

Horticulture Tips

February 2006

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources
Oklahoma State University

GARDEN TIPS FOR FEBRUARY!

David Hillock

General

- Base any plant fertilization on a soil test. For directions, contact your county Extension Educator.
- Provide feed and unfrozen water for your feathered friends.
- Clean up birdhouses before spring tenants arrive during the middle of this month.
- Avoid salting sidewalks for damage can occur to plant material. Use alternative commercial products, sand or kitty litter for traction.
- Join *Oklahoma Gardening* on your OETA station for the start of its 24th season beginning in March. Saturdays at 11:00 a.m. and Sundays at 3:30 p.m.

Trees & Shrubs

- Fertilize trees, including fruit and nut trees and shrubs, annually. (F-6412)
- Most bare-rooted trees and shrubs should be planted in February or March. (F-6414)
- Finish pruning shade trees, summer flowering shrubs and hedges. Spring blooming shrubs such as forsythia may be pruned immediately after flowering. **Do not** top trees or prune just for the sake of pruning. (F-6409)
- Look for arborvitae aphids on many evergreen shrubs during the warmer days of early spring.
- Gall-producing insects on oaks, pecans, hackberries, etc. need to be sprayed prior to bud break of foliage.
- Dormant oil can still be applied to control mites, galls, overwintering aphids, etc. (F-7306)

Fruit & Nuts

- Spray peaches and nectarines with a fungicide for prevention of peach leaf curl before bud swell. (F-6235)
- Mid-February is a good time to begin pruning and fertilizing trees and small fruits.
- Collect and store graftwood for grafting pecans later this spring.
- Begin planting blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, grapes, asparagus and other perennial garden crops later this month.
- Choose fruit varieties that have a proven track record for Oklahoma's conditions. Fact Sheet 6222 has a recommended list.

Turf

- A product containing glyphosate plus a broadleaf herbicide can be used on **dormant** bermuda in January or February when temperatures are above 50°F for winter weed control. (F-6421)

Vegetables

- Cool-season vegetable transplants can still be started for late spring garden planting.
- By February 15 many cool-season vegetables like cabbage, carrots, lettuce, peas and potatoes can be planted.

Flowers

- Force spring flowering branches like forsythia, quince, peach, apple, and weigela for early bloom indoors.
- Forced spring bulbs should begin to bloom indoors. Many need 10-12 weeks of cold, dark conditions prior to blooming.
- Feed tulips in early February.
- Wait to prune roses in March.

Chilling Requirement for Peaches

Eric T. Stafne

Chilling requirement is a term to express the number of hours below 45°F necessary to break bud dormancy. Temperatures in the 40 to 50°F range are most effective in satisfying the chilling requirement. Little chilling is accumulated below 30°F and temperatures above 60°F can negate some of the accumulated chilling.

Most peach cultivars require between 600 and 1,000 hours of chilling, although some require as little as 250 hours or less. Dormancy in peaches has two separate stages: rest and quiescence. Rest is a time when the chilling requirement is being accumulated and the buds will not grow. Quiescence is the period of dormancy that peaches enter once their chilling requirement has been met. During this stage, buds will break and grow when sufficient warm weather occurs that is favorable for growth. Often in Oklahoma the chilling requirement may be met in mid-winter (late January/early February), but normally cold temperatures will keep buds from swelling until late February or March.

Below are the accumulated chilling hours for three locations in Oklahoma as of January 30, 2006:

Chilling hours for 2005-2006

	Oct	Nov	Dec	30-Jan
Byars	17	165	449	703
Porter	28	179	455	699
Perkins	23	173	441	715

Starting 10-24-05 (first freeze)

As this table indicates, many cultivars likely have reached their chilling requirements already and are in the quiescent phase of dormancy. Therefore, if sufficient warm weather continues, bud break may occur earlier than normal this year. As one grower stated, "We may need to

sweat out two months of uncertainty (due to cold weather and frosts) instead of just a couple weeks." Such is life for peach growers, so be aware that the potential exists for an early bloom period this year. If this occurs then other activities will need to be done earlier than normal as well, such as pruning (F-6228), insect and disease control (F-7639, F-7641, CR-6240), and weed control (CR-6242).

