

NoCo Bloom

SPRING | SUMMER 2026



LARIMER COUNTY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



THE GARDENS
ON SPRING CREEK



City of
Fort Collins

FROM THE GROUND UP


SPIGOT
TO DRIP

SOIL TESTING

EXPERT PLANT
PICKS

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Welcome Back!




As spring returns and gardens begin to stir back to life, it's the perfect time to lay the groundwork for a successful growing season. Healthy plants start below the surface, and understanding your soil is one of the most important steps you can take as a gardener. In this spring issue of NoCo Bloom, we dig into the essentials—from soil amendments and strategies for xeric and native plantings to building productive beds for vegetables and herbs, and switching your irrigation system to drip. Whether you're refreshing an established garden or planting something new, a strong foundation now will help your garden thrive all season long.

To better support our readers during the busiest planning and planting times of the year, NoCo Bloom will now be published twice a year instead of three—in the spring and fall. This allows us to focus on providing in-depth, practical guidance when you need it most.

Are you enjoying NoCo Bloom? We'd love to hear from you! Please take a brief survey to share your thoughts and let us know what topics you want to see covered in future issues. 🌸



COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
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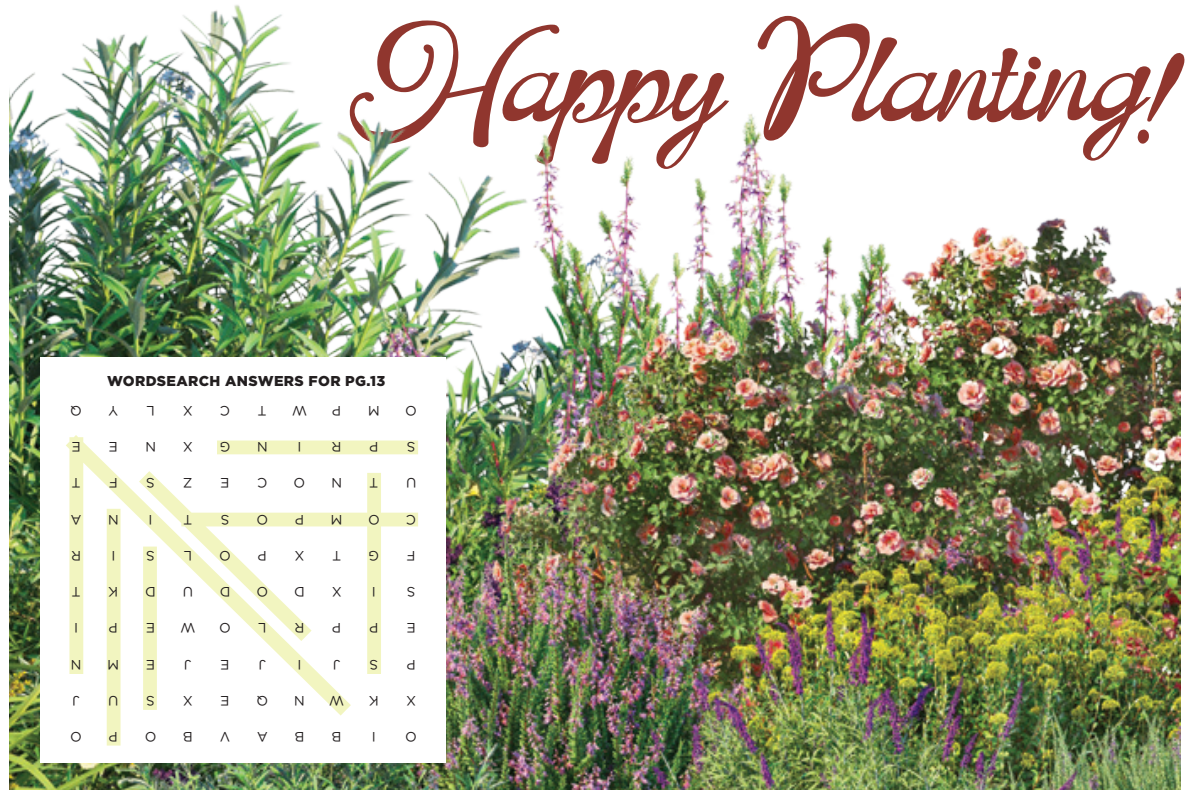


CSU EXTENSION IN LARIMER COUNTY
1525 Blue Spruce Dr., Fort Collins, CO 80524-2004
970-498-6000 | larimer.gov/extension 



**THE GARDENS ON SPRING CREEK
CITY OF FORT COLLINS**
2145 Centre Ave., Fort Collins, CO 80526
970-416-2486 | FortCollins.gov/Gardens 

Happy Planting!



WORDSEARCH ANSWERS FOR PG.13

O	A	T	X	C	L	M	d	W	O	
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PLEASE NOTE: If you are a gardener living in Weld County and needing help, visit www.WeldMasterGardeners.org or email the Weld Garden Help Desk directly at weldmastergardeners@outlook.com.

SOIL AMENDMENTS

SPHAGNUM/PEAT MOSS



FRESH MANURE



COMPOSTED MANURE



PLANT COMPOST



As spring planting approaches, healthy vegetable gardens start with good soil. Soil amendments—materials mixed into soil to improve plant growth—are either organic or inorganic, though organic types are most common for home gardens. They increase organic matter and nutrients, improve water infiltration and nutrient retention, and support beneficial soil life.

Common organic amendments in Colorado include sphagnum/peat moss, manure, and compost. Sphagnum and peat moss help sandy soils hold water and add organic matter, but peat harvesting raises sustainability concerns. Manure is widely available, but fresh manure must be applied at least four months before harvest to reduce pathogen risk. Composted manure is safer because heat kills pathogens and weed seeds; however, all manure products should be checked for excessive salts.

Compost is considered the gold standard. Manure-based compost is usually cheaper but higher in salts, while plant-based compost is typically lower in salts but more expensive.

