in the same pot), herbs (thymes are especially nice), Angelonia, Lantana, Impatiens. Sometimes I will stick in a Coleus for the extra color in the leaves and possibly an ornamental ivy or some other fun plant as the spiller. The list can go on and on. Mix and match, vary the leaves, flowers, height - just have fun.
 4. CREATE – after selecting the plants and the container just follow the usual guidelines – good soil, fertilizer, planting depth, care and attention during the growing season, etc.
 5. LOCATION – place your creations around your porch, deck, garden. Pull up a comfortable chair, grab a glass of lemonade and have fun watching these amazing birds.

Happy Gardening and Birding (perfect combination for a spring day),
Ladybug

Read more: <http://www.birdsandblooms.com/gardening/small-space-gardening/diy-container-garden-hummingbirds/#ixzz39koos6Gx>

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