

# The Garden Path

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## **PLANT OF THE MONTH** By Marty Finkel

Plants in the genus *Sarcococca* generally are known as sweetbox, or Himalayan sweetbox, and most of the approximately 18 species are from the Himalayas and southeast Asia. They are related to boxwoods. The culture for all the species described here is the same; that is, plant in well-drained soil in light to deep shade – no sun. The winter-blooming ones are excellent sources of nectar for insects, and birds are attracted to the berries. Once established, they are drought-tolerant and deer resistant.

The most popular is the dwarf sweetbox, *S. hookeriana* var. *humilis*, most often sold as *S. humilis*. It is also the most cold-hardy. It grows to about 16-18" tall and spreads to form dense, weed-blocking mats. It blooms in late winter with a sweet fragrance that is carried throughout the garden.

For a taller, also popular variety, try Himalayan sweetbox *S. hookeriana* var. *hookeriana*, which matures at 4 to 5' and suckers at a slower rate than the dwarf sweetbox. It makes a very nice shrub for screening, or it can be used as a hedge.

Willow-leaf sweetbox, aka Narrow-leaf Christmas false box, is a beautiful 3' - 4' shrub that forms a thick, slowly spreading mass of upright, arching stems that is twice as wide as tall. This one's native habitat is forests and stream banks in western Himalayan regions. This variety is not as easy to find as the previous two.

Two non-spreading sweetbox species are ruscus-leaved sweetbox (*S. ruscifolia*) and *S. confusa*. Ruscus-leaved sweetbox has fragrant flowers on arching branches in the spring. It makes a 3' x 3' shrub with small (2"), pointed, dark glossy leaves. *S. confusa* is compact and slow-growing to about 3 to 5' tall and wide and has sweetly scented clusters of tiny white flowers from early December to March.

## **CHECKLIST** By Mary Jane Bosworth

- Winter applications of lime are beneficial to spring gardens since lime takes a long time to react with the soil. Before doing this, make sure you take a soil sample and have it analyzed to see if lime is needed. If it is, then broadcast at the rate of 15 to 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- Add your raked leaves to your compost bin for good compost in the spring.
- There is still time to plant spring blooming bulbs.
- Cut back Sedum, Mexican Bush Sage, Fall Asters and Garden mums within a few inches of the crown.
- Add colorful, cold hardy annuals to your garden for color this winter.
- Weed out the "weed" trees and shrubs in wooded areas while they are easily removed and before they compete for light and nutrients with desirable plants.
- Keep in mind that newly planted additions to the garden need water during the winter months.
- Fertilize spring flowering bulbs.
- And the most important thing to remember – make a list of garden items and plants that you could give as presents to friends and family!

## **HERB IN THE WINDOWSILL** By Edna Gaston

A few years ago I wrote an article about bringing in herbs for the winter. A recent article with suggestions from Birds and Bloom prompted me to revisit this idea. Now that we've had our first frost and freeze, outside herbs are limited. But there is a way to continue enjoying our plants.

Here are a few reminders:

1. Decide which window will host your garden.
2. Determine the amount of sunlight received each day. Most of the leaves should be off the trees now.
3. Based on light, group herbs. A good reference book will list light and moisture requirements.
4. Select a container. I usually use plastic boxes and a tray to catch water. Sometimes I fill the container with herbs and then plant. But sometimes I leave the plants in individual pots and put in the container. Either way works.
5. Purchase a good quality potting soil. As you plant the herbs, add a little time release fertilizer. If leaving in the original pots, don't add any fertilizer if you can see fertilizer on the surface. Too much fertilizer means rapid foliage growth. This decreases the flavor.

Now here are the suggestions from Birds and Bloom along with my comments:

1. Bronze Fennel – beautiful plant but will get tall. Grow overwinter then plant outside next spring.
2. Garlic Chives – like this plant. Regular chives has purple blossoms, this one has great white blooms. Leaves have a nice flavor.
3. Red veined Sorrel – excellent addition for color, looks great in my container.
4. Lime balm – like its cousin, lemon balm, this can spread so it is best in a container. Such a refreshing scent, grow it!
5. Fern Leaf Dill – always a favorite.
6. Vietnamese Coriander – haven't tried this variety but love Coriander.
7. Thyme – so many varieties so little time. Sorry about that. Any but wooly are perfect for culinary purposes. Wooly is a great addition for ornamental use in the garden but temperamental. Mother-of-Thyme has a tendency to become woody with age and not as attractive. But cuttings can be taken to replace the original plant. All thymes are easy to propagate.
8. Hot and Spicy Oregano – again not familiar with this variety but like oreganos in general. This plant will eventually get large and becomes a great plant in the landscape.
9. Dwarf Winter Savory – great culinary plant.