Graftwood Sources for 2006

Becky Carroll

Attached to Hort Tips is the updated list of graftwood sources for 2006.

Preparing for Fruit Prevention

Mike Schnelle

Numerous calls may be expected this spring concerning what could be sprayed on messy trees to encourage flower/fruit abortion. Many compounds, NAA, carbaryl (Sevin), others, have been tried in the past with limited success. Florel is currently labeled to spray on most ornamental trees for fruit prevention. However, exact timing is paramount. A consumer cannot expect well formed fruits to drop as a result of this chemical application. Rather, it is effective at the very early stages of fruit development. Because so many plants are on the label, check with the manufacturer for a recommendation on a specific ornamental. Florel is manufactured by Monterey Chemical Company. More information may be obtained at www.montereylawngarden.com.

Another alternative is to grow male trees. Species such as certain mulberry, ginkgo, honeylocust, ash, cottonwood and others come in fruitless varieties.

Pruning Woody Ornamentals

David Hillock

With recent weather conditions – warm, mild temperatures and drought – questions have arisen as to how this might affect pruning of plants in the landscape.

Recent weather conditions should not affect, to a great deal, the normal pruning activities for most ornamentals in the landscape. Waiting to trim trees and shrubs that do not bloom in the spring until late winter or early spring before new growth begins is still advisable; spring flowering plants should be pruned after they flower in the spring. However, remember that there should always be a purpose for pruning; don't prune just for the sake of pruning.

Pruning can actually be done at any time of the year; however, recommended times vary with different plants. Contrary to popular belief, pruning at the wrong time of the year does not kill plants, but continual improper pruning results in damaged or weakened plants. Do not prune at

the convenience of the pruner, but rather when it results in the least damage to the plant. There is little chance of damaging the plant if this rule is followed. The least desirable time is immediately after new growth develops in the spring. A great amount of carbohydrates stored in roots and stems is used in developing new growth. This "food" should be replaced by new foliage before it is removed; if not, considerable setback in plant growth may occur. This is a common problem encountered in pruning.

Trees known as "bleeders" (those that drip large amounts of sap from pruning cuts) are usually pruned when sap is not actively flowing such as winter when temperatures remain below freezing or in summer. The warm, mild temperatures we are experiencing right now may result in these trees bleeding sap if we prune now. However, this is not detrimental to the trees as once believed and will not kill the tree.

Results from the affects of drought stress coupled with cold temperatures may not be recognized until later this summer. It might be wise to do little pruning this winter and wait to see what damage might show up later. At that time pruning may be necessary to remove dead and damaged tissue and to "clean up" the plant.

Evergreen Trees, Shrubs, and Vines

Evergreen plants do not shed all their leaves at one time. Therefore, their branches are not bare in winter like deciduous plants. Evergreens should be pruned to control their shape and size and to remove dead, diseased, or damaged limbs. Old branches may also be removed to allow for new growth. Usually evergreens require less pruning than deciduous trees and shrubs.

Drought and freeze damage may be expressed as scorched leaves or leaves that turn completely brown and then fall off or the top 1/3 of the plant might die. Most broadleaf evergreen shrubs will usually recover from slight to moderate damage and some will even tolerate severe damage. Coniferous or needled trees and shrubs will probably recover if less than a third of their leaves are lost but may not live if two-thirds or more of the needles die.

In essence, it is a good idea to irrigate the landscape this winter due to the obvious lack of adequate precipitation. Watering thoroughly once a month may be needed; in areas that have sandy soils and/or are exposed to the dry winds watering every two or three weeks may be necessary.

Oklahoma Proven Selections for 2006

David Hillock

Wishbone Flower, *Torenia Summer Wave*[™] Series

The Summer Wave[™] Series is a collection of hybrid *Torenia*, or wishbone flowers, that thrive in the summer heat. The plants form a 6" high by 12" wide mound that is great for the border, in a pot, or mixed with other plants in a larger container. The Summer Wave[™] Series is comprised of the following cultivars: 'Amethyst', 'Blue', 'Large Violet', and 'Lavender Blue'. Each produces flowers from spring until fall, and each flower has a wishbone at its center, thus the name.

