



Jackson County Master Gardeners Announcements

February 2023

The Plant Clinic is open at the OSU Extension office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 – 2:00 p.m.

Speakers Bureau Schedule for February

- **February 4th** Susan Koenig will be speaking on “Understanding Vegetable Garden Fertilizers” from 1:00-2:30 p.m. at the Medford Library.
- **February 18th** Janine Salvatti will be speaking on “No-dig Lasagna Gardening and Spring Garden Cleanup” from 1:00-2:30 p.m. at the Medford Library.





The Presidents Corner

What is a Master Gardener?

By Marcie Katz

I am sure after reading the title of this article, that a word or idea comes directly to mind about what a Master Gardener is to you. To many, it refers to a knowledge of gardening, the how and why of being a successful gardener, forever learning. To others it invokes pouring over seed catalogs, looking for just the right seeds to raise that special heritage tomato or long-forgotten bean. Then there are those who look to improve their environment and the planet by planting natives in their home landscape to benefit the local wildlife and insects, and to support their food chain.

Or maybe it is just about joining a group of like-minded people, working side-by-side in the Demonstration Gardens, greenhouses or on special projects. We are a community. We come from different walks of life, different careers and sometimes different states or countries! Gardening is what brings us together, and whether we are novices or licensed pros, we enjoy each other's company in doing what we love.

Gardening is something we can do our whole life. Whether a sunny windowsill full of house plants, a big yard, or a small patio, it is someplace to get our hands dirty and grow things. Gardens, like life, will wax and wane according to our responsibilities and constraints put upon us. When we are young and energetic, there are so many demands of running a home and career. As we age, we have the time, but physicality sometimes puts limits on us. We find ourselves in new roles as our needs and abilities change.

For many, taking the Master Gardener Program comes later in life; lucky are the ones who can be a part of it in their youth! For those of us that have some free time on our hands, however, there are other ways to be involved that don't require heavy lifting or a strict schedule – you can be a Master Gardener Volunteer! Volunteering is the heart of our organization; it is what keeps the program going and serves the public by teaching the art and science of gardening for future generations.

In our Jackson County Master Gardener Association there are lots of ways to volunteer! Of course, not everyone wants to be the President or on the Board of Directors, but that is a great way to know what the organization is doing and have a say in its future.

If you don't want anything quite that formal, join a Working Group that only meets once a month! There is a variety to choose from; find one that fits your interests or skills:

- **Gardens WG** (Native Nursery, Practicum, Demonstration Gardens, grounds maintenance, garden enhancement)

- **Marketing and Technology WG** (*Garden Beet*, Facebook, MailChimps, YouTube, the JCMGA website, advertising, photography and videography)
- **Member Services** (Directory, Member registration, condolences)
- **Community Outreach WG** (Garden/School Grants, Scholarships, Speakers Bureau, Community Gardens, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion)
- **Fundraising WG** (special events, incoming grants)
- **Practicum** (mentors, Garden Buddies)

Last but not least, the **Plant Clinic** is where your help would be much appreciated. In addition to all that fun we always need extra bodies for the once-a-year events such as **Spring Garden Fair** (yes, it's back!), **Fall Festival** (new, coming this fall!) and **Winter Dreams, Summer Gardens** (held virtually, virtual host volunteers needed). Or, how about just coming out to help for a few hours at the **Picnic, Graduation**, or on **Wednesdays**, March through October in the **Demonstration Gardens**?

YOU, the JCMGA members, are the Master Gardener Body and your volunteerism is its life blood! Please come and donate some of your free time, be around people who share the same interests and have fun. It's good for you and benefits the community. No matter your level of involvement – whether online in zoom meetings making decisions, on committees, or out on the grounds getting dirty – we need and appreciate all of you!



Introducing the New Master Gardener Coordinator Grace Florjancic

Hello everyone!

My name is Grace Florjancic and I am the new Master Gardener Program Coordinator for Jackson County. I am excited to meet and work with you all to provide the community with excellent opportunities to learn more about horticulture.

I graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science in microbiology and a minor in horticulture. My undergraduate research focused on interactions between plants and microbes. Part of my research involved managing an apple orchard on Virginia Tech's research farm. I find these interactions fascinating and am always ready to learn more about this topic. I was also a member of the Soil Judging Team at Virginia Tech. I am delighted to still be in the mountains even though I am on a new coast now. I can't wait to see how the local climate and plant life impact the soil here differently from Virginia's mountains.