Finally, remember to choose amendments based on your soil's needs and crop requirements. For more information, see CMG Garden Notes #711, PlantTalk Colorado #1605, or Choosing a Soil Amendment by John Murgel. 🌱



By Sarah Erdman,
Master Gardener

events 'n classes

COMMUNITY-WIDE RESOURCES

Grow and Give Program – Grow Food & Share The Harvest
Colorado State University Extension, growgive.extension.colostate.edu (includes vegetable growing tips), or join the Larimer County program at <https://col.st/74yjy>

Reach a Larimer County Master Gardener Year–Round!
Larimer County Master Gardeners are always available to answer your gardening questions. Email: larimermg@gmail.com

Gardening Q&A Booth at the Larimer County Farmers' Market
Saturdays, May 16 to Oct. 31, 200 W. Oak St., Fort Collins, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, LarimerCountyFM.org

Larimer County Master Gardener Office Duty
In office every Tuesday and Thursday, May 2 to Oct. 1, larimermg@gmail.com or 970–498–6000, 1525 Blue Spruce Dr., Fort Collins, 10 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, LarimerExtension.org

Loveland Farmers' Market Master Gardener Q&A Booth
June 14, July 12, Aug. 9, and Sept. 13, Fairgrounds Park, 700 S. Railroad Ave., 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, lovgov.org/services/parks-recreation/events/farmers-market

Master Gardener Q&A Booth at Greeley Farmers' Market
Every Saturday May to August, Union Pacific Depot, 902 7th Ave., Greeley, 8 a.m.–noon, Free, greeleygov.com/activities/fm

Master Gardener Q&A Booth at Windsor Farmers' Market
Every Saturday June to August, 110 5th St., Windsor, 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/213/Farmers-Market

Town of Berthoud Farmers' Market Master Gardener Q&A Booth
June 20, July 18, Aug. 15, and Sept. 19, Town Park, 200 N. 7th St., 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, berthoud.org/1430/The-Berthoud-Market

Weld County Master Gardeners Help Desk
Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday until Oct. 31, Walk-ins welcome during Help Desk hours, 525 N 15th Ave., Greeley, weldmastergardener@gmail.com, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, WeldMasterGardeners.org

COMMUNITY-WIDE EDUCATION

Extension Gardening Webinars Archive
Recordings of previous gardening webinars are available at any time, Free, planttalk.colostate.edu/webinars

April 28 » Vegetable Gardening in Colorado
Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

May 6 » Create a Pollinator–Friendly, Water–Efficient Garden
Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

May 13 » Myths, Mistakes and Misunderstood Insects
Presented by Melissa Schreiner with CSU Extension in the Tri–River Area, noon–1 p.m., Free, registration required, planttalk.colostate.edu/webinars

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events n' classes

May 14 » Gardening at Altitude:

Native Plants for Mountain Landscapes

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

May 19 » Beyond Pollinators: What Insects Reveal About Your Garden's Health

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

May 27 » Colorado Native Plants: Top Species for Waterwise Yards

Resource Central, noon–1:30 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

June 2 » Compost 101: Basics of Building Healthy Soil

Resource Central, 5–6:30 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

June 10 » All the Common Weeds and What They Tell You

Presented by Cassey Anderson with CSU Extension, noon–1 p.m., Free, registration required, planttalk.colostate.edu/webinars

June 17 » How to Create a Bird-Friendly Landscape in Colorado – English (Spanish version 6/24/26)

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

July 8 » Native Plants are Imaginary

Presented by John Murgel with CSU Extension in Douglas County, noon–1 p.m., Free, registration required, planttalk.colostate.edu/webinars

Aug. 3 » Working With Seeds Through the Seasons

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

Aug. 5 » Late Summer Perennial Gardening in Colorado

Resource Central, noon–1:30 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

Aug. 10 » How to Design a Rock Garden for Colorado's Climate

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

Aug. 12 » Showstoppers and Habitat Heroes: Native Plants for your Home Landscape

Presented by Allisa Zurbuchen with El Paso County Extension, noon–1 p.m., Free, registration required, planttalk.colostate.edu/webinars

Aug. 12 » Your Native Plant Garden: What to Expect as Your Landscape Matures – English (Spanish version 8/19/26)

Resource Central, 6:30–8 p.m., Free, registration required, resourcecentral.org/seminars

BERTHOUD

June 13 » Conservation Gardens Fair

Northern Water Headquarters, 220 Water Ave., 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, See website for details, northernwater.org/about/education-and-outreach/events

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SPIGOT-TO-DRIP SYSTEMS

One of my favorite DIY garden hacks are spigot-to-drip systems. These systems run drip irrigation off a hose bib and use a timer to turn the irrigation on and off. For gardeners who don't have a permanent, in-ground irrigation system, a spigot-to-drip system is an affordable option that allows you to automate watering and maximize irrigation efficiency and minimize evaporation that occurs with overhead watering.

TO SET UP A SPIGOT-TO-DRIP SYSTEM YOU WILL NEED THE FOLLOWING PARTS:

Y-Hose Splitter with at least 2 shut-offs: brass or metal connectors are the most durable

PTFE Thread Seal Tape: Thread tape helps seal threaded connections and prevent leaking. I've found "Blue Monster" brand to the best at preventing slow leaks. Thread tape should be wrapped around each threaded connection in the direction you will screw together the fittings.

Battery Powered Timer: There are multiple types of timers available including egg timers, digitally programmable timers and smart timers that can be programmed from a phone app.

Backflow Preventer: This piece prevents potentially contaminated irrigation water from flowing back into the drinking water supply.

Pressure regulator and Wye Filter: Pressure reduction is essential for drip to work efficiently, and the filter helps prevent drip emitters from getting clogged.

Hose Thread to Plumbing Thread Adapter: This piece is installed after the filter and converts the threading from housing plumbing threading to hose threading.

Hose: A short length of hose can be used to connect drip tubing to rest of components. Drip tubing can also be used with fittings but is less flexible.

Drip tubing: Solid tubing can be used to move water to distant garden beds. In-line drip tape or point source drip emitters are used to move water to base of plants.

Landscape staples: to secure drip tubing to ground

Mulch: Cover drip tubing with mulch to prevent UV degradation.

Flush valve fitting: Include a flush valve at the end of the irrigation line so that lines can be cleaned out.



by Emma Pett, Water Conservation Technician

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Install a Y-splitter at the spigot so that you can use one side for a drip system and the other for a hose connection.
- Ensure that the adapter to convert plumbing threading to hose threading is oriented in the correct direction so that you don't damage components by cross threading.
- Use thread tape at each threaded connection to prevent leaks. Flush the system with water before installing emitters or capping the end of inline drip.
- Regularly check your drip filter and rinse it out if it gets sediment in it.
- Flush the system before installing emitters or capping an inline drip system to remove any sediment or debris from the lines.
- Avoid sharp bends in drip lines, this can cause kinks in the line. Create wider angle loops when changing directions or use fittings to create right angle turns when necessary.
- Inline drip is great for densely planted areas and for trees. Point source drip is better for more sparsely planted areas or for plantings that have mixed water requirements.
- Most of these parts can be found at an irrigation supply store. The Y-splitter for the hose bib and timer likely will need to be purchased at another store. 🌱

Free drip irrigation tool kits are available for loan through the Poudre Library. Check with your water utility to see if they offer rebates for drip irrigation.