- Exposure: Partial shade
- Soil: Moist, well-drained
- Hardiness: Use as an annual

'Golden Jubilee' Anise Hyssop, *Agastache foeniculum* 'Golden Jubilee'

'Golden Jubilee' is a cultivar of the North American native commonly known as anise hyssop. It was selected for its chartreuse foliage, was named to commemorate HM Queen Elizabeth II's golden jubilee, and was the 2003 All-America Selections flower award winner. Reaching 2' tall and 1' wide, 'Golden Jubilee' produces light purple flower spikes from early summer to fall. Although a perennial, it will reseed in your garden and the new plants will also be golden. As an added bonus, brushing against the foliage releases the plant's licorice scent.

- Exposure: Full sun
- Soil: Moist, well-drained
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 6

Diabolo® Ninebark, *Physocarpus opulifolius* Diabolo®

Diabolo® is a cultivar of ninebark prized for its deep maroon foliage, which contrasts nicely with the clusters of white flowers produced in the spring and is a great companion for gold or chartreuse-leaved plants. This deciduous shrub grows from 6' to 10' high and wide but can be rejuvenated by pruning it to the ground in winter. Red fruit extends ninebark's show into the fall and exfoliating bark adds winter interest. Diabolo® is a hardy and durable shrub that can be used as a screen, for massing, or at the back of a border.

- Exposure: Full sun to part shade
- Soil: Tolerant of acid, alkaline, or dry soils
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 2

'Prairifire' Crabapple, *Malus* 'Prairifire'

Few trees have as much year-round interest as the crabapple and few crabapples are as beautiful and disease resistant as 'Prairifire'. 'Prairifire' starts the spring with a profusion of rose-pink flowers just as the leaves emerge. As summer progresses the leaves turn from purple-red to dark green and red fruit forms that persist well into the winter. The diseases that affect many crabapples don't phase this tree and its rounded crown, which will not exceed 20' tall, makes it a perfect choice for planting under utility lines or in masses.

- Exposure: Full sun
- Soil: Well-drained
- Hardiness: USDA Zone 4

For more information about Oklahoma Proven go to <http://oklahomaproven.okstate.edu/> or contact Lou Anella, 405-744-6593.

All American Selections Winners for 2006

David Hillock

For 2006 there were obviously some tough contenders for the top honors in the All America Selections program because there are several ornamental winners in three different categories this year and four vegetable winners.

Flowers

Bedding Plant Award Winners

Dianthus F1 'Supra Purple'

'Supra Purple' fills garden space with color. This dianthus is a cross between various species and the result is a strong plant that will flower under hot summer growing conditions. 'Supra Purple' plants remain under a foot in height, but they are vigorous and continue flowering through the growing season. The growing season in the South could be fall and early winter. A long flowering period was one of the superior traits observed by AAS Judges. 'Supra Purple' plants adapt to different growing conditions. They are recommended for containers and rock gardens. They will add continuous bloom to a perennial border, which may need more color. 'Supra Purple' was tested as an annual and won the award based on the first year performance, but similar to other dianthus, it may over winter and flower next spring.

The 'Supra Purple' single flowers have highly fringed petal edges which are perfect for decorations. Add them to salads, bouquets, or float some on water for an eye-catching centerpiece. The color is closer to a rosy-purple than the dark, almost black-purple, seen on some plants.

Nicotiana F1 'Perfume Deep Purple'

'Perfume Deep Purple' flowers are shaped like stars. The stars shine at night and this is when 'Perfume Deep Purple' begins its performance. The unique quality is the strong fragrance which scents the air in the evening. The fragrance is not wasted during the day when many people are working. The nightly release of the perfume will entice gardeners to relax and linger in their gardens. Consider 'Perfume Deep Purple' as natural aromatherapy. The rich, lavish deep purple flower color is another unique trait, distinct from other nicotianas. 'Perfume Deep Purple' is easily grown from seed, young green bedding plants or flowering pot plants. Nicotiana, named for Jean Nicot, who introduced tobacco to the French Court, needs a sunny location and is perfectly adaptable to container culture.