I have previously worked at Meadowlark Botanical Garden located just outside of Washington D.C. I worked on a small horticulture team maintaining and designing seasonal displays and existing perennial beds. I primarily worked with the indoor and outdoor Wedding Venue Gardens, Pollinator Garden, and Kitchen Garden at Meadowlark. I learned a lot working in the Pollinator Garden about Virginia's native plants, pollinator species, and invasive plants and am eager to become familiar with Oregon's. I am looking forward to sharing my knowledge and experiences with you all and hearing about yours!

Cheers to a new and exciting year together,



**Announcing the Annual Jackson County Master Gardener™ Association
Photo Contest
Sandy Hansen**

The Jackson County Master Gardener™ Association Member Services Working Group (MSWG) announces its annual photo contest.

- ◆ The 2023 JCMGA Photo Contest is open to all current Jackson County Master Gardener™ Association members.
 - ◆ **Photos may be submitted from February 5th until February 26, 2023.** We can accept two (2) photos from each member, although there will be only one winning photo per person.
 - ◆ Photographs are limited to those taken in gardens of the Rogue Valley and the focus must be on a plant or flower - no people (for privacy concerns), no pets, no chicken coops, or other form of livestock and insects.
 - ◆ Please submit your photograph in portrait format, rather than landscape format to jcmgaphotos1@gmail.com.
 - ◆ All photographs must be at least 1500 x 1575 pixels (5"x5-1/2" at 300 dpi) and all submitted photos become the property of JCMGA.
- In addition, since the photograph on the cover of the directory is longer from top-to-bottom than from side-to-side, photos submitted must be in portrait format rather than landscape.
- Please submit your picture to jcmgaphotos1@gmail.com and include your name, phone number, email address and a short description of the flora pictured. If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Hansen, sandyhansen08@gmail.com. All identifying information will be removed and the contest will be judged by members of the Member Services Working Group and the editor of the *Garden Beet*.
- The winning photograph will appear on the cover of the 2023 JCMGA Chapter Directory, and four runners-up will have their photographs featured in the *Garden Beet*. Winners will be announced in the April *Garden Beet*. Four runners-up will have their photographs featured in the *Garden Beet*. Winners will be announced in the April *Garden Beet*.

Whether your garden consists of several acres or a single plant in a hanging basket, we would love the opportunity to honor the beauty you have created and nurtured.

- All submitted photos become the property of JCMGA.

Funding Master Gardener Programs Across the State

Kathy Apple

Did you know that Master Gardener programs exist because the Oregon State Legislatures funds faculty and staff through the OSU Statewide Public Service Programs? Currently five counties, Benton, Clatsop, Douglas, Linn & Tillamook, do not have faculty or staff support for a Master Gardener program. Funding for our own Jackson County is never guaranteed without your support!

The Oregon State Legislature has just begun building the state budget for 2023-2025. They have about five months to get the job done.

Ask your State of Oregon Senator & Representative now to support OSU Statewide Public Service Programs at \$206M.

MG Program funding is part of this package.

- Tell them about your love for gardening and educating the public.
- Share stories about how your service makes your community a better place!
- Act now when the Oregon Legislature is making budget decisions!

If you need help contacting your representatives, go to the Oregon Master Gardener Association website advocacy page at

<https://omga.org/advocacy/>

There you will find a toolkit to help you. The toolkit includes a short form letter to send to your legislators, talking points for calling your legislators, sample letters to customize your message, and legislature contact information.

Keep our Master Gardener program alive and well! Contact your state representatives today!



Oregon State University
Extension Service
Master Gardener™

Purslane - Weed or culinary succulent?

By Sandy Hansen

I don't know how many times I have looked at the purslane in my garden and stopped to ponder if I should leave it or pull it, if I should eat it or compost it. As it turns out, I found I should leave it because it is an edible succulent. In Colonial

America, it was common to eat purslane, as it was plentiful and it was free. Also, from what I have read, it is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, especially the *Portulaca oleracea*.



Purslane is still used in many kitchens in Europe, especially in France. The use of purslane has been featured in many cookbooks throughout the ages. In 1600, an Englishman recommended it be used in salads. The flavor lends itself to being used not just in salads but because it is tart and salty, it could be used pickled and sauteed with eggs.

