Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University

The Gardener's Journal

Winter 2004

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Restoration of the Conservatory

by **Preston Stockton**, *director*

I have always heard the old saying that people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. You never know about old sayings—does one pay attention or ignore them? But one thing I have learned in my years at the Gardens is that people who work in glass houses should *always* pay attention to slipping glass! To prevent just that, we reglaze the glass in our greenhouses every twenty to twenty-five years. Reglazing is routine maintenance for a greenhouse; without it, the caulking that holds the glass firmly in place will become brittle, allowing the glass to slip and, sometimes, to fall. Although several of the greenhouses were reglazed in 2000, the conservatory had not been reglazed since 1981, and we had noticed slippage over the last few years. We were hoping to delay the project for a while, but with the cost of glass going up so quickly, we decided to tackle the project in September.

During the reglazing process, existing glass is removed, and the glazing bars on the structure are cleaned of old caulking. New rope caulk is then applied to the glazing bars and the glass, and then the glass is replaced. Finally, a bead of new caulk is run on top of the glass, and the bar cap is secured. Sounds pretty simple, doesn't it? Nothing at Reynolda is ever simple!

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Workers removing glass and cleaning glazing bars.

A Little of Reynolda for Your Home—*Evening Primrose and Sundrops*

by **Diane Wise**, *head horticulturist*

It seems that I no sooner put the garden to bed for the winter than I'm anticipating the new season. I work primarily in the formal garden, which has been restored to the 1917 landscape plan and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places; consequently, I'm not at liberty to introduce new plants or move existing plant materials. So how much anticipation can there be? Lots. I spend hours pondering and refining the garden in my head, always believing that this year will be the best—although my Grammy says that there is no best, that a garden always looks its prettiest

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The Conservatory Restoration

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The original plan for the greenhouses is dated August 1912, and we know that they were some of the first structures raised on the estate. Designed and built by Lord and Burnham Greenhouse Company, there are four growing houses and, in the middle, a domed conservatory or Palm House, as it is often called, for displaying plants. The conservatory is a particular challenge to reglaze, as four of its nine runs of frosted glass are curved. Here, we opted to replace the glass rather than to reuse it, as we knew that a significant percentage of the glass would be cracked or broken during removal. Standard Bent Glass Corporation in Butler, Pennsylvania, made the new curved glass for the project. Ludy Greenhouse Company in New Madison, Ohio, which has completed three earlier projects for us, provided labor. In addition to reglazing, the Ludy crew cleaned and restrung the cords on the aluminum shades on the greenhouses. This part of the project took about three weeks, and then it was our turn. The Gardens staff cleaned and painted much of the steel framework inside. David Bare, greenhouse manager, enlisted several volunteers to help him repot and label various plants. Finally, the collection was moved back into the renovated conservatory. Today, the conservatory looks as good as new. Hopefully, it will remain in good shape for another twenty years.

We are fortunate to have such fine Lord and Burnham greenhouses and conservatory here at Reynolda Gardens. Lord and Burnham built hundreds of greenhouses on private estates in the early 1900s, but very few of these houses remain. Most of these estates were sold for development, and the greenhouses were torn down or moved. In other cases, the cost of maintaining the greenhouses was prohibitive, and they fell into ruin. Occasionally, with luck, a greenhouse survived. Several years ago, one of the wings of the original greenhouse at Hershey Gardens in Pennsylvania was found disassembled in an old barn in the area. It has since been returned and is now used as a native butterfly exhibit. A nursery across from Three Mile Island is currently using the other wing, and the main section of the greenhouse is in Florida on a private estate. The original greenhouse at Graylyn was another lucky one. It was moved and reconstructed at a local private home.

Evening Primrose and Sundrops

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at some time other than when it is viewed. For her, that time was always last week, as in "You should have seen my roses last week." She believed that it gave the observer and the gardener something to look forward to. In a garden, there is always the challenge and promise of a new year and the hope that it will be the best yet.

In the last few issues of the *Gardener's Journal*, we've discussed plants that have the Wise Seal of Approval (WSA), those old standbys that promise lasting good looks for a modicum of effort on our part. WSA plants are perennial, dependable, robust, and easy to grow; varied in color or texture; bear attractive flowers or fruit; and no staking or dividing is required. Japanese anemone and sedum fall into this category, and I'd like to add plants of the genus *Oenothera*, which contains sundrops and evening primrose, to the list.