'Perfume Deep Purple' does not require pinching, pruning or deadheading to maintain a crown of starry blooms all summer. Quite heat tolerant, plants need minimal maintenance. Only water and fertile soil are needed for 'Perfume Deep Purple' to bloom profusely all summer.

Cool Season Bedding Plant Award Winners

Diascia F1 'Diamonte Coral Rose'

'Diamonte Coral Rose' is an improved variety in a class that was relatively unknown five years

ago. *Diascia* is native to South Africa, like gerbera and *dimorphotheca*. 'Diamonte Coral Rose' exhibits earliness, freedom of bloom and hybrid vigor as improved traits. There is a connection among all three because as a breeder creates a hybrid, these multiple qualities are the breeding objectives. Hybrid vigor results in a long blooming season and profuse flowering, which judges observed during the trial. 'Diamonte Coral Rose' is a frost tolerant annual. The plants perform well during the hot summer growing season and under cool growing conditions, such as the fall and winter seasons in southern locations. The category, Cool Season Bedding Plant Trial, means 'Diamonte Coral Rose' was tested at southern sites during the winter, and won the award.

'Diamonte Coral Rose' flowers are tubular with backward pointing spurs. The five-lobed blooms have broad lower lobes. 'Diamonte Coral Rose' plants have a spreading habit and are perfectly designed for any container. Planting them close to the lip will encourage the plant to cascade over the side. Needing a full sun growing location, 'Diamonte Coral Rose' combines well with other cool tolerant annuals, such as snapdragons or dianthus.

Viola F1 'Skippy XL Red-Gold'

'Skippy XL Red-Gold' is the first *Viola cornuta* to earn the prestigious AAS Award. Three improvements were exhibited in AAS trials. The unique combination of colors is first to be observed. 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' flowers are ruby red with violet red shading below the golden yellow face containing whiskers. This combination is found on 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' only. The flower shape and size are definitely improved. The round 1 1/2 inch flower is similar to a pansy, and larger than many viola blossoms. The lasting and enduring flower color provided by 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' is another notable trait. The freedom of bloom is attributed to the plant's ability to bud and flower under a wide range of temperatures. It is this adaptability that results in continuous bloom.

'Skippy XL Red-Gold' was tested across the US and Canada, but unlike other trials, this AAS winner was tested in the South during the fall and winter seasons. This is the time for peak performance. 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' achieved this exceptional garden performance to win the AAS award. 'Skippy XL Red-Gold' can be relied on for flower color whether it is grown in an annual or perennial border, window box or patio planter.

Flower Award Winners

Ornamental Pepper 'Black Pearl'

'Black Pearl' is a handsome plant with black foliage. But the standout quality is that 'Black Pearl' looks better as the summer season progresses. The plants branch, producing more clusters of black, pearl-like, shiny peppers. The plant grows taller and wider developing into a black pyramid shape without pinching, pruning, or grooming. 'Black Pearl' is exceptionally heat tolerant and requires minimal water and fertilizer. It is easy to grow from seed, bedding plants or pot plants with fruit set. There are no serious insect or disease problems. As the plant matures, the black peppers turn red, adding a new color to the plant. While edible, the peppers are very hot. Use with care! Black foliage is very trendy and 'Black Pearl' delivers true black leaves to the full sun garden. 'Black Pearl' is an effective background plant particularly with silver, white or pastel flowering annuals in the foreground.

Never out of bloom, 'Black Pearl' has already been selected as a "most popular" new plant by consumers visiting a trial ground. Its foliage, color and low care will attract many gardeners and "non-gardeners" to 'Black Pearl.' It performs exceptionally well in containers and deserves to be featured as the centerpiece.