THE INS AND OUTS OF SOIL TESTING:

A HOW-TO GUIDE



By Alison O'Connor, CSU Extension in Larimer County, Horticulture Professor

It's likely that you've heard of soil testing, but maybe it's unclear of when it's necessary and what it provides. And if you've tested your soil, perhaps the report left you mystified. Let's cover the ins and outs of doing soil testing, how to do it properly, and where to get it done.

A soil test is a wonderful resource to provide gardeners with baseline measurements and information regarding their soil. It's especially useful for vegetable gardens that often get amended every season. Having baseline measurements is a way to keep track of your garden's inputs. For example, amending every year may not be necessary, especially if your organic matter levels are near 4-5%. If you're planting a new landscape, soil testing can be a roadmap for the future.

It's important to use a certified lab (and not the off-the-shelf kits), which produce valid, replicable results. A routine soil test will cost between \$20-35 (not including shipping), depending on the lab you use and the level of testing.

IN ADDITION, A SOIL TEST WILL PROVIDE:

- Quantifiable information gardeners can refer to in future years
- Information to help determine if a management change, such as adding amendments, has impacted your soil
- Recommendations specific to your garden soil

However, soil tests will not help you solve any diagnostic problems, like pests or disease, or provide information on cultural management practices. Also, a routine soil test will not provide information about possible herbicide, insecticide, or chemical contamination. These tests can be done but require a specialized lab.

Also, because soil tests are a snapshot in time, some nutrient levels, like nitrogen (tested as nitrate) change quickly and your results may not reflect what is available to plants in the garden. If you test the soil in your vegetable garden, it is unlikely to apply to areas in the rest of the landscape, like your perennial gardens, and sometimes testing is just unnecessary—such as a 20-year-old lawn area. The results from testing these areas are very unlikely to affect how you maintain those spaces. Finally, interpreting soil test results can be tricky, so reach out to your local Extension Office or the lab for clarification.

A basic test will test for pH, salts (EC), and organic matter levels, and major nutrients (nitrate, phosphorus, potassium, and sulfur). A complete test typically includes micronutrients (e.g. magnesium, manganese, copper).

Because of Colorado's typically high pH levels, there are certain testing components unique to alkaline soils, which is why using a local or regional certified lab is important. 🌱

THE FOLLOWING ARE OPTIONS

CSU SOIL, PLANT, AND WATER TESTING LAB

(Denver)

Basic soil test | **\$38**

Complete soil test | **\$45**

WELD LABS

(Greeley)

Basic soil test | **\$20**

Essential soil test | **\$26**

WARD LABS

(Kearney, NE)

Basic soil test | **\$17.35**

Routine soil test | **\$23.65**

events 'n classes

DENVER

June 11 » Plant Select Annual Conference

Denver Botanic Gardens, 1007 York St., 8:30 a.m.–4 p.m., plantselect.org

FORT COLLINS

Most Saturdays » Tai Chi

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 8 or 9 a.m., \$15, fortcollins.gov/gardens

April 26 » Educational Table presented by People & Pollinators Action Network

CSU Orchestra concert, The Birds and the Bees, 7:30 p.m., Free, music.colostate.edu/events/concert-orchestra-concert-the-birds-and-the-bees-free

May 2 » Home Grown Food 19th Annual Starter Barter & Plant Sale

Sproutin' Up, 520 Hickory St., 10 a.m.–noon, Free admission, homegrownfoodcolorado.org/starter-barter-plant-sale

May 2 » Just Drip It!

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 10 a.m.–12:30 p.m., \$10 in-person / \$5 virtual, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 2 » From Milk to Magic: Crafting Fresh Mozzarella & Cottage Cheese

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 10 a.m.–1 p.m., \$40, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 2 » Bonsai 101

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 1:30–3:30 p.m., \$75, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 9 » Mindful Birding

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9 a.m.–noon, \$30, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 9 » Collage Flowers

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 2:30–3:30 p.m., \$25, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 16 » Larimer County Farmers' Market

Every Saturday, May 16th to Oct. 31st, 200 W. Oak Street, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., Free admission, larimercountyfm.org

May 16 – May 17 » Spring Plant Sale

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9 a.m.–5 p.m., Free; ticket required, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 16 » Garden Mindfulness Techniques

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 1–2 p.m., \$25 virtual, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 23 » Visible Mending Workshop

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30–11:30 a.m., \$30, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 23 » Uses of Locally Grown Medicinal Plants

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 1:30–3:30 p.m., \$23 in-person / \$10 virtual, fortcollins.gov/gardens

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)

May 23 » Garden to Glass Mocktails

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 2–3:30 p.m., \$35, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 30 » Diagnosing Drama in the Garden

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9–10:30 a.m., \$10 in-person / \$ 5 virtual, fortcollins.gov/gardens

May 31 » Mindfulness—An Approach to Life

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 1–3 p.m., \$25, fortcollins.gov/gardens

June 6 » Why are Trees so Cool

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 10–11:30 a.m., \$10 in-person / \$5 virtual, fortcollins.gov/gardens

June 6 » NOCO Native Plant Swap and Giveaway (at the Fort Collins EcoFest)

Washington Park, 301 Maple St., 10 a.m.–1 p.m., Free, vhub.at/noconative

June 13 » In the Weeds: Common Problem Plants and How to Manage Them

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 10–11:30 a.m., \$23, fortcollins.gov/gardens

Mid-June to Mid-Aug. » Northern Colorado Daylily Club's Display Garden

at Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., See website for details, Entrance fee to the Gardens applies, nocodaylily.org

June 19 – June 21 » Father's Day Tree Sale

Fort Collins Nursery, 2121 E. Mulberry St., 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (Fri–Sat)/10 a.m.–5 p.m. (Sun), Free admission, fortcollinsnursery.com

June 20 » Pollinator 101: What the Buzz!

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30–11 a.m., fortcollins.gov/gardens

June 20 » Awakening with Nature: Seasonal Meditation and Breathwork

The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 9:30–11:30 a.m., \$60, fortcollins.gov/gardens

June 25 » Twilight Garden Series: Native Plants

Held at The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Avenue, 6–8 p.m., See website for details, fcgov.com/gardens

June 27 » Garden Tour 2026 hosted by the Junior League of Fort Collins

see website for location details, 8 a.m.–1 p.m., \$30, zeffy.com/en-US/ticketing/garden-tour-2026

July 17 – July 19 » Summer Perennial Sale

Fort Collins Nursery, 2121 E. Mulberry St., 9 a.m.–5 p.m. (Fri–Sat)/10 a.m.–5 p.m. (Sun), fortcollinsnursery.com

July 23 » Twilight Garden Series: Creating Beauty in the Garden

Held at the CSU Trial Gardens, 1401 Remington St., 6–8 p.m., See website for details, fcgov.com/gardens

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Vegetable and herb gardening IN COLORADO SOILS

The hope and joy that comes in springtime for gardeners is, in no small part, due to gardens beginning to grow. There are several key components that can help gardeners, both experienced and new, to have a successful herb and vegetable garden.

