



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

OCTOBER 2015 COLUMN

Dear Readers:

In last month's column it was stated that the Spotted-wing Drosophila (SWD) had not been found in Crow Wing County yet. It has now been reported in Crow Wing County and was confirmed the week of August 2nd.

Dear Master Gardener:

When I lived in St. Paul I had a stately American elm that unfortunately fell victim to Dutch elm disease. Are there any varieties of elm that are not susceptible to Dutch elm disease and are hardy up here?

Dutch elm disease (DED) is a fungal disease that will infect all native Minnesota elm trees; however, the disease does not always kill the tree. All native species of elm are susceptible to DED, including the American elm, red or slippery elm and rock elm. Fortunately, researchers and plant breeders have developed several hybrid Asian elms and American elms that are resistant or tolerant of DED to replace those stately giants we have lost.

Hybrid Asian elms are the result of controlled breeding programs throughout North America. Generally, they are smaller at maturity and may have leaves and mature forms that are distinctly different than an American elm. 'Discovery' elm, also known as Japanese elm, is stress and drought tolerant, hardy to USDA Zone 3 and reaches a mature height of about 40 feet tall and a spread of 30 feet. It is a medium-sized tree with a vase-shaped habit of growth, shapely throughout its life, an excellent shade tree for the home landscape and extremely resistant to DED.

'Prairie Expedition' is a 2004 North Dakota State University selection that was named in honor of the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. It is hardy to USDA zone 3 and DED resistant. The original tree was the only survivor among other American elm trees that died from DED. It has that classic umbrella-like form which typifies American elm and reaches a mature height of 60 feet and spread of 40 feet.

Dear Master Gardener:

My family is Irish and according to Gaelic folklore the hawthorn is strongly associated with fairies and is often referred to as the fairy tree. Because of this it is believed to be bad luck to cut one down or remove branches so as not to disturb the little folk. In Ireland you often see them next to holy wells where people decorate them with ribbons, rags or other votive offerings. In honor of my Irish heritage I would like to plant a black hawthorn in my yard if they are hardy in this area. Do black hawthorns grow here?

Crataegus is a very large genus with 11 species found in Minnesota. According to the Minnesota DNR, *Crataegus douglasii*, a North American species of hawthorn known by the common name of black hawthorn, has been found only near Lake Superior in Lake and Cook counties. It was listed as a state threatened species in 1996. Hawthorns are thorny shrubs or small trees with alternate, simple leaves and white flowers. *Crataegus macracantha*, Fleshy Hawthorn, is a Minnesota native common to thickets, pastures and the edge of woods, which reaches 15-20 feet in height and width, has abundant white flowers followed with bright red fruit, has good rust resistance and is hardy to zone 3. *Crataegus mollis*, Downy Hawthorn, grows in bottomlands, hillsides, and the edge of woods throughout Minnesota. It reaches 35-40 feet in height and 35-50 feet in width, has showy white flowers and red fruit in late August, and is hardy to zone 3. You can purchase hawthorns at Minnesota nurseries that specialize in native plants.

Dear Master Gardener:

How do I keep my gladiolus, calla lily, caladiums and canna bulbs over the winter?

Plants with tender bulbs, corms, tubers, and roots (such as cannas, dahlias, caladiums and tuberous begonias) will be killed by the cold Minnesota winters if not brought indoors. Most tender materials should be dug after the foliage dries up or is killed by frost. Dig them up carefully, loosening the roots gently with a fork or spade, digging several inches back from the base of the plants so that the roots are not mistakenly cut off. Avoid nicking or damaging the fleshy structure because diseases enter through cuts and bruises easily and consequently cause rotting in storage. Wash them gently with a hose, except gladiolus corms which are best left unwashed, allowed to dry, then the soil gently brushed off. For most plants (dahlias, cannas, calla, caladium) the curing period should be about 1-3 days, depending on temperature. Cure them in a room or area away from direct sunlight or drying winds. Curing for gladiolus should be about three weeks, then the old corm and cormels removed. Drying and curing temperatures should be 60 - 70° in a dry, well-ventilated area. Before storing corms, inspect them for insects or diseases and dust them with an insecticide-fungicide mixture labeled for the specific plant if needed. Pack them in slightly damp peat moss, vermiculite or sawdust and keep them in a cool place to retain dormancy. Label your stored plant material, so you know what you are planting next spring. Periodically check your bulbs, tubers, and roots while they are in storage and remove any damaged or rotting material. If tuberous roots, such as dahlias, have some rot occurring, just cut back until you reach clean white, fleshy tissue again. Remember that these are living plants and therefore may need attention and care even during their dormant period.

Dear Master Gardener:

This fall a visiting friend gave me some plums from her Twin Cities garden that were absolutely delicious. They were deep purple with juicy, yellow flesh. I would like to grow some plums here in Crow Wing County and am wondering what kind I should buy.

Plums, along with apricots and cherries, are known as stone fruits because of their extremely hard inner seed. All three are in the genus *Prunus*. Plums are a bit unusual in that not only do they require the presence of one or more other plum trees, but at least one of those trees must be of a different cultivar. Plums are indeed delicious and range in color from yellow to red to

purple with most having yellow flesh. There are several varieties that have shown to be hardy in zone 3 in University of Minnesota trials. They are La Crescent, a yellow plum that is very sweet; Pembina, bright red in color; Pipestone, red with large fruit; Toka, deep magenta; Underwood, red, unusually hardy and the oldest cultivar available; and Waneta, red and also very hardy. If you have wild plums within 100 yards of the tree you choose to plant, they will serve as pollinator trees, otherwise Toka seems to be the most highly recommended cultivar for cross-pollination and will by itself need a different pollinator.

All varieties of plum need full sun. They should be spaced from 12 – 20 feet apart. Pot-grown trees can be planted at any time when the ground is frost-free, but bare root plants will survive best when planted in the very early spring. Expect fruit 2-5 years after planting. Depending on the cultivar, plums ripen between late June and mid-August. The biggest problem with plums is that they bloom so early in the spring that sometimes the fragile blossoms freeze and the tree will bear no fruit that year. Most years, however, that does not happen and in the non-freeze years heavy crops are the norm.

Only one prune-type European plum does well here in Crow Wing County, Mount Royal, which has blue skin and ripens in late August. Like all growing things, plums have enemies, both insects and diseases, but their major enemy is birds. Birds love plums and can decimate a crop of fruit unless trees are covered with netting.

OCTOBER GARDEN TIPS

- October is the best time of the whole year to fertilize lawns. Grass is sending nutrients to roots for winter storage and not to above-ground leaf growth. Much of the fertilizer will be root-stored for early spring release. Weed control is also best in the fall for similar reasons.
- Rake, grind and bag leaves and place them in beds for winter mulch. Next spring place a bag next to your compost pile and add from it periodically to aid the composting process.
- To prevent dehydration, water trees, beds and shrubs regularly until the ground freezes.
- Plant tulips, daffodils and other spring bulbs this month. If rodents have been a problem in the past, spread chicken wire or hardware cloth over them as a deterrent.
- Rake up and dispose of rotting fruit and fallen leaves from apple trees so that the disease and insects harboring in them don't remain in the soil.
- Dig up spent annual and vegetable plants and add them to the compost pile.
- Consider leaving some dried plants in the soil over winter. They add vertical and textural interest to an otherwise boring bed as well as capturing snow for extra mulch.

Crow Wing County Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. 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 recorded message. A Master Gardener will return your call.