Salvia farinacea 'Evolution'

'Evolution' is the first *Salvia farinacea* with lilac flower spikes. From a distance, 'Evolution' flowers are several shades lighter than its closest comparison. This new color is desirable for garden use as it widens the color choices for "blue" annuals. Belonging to the mint family, 'Evolution' is easy to grow. Gardeners can begin with seed, young bedding plants or flowering potted plants with the confidence that 'Evolution' will provide continuous color from early summer to the first hard frost. Treated as an annual in the North, 'Evolution' may be a perennial in frost-free areas. Native to Texas, *Salvia farinacea* is heat and drought tolerant. 'Evolution' is low maintenance. No deadheading is needed for all-season color. Relatively disease and pest free, 'Evolution' will perform best in a full-sun location.

There are two more advantages that 'Evolution' offers gardeners. The plants are quite adaptable and can be grown in patio containers or ceramic pots. The lilac flower spikes can be cut, dried and used as everlasting flowers for bouquets, decorations or craft projects. 'Evolution' deserves a sunny spot in an annual or perennial garden for its non-stop color.

Zinnia F1 'Zowie! Yellow Flame'

'Zowie! Yellow Flame' is the first semi-tall zinnia with a unique bicolor pattern. Each bloom flames with a scarlet-rose center and yellow petal edges. There is no other zinnia with this fiery design. In addition, this bicolor pattern is consistent from one plant to another. As expected, there are more desirable traits from 'Zowie! Yellow Flame.' Gardeners will be glad to learn 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' is easy to grow from seed, young bedding plants or flowering potted plants. 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' will prove its long flowering season with dazzling blooms from early summer to final killing frost. During this season-long color, 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' blooms can be cut for bouquets. The University of Maryland conducted cut flower trials and found 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' had a vase-life of up to two weeks.

'Zowie! Yellow Flame' is highly recommended for containers because plants are heat and fairly drought tolerant. With zinnia plants in containers, gardeners will find less time is spent watering. 'Zowie! Yellow Flame' functions well as the tall centerpiece plant surrounded by other full-sun annuals, such as yellow marigolds or purple-leaved foliage plants.

Vegetables

Carrot F1 'Purple Haze'

'Purple Haze' is the only imperator-shaped purple carrot. Purple is a very trendy color and gourmet chefs are always looking for a new vegetable color. 'Purple Haze' has a purple exterior and orange interior. Circles of cut 'Purple Haze' carrots have two distinct colors: a halo of purple with a bright orange center. The best appearance of 'Purple Haze' will be raw in salads or cole slaw. When cooked in water, the purple color will fade. When carrots are cooked quickly, as in a

stir-fry, the purple color will remain. Best of all, 'Purple Haze' tastes great. It has a sweet flavor no matter what color.

'Purple Haze' is easy to grow from seed. Sow seed in prepared soil as early as possible. Place seed 1/2 inch deep and cover with soil. The garden soil should be rich, loose, deeply worked with excellent drainage to grow 12-inch long, straight carrots. Expect germination in 14-21 days. Thin seedlings to be 2 inches apart. The purple pigment is influenced by soil temperature and drainage. The strongest purple color will occur when plants are grown at 59-68°F. For gardeners with heavy clay soil, growing 'Purple Haze' carrots in patio containers is a snap. Use the same growing directions as soil, but water more frequently, since the soil in containers has a tendency to dry out more rapidly.

Cilantro 'Delfino'

'Delfino' is an aromatic, edible herb, and unlike other coriander has unique, fine fern-like foliage. 'Delfino,' like all cilantro, offers gardeners two distinctly different flavors in one handsome plant. 'Delfino' is easily grown, preferring a full sun location. The branching plant produces more leaves, resulting in a higher yield of this edible herb. The leaf flavor is similar to a strong parsley taste with citrus. The fine 'Delfino' foliage is perfect for recipes, such as salsas, requiring finely chopped leaves. Less chopping is needed. Store fresh 'Delfino' foliage with stems in a glass of water. By changing the water often, foliage remains fresh for a week.

'Delfino' plants will bolt, or flower, at higher temperatures. The small white blooms are delicious with a flavor similar to the foliage. Add cut flowers to salads. Luckily, the flowers are produced abundantly. Allow some flowers to "go to seed," which is coriander. The seed is formed in small pods, which will dry, harden and turn brown. When brown, they are ripe and ready to harvest. Use seed whole or crushed for a citrus flavor in homemade soup or chili. 'Delfino' is a dual nature herb - two flavors in one plant that is adaptable to container gardening. Plant 'Delfino' next to the edges so it cascades over the lip of the pot, adding the handsome texture to a full sun container garden.