Purslane is a member of the Portulacaceae family. Common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is widely consumed as an edible plant, and in some areas, it is considered invasive. *Portulaca grandiflora* is a well-known ornamental garden plant. Purslanes are relished by chickens. Some *Portulaca* species are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including the nutmeg moth (*Hadula trifolii*).

Speakers Bureau

Our Master Gardener Speakers Out In the Community

Colet Allen

Our public library invited JCMGA to present a “winter series” of three gardening classes on Zoom. First up was one on “Choosing Seeds for Spring Planting” presented by Ronnie Budge on January 21. Her PowerPoint slides had pictures of seed packets and pages from seed catalogs, and she explained what to look for when deciding which varieties to order. She advised participants to seek out JCMGA’s *Garden Guide* for more information. The presentation was recorded and will be on the library’s YouTube channel. We’ll share the link with you as soon as we get it.

The always fun and knowledgeable John Kobal provided a “Worm Composting” hands-on demonstration at the Applegate Library on January 28. He reported that he had a good time and that it went well with many expressions of appreciation at the end. One of the happy 8 attendees got to take home some red wigglers.

The branch supervisor Christine Grubbs indicated that she would like to have a monthly series of gardening talks at her library. John recommended his *Year Around Gardening* for July and August. I look forward to talking to Christine.

Presenting programs at our public library, whether via Zoom or “live,” is truly a “win-win” opportunity since the library reaches a new-to-us audience with their publicity.

I will start posting our speaker engagements monthly in the Garden Beet. They will appear on the JCMGA Calendar as well as in the Announcements section of the Garden Beet. Remember these classes can also be used toward continuing education hours for Master Gardeners.

Reminder to Master Gardeners:

If you as a Master Gardener provide a presentation that has not been set up by the Speakers Bureau Coordinator (Colet Allen) please send an email coletallen1@gmail.com or text 425-941-7637 to her with the following information: Day and time of the presentation; the Title; Location; Name of the presenter; and Number of people in attendance. We need to track our outreach efforts as some of our funding is based on the value we provide. Thanks to all of you who are out there working to improve our community.

Keystone Native Trees Promote Biodiversity.

By Lynn Kunstman

By now, most gardeners understand the importance of native plants in performing our critical ecosystem services. These services are carbon sequestration, soil restoration, food web value, wildlife habitat, watershed value, pollinator habitat, and weather moderation. While the exotic plants we grow in our gardens may perform some of these functions, they do not contribute to the food web in any sustainable way. Native plants, adapted to our area, are truly the workhorses of biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

That said, not all native plants contribute at the same level. In fact, about 5% of plants support around 75% of insects. These are called KEYSTONE plants, because of their critical function and contribution to ecosystems. And as insects are the food of most vertebrate species, we must support and increase their numbers as much as possible. We can have a positive and quite efficient effect in our yards by choosing and planting local keystone native plants.

Begin with trees, which are the food web powerhouses, both for pollinators (yes, the bees are in the trees!) and for insect bird food. Rogue Valley trees listed in this article will be linked to the [Oregon Flora](#) where you can read a description of each. If you have a small suburban yard, some of these trees may not be appropriate. Here are our top keystone trees:

Native Willows (*Salix*): In the western United States, willow trees host the highest number of moths and butterflies (312 species of *Lepidoptera*), which are the primary source of food for our songbird nestlings and fledglings. These are NOT the weeping willow planted in yards and parks, which comes from Asia. [Oregon willows](#) are widespread and varied. Several occur in Jackson County. They prefer wet sites and should not be planted on small lots or near drain or sewer lines, as they will invade pipes. But if you have property with a creek, or low wet area, by all means get some established.

Native Cherry (*Prunus*): Most of us are familiar with *Prunus avium*, the sweet cherry introduced from Europe that is now naturalized throughout much of the Willamette Valley and coastal mountains. Birds have carried these seeds to wild areas where they establish. Please plant one of our three native cherries, [Bitter Cherry](#) (*Prunus emarginata*), [Klamath Plum](#) (*Prunus subcordata*) and [Chokecherry](#) (*Prunus virginiana*). All three are small trees which can be grown in smaller lots as specimen trees or added to a hedgerow along a fenceline to provide screening, cover, food and nesting sites for birds. Native cherries host 240 species of *Lepidoptera*.