These are just a few suggestions. Get ready to experiment and have fun!

Happy Gardening Holidays,  
Ladybug

## **THE TYROS' CORNER** By Eileen Novak

Did you ever see that commercial on TV some years ago for margarine? It featured a nice looking, middle-aged woman with a crown of flowers tasting something from a small tub and saying "butter". When the announcer corrected her to define the product as margarine, the woman scowled, raised her arm and pointed to the sky. The ensuing lightning and thunder almost drowned her out as she growled "it's not nice to fool Mother Nature!"

Folks, I think someone has been attempting to do just that lately.

Case in point: after having had the dubious pleasure of mowing our ACRES of lawn last year, when the NRCS representative told us we could get some help putting in a pollinator field, I was ALL FOR IT. I chose 2 areas: half an acre in front, and a full acre in back. We sprayed the fields with glyphosate, waited to see if anything else would sprout, sprayed again and when all was brown and barren, we (I mean he – I don't pretend to try to do anything with the tractor) tilled it, waited, and tilled it again.

The waiting stage after the first till was so seeds newly exposed to sunlight would sprout and the subsequent tilling would cut short their little vegetative lives. They had plenty of rainfall to ensure anything out there germinated: nature was on our side at that point, sending hurricane Matthew and his more than 5 inches of

rain to us. I say more than 5 because that's all my 2 rain gauges will measure. Who would expect more? I was somewhat lacking in sheer scientific curiosity to go out in the midst of the wind and sidewise rain to empty the gauges.

The next step for the pollinator fields was putting down the seed. We watched the weather and timed it so we got the seed down and rolled into the soil the day before a predicted rainfall. The clouds passed us by, however. We were at church 2 miles down the road and had rain pouring down but as we drove toward home, the rain dwindled, and by the time we were a fourth of a mile from the driveway, the pavement was dry and the outlook was bleak.

Two weeks later, another prediction for rain had us wondering. The church was going to have a yard sale on Friday. On Thursday, I went to a meeting while my husband took the donations for the yard sale. Again, rain caused the people delivering stuff to scramble for the awnings, while back at our place, not a drop.

It's been another week and the rain we did get this week wasn't enough for the rain gauges to show anything. I went out and brushed away the top layer of soil to expose a stark, dry surface. Things are looking bad for the pollinator fields.

So I guess my point for all you new gardeners out there would be that any time you are doing something, and are counting on Mother Nature to help the endeavor, make a backup plan. Our plan is to buy more seed and try again in the spring.

### **GARDENING ON THE WEB** by Carl Shafer

Today we first look at several sources for recommended varieties of vegetables and flowers. The All American selections ([all-americanselections.org](http://all-americanselections.org)) is our first stop. They began naming regional winners in 2014 and "Flowers from Cutting" in 2015. You can find all of their winners since 1933 on the web site. They have announced their first group of winners for 2017. Included in this group is a pea as a regional winner in the southeast. The most recent listing of recommended vegetable cultivars I have found is "Vegetable Cultivars for Kentucky Gardens – 2013". ([www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id133/id133.pdf](http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/id/id133/id133.pdf)) The next stop is for flowers at the J C Raulston Arboretum. (<https://jcra.ncsu.edu>). When you get there, click on "Horticulture" then "Gardens" then scroll down to "Color Trials". There you can check out their many results. Note that these trials are part of the All American Selections program. Note also that these trial beds are out in the open where the public can observe them up close for themselves. Many gardening magazines will have prize winning plants from the past year and/or new introductions for the coming year. You can check magazines by doing a web search. Most times complete details will not be available to non-subscribers. You can use this information to check your local library. Another source of information is seed catalogs.

Here are three posts on gardenrant.com that you may find interesting: On Oct 3, Thomas Christopher posted "Fall Planting", on Oct 5, Evelyn Hadden posted "Common Gardening Practices That Harm Bees", and on Nov 12, posted "Bulb-Forcing Videos" featuring 8 videos have been selected by their horticulture consultant, Carol Allen.

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