Planning what you want to put in the garden and when is a great start that can satisfy gardeners' early season longing to be in the garden. Cool season crops that tolerate air temperatures down to 28 degrees Fahrenheit such as beets, radishes, lettuce, spinach, etc. can be planted in March or April, and again in late summer for a fall crop.

Soil temperature is important when planting. Warm season crops (e.g., tomatoes, beans, peppers, melons) are more particular about temperatures and like soil temperatures to be above 60 degrees Fahrenheit before planting. If you plant tomato seedlings into cold soil, the plants will often sulk. It's better to wait until the soil has warmed so the plant grows immediately. To measure soil temperatures, it's best to dedicate a thermometer to that purpose—use an old (or new!) kitchen thermometer. Test soil temperatures once the sun has risen in the morning, 4–6" deep into the soil.

Most seeds can be "pre-germinated" inside with a wet paper towel and a lightly sealed container or plastic zip bag for 12–24 hours prior to planting. Pumpkins, beans, melons, and squash can be directly sown after mid-May. It can be useful to write up a timeline of when to start seeds based on the needs of the varieties you select (count back from when you want to harvest and generally add about 3-7 days for germination time). The seed packet or seedling tag will give timing directions.

Herbs can be started from seeds but may take longer to germinate and grow than many annual vegetables. Some exceptions are annual herbs such as dill and basil, which grow rapidly. For perennial herbs such as oregano, thyme, or chives, you can often find seedlings easily at your favorite local garden center. Herbs like moist, well-drained soil with full sun. If growing leaves, try to prune off any flowers as they can detract from leaf flavor.

Soil can make or break a successful garden. If you have never done a soil test, it's something to consider. Take 5–7 samples throughout your vegetable garden soil about 6" deep, and mix them together in a plastic bucket to get about 2 cups of material. Ensure any large pieces of plant material or rocks are removed and that the soil is completely dry, then send to a professional soil testing lab. For more information on the ins and outs of soil testing, refer to the partner article in this edition of NoCo Bloom.

Vegetable gardens are often sufficient in nutrients needed by vegetables if they have been amended and used for many years. New gardens may benefit from amending with organic material but a soil test from a professional lab will tell you if your soil has excesses or deficiencies.



By Cassey Anderson, CSU Extension in Adams County Horticulture Specialist

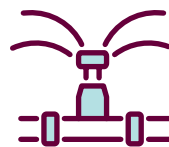


Nitrogen can be limited if the soil organic matter is low or if the garden is heavily used. This does not mean that all gardeners should add nitrogen every season. If you have 4–5% organic matter in your soil, microbes will do the work for you by digesting the organic matter and releasing nutrients including nitrogen for plant absorption. If you do not have 4–5% organic matter you may need to supplement with nitrogen fertilizer (organic or conventional, the plant doesn't care). Find a fertilizer that you like and that works for your garden needs.



When working soil, the soil should be moist, but not wet, to best preserve soil structure. Tilling is an option but best used sparingly. If you can, try to use a tool such as a broadfork. This helpful tool has a horizontal steel crossbar with several long, sharp tines and two long handles, which helps loosen the soil. Broadforks can be a great way to incorporate compost as an amendment—and it's a great workout for gardeners!

Avoid overhead irrigation in the vegetable garden and stick to methods that water plants at the base, such as drip, soaker hoses, or hand watering with a hose-end sprinkler. Overhead irrigation can waste water and encourage insects and diseases. Also consider adding mulch to your garden beds, such as thin layers of grass clippings, which break down quickly and add organic matter and valuable nutrients.



Remember that Colorado Master Gardeners and your local CSU Extension office can be a great resource for additional questions. 🌱



Find your local Extension Office at <https://col.st/x7130>.



events 'n classes

Aug. 1 » CSU Flower Trials Public Evaluation Day: Public is invited to vote for their favorites and provide feedback for breeders and retailers. Free tours on the hour. CSU Trial Gardens, 1401 Remington St., 9 a.m.–noon, Free admission, Flowertrials.colostate.edu

Aug. 8 » Birding 102
The Gardens on Spring Creek, 2145 Centre Ave., 8–10:30 a.m., \$30, fortcollins.gov/gardens

GREELY

Master Gardener Presentation, Hosted by LINC Library Carbon Valley Regional Library, 501 8th Ave., 6–7 p.m., Every third Thursday, Free, registration required, in-person, mylibrary.us/cvrl

LOVELAND

April–September » Native Plant Sale
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 180+ species of native plants available, Order online, pick-up in person, suburbitat.org

Chapter FL PEO Flower Sale, raising funds for educational scholarships for women
Faith Church, 2707 N. Wilson Ave, noon–4 p.m., Orders due 5/1/26: 970–667–6201 or maryella@qwestoffice.net

June 2 » Bird Banding & Bird Walk
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9–11 a.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

June 9 » Guided Trail Walk with Restoration Ecologists
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9–10:30 a.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

June 16 » Restoration Ecology Class
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9 a.m.–noon, Donation, suburbitat.org/events

June 23 » Native Bee Class & Survey
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 10 a.m.–noon, Donation, suburbitat.org/events

July 11 » Northern Colorado Daylily Club Members' Garden Tours
See website for details and to confirm date (growing season dependent), Free, nocodaylily.org

July 11 » Bird Banding & Bird Walk
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9–11 a.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

July 18 » Garden Tour at Chapungu Sculpture Park
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 10 a.m.–noon, Donation, suburbitat.org/events

July 31 » Moth Sheeting
High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 8 p.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

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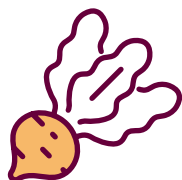
Soil Temperature & COMPATIBLE CROPS



60° & ABOVE

Use a thermometer!

tomatoes, beans, peppers, melons



45° & ABOVE

Plant in March or April & late summer

beets, radish, lettuce, spinach

GET GROUNDED:

SOIL SECRETS FOR XERIC GARDENS

For many of us, developing a rich, dark soil instinctively feels like the best thing to do for our gardens. But, as many of us learn as we experiment with growing xeric (low-water) and native plants, one size most definitely does not fit all when it comes to soil management.