The name *Oenothera*, pronounced ee-noth´er-ra or ee-no-thee´ra, comes from the Greek oinos meaning wine, an allusion to the use of its roots as a pickled relish with after-dinner wine. *Oenothera* is a member of the Onagraceae family and is comprised of 124 species of annual, biennial, or perennial herbs. Exclusively a New World genus, they are native to North America, where they flourish as far north as the Agriculture Research Station in Marden, Manitoba, and as far south as South America, where they grow all the way to southern Chile. Their soil requirements are minimal—stony, mountainous, sandy, even desert; it just doesn't matter as long as they have plenty of sunlight. In fact, they're so adaptable that oenotheras can now

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O. BIENNIS

be found on every continent except Antarctica. Many are prominent plants of our plains and prairies, such as the common evening primrose, *O. biennis,* which naturally occurs in Missouri and Nebraska. This tall, rangy plant was valued by Native Americans, who used its young shoots and roots as a food source and its seeds, a source of gammalinoleic acid (necessary in the production of fatty acids and prostaglandins), as a medicine.

In height, oenotheras range from the large flowering evening primrose, *O. glazioviano*, which can reach six feet, all the way down to the Mexican evening primrose, *O. berlandieri,* which barely tops six inches. Their showy blooms are usually yellow, white, pink, or rose, and may change color as they age. Often cup-shaped or funnel-formed, the flowers may be solitary and borne in leaf axils or clustered in terminal racemes; most are attractive to bees and butterflies. The dark green leaves may be glaucous or shiny and either oval or linear in shape; often they are covered with velvety hairs. Stems may be erect or trailing, usually red-tinged, and can be woody.

Numerous seeds are borne in oval or cylindrical capsules that are highly decorative and may be very large, as in the three inch, winged seedpod of the desert evening primrose, *O. deltoides*. Often the pods can be dried and used in arrangements. While we're discussing seed, I do have one caveat—oenotheras are prolific and naturalize readily. Although they can be deadheaded, it isn't always easy or particularly effective. In this genus, ripened seedpods and unopened flower buds are found on the same stem and frequently side-by-side, so it's somewhat difficult to remove one without the other. Personally, I think it is easier to give your oenotheras plenty of room and let them self-seed. Later, if you decide that you have too many, you can remove the ones you don't want. It's simple to pull them up when small and share them with your fellow gardeners. Please don't let oenotheras' fecundity prevent you from adding them to your garden. A plant this attractive, hardy, and vigorous should be used often.

There is an oenothera for every climate and every garden. The cultivated ones are good in a border or a rock garden; the less ornamental ones are useful for the native or wild garden, where their seed is highly prized by finches and other small birds. For our purposes, we will deal only with cultivated, perennial oenotheras. These include the evening primroses, which have lightly scented flowers that generally open at night, and the sundrops or suncups, which are generally day-flowering. Please remember that I've used the word generally here. There are exceptions to every rule, and I'm about to share some with you.

Cultivated oenotheras are usually taproot plants that prefer a sunny or slightly shady, dryish site. Keep in mind that disturbing any taproot can cause resentment, so any transplanting of the babies should be done while they are still small, one to two inches in diameter. Drought tolerant once established, oenotheras dislike wet feet, so amend your heavy clay soil accordingly. Below are some basic instructions for planting your oenotheras. I've also prepared a list of cultivars that you may want to try in your garden. Those used at Reynolda are marked with an *. None of these are difficult to find, and a good selection should be available at most of our local nurseries. It's best to plant them in spring or early summer.

Instructions for planting:

1. Amend soil, if necessary.
2. Dig a large, deep hole. As these plants have taproots, the depth of the hole is important. Disturb the roots as little as possible.
3. Fertilize with time-release fertilizer (once) or 5-10-10 (monthly) during the summer.
4. Water every three days for the first two weeks. Water weekly during the first summer if we do not have adequate rain.
5. Enjoy!