Pepper F1 'Carmen'

'Carmen' is an improved sweet pepper with an unusual shape. Most gardeners think of a bell shape when "sweet" peppers are mentioned. Not so any more. 'Carmen' is an Italian bull's horn type which refers to its elongated shape, about 6 inches long. The medium thick flesh is the sweetest when it is ripe red, but 'Carmen' peppers are sweet even when immature or green. One of the improved traits is the earliness to ripe red. Gardeners can look for red peppers about 75 days after transplanting into warm garden soil. The other improved traits are sweet flavor and high yield. The yield of a pepper plant is determined by its adaptability. 'Carmen' proved to be widely adaptable, flowering and setting fruit over a wide temperature range. Like all peppers, 'Carmen' will produce the highest number of peppers when grown in full sun and given proper nutrients and water.

'Carmen' plants are productive with an upright, medium height of 28 to 30 inches. This plant size is perfectly adaptable to larger patio containers. Grow 'Carmen' plants with sun-loving, trailing annuals such as verbena to drape over the edge. This is the most trendy combination planter -

growing edibles and annuals together. 'Carmen' is easy to grow in gardens or larger sized containers.

Pepper F1 'Mariachi'

'Mariachi' is named after the Mexican regional musical band that became popular in Jalisco, Mexico in the mid-1800's. Both the band and the pepper are festive and colorful, reminding us to enjoy our outdoor living spaces and gardens. 'Mariachi' is a beautiful plant, deserving a sunny location in an annual or perennial flower bed. 'Mariachi' sets fruits and produces an abundant crop of high quality, mild chile peppers. The chile peppers are pendant, meaning they will hang below the stem. It is a fleshy pepper that ripens from creamy white to rose, then red. Some people may wait for the mature red pepper, but because its flavor is delicate and complex, having fruity undertones reminiscent of melons, the gardeners will harvest them at the creamy white stage. 'Mariachi' peppers are moderately pungent, with Scoville readings in the 500 to 600 range when grown under non-stressful conditions. Add stress, such as extremely hot weather or overly dry soil, and Scoville readings may rocket.

'Mariachi' chiles can be used in salsas or sauces and are especially flavorful when roasted whole on the grill or under the broiler. 'Mariachi' peppers can be used in many dishes, either raw or cooked, but the reason to grow vegetables is the exceptional taste and highest nutritional value - fresh from your garden.

To learn more about these and other AAS winners go to <http://www.all-americanselections.org/>.

Rose Winners for 2006

David Hillock

Julia Child

Julia Child is a floribunda destined to be as famous as her namesake. Personally chosen by the award-winning chef herself, this rose combines old-fashioned style with delicious fragrance rarely found in a free-flowering plant. This rose has a rounded habit and excellent disease resistance, raising the bar for any English-style rose. Julia Child also features a sweet licorice perfume that exudes from each fully-petaled flower, as well as a butter-gold color that's perfectly suited to any landscape. *Hybridized by Tom Carruth and introduced by Weeks Roses of Upland, CA*

Rainbow Sorbet™

Rainbow Sorbet™ is as cool and delicious as it sounds. This multicolor floribunda harkens back to the popular variety Playboy from which it is a descendant. More rugged and winter hardy, it shows a remarkable resistance to black spot. A symphony of bright color uninterrupted through the season, it is perfect as a single bold accent or as a border for those who like to make a statement in their garden. *Hybridized by Ping Lim, Rainbow Sorbet is being introduced by The Conard-Pyle Company/Star Roses of West Grove, PA*

Tahitian Sunset

Tahitian Sunset offers a little slice of paradise. This brightly-hued hybrid tea features splendid blossoms starting from high-centered, orange-yellow buds that open fully to a peachy apricot-pink with yellow highlights. The vigorous plant produces 14-16 inch stems and flowers with about 30 petals to create blooms up to five inches in diameter. With its complex color, delightful licorice fragrance and semi-glossy foliage, this perfectly formed rose makes a strong focal point in any garden. *Hybridized by Keith W. Zary and introduced by Jackson & Perkins of Medford, OR*