While many vegetables and perennials we know and love thrive in richly amended, tilled soils with high levels of organic matter, many xeric plants, adapted to growing in drier sites, despise such settings. Instead of growing dense and healthy, plants fail to thrive, never developing with vigor or attaining full size. In some cases, like with amended soils under organic mulches (like wood mulch), some plants will even rot, typically after flowering when their energy is split between growth and seed development.

Because plants produce less overall growth in dry environments, soils in arid regions develop with smaller amounts of leaves and other types of plant matter breaking down into their profiles. As a result, soils in dry regions are naturally denser and less influenced by organic matter than soils from wetter regions. This influences their air- and water-holding capacity, microbial communities; and nutrient cycling. Amending each year with organic matter, like compost, actually pushes your garden soils further from what xeric garden plants want.

LESS IS MORE!

So, what's a gardener to do? In most cases, less! This may feel uncomfortable at first, but less amending and tilling is likely to feel like a relief, especially when results follow. Save tilling and amending for correcting compacted soils, which lack adequate pore space to allow for air and water delivery to plant roots, and suppress healthy microbial activity. Plants grown in compacted soils will be stunted, and the soil itself typically feels hard to the touch; you'll find such soils around construction projects and in high-traffic areas. Compaction can be insidious and happens more easily than most gardeners realize—particularly in clay soils. Minimize compaction by not working in the garden when soils are saturated, sticking to paths whenever possible—this may include building more paths where you frequently work or walk—and using mulch.

One approach to alleviate compaction is to spread a modest amount of slow-release nitrogen fertilizer and a deep layer of dried leaves on the space, then till once as deeply as you can manage. Don't be tempted to do more, as over-tilling is equally hard on garden soils. A couple inches of compost can replace a deep layer of leaves. Be sure it is not high in salts (reputable suppliers test for this) and is free of herbicide residues, which have become problematic in recent years. You can test for residues at home by growing beans and cucumbers in a pot of garden soil amended with a few inches of the compost in question; most problematic herbicide residues cause the leaves of these crops to cup.

Like over-amending, over-fertilization of xeric plants is easier than you'd expect. It results in floppy, excessive growth, increased pest and disease pressures, and reduced drought-tolerance. It will also increase weed pressure, as it feeds all plants in your garden, including those you don't want. So, fertilization in xeric gardens is more the exception than the rule. Save it for stressed plants that need a boost, recent transplants to help reduce transplant shock, or periodically (like on a five-year basis), if the garden is visibly losing vigor due to biomass having been removed year after year during cleanups. Many fertilizers work; I prefer to side-dress my plants with small amounts of slow-release fertilizers (either nitrogen sources like blood meal or complete, pelletized fertilizers) dug in two to three inches deep at the drip line of the plant.

SOIL COVERINGS DOUBLE YOUR EFFORTS

A handful of more familiar recommendations underpin responsible care in waterwise gardens. Minimizing soil disturbance—yes, this means no weeding with a cultivator—to reduce exposure to the resources existing weed seeds need to germinate and grow. Conveniently, this also reduces nutrient losses to erosion. Consider adding mulch—pea gravel is among the best for xeric plants in our area—which further decreases weed seed germination, helps to moderate soil temperature swings, and benefits soil moisture both by increasing water infiltration in addition to reducing water losses to evaporation. **PRO TIP:** *Stay away from any rocks coarser than pea gravel size (even ½" is too large), as they are challenging to weed, as well as synthetic mulches, which present a host of issues in the long run.* A properly mulched garden eliminates the need for weed fabric. And if you already have some onsite, it's worth the effort to remove it. Soil coverings are not essential; if my choice were between bare garden soil, weed fabric, or a coarse gravel mulch (1/2" gravel or larger), I would garden the bare soil, planting densely and including groundcovers to get many of the benefits of a mulch without the long-term issues of more problematic soil coverings.



By Bryan Fischer, Curator of Plant Collections, The Gardens on Spring Creek



WATERING HABITS IMPACT YOUR SOILS OVER TIME

Watering deeply and less frequently is a final tenet of waterwise soil management. Frequent, shallow waterings—like those that are common in turf settings and annual or lush perennial beds—encourage the development of a dense network of roots near the soil surface. These roots then quickly absorb the water available in the top few inches, becoming reliant on easy-to-access moisture. By watering less frequently and much more deeply, plants are forced to develop deep, plunging roots that access water from a much larger range in the soil's profile—making them less susceptible to long dry periods and abrupt temperature swings thanks to the insulating properties of the soil itself. A network of strong, deep roots will help to better anchor soil and contribute to its development over time, sinking appropriate amounts of organic matter and nutrients deeper into the matrix where both can be longer lasting than at the surface where increased heating, air movement, and microbial activity can diminish them in short order.

SOIL CARE IS PART OF THE BIGGER PICTURE

All plants need frequent and reliable irrigation through establishment and until they've rooted into the surrounding soil. For perennials, this could be a few weeks, though for trees and shrubs, it can be more in the order of months and years. I aim to water my waterwise home garden beds only as needed, which typically works out to anywhere from once a week to once or twice a month during summer depending on precipitation and heat. Planting into a properly prepared bed—remember, this may mean no soil amendment or tilling—and mulching the bed one to two inches deep with a pea gravel will go a long way in building a foundation that will allow your xeric plants to thrive. 🌱

events n' classes

Aug. 1 » Bird Banding & Bird Walk

High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9–11 a.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

Aug. 8 » Guided Trail Walk with Restoration Ecologists

High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 9–10:30 a.m., Donation, suburbitat.org/events

Aug. 22 » Garden Tour at Chapungu Sculpture Park

High Plains Environmental Center, 2698 Bluestem Willow Dr., 10 a.m.–noon, Donation, suburbitat.org/events

WINDSOR

Third Wednesday Garden Class, presented by Weld County Master Gardeners or horticultural professionals, Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 1524 7th St., May 20, July 15, Sept. 16, noon–12:45 p.m., June 17 and Aug. 19, 6–6:45 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/248/Treasure-Island-Demonstration-Garden

May 10 » Mother's Day Garden Tour

Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 1524 7th St., 1:30–3:30 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/248/Treasure-Island-Demonstration-Garden

June 14 » Father's Day Garden Tour

Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 1524 7th St., 1:30–3:30 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/248/Treasure-Island-Demonstration-Garden

June 23 » Sick Tree Day – Horticultural experts offer advice Town of Windsor, 5–8 p.m., Free, Contact the Community Recreation Center (970–674–3500) for an appointment, space limited

July 12 » Simplicity Day Garden Tour

Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 1524 7th St., 1:30–3:30 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/248/Treasure-Island-Demonstration-Garden

Aug. 9 » Book Lover's Day Garden Tour

Treasure Island Demonstration Garden, 1524 7th St., 1:30–3:30 p.m., Free, recreationliveshere.com/248/Treasure-Island-Demonstration-Garden



Compiled by Kathleen Atkins, CSU Extension Master Gardener. Event information is welcome at nocobloomevents@gmail.com

DIG THIS:

EXPERT PLANT PICKS FOR YOUR GARDEN

What should you plant this year? We asked the people who grow, study, and care for plants every day. From resilient performers to under-the-radar standouts, these selections combine beauty, adaptability, and real-world garden success.