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Mr. Kimmey Tilley and
Mr. James Woodel

Evening Primrose and Sundrops

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*Young's Evening Primrose
O. fruticosa youngii
This is the species type of evening primrose. Remember the exceptions that I told you about in the bloom time of evening primroses and sundrops? This is one of them. Young's evening primrose does not bloom in the evening; its flowers open during the day. All confusion aside, this is a wonderful plant. Native to eastern North America, it is hardy from Zones 4 through 10 and will reach two feet in height with a one foot spread. This oenothera's reddish buds open to cup-shaped, bright yellow flowers that are often covered with butterflies. The blooms are small but numerous and are borne from mid-May until frost. The stiff, branching stems are red-tinged and hairy. The shiny leaves begin the season as a deep green, changing to a bright red in the fall months. The seed capsules are numerous and are full of tiny seeds that our birds love. You can see *O. fruticosa youngii* beginning in late April underneath the wisteria standards in the Blue and Yellow Garden. Please note that the cultivars of this species are often classified as *O. tetragona* in plant catalogs.

- *O. fruticosa* 'Cold Crick'
  Bright yellow flowers on one foot tall plant. Very narrow foliage. Sterile.
- *O. fruticosa* 'Illumination'
  Deep yellow flowers on one to two foot tall plant. Mahogany-tinged foliage with waxy red buds and stems.
- *O. fruticosa* 'Summer Solstice'
  Bright yellow flowers on one to two foot tall plant. Very shiny, deep green foliage turns bright red in summer and burgundy in autumn.
- *O. fruticosa* 'Yellow River'
  Large, canary yellow flowers on two foot tall plant. Deep brick red stems.

*Ozark Sundrops
O. *macrocarpa* (sometimes *O. missouriensis*)
This is the species type of sundrops and another exception to the rule. Although called sundrops, *O. macrocarpa* blooms during the evening. Native to Missouri and Nebraska, this trailing plant will reach one foot in height with a two foot spread. Ozark sundrops are robust and extremely tolerant of poor soil, drought, and heat. The showy yellow flowers are fragrant and may be four inches in diameter; bloom period is late May until frost. The velvety leaves are mid-green with silvery ribs. The winged seed capsules may measure three inches in length. This plant does not self-sow, 'tis a pity. Because of their trailing growth habit, Ozark sundrops are useful for softening the edges of a path or bed. Ours can be viewed beginning in late April around the Lion's Head Fountain at the end of the main allée.

- *O. macrocarpa* 'Greencourt Lemon'
  Pale yellow flowers on a ten-inch plant. Very narrow, gray-green foliage.
- *O. macrocarpa* 'Fremontii Lemon Silver'
  Bright lemon yellow blooms on an eight-inch plant. Narrow, silver leaves. Prefers hot sun.

O. fruticosa

Side elevation drawn by Charles Barton Keen, March 24, 1920.

The Early Years of the Play House

by **Camilla Wilcox**, *curator of education*

In early spring of 1920, the world was just beginning to emerge from the pressures and hardships of World War I. Mr. Reynolds had died almost two years before, leaving his widow, Katharine, to care for their four young children, two girls and two boys. Even with her responsibilities at home, Mrs. Reynolds had continued to help with war efforts and community projects while overseeing building and daily operations at Reynolda. Construction was moving ahead on the English-style village that would be a commercial center and home to estate employees, with buildings designed by Charles Barton Keen, enhanced by gardens and landscaping designed by Thomas Sears. Preparations had begun for the new two-acre Fruit, Cut Flower, and Nicer Vegetable Garden adjacent to the formal garden near the greenhouse. A knoll at the southeast corner of the new garden had been chosen as the site for the children's Play House.

Drawings for building Number 36, the Play House, were completed on March 24. On the original plan, it was U-shaped, with two bedrooms, a kitchen, pantry, dining room, living room with fireplace, and a full bath, about 830 square feet in size. The roofline rose steeply toward the center and descended gracefully over the two wings. With curved eaves and an undulating pattern of molded wooden shingles, the roof recalled the design and appearance of thatched roofs common in English villages.

Though it is not known precisely when the Play House was built, it appears on a 1925 utilities map. Photographs taken in the mid-1920s, attributed to Thomas Sears, show the completed structure. As built, it had been changed from the original plan. Most noticeably absent were the two small wings. A bedroom had been removed and the kitchen/pantry reduced to a small kitchenette. The size was then about 700 square feet, and the need for a tiered roofline was eliminated.

The building site was excavated from a hillside. The resulting banks to the rear and south, as well as the lawn in front, were planted in grass. Flagstone steps that began near the driveway of the residence led down a gentle incline to a rustic Dutch door at the rear of the

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Approaching the back door of the play house by the path from the family residence. The front of the play house faces the garden. c. 1925

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Volunteers who assist with garden maintenance, educational programs, and special projects.