Native Oaks (*Quercus*): Our local native oaks are [Canyon Live Oak](#) (*Quercus chrysolepis*), [Garry or Oregon White Oak](#) (*Quercus garryana*), [California Black Oak](#) (*Quercus kelloggii*), and a quite nice shrubby chaparral species, [Huckleberry Oak](#) (*Quercus vacciniifolia*). This last is not

a huckleberry, but a true oak, with acorns and leaves that resemble *Vaccinium*. Hence the name. Western oaks host over 200 species of moth and butterflies and tasty caterpillars for baby birds.

There are many other keystone trees you could explore: birches, alders, aspen, poplars, Douglas Fir and maples. Choose trees that are appropriate to your soil and water conditions.

Some of these plants and many more are for sale in our JCMGA nursery, on the SOREC Extension campus, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point. The nursery is open for sales on **Wednesdays from 10 am to noon**, April through October, and by appointment. Contact Lynn at kunlynn52@gmail.com to schedule an appointment. We also have seasonal pop-up sales, so be on the lookout for those.

Garden for Life!

PRACTICUM IS BACK!

by Jane Moyer

March 13, 2020! The last day Practicum was able to practice in all its glory! A day many of us will never forget! The day SOREC was closed due to COVID.

The greenhouses sat mostly unused for almost three years. Weeds crept in under the walls. Spiders spun their webs with abandon. Dust accumulated. Many Practicum mentors decided it was time to move on to other pursuits. And the Creepy Old House, where the Practicum "classroom" was in the garage, was condemned because of asbestos. Many wondered if this all meant the end of Practicum.

But NO! PRACTICUM IS COMING BACK! The remaining mentors and newly recruited mentors have spent many a Tuesday morning scrubbing, cleaning, sweeping, vacuuming, installing new lights in the Prop House, creating a new teaching space in Greenhouse #1 and reorganizing Greenhouse #2. New mentor manuals have been created for the mentors who needed them. Handouts for the entire program have been run and organized. New mentors were trained and returning mentors were refreshed during an all-day training on January 31. Students signed up on February 1 for their Practicum days. And the first day of Practicum will be February 9.

PRACTICUM IS BACK!



We're Back!!

Janine Salvatti

So exciting to see so many new and enthusiastic Class of 2023 Master Gardener students!

Jane organized and led a perfect first day for students!

Barbara Low along with Kathy Apple, Karcie Katz, Colet Allen and Janine Salvatti provided the students with a wonderful potato bar and salad luncheon. They baked potatoes, made chili, and brought all the toppings, cookies, and drinks for about 70 people.



Our president, Marcie Katz, always hard at work.





Our newbies were warmly and enthusiastically greeted by Lynn Kunstman, Pam Hiller, and Lucy Pylkki, and Margaret Saydah

Sandy Hammond set up a "free" book table for students.

We are off to a great start with the Class of 2023!



Easy Fundraising for JCMGA

by Jane Moyer

Over the years, my 1992 pickup had progressed from daily use to being used only occasionally for hauling loads of landscaping material, then to being towed to the mechanic every time I wanted to use it, to an ugly yard ornament. I had been thinking for a long time about donating it to a local nonprofit for a tax write-off so was overjoyed when the Jackson County Master Gardener Association entered a partnership with CARS (Charitable Adult Rides and Services). This organization accepts cars, trucks, vans, SUVs, boats, motorcycles, ATVs, RVs, trailers, and airplanes to fix up for resale or to sell as parts — with a large portion of the profits going to a nonprofit of the donor's choice. I decided to give it a try.

Arrangements can be made by either filling out a form on the CARS website at careasy.org or by calling 1-855-500-RIDE (7433). Have the title available when contacting them. They will ask for information from it. If doing it online, when prompted to choose a nonprofit to receive the proceeds, click on the Education and Research category to find JCMGA.

A date will be set for your donation to be picked up that depends on availability of a tow truck. My date was December 31. New Year's Eve turned out to be a very busy day for tow trucks so my date had to be moved to the following week.