Chad Miller | CSU
PUMPKINS (*Cucurbita*)

Pumpkins are among the most diverse of all horticultural species with these winter squash coming in all shapes and sizes. They can be warty, flat, miniature, the size of small cars, and come in an array of colors beyond orange, including white, speckled, dark green, butterscotch, and umber. Plus, pumpkins are edible and are perfect for fall decorations. What's not to love?

☀ Full Sun 💧 Moderate ⚡ Varies by species 🌍 Zones 3+; annual vegetable



Emma Pett | City of Fort Collins Utilities
PLAINS OVAL SEDGE (*Carex brevior*)

One of my favorite plants I grew this past season was Plains oval sedge (*Carex brevior*). It's not a flashy plant, but it is versatile and easy to grow. It can thrive in a variety of conditions ranging from a dry, shady meadow to a sunny, moist floodplain. Plants bloom from June into July.

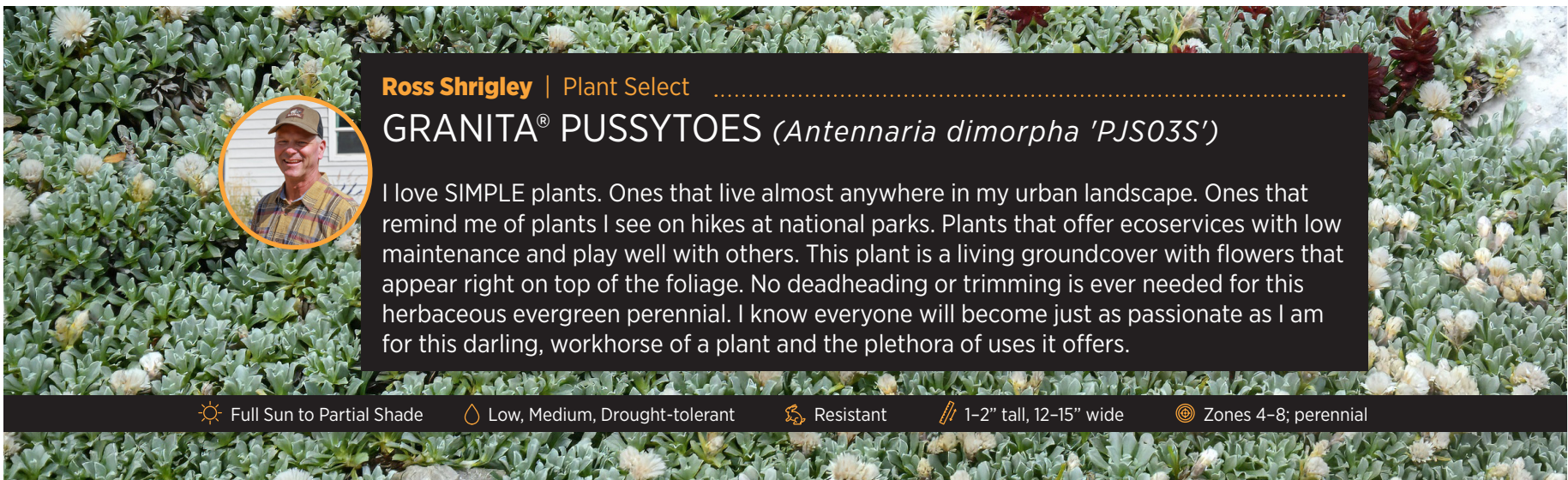
☀ Full Sun, Partial, Full Shade 💧 Low 🦋 Resistant 📏 2' Tall, 6-10" Wide 🌍 Zones 3-8; grass-like perennial



Kathleen Atkins | CSU Extension
SALVIA SUMMER JEWEL™ (*Salvia coccinea*)

One of my sure bet annuals for Colorado is the award-winning Salvia Summer Jewel™ series. I have used them in many situations—wretched soil, containers, part shade—and they have performed well in each location. Once established, this annual is surprisingly drought-resistant and it's available in four different colors. I frequently find them grown as affordable multipacks at my local nursery. Give one a try!

☀ Full Sun to Partial Shade 💧 Low 🦋 Resistant 📏 18-20" tall, 12-15" wide 🌍 Zones: 5-8 (annual) 8-10 (perennial); grown as an annual locally!