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The two boxwoods flanking the entrance survived in this location for over seventy years, finally succumbing to disease in the 1990s. They were replaced with boxwoods similar in size to the originals. c. 1925

The Play House

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Play House. Large, existing pine trees between the Play House and the garden were preserved, and additional shrubbery was planted around the house. Rustic wooden benches on the small flagstone porch, vine-covered trellises, and flower boxes on the front windows added to the storybook feel of the cottage. A flagstone walk led from the front door of the Play House toward the garden, with an extension forming a square of grass in the center. Brick stairs led down a steep bank into the garden.

Inside, the Play House was furnished with the so-called English cottage style of furniture, which was popular in the 1920s. Pieces were brightly colored, with hand-painted designs featuring hollyhocks. Within a few years, vines grew to shade the porch, enhancing its English cottage appearance. Awnings were added to shade the interior from the summer sun. With charming furniture, low ceilings, and child-size plumbing fixtures, it was ideally suited for children's activities. Mary and Nancy Reynolds hosted many overnight parties there, chaperoned by their teachers.

By the early 1930s, the trustees who were charged with the care of Reynolda began to address concerns about the future care of the garden. They engaged Thomas Sears to return and draw plans for changing some of the plantings and reducing maintenance costs. According to notes made by horticulturist Robert Conrad in 1932, the shrubbery in front of the Play House was overgrown and would be removed, at a cost of $50.00.

The Play House has served many functions over the years—from storage, to employee housing, to office space—and is not open to the public; however, the building and the grounds around it have been carefully preserved. The trees that were spared in 1920 have survived, and many of the original plantings remain or have been replaced in kind. The plaster walls have been protected and the roof restored. For a complete discussion of the restoration of the roof, see *The Gardener's Journal*, Winter 1999.

Within a few years after construction, awnings were added and lush vines had grown to shade the porch. c. 1925

The pines in front of the Play House were preserved during construction. Shown here with snow, winter 2004.

Two of the "Nicer Vegetables"—Asparagus and Rhubarb

by **John Kiger**, *assistant director*

One of the most relaxing aspects of working at Reynolda Gardens is planning and growing crops in the vegetable garden. Volunteers, staff members, and I generally come up with something new to display every year. Although some suggestions are not to my taste, I try to keep an open mind. Having grown up working in a family garden, I am more at home with ordinary garden-variety plantings, such as green beans, okra, crookneck squash, beets, and cucumbers—plants I call the basics.

Sometimes, though, the fountain of inspiration appears to be drained, and I find myself going back to the drawing board—literally, poring over the original planting plans Thomas Sears created in early 1921. Dubbed the Fruit, Cut Flower, and Nicer Vegetable Garden, this two-acre garden contained a large section dedicated to strawberries. Eggplant, celery, peppers, and tomatoes are listed as well. While perusing the plan this year, one area in particular caught my eye. The plots where the beautiful All-America Rose Selections Garden is now located were originally dedicated to asparagus and rhubarb plants. Photo documentation dating back to the mid-twenties clearly shows that these plants were planted; however, the longevity of their success is not known. Normally, I would not plant these two plants, just as a matter of personal preference, but after conducting a little research, I found them to be quite interesting.

In the mid-twenties, the garden in front of the Play House contained asparagus and rhubarb.

Asparagus

Asparagus, a long living, sun loving perennial, is native to central and southern Europe and is a member of the lily family. It grows best when planted in loose, sandy soils. Once an asparagus crown is planted, it requires a three year growing period. This allows the plant to grow a strong, fibrous root system that spreads horizontally. Harvesting may be done at a minimum during its second year of growth, but it's in the third season that one begins to reap the bounty. It is suggested, however, that spears should be harvested for only one month during that third season because excessive harvesting at this time could weaken the plant. During the growing season, the spears develop into "ferns" with red berries. This foliage provides nutrients to sustain the plant, so it should not be cut until it dies back on its own. When the plant is at its peak and in full production, it is not uncommon for spears to achieve a height of ten inches in a twenty-four hour period, with harvesting every four or five days. Under the ideal conditions (and this is assuming that day and night temperatures are perfect for production), harvesting every twenty-four hours is not uncommon. Asparagus provides a wide range of health benefits. Not only is it low in sodium but it also contains no fat or cholesterol and is an excellent source of fiber, potassium, thiamin, and vitamins A, C, and B_6.

Rhubarb

Rhubarb originated in Asia and was first cultivated for medicinal purposes over 2,000 years ago. It wasn't until the eighteenth century that people in Britain and America found that rhubarb could be grown and the petioles (stalks) could be used for culinary purposes. The petioles must be thoroughly cooked and cannot be eaten raw; the leaf cannot be eaten either cooked or raw since it contains large amounts of oxalic acid. Properly prepared, it is a favorite ingredient for pies and other desserts, so much so that it is often called "pie plant." Some people commonly referred to rhubarb as a fruit since it was used in so many desserts. On the contrary, rhubarb is a close relative of garden sorrel, placing it squarely in the vegetable family. High in dietary fiber and vitamin C, this vegetable grows best in the northern part of the United States.

Two years ago, a garden volunteer expressed an interest in growing a few rhubarb plants. I wasn't sure rhubarb could be successfully grown in this area since I had never planted it. Three healthy plants were purchased and planted. For a short while they performed perfectly, but the hot summer sun took its toll, and the plants died. Growing rhubarb in our area is a challenge, but some gardeners have had success with growing it in light shade rather than full sun.

Container Gardening

by **Michelle Hawks**, *horticulturist*

For those people who have the urge to garden—no matter how unpromising the site—planting in containers is a very easy and extremely fun way to bring the garden inside or to create beautiful displays outside. You do not need to be a fulltime gardener or have expert knowledge to be a great container gardener. If you own a houseplant or a pot of rosemary, you are a container gardener. Welcome to the club!

Container gardening is the most expressive part of gardening for me. I feel freer with my containers than with my flowerbeds and really put my personality into them, making them wild, brightly colored, and exuberant. Many people find container gardening to be advantageous. Each person is unique, with his or her own particular circumstances.

Containers

There are thousands of containers to choose from: wire baskets; wooden boxes; clay pots; clay pots and planters; metal containers; and my favorite, novelty containers, which are hugely underrated. The most important thing to remember about container gardening is that your container can make your design. You can have the ugliest plant, but if it is in a nice container, who cares what your plant looks like?

- Wire baskets are available in a huge variety of sizes. They're easy to work with and can be moved around easily. Moss looks especially beautiful when seen through delicate wire. The disadvantage is that they do not hold water very well, so they could dry out quickly.
- Wooden boxes are great. You can make your own or buy and repaint for your own scheme. Painted wooden planters can be a great way to complement the exterior of your home and create a unified garden design. Avoid using stains and sealers on your wooden planters, as these are usually toxic to plants. Plastic liners can extend the life of your planter. The disadvantage of using wood is that it requires occasional maintenance. Redwood and cedar are relatively rot resistant.

Winter flowers are replaced with heat tolerant plants in the spring.

- Clay pots and planters, which come in a wide range of styles, sizes, and shapes, provide a healthy environment for most plants. They have weight to them, so they won't blow over easily. The thick walls protect plant roots from changes in temperature. Clay allows air and moisture to penetrate the sides of the pot. The warm, earthy color complements most garden themes and appears even better with age. The main disadvantage of clay is that it acts like a wick to remove moisture from the potting soil, so it dries out quickly. This can be a problem for moisture loving plants. Clay breaks easily and may be damaged by frost.
- There are metal garden planters for every garden style. These garden planters are durable and often increase in beauty as they age. Metal planters will not chip, crack, or break. Heavy cast iron is a good choice for planters in public areas such as driveways and front yards. The disadvantage is that outdoor metal planters can really heat up in strong sun, which dries the soil and can damage roots. Most metal planters are heavy, they rust, and no air gets to the roots.
- Plastic pots are lightweight, strong, and flexible. They are available in every color of the rainbow. Plastic is an excellent choice for moisture loving plants or for those gardeners who water infrequently. Plastic pots generally have thinner walls, offering roots little insulation from temperature change. Plants in dark colored plastic containers wilt quickly; and sunlight can be hard on plastic, causing fading and brittleness.
- Now, my favorite: novelty containers. You can use anything from watering cans and chairs, to old tires, sinks, bathtubs, wheelbarrows, and old whiskey barrels, which I have. I love all these because you can have fun with them. Using unique planters can add real personality and flair to your garden space. Be creative and adventurous, and you'll be surprised at the attractive effects you can produce. Experimentation is the key!