That's all there is to it. CARS does the rest. They arrange and pay for repairs to make the donation sellable, if possible. If this isn't possible, they part it out and sell the parts. Their goal is to ensure the chosen nonprofit makes the maximum amount of money. Within 30 days of the sale, they send a thank you letter that can be used as a tax receipt. If the donated vehicle sells for more than \$500, they will also send an IRS Form 1098-C, Contributions of Motor Vehicles, Boats, and Airplanes, if your tax ID number (usually your Social Security number) has been provided.

Easy peasy! No more ugly yard ornament! A tax deduction in hand! A nice donation to JCMGA! And a feel-good moment as you wave goodbye.





Winter-blooming Plants to Nourish Bees

Barbara Low

This week, I ran across an article, [7 winter-blooming plants to nourish bees](#), from OSU, written by Kym Pokorny. Her source for this article was Andony Melathopoulos. Andony was one of our Winter Dreams Summer Gardens 2022 presenters. He spoke about the many different types of bees and their importance to our environment.

This caught my eye because I really enjoyed his presentation. Andony, the Oregon State University Extension Service pollinator specialist and assistant professor in the College of Agricultural Sciences, is a very good presenter with a great deal of knowledge about his topic.

In the article, I learned that black-tailed bumblebees can be out and about as early as January. With bees starting to come out that early, it is important that we have plants which are starting to bloom to provide them nutrition.

The winter-blooming plants which he suggests having in our yards are:

1. **Hazelnut (*Corylus*):** Members of the *Corylus* genus – including the popular contorted and weeping hazelnuts – are one of earliest sources of pollen for bees.
2. **Oregon grape (*Mahonia*):** No garden – or bee – should be without one of these evergreen shrubs, especially since it's designated as Oregon's state flower. But an even better reason are the insanely yellow flowers that last for weeks.
3. **Heath and heather (*Erica* and *Calluna*):** Bees zoom in to heaths and heathers like they're approaching a runway. In shades from purple to copper to gold, these low-growing plants make a mat of color throughout the year, including winter.
4. **Winter jasmine (*Jasminum nudiflora*):** Though it doesn't have the fragrance of other jasmines, this vining shrub has bright yellow flowers that are a welcome sight in winter.
5. **Witch hazel (*Hamamelis*):** Bees get fired up over witch hazel with its crepe paper-like flowers in orange, red and, most famously, yellow.
6. **Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*):** The periwinkle-colored flowers of rosemary will pop out all winter but really provide a spectacular spread of nectar and pollen in late winter when many bees and hummingbirds are gearing up.
7. **Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.):** These evergreen shrubs explode with white flowers that bumblebees and hummingbirds flock to. Manzanitas are native to the western United States and come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, from large, treelike shrubs to ground covers.

8. **Chaparral currant (*Ribes malvaceum*):** Bees go gaga over this California native, which blooms after Christmas and keeps on blooming through the end of winter.

“Even a small amount of habitat will sustain bees, even rare species,” Melathopoulos said.
“These are tiny creatures. Well-thought-out landscapes can provide all the food they need in winter. Gardeners can really help with that.”

He also suggests checking out the Extension publication [Trees and Shrubs for Fall and Winter Bloom](#).

These are plants that I will consider planting this spring for blooming next year.

Resources

By Kym Pokorny, kym.pokorny@oregonstate.edu

Source: Andony Melathopoulos, melathoa@oregonstate.edu

What's going on?

Marketing and Technology Working Group ---

Off to a great start in the new year, the Marketing and Technology Working Group had our first meeting on January 9th. Our meetings are held on the second Monday of each month unless it works out to be a national holiday. This month's meeting, we discussed many topics such as:

- The focus of the Garden Beet
- The Working Group budget for 2023
- The Brochure
- The use of QuestionPro
- The new class for 2023
- Zoom recordings.

If you are interested in joining our group for a discussion or to lend a hand or if you want more information, please contact Sandy Hansen, Chair at sandyhansen08@gmail.com or 707-332-4934. All are welcome.

Member Services Working Group –

We are off and running! Our working group members along with some other Board members organized the Class of 2023 First Day Lunch – a great success. We are now working on updating the Chapter Directory for 2023. Our goal is to have the directory ready for you by the end of March.

If you are interested in being a part of our group, contact Barbara Low at barbaralow@msn.com .