Wild Blue Yonder™

Wild Blue Yonder™ offers a journey into uncharted territory. The lavender blend is the first rose in this color range to garner the AARS designation since 1984. Every large wavy petal is a velvety warm wine-purple layered onto rich lavender, making Wild Blue Yonder a unique rose to behold. Each lovely blossom exudes the perfume of sweet citrus and rose. A vigorous 'shrubby' bush, its abundant, deep-green leaves provide the perfect accent to the extraordinarily novel color. *Hybridized by Tom Carruth and introduced by Weeks Roses of Upland, CA*

Perennial of the Year™ for 2006

David Hillock

The Perennial Plant Association has named *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* 'Feuerhexe' (also known as Firewitch) 2006 Perennial Plant of the Year™. Cheddar pink is the common name of this excellent sun exposure perennial. It is an evergreen selection with bluish-gray, silvery foliage and purplish-pink fragrant flowers in mid-spring. Rebloom can occur in the summer and into the fall. This cheddar pink is hardy from zones 3 to 9. Mature mats of this cheddar pink have foliage 3 to 4 inches tall and 6 to 12 inches wide. Flowers will reach 6 to 8 inches high. This evergreen perennial performs best in full sun in well-drained soils.

Ornamental Qualities

Dianthus gratianopolitanus 'Feuerhexe' (Firewitch) is a low growing, mat-forming alpine plant with narrow bluish-gray foliage that remains evergreen. Brilliant purplish-pink flowers cover the plant at bloom time. The flower color has also been variously described as hot pink or purple red or magenta. The color combination of the foliage and flowers is striking at peak bloom in mid-spring. And if that weren't enough, the air becomes perfumed from the scented flowers which have a spicy and clove-like fragrance. Peak bloom is mid- to late spring with rebloom occurring in the summer and fall especially when the spent flowers are removed. The foliage height is 3 to 4 inches with flower stems reaching to 8 inches. This favorite Cheddar pink is hardy from USDA zones of 3 to 9.

Cultivation

Dianthus gratianopolitanus 'Feuerhexe' (Firewitch) is easily grown if a few cultural tips are followed. *Dianthus* selections should be sited in full sun locations or in light shade in extremely hot climates. The soil should be well-drained and neutral to slightly alkaline. Plants placed in poorly drained soils will eventually deteriorate. In moderate to high rainfall areas, one should mulch with pea stone or gravel to keep foliage clean and dry. Do not mulch with deep layers of

organic matter, especially in winter. After flowering in late spring, the spent flowers should be cut back which will promote rebloom later in the season. Eliminating plant stress created by improper cultural techniques can prevent potential disease problems, such as rust, leaf spot, root rot, and Fusarium wilt.

For more information about the 2006 Perennial of the Year visit www.perennialplant.org

Upcoming Horticulture Events

Oklahoma Urban & Community Forestry Council Annual Conference

February 16-17, 2006, Clarion Meridian Hotel & Convention Center, Oklahoma City

More information about this conference is available on the following web sites or contact Gail Ederer at 405-844-6543:

<http://homepage.mac.com/gailederer/FileSharing47.html> (black & white version)

<http://homepage.mac.com/gailederer/FileSharing46.html> (color version)

Turf & Nursery Field Day

May 17, 2006, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater

State Master Gardener Continued Training Conference

May 19, 2006, McAlester, Oklahoma

Plans are underway for next year's State Master Gardener Conference to be held in McAlester at the Southeast Expo Center on May 19, 2006 with a preconference Evening Social on May 18. Please mark your calendars now and plan to attend. The Pittsburg County Master Gardeners are hosting the conference and are working hard to make this conference another fantastic one!

Landscape IPM Workshop

May 31, 2006, OSU, Stillwater Campus

Oklahoma Gardening Summer Gardenfest

June 10, 2006, OSU Botanical Garden, Stillwater

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Stephanie Larimer at 405-744-5404 or stephanie.larimer@okstate.edu.