



## CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

## Ask the Master Gardener

## JANUARY 2015 COLUMN

**Dear Master Gardener:**

**I find the Asian-looking leaves of the ginkgo tree very attractive and would like to plant one in Nisswa. Will it grow here and is there anything I should know before I plant one?**

Though we don't see many *Ginkgo biloba* trees here, there should be no problem in getting them to grow. They are hardy through zone 3, so hardy that they survived the atom bombing of Hiroshima when almost all other plants were destroyed. They are tolerant of drought, air pollution and salt, and are resistant to most insects, animal predation, and diseases. They grow up to 40 ft. tall and have a roughly pyramidal shape. They are prized for their lovely 3-inch, fan-shaped leaves and their rich yellow fall color. In Asia the leaves have both culinary and medicinal use. They are considered the world's oldest living tree species and can live for a thousand years. They originated as wild trees during the Mesozoic era 200 million years ago in China, where they were domesticated and propagated. Of course there is always a fly in the ointment. For the ginkgo it is the very distasteful odor (some compare it to vomit) emitted by rotting fruit of the female ginkgo in the fall. Ginkgos are dioecious, meaning that male and female parts are on separate trees. They are pollinated by wind and only the females produce fruit. The odor remedy is to plant only male ginkgos. Most commercially available trees are male but check carefully to make sure. They are sometimes called the "maidenhair tree", perhaps because of their similarities in foliage to the maidenhair fern, or the "fossil tree" because of their history.

**Dear Master Gardener:**

**I would like to add some plants with silver-colored foliage to my gardens. What plants do you suggest?**

In a garden, silver and gray colored plants can soften the transition from one plant to the next. They are great additions to a moon garden as they pick up and reflect the light of the moon. A "deer resistant" annual with silver foliage you could add to your garden is Dusty Miller. Perennials with silver or gray foliage include:

- *Athyrium niponicum* (Japanese painted fern); *Athyrium* (hybrid) 'Ghost'
- *Artemisia*
- *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost', and 'Looking Glass'
- *Heuchera* (Coral Bells) 'Jade Gloss', 'Pewter Veil', and 'Silver Scrolls'
- *Lamium maculatum* (Spotted Dead Nettle) 'Beacon Silver', 'Orchid Frost', and 'White Nancy'
- *Perovskia* (Russian Sage) 'Little Spire' (dwarf)

- *Pulmonaria* (Lungwort) 'Berries and Cream', 'E.B. Anderson', 'Little Star', 'Majeste', 'Margery Fish', 'Raspberry Splash', 'Silverado', 'Silver Bouquet', 'Silver Shimmers', 'Sissinghurst White', and 'Smokey Blue'
- *Stachys* (Lamb's Ears or Big Ears) 'Helene von Stein'

**Dear Master Gardener:**

**How do I go about creating a miniature moss dish garden?**

First, decide on a container other than metal because mosses are sensitive to metals and chemicals. Drill a drainage hole if your container doesn't have one and line the bottom of the container with landscape fabric, so the drainage hole doesn't clog. An unbleached coffee filter also works well. Add a thin layer of pea gravel or similar drainage material; then fill the dish with well-draining potting mix to just below the brim. Lay moss and lichen on top of the potting mix and firmly press down. Cut the moss to fill the dish by adding a larger piece of moss than the space allows and trimming it to a size a little larger than needed so the edges can be tucked in. Tuck the moss into the dish. Harvest moss from your own property or check your local garden center or floral shops. Always collect responsibly and remove only what you need from a colony. It is illegal to remove moss from protected areas, such as state and national parks or public land. When your dish garden is complete, water it thoroughly and press the moss down. Water it well every week, misting between waterings or adjust the frequency depending upon rainfall if your dish garden is outside. If kept outside, keep your dish garden in a shady spot. You may add accents to your dish garden; anything other than moss is considered an accent. Accents can be other plants, such as hostas, Christmas fern, miniature ebony spleenwort, dwarf mondograss, and other species that thrive in conditions similar to those of moss. You may also add stones, pieces of driftwood or other accents for visual interest.

## **JANUARY GARDEN TIPS**

- The average annual minimum temperature in January in Crow Wing County is minus 30 to minus 35 degrees F.
- In January houseplants often suffer from the very low humidity in most homes. Watering from the bottom, soaking the entire rootball, can help. Fill your sink with water deep enough to come to within an inch or two of the top of the pot. Making sure that the pot has bottom drainage holes, submerge it and let it sit in water for about 20 minutes or until the soil on top feels damp. Return the plant to a sunny window.
- Poinsettias can be kept attractive for several months by placing them in your sunniest window and checking the soil surface every day or two. As soon as the surface no longer feels moist, water it. Do not let the plant (or any plant) sit in water. In February start fertilizing at half strength every four to six weeks
- Avoid using commercially prepared ice-melting chemicals. They can kill or damage grass, perennials and shrubs. Use sand instead. Dampened sand adheres better than dry on icy walks.

- If you received amaryllis bulbs for Christmas, start them now and keep them green and watered until planting them outdoors after the last frost. Planted now they should bloom in 4-6 weeks.

## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension. All information given in this column is based on research and information provided by the University. To ask a question, call the Master Gardener Help Line at 218-824-1000, extension 4040 and leave a message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

UMN Extension Crow Wing County Master Gardeners' Website  
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