Winter Dreams Summer Gardens Working Group –

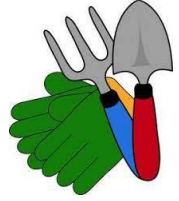
Our group has started meeting to review the WDSG 2022 evaluation survey data. What went well and what we can improve. This month we will start planning the WDSG 2023 Symposium!

If you are interested in being a part of this group, please contact Colet Allen coletallen1@gmail.com , Susan Koenig srkoenig@aol.com or Barbara Low barbaralow@msn.com .



February in the Garden

By Barbara Low



Good morning on this very cold day. Frost on the windows, grass, and shrubs. I'm sitting by my window watching the birds in our backyard – some in the bird feeders, others in the bushes. I see several different kinds of birds – each with their own habits.

Last month, I talked about what we should be doing in our gardens during the month of January. I am continuing this series of articles and hope that you find them to be helpful and inspiring. With that said, our gardens still need to be cared for so that they will do well in the spring and summer.

The Jackson County Master Gardener Association has a great resource for gardeners to use. It is the *Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley – Year-Round & Month by Month* book. This great reference book for gardeners is mainly about the growing of vegetables, berries, and melons.

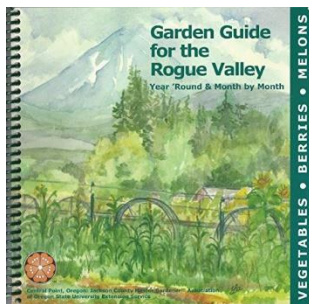
In this article, I will briefly refer to what we should be working on during the month of February based on the information in this book and articles on the OSU website.

February is the time to:

- **Continue to plan** what you want to plant in spring – if you haven't done it already. What seeds do you want to order? Do you want to try some new or different vegetables and/or berries?
- **Plants which you plant as seeds to transplant later**
 - Cabbage
 - Lettuce (head)
 - Parsley
 - Onions
 - Pak Choi
 - * Chinese Cabbage
 - * Endive, Escarole
 - * Leeks
 - * Oriental Greens
- **Plants which you can plant as seed outside**
 - Peas (if there are the right soil conditions)
 - Arugula
 - Corn salad
 - Radishes
 - * Cress, Garden
 - * Mustard greens, turnip greens
 - * Spinach
- **Plants to Transplant this month**
 - Asparagus roots
 - Horseradish
 - Onion sets, plants
 - * Herbs, perennial
 - * Lettuce (head)
 - * Strawberries



- **Time to prune your established grapes**
 - <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1639> This publication from the OSU Extension is great in showing exactly what to do to prune and take care of the grapes.
 - **“Table Grape Pruning”** OSU Master Gardeners You Tube video with Sherry Sheng. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ym1ZKZYKfS0>
- **Remove mulch from established asparagus beds and fertilize.**
- **Fertilize over-wintering vegetables with high nitrogen fertilizer**
- **Fertilize rhubarb – OSU publication “Grow Your Own Rhubarb”**
<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec797>



The *Garden Guide for the Rogue Valley – Year-Round & Month* book contains a wealth of gardening information. You can purchase it at our local Grange Co-op or at the OSU Extension office for \$21.00. It can also be purchased on-line at <https://jacksoncountymga.org/shop/> Note that a shipping fee will be applied.

Other Resource:

- **“Strawberry Nutrient Management Guide for Oregon and Washington” OSU Publication** by Emily Dixon, Bernadine Strik, Javier Fernandez-Salvador, and Lisa Devetter <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/em9234>

Happy Gardening and Stay Warm
Garden For Life

Getting in the Pink

Whether crimson, fuchsia, garnet, ruby, scarlet, or vermillion, the seed heads of amaranth species such as *Amaranthus cruentas*, *A. caudatus* and *A. hypochondriacus* will truly put your garden plot in the “pink”! *Amaranthus blitum*, *A. spinosus* and *A. tricolor* have brilliant edible stalks and leaves.

Amaranth wasn’t recognized until the American health movement in the 1970s, according to the Oldways Whole Grain Council, but it’s been grown here for a long time. Today’s seed catalogs promote numerous varieties to sow in home gardens.

A brief history: Evidence points to *A. cruentus* as the first cultivated amaranth, with remains found in northern Argentina dating back 8,000 to 7,000 years ago. Pale forms dating to around 4000 BC have also been discovered at Tehuacan Puebla in Mexico.

Despite difficulties in accurately tracking the beginning of amaranth’s cultivation, records document amaranth in regions of central and southwestern parts of North America. It’s been found in Ozark rock shelters from 1100 AD. Documents show indigenous tribes along the Colorado River in present day Arizona and Utah traded it to colonial explorers.

The most significant records show that for the 15th-16th century Aztec empire amaranth was one of three major staple and ceremonial crops. It also appeared in ancient Southeast Asia and China.

So why grow this ancient plant? Amaranth offers leafy greens and “super” seed. Although not a true cereal, it’s one of six “pseudocereals” – technically seed, but used like cereal grains.

Despite their miniscule size, amaranth seeds are protein powerhouses. Its complete protein is double that of rice or corn, containing more than 10% of the RDA of protein, fiber, iron, selenium and B pyridoxine; 20% of magnesium and phosphorus; and half the RDA of manganese. It’s also gluten free!

Impressive seed-producing varieties can reach 9’ or more. Panicles of grains add the crowning touch with vertical, pendulous, and draping heads in a variety of vibrant magenta shades, neon green and brilliant gold.

Not interested in grain? Smaller varieties from 2’ to 5’ sport nutritious leaves and stalks in brilliant colors and striking patterns.

Being a C4 plant – a carbon fixer in high-temperature and low-moisture conditions – it’s highly adaptable to a wide range of growing conditions and elevations.

While cultivating amaranth is quite easy, choosing varieties to plant is more challenging considering all the delicious types to choose from. You just have to decide if you want edible leaves or heads full of seeds.

Whatever the variety, amaranth needs full sun and light, well-draining soil. For stronger plants, start indoors 6-8 weeks before the last frost.

Sow seeds atop pre-dampened seed starter mix, covering them with a thin layer of the same mix. Water thoroughly, cover with a plastic dome lid, then keep at 65-75°F. until sprouts emerge in about 3-7 days.

Pot up when about 3-4" high, keeping plants under lights until last frost. After acclimating, transplant them out in rows, spacing plants 12" apart.

Harvest leaves and stalks for fresh greens. When grain falls from gently shaken plants, put the entire heads in bags, shaking to loosen the grains.

Whether you want an ornamental plant for wonderful seed heads or plan to harvest healthy leaves and grains, put the pink in your garden with the amazing, ancient amaranth.

Seed Sources:

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds

<https://www.rareseeds.com/store/vegetables/amaranth>

They have numerous heirlooms and new varieties.

Johnny's Select Seeds

<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/flowers/amaranthus/>

Eden Brothers

<https://www.edenbrothers.com/collections/amaranthus-seeds>

8 varieties to select from.

Resources:

Oldways Whole Grain Council

<https://wholegrainscouncil.org/whole-grains-101/grain-month-calendar/amaranth-may-grain-month>

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds

<https://www.rareseeds.com/how-to-grow-amaranth>

WhyFarmit

<https://whyfarmit.com/grow-amaranth-from-seed/>

Tips:

Amaranth species are wind pollinated. Deter cross pollination by planting different varieties, including celosia, cockscomb, lambs quarter and pigweed, 1,000 feet from each other.

For flea beetles, use floating row cover until the plants are 2' high and can handle damage.

Aside from consuming leafy stems and protein-rich grain, amaranth grain pops and makes a great dye.

Recipes:

Popped Amaranth

½ cup of amaranth seeds

1 deep-sided large heavy pot

colander or sieve

Heat a heavy pot over medium high heat until a few drops of water sizzle. Pour in amaranth. Shake continually until seed pops within a few seconds. When popping ceases, remove pot and dump popped amaranth in a colander. Shake to remove burnt or unpopped seeds.

Serve immediately or use in other recipes. ½ cup seed makes about 1 cup of popped amaranth.

Eat as is or use in other dishes like pilaf, atop salads, as a binder for meatless dishes or mix it with chopped toasted nuts and melted dark chocolate for a nutritious bar.

Chocolate Bliss Bars:

Mix 1 cup popped amaranth with ½ cup chopped toasted nuts and 8 oz melted dark chocolate. Spread in an 8"-square parchment-lined pan. Chill in fridge for 15 minutes, then cut into bars. These make a very healthy snack.