A planting of winter blooming plants for a cool sunporch.

No matter what container you choose, make sure it has adequate drainage. Use quality potting mix, as it's designed for good drainage; ordinary garden soil will compact too heavily. Add perlite and peat moss to all of your containers. This should help the mix drain freely but still retain moisture. Mix in some compost to improve the organic quality of the potting mix.

Choosing and Combining Plants

The first step to any combination is choosing plants that prefer the same conditions. Know the site conditions you have available, and stick with plants you know can thrive there. If all you have is a shady spot, then use containers full of shade-lovers like fern, hosta, and caladium. These can provide foliage interest, while flowering interest can come from fuchsia, lily, and impatiens. If your container garden location is sunny and hot, you have no boundaries; you can use tropical plants like brugmansia, bougainvillea, hibiscus, lantana, plumbago, geranium, cat whiskers, and scaevola.

Flowers and Foliage

Imagination is the key to growing flowers in containers. First, imagine plants you want to grow. Second, imagine the type of containers. Then, imagine the harvest of flowers that you will enjoy, because it is certainly within your reach. The right plants are the ones you select to grow. Most people traditionally think of small plants for containers, but if you really want to grow a particular plant, give it a try; very few plants are unsuitable for container gardening. Experiment and have fun.

Color is what our eyes see first, so it is one of the most important qualities to consider. If you are planning your garden around your favorite color, you'll probably want to use many variations of that color. Colors can be harmonious or contrasting. Go with what you naturally prefer, but leave your options open to try something new and daring. Everybody enjoys a tie-dye shirt once in a while!

Combining plants with different shapes is another way to add interest to your container gardening. Tall plants with structural form, like canna, hibiscus, elephant ear, and ornamental grass, add a strong vertical line. These plants can be effective singly for a dramatic effect, or used in mixed containers as a focal point. Some plants and flowers are spiky and rigid, like snapdragon, astilbe, cat whiskers, lavender, and foxglove. Others, like dwarf sunflower, lantana, plumbago, and dahlia, have a compact, rounded shape.

I like to finish my flower containers by top-dressing them with decorative materials, such as rocks, seashells, glass beads, and marbles, which not only look good but also help retain soil moisture.

Vegetables

Almost any plant you take a fancy to will live in a container. Growing up on a farm in the hills of Fancy Gap, we had huge gardens. I remember walking down to the garden with my mom to pick and having to carry all of it back up the long hill. I hated that long hill to the garden. One hot summer day, we were picking half-runners and pulling weeds, and my mom accidentally picked up a nice long black snake. Now, my mom isn't the athletic type, but that day she made that long hill in about two steps, leaving me in the garden with that snake. Do you know how much easier it would have been if we had known about container gardening? I could have just stepped out on the porch for a tomato or onion for that night's dinner instead of walking down that long hill.

All colors, shapes, and kinds of vegetables can be grown nicely in containers. Vegetables grown in containers can be surprisingly productive and especially satisfying to the grower. All you need is a nice sunny spot and a little preparation. Almost any kind of container can be used. The size of the container will vary according to the crop selection and space available. When selecting a container, remember that bigger is better, for ease of maintenance and maximum production. In our warm climate, it's best to use light rather than dark colored containers to reduce heat absorption. This puts less stress on your vegetables. Raising the container off the ground helps improve drainage.

Now for the big question: What vegetables can grow in containers? Almost all of them do. You can imagine how well cherry tomatoes are suited to container culture. Try 'Burpee's Tumbler Hybrid', 'Nebraska Wedding', 'Principe Borghese', 'Russian Persimmon', and 'Siberian'. Always put your stakes in the container before your plants, so you won't damage the plants. Peppers, such as 'Habanero', 'Miniature', 'Yellow Bell', and 'Healthy' are well suited for containers. Cucumbers love the warm

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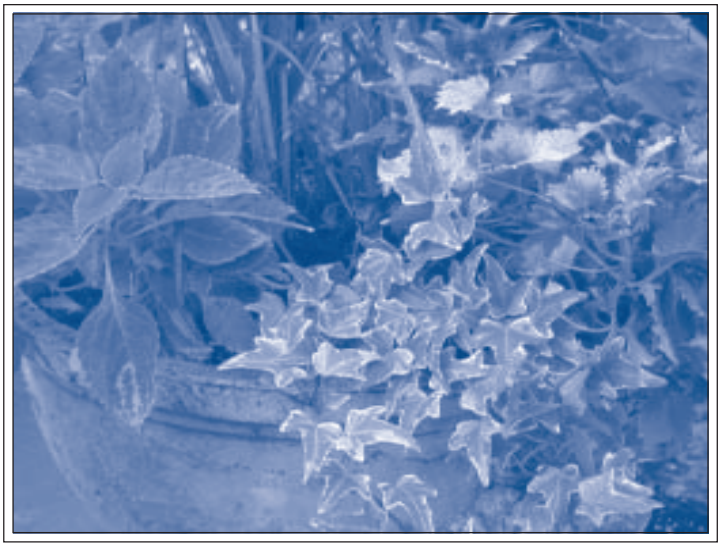

Coleus plants in a variety of colors and textures add interest to summer containers.

Container Gardening

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soil a container provides, so you can plant earlier in spring and harvest longer into the fall. It's easier to keep an eye on the water needs of cucumbers when they are grown in pots on a deck. Choose bush varieties such as 'Bush Champion', 'Pickle Bush', or 'Salad Bush Hybrid', all of which produce both male and female flowers, or you'll have flowers and no fruit. Radishes, carrots, and beets can thrive in containers. Mix them with other vegetables to provide a little shade during the hot afternoons.

Sage and lavender planted together in a terracotta pipe in the herb garden.

Herbs

Herbs give flavor to food we eat, add texture and beauty to the garden, and provide fragrance and flair to our homes. Decorative tubs and pots of herbs can be the focal point of a terrace, or pots can be grouped together on steps. There are many reasons why you might want to grow herbs in containers, rather than in the garden. Many herbs are small and tend to get lost in a landscape; growing them in containers brings them closer to the viewer. Basils are excellent herbs to grow in containers because they add such attractive colors and textures to the plantings. A container of basil by the back door provides easy access for harvesting. Any type or size container can be used. An entire salad garden can be grown in one oak barrel. Hanging containers will gracefully display your plants and keep them in sight and away from pests.

Consider having a moon herb garden. Blue, gray, and white plants look magical at night. You might use lots of different colored thymes. Lavender, with its silvery leaves, and rosemary's blue flowers are attractive in the moonlight. No matter what herbs you choose for your container, you can never go wrong. Whatever the container, herbs need well-drained soil. Mix in compost, perlite, and a little sand for good drainage.

When doing container gardening, always have fun and realize it's just a garden. You can take it out or move it or just start all over. So start going to the flea markets and yard sales, look for those containers, and start planting!

Winter Flowers

by **David Bare**, *greenhouse manager*

When I was a kid growing up in Baltimore, the five and dime storefront windows were lined with potted flowering plants in late winter: bright blue and pink cinerarias, the upturned blossoms of cyclamens, and, best of all, the weird, yellow-speckled red pouches of calceolarias. The appearance of winter flowers in February and March marked a period in the progression of seasons, just as poinsettias and amaryllis did with the approach of Christmas. Whether it is the result of increased heating and cooling bills, or the reliability of other plants, or the floral industry's heavy concentration on the holidays, the cool season floral crops don't seem as common as they used to be. This is a shame, because many of these plants are beautiful and charming and can't be grown any other time of year.

While we are bearing the worst of our winter weather, the greenhouse is at one of its finest points, filled with enough flowers to thaw the most frozen of spirits. Many of these plants are one-shot deals. They exist solely for the pleasure they present during this flowering cycle, and then they are done. Essentially, they are disposable crops, but that doesn't mean their flowering life can't be prolonged with a little extra care. Warmth and dryness are the enemies of winter flowering plants. Placing them out of direct sun and in the coolest spot in the house will help prolong their beauty. Temperatures as low as forty degrees are tolerated, and placing them on a sun porch or even outside on cool days is the best way to keep them going.

Growing and Caring for Winter-Flowering Houseplants

Cineraria, *Cineraria maritima* (also known as *Senecio cineraria*) and pocketbook plant, *Calceolaria* complex hybrids are started from seed in the heat of summer to early fall. They need to be sheltered from direct sun and have night temperatures in the fifties. Both plants originate from tiny seed that must be sown with care. Soil should be kept moist at all times, and plants should constantly be stepped up to increasingly larger pots to avoid becoming pot bound. The seed-grown plants should be kept from freezing. They will come into bloom in mid- to late winter.

Cineraria

Calceolaria

Cyclamen, *Cyclamen persicum* hybrids grow from corms and need much the same care as cinerarias and calceolarias—moist conditions, out of direct sun. The red, pink, or white flowers are carried on the plants for several months before they gradually slow down. At this point, watering should be reduced until the plant goes dormant, after which the corm can be removed and stored. Start the corm in autumn of the following year by planting it in fresh soil. Cyclamen may also be started from seed, though the process takes a bit of patience, since they take about a year and a half to flower. Miniature varieties can flower in six to eight months from seed.

Primrose seed may also be sown in mid-summer to flower in the winter. Two or three varieties are commonly available at florist shops.

- The fairy primrose, *Primula malacoides* carries its slightly fragrant flowers in three or four whorled tiers. The pink, purple, or white flowers of this Chinese species usually have yellow eyes. Their undersides are covered with a silvery white meal. This delicate and sensitive plant will not tolerate mistakes in its watering schedule and must be kept moist at all times.
- *P. obconica* has larger flowers, about an inch and a half in diameter, which, along with the scalloped leaves, lend the appearance of a geranium to the plant. The flowers of this species are longer lasting than those in other groups. This primrose is often cited for causing a skin rash in susceptible people.
- *P. acaulis* is the last group that is readily available to brighten winter windowsills. These colorful hybrids are sturdy and long lasting as long as they are kept cool. In fact, they can be kept very cool, as they are perfectly hardy in our climate, heat being more to their detriment than cold. These short plants are available in white, red, purple, pink, and orange, often with contrasting centers or petal edges. Move them out to the garden after flowering to enjoy them a little later in the year next spring.

Forcing Bulbs

Forced bulbs are another way of bringing spring indoors a little early. Tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths, as well as the smaller bulbs like snowdrops, crocus, and reticulate iris are perfect subjects for indoor forcing. Bulbs need a cold, moist period to initiate flowers, so after planting they need a period of twelve to sixteen weeks with temperatures ideally in the thirty-five to forty-eight degree range. Higher temperatures or a shorter chilling period can result in shorter plants or aborted flowers. In the South, it can be difficult to find a spot that can maintain these temperatures for the proper length of time without bringing the plants into flower during their usual outdoor blooming period. Bulbs timed to be forced into bloom in January need to be started in mid-September, when temperatures are still likely to be in the eighties.

An old refrigerator is the perfect spot for conditioning bulbs for forcing. If using the vegetable bin of the family refrigerator, be sure to keep the bulbs away from fruits, which may produce ethylene gas and cause the flowers to abort. Enclose the pot in a plastic bag and make several slits for ventilation. Roots should form in the pots within six weeks and shoots will become visible in another six weeks or so. The pots should be moved out when the shoots are an inch or so out of the soil. It is best to initially expose the pots to fifty degree temperatures and gradually move them into the warmth of the house. Flower development can be controlled by exposure to cold. As long as the pots are protected, temperatures in the mid-thirties are tolerable to bulbs. Development is slowed substantially this way. Conversely, exposing the bulbs to warm temperatures will bring them very quickly into flower.

Forced bulbs can be planted in the garden after they have finished. Remember that care after blooming is important for all bulbs, and that healthy foliage translates to bigger, better-blooming bulbs. It is not really worth it to try to revitalize a tulip bulb, but hyacinths, daffodils, or any of the more perennial bulbs can start again in the garden. You may not get a spectacular show the first year after planting out, as the forcing process robs the bulb of much energy, and it has to "recharge its battery" before it will again put on much of a show.

Winter flowers are a good way for us to recharge our own batteries in the dull days of January and February. It may seem a lot of trouble to prepare for winter beauty in the heat of late summer, but the effort is well rewarded by the intensity of color and the particular charm that only these spring flowers possess.

Cyclamen ready for sale in the greenhouse.

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In the Greenhouse, Winter 2004

Children visit the conservatory with education volunteer Dina Nieuwenhuis.

Succulents and orchids are featured collections.

The conservatory contains an educational display of plants from around the world.

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

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