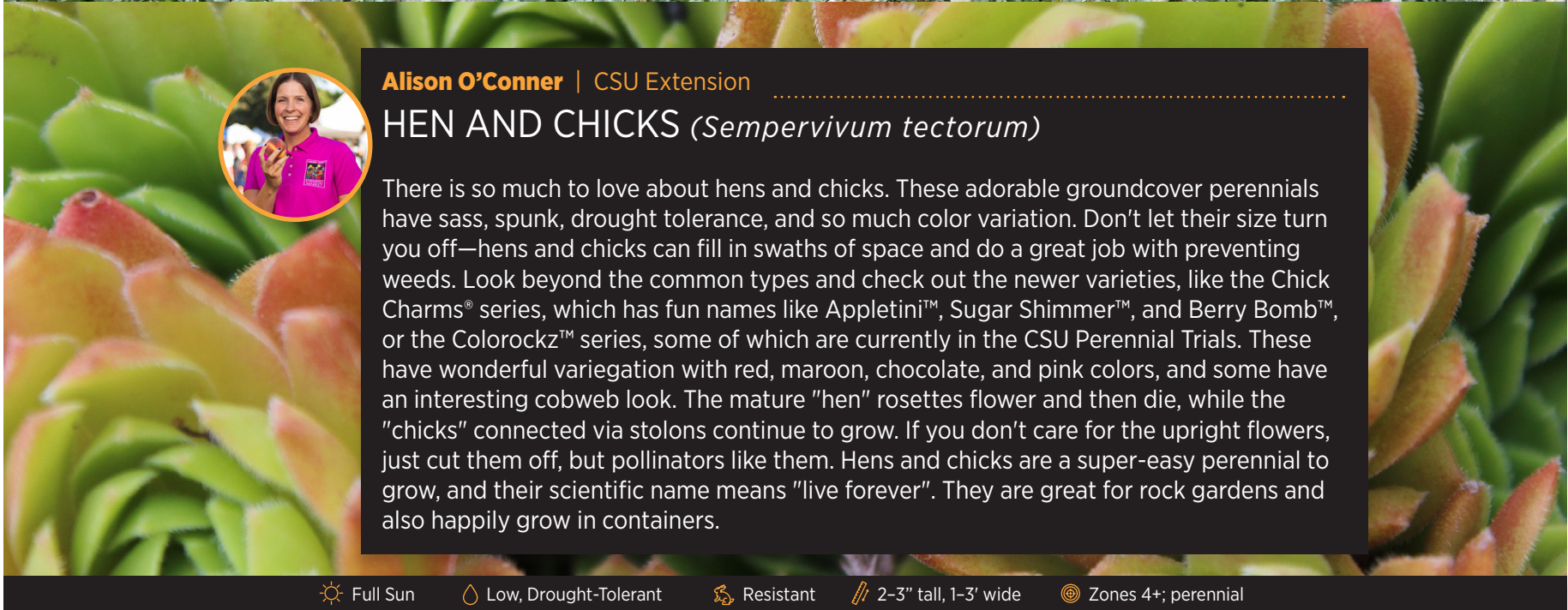


Ross Shrigley | Plant Select

GRANITA® PUSSYTOES (*Antennaria dimorpha* 'PJS03S')

I love SIMPLE plants. Ones that live almost anywhere in my urban landscape. Ones that remind me of plants I see on hikes at national parks. Plants that offer ecoservices with low maintenance and play well with others. This plant is a living groundcover with flowers that appear right on top of the foliage. No deadheading or trimming is ever needed for this herbaceous evergreen perennial. I know everyone will become just as passionate as I am for this darling, workhorse of a plant and the plethora of uses it offers.

☀ Full Sun to Partial Shade 💧 Low, Medium, Drought-tolerant 🐛 Resistant 📏 1-2" tall, 12-15" wide 🌍 Zones 4-8; perennial

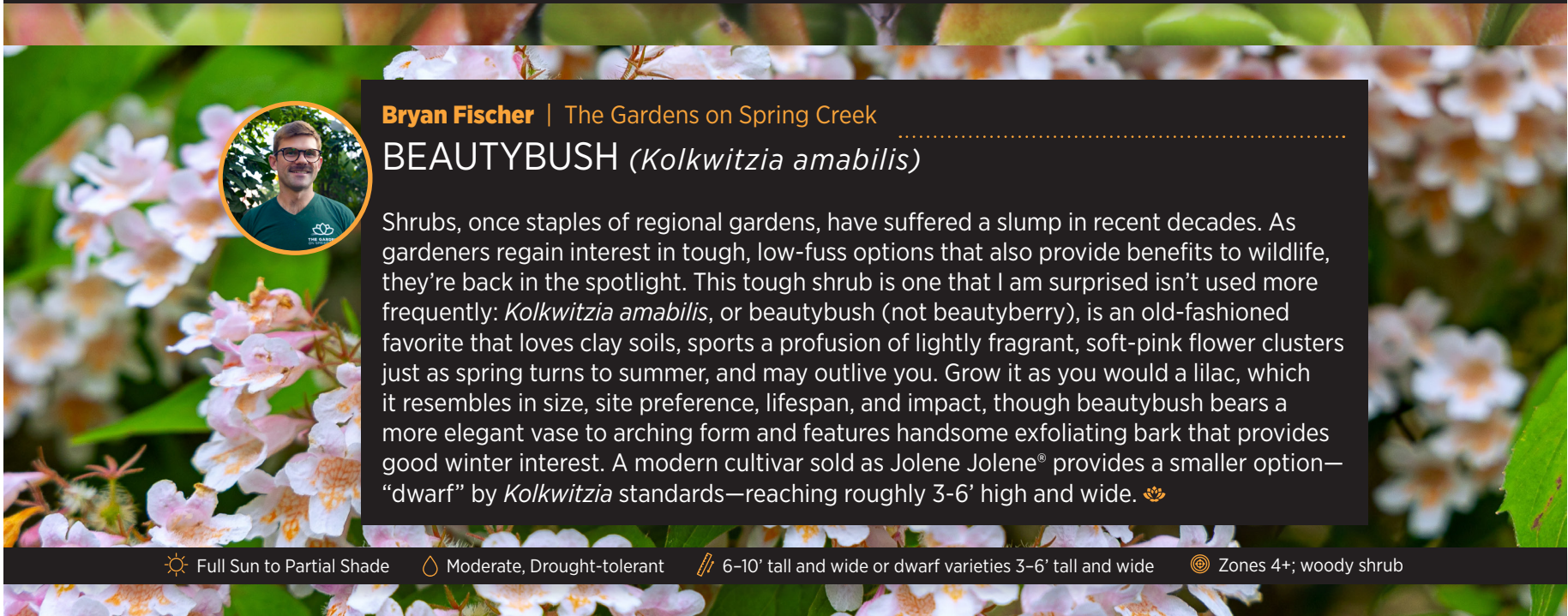


Alison O'Conner | CSU Extension

HEN AND CHICKS (*Sempervivum tectorum*)

There is so much to love about hens and chicks. These adorable groundcover perennials have sass, spunk, drought tolerance, and so much color variation. Don't let their size turn you off—hens and chicks can fill in swaths of space and do a great job with preventing weeds. Look beyond the common types and check out the newer varieties, like the Chick Charms® series, which has fun names like Appletini™, Sugar Shimmer™, and Berry Bomb™, or the Colorockz™ series, some of which are currently in the CSU Perennial Trials. These have wonderful variegation with red, maroon, chocolate, and pink colors, and some have an interesting cobweb look. The mature "hen" rosettes flower and then die, while the "chicks" connected via stolons continue to grow. If you don't care for the upright flowers, just cut them off, but pollinators like them. Hens and chicks are a super-easy perennial to grow, and their scientific name means "live forever". They are great for rock gardens and also happily grow in containers.

☀ Full Sun 💧 Low, Drought-Tolerant 🐛 Resistant 📏 2-3" tall, 1-3' wide 🌍 Zones 4+; perennial



Bryan Fischer | The Gardens on Spring Creek

BEAUTYBUSH (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*)

Shrubs, once staples of regional gardens, have suffered a slump in recent decades. As gardeners regain interest in tough, low-fuss options that also provide benefits to wildlife, they're back in the spotlight. This tough shrub is one that I am surprised isn't used more frequently: *Kolkwitzia amabilis*, or beautybush (not beautyberry), is an old-fashioned favorite that loves clay soils, sports a profusion of lightly fragrant, soft-pink flower clusters just as spring turns to summer, and may outlive you. Grow it as you would a lilac, which it resembles in size, site preference, lifespan, and impact, though beautybush bears a more elegant vase to arching form and features handsome exfoliating bark that provides good winter interest. A modern cultivar sold as Jolene Jolene® provides a smaller option—"dwarf" by *Kolkwitzia* standards—reaching roughly 3-6' high and wide. 🌸

☀ Full Sun to Partial Shade 💧 Moderate, Drought-tolerant 📏 6-10' tall and wide or dwarf varieties 3-6' tall and wide 🌍 Zones 4+; woody shrub

Garden Lemonading:

TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITY

The Cambridge Dictionary blog of possible new words defines “lemonading” as “a way of approaching problems or challenges in life that involves remaining positive and optimistic and seeing them as opportunities for growth or improvement.” It derives from the saying “when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

As an avid gardener, I know that many of us are “lemonading” any number of problems in the garden that give us the opportunity to come up with resolutions that are satisfying, functional, and beautiful. Looking back, most challenges I’ve encountered can be traced to three common factors. The first is underestimating the impact of wildlife. While it is wonderful to get a visit from these critters (I find raccoons are the exception), they are, at times, a source of destruction that necessitates solutions that are practical and sometimes unique. The second comes from those parts of our gardens that seem mundane or nonfunctional. Finally, challenges can arise from gardens that grow and spread, and not always in the intended ways. The growth of plants can lead to unruly chaos in need of order beyond the usual trimming or division. Read on for some of the problem-solving strategies that I have developed in conjunction with inspiration from other gardeners, resources such as our local extension service, and botanic gardens.



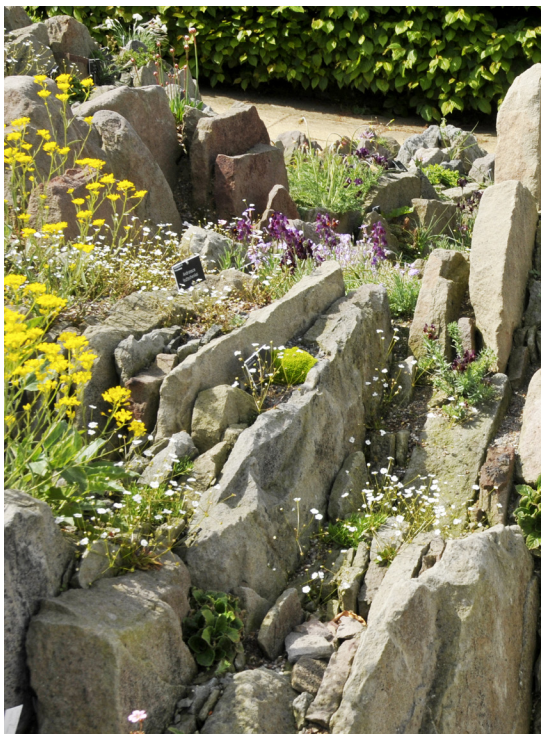
Raccoons, Elk, Deer, and Squirrels, Oh My! Lemonading Wildlife Problems

A great delight of living in Colorado are visits from cute bunnies, fawns with their mothers, elk, and the occasional bear and bobcat. However, their presence can also cause angst. Thankfully, most Colorado yards can tolerate some snacking of flowers, leaves, and shrubs. For instance, my neighbor has euonymus shrubs that are regularly eaten by elk and are rejuvenated come springtime. However, there are times when some behaviors of wildlife lead to serious injury of various plants in your landscape. For instance, I once was having some trouble with elk and deer rubbing the velvet off their antlers on my bristlecone pine. The only solution was to create a barrier that would allow the tree to heal and prevent further injury. Every fall, for about 4 years, I placed a fence around the tree until it healed and outgrew the need for the fencing. In wild landscapes, bristlecone pines exhibit eccentric growth that is shaped by a wide variety of environmental conditions, and their hardiness allows them to recover from various injuries caused by wildlife, strong winds, and other types of severe weather. In thinking about the bristlecone in wild landscapes, I have grown to appreciate the resilience of this unique imperfect looking tree and embrace its quirkiness.

Changing how I viewed the adorable visitors who often appear also helped me embrace an important truth: this space is meant to be shared. For instance, raccoons carefully monitored my grapes and, at the exact moment of ripeness, would bring the whole family for a feast. If I heard them in the middle of the night, I found that playing a YouTube video of bobcat hunting sounds would get them to leave. This unique technique worked much better than yelling out the window or banging pans in the middle of the night, which did nothing to stop the feeding frenzy.

There was no way I could protect my crop all the time, so I decided to share. I found there were always enough grapes for jelly and to share with both human and animal neighbors. The same was true for the apples that squirrels would eat part of, then throw on the ground. I could harvest nearly ripe apples and let them ripen on the kitchen counter, while the deer cleaned up the partially eaten apples discarded by the squirrels.

Lemonading the Ho-hum Parts of the Garden



One of the best examples of a ho-hum space transformation came from my neighbor. The mundane area was a small patch of soil that was occasionally used for growing herbs or tomatoes. After reading "Crevice Gardens" by Kenton Seth and Paul Spriggs, she was inspired to reinvent this site. According to the authors, a "crevice garden is a style of rock gardening that employs crevices between rocks to mimic the conditions that many difficult-to-grow plants need."

While crevice gardens can be somewhat labor-intensive to build, the labor required to maintain them is much less than for many types of perennial gardens. Slowly, over the course of one summer, she placed rocks and installed minimal irrigation, finishing the space by planting flowers and succulents, all described in Seth and Spriggs' book. This once odd and uninteresting space is now a bright spot in her yard.

Lemonading the Challenges of Plant Growth

As trees and shrubs grow, they provide more shade and coolness in the garden, but that shade can begin to stunt the growth of sun-loving plants. For example, my once-spindly apricot tree allowed more sun to reach the rhubarb planted a few feet away, helping it flourish and provide enough rhubarb for jam, tarts and crisps, and syrups used for desserts, pancakes and drinks. However, once the tree developed its spreading canopy, the rhubarb plant growth became nearly nