



CROW WING COUNTY MASTER GARDENER PROGRAM

Ask the Master Gardener

FEBRUARY 2016 COLUMN

Dear Master Gardener:

I have a list of trees that would make good yard trees in this area, but before I replace the trees that I lost in last July's storm, I would like to compile a list of trees that might be problems. Can you help me?

You are wise to look at problem trees. As you know, all trees are susceptible to some disease or insect. A tree that is appropriate in one yard could be inappropriate in another. For instance, a lot with power lines running across it would not be a good place to plant tall trees like white pines or bur oaks, while the house next door without power lines would be a good place for them. Here is a list of some commonly available trees and what some of their limitations can be:

- Silver maple: Softwood trees whose rapid growth makes them weak and susceptible to storm and ice damage. Produce a prolific number of seeds. Roots tend to rise above the ground surface, making lawn mowing over them difficult and causing sidewalks to buckle.
- Elm: Very susceptible to Dutch elm disease.
- Ash: Very susceptible to emerald ash borer.
- Weeping willow: Extremely large. Brittle. Appropriate only for very large suburban lots.
- Cottonwood: Soft wood that breaks easily in wind and ice. Produces copious amounts of "cotton" in early summer.
- Red and pin oak: Very susceptible to oak wilt disease, which kills them quickly.
- Boxelder: Brittle. Easily damaged by ice and wind. Provides habitat for boxelder bugs, which like to invade homes in the fall.
- Aspen: Short-lived. Spreads by suckers, which can be a lawn problem.
- Colorado blue spruce: As the name implies, is not native to this area and therefore is not long-lived. Susceptible to Cytospora canker and Rhizosphaera needle cast, which disfigure the tree.
- Cedar: Susceptible to cedar-apple rust. A favorite deer food.
- Fruit trees (apple, pear, plum, and apricot): Beautiful and useful and not really a problem, but require a good deal of knowledge in care, pruning and spraying.

Research is being done to create cultivars of several of these trees that will eliminate their objectionable features. Some may be available this year. Check with your local nursery.

Dear Master Gardener:

I never know which fruits and vegetables should be refrigerated and which should be stored at room temperature.

The following fruits and vegetables should be stored in the refrigerator: apples (store in refrigerator after seven days old), artichokes, green onions, apricots, asparagus, herbs (not basil), blackberries, blueberries, green beans, leafy vegetables, lima beans, leeks, cherries, beets, lettuce, cut fruits, broccoli, mushrooms, figs, Brussel sprouts, peas, grapes, cabbage, radishes, carrots, spinach, strawberries, cauliflower, sprouts, celery, summer squash, cut vegetables, and sweet corn.

Fruits that ripen on the counter and then can be refrigerated are avocados, kiwis, nectarines, peaches, pears, and plums.

Fruits that should be stored at room temperature are: apples (store at room temperature until seven days old; then apples should be refrigerated), bananas, grapefruits, lemons, limes, mangoes, muskmelons, oranges, papayas, pineapple, pomegranates, and watermelons. Vegetables that should be stored at room temperature include: basil (in water), cucumbers, onions, eggplants, garlic, jicama, peppers, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, winter squash and tomatoes (technically a fruit). Store garlic, onions, potatoes and sweet potatoes in a well-ventilated area in the pantry. Protect potatoes from light to avoid greening. Cucumbers, eggplant and peppers also can be kept in the refrigerator for one to three days if they are used soon after removal from the refrigerator.

Dear Master Gardener:

How can I propagate my houseplants? Can I just cut off a piece of the plant and put it in water?

Houseplants can be propagated in many ways, but the most common and probably the easiest is the vegetative cutting. The three typical forms of vegetative cutting are stem, leaf petiole, and leaf. The type of cutting you use depends on the plant you are propagating. Stem cuttings, which work well for Swedish ivy and Dieffenbachia, should be three to five inches long with at least two nodes (point where leaf attaches to stem). Remove the leaves except the top two to three sets. Then, using your index finger or a pencil, make a hole in the rooting medium and insert the bare-stem portion of the cutting. Make sure that at least one node is covered by the potting medium and firm it in place. Water well. The cuttings should root in a few weeks.

Leaf-petiole cuttings work well for African violets and some varieties of jade plant. They are taken by choosing a healthy mature leaf and cutting the petiole (the leaf stem) off near the crown of the plant. Trim the petiole back so it is one to one and a half inches long and insert it so the base of the leaf just touches the potting medium. Firm it in place and water medium as described for stem cuttings. Plantlets will emerge at the leaf base in a few weeks.

A leaf cutting is a good way to propagate some begonias and Sansevieria (snake plant). It is done by taking a section of leaf and placing it in contact with the potting medium. For example, a leaf of a snake plant can be cut into three-inch sections and placed into potting medium so that about one inch of the leaf cutting is covered.

FEBRUARY GARDEN TIPS

- Prune shade and fruit trees. Winter pruning reduces the chance that insects and disease will infect the fresh wound sites. Consider hiring a certified arborist for your safety and for his professional knowledge and expertise.
- For those itching to start gardening, seeds that should be started indoors this month are snapdragons, impatiens, pansies, begonias and coleus.
- If you are going to start seeds, begin assembling supplies you will need: seeds, flats with clear plastic lids, adjustable lights (fluorescent shop lights work well), and soil-free, sterile potting soil.

- Keep Valentine's Day cut flowers fresh by placing them in a cool spot when you aren't around. Replace the water and preservative as the water level drops and as soon as the water looks cloudy. Make a fresh cut and add more preservative whenever you replace water.
- Summer bulbs that are in storage should be checked for desiccation and rot, discarding those that are shriveled or soft and mushy.

University of Minnesota Extension Master Gardeners are trained and certified volunteers for the University of Minnesota Extension Service. All information given in this column is based on university research. To ask a question, call the Master Gardener Help Line at 218-454-GROW (4769) and leave a recorded message. A Master Gardener will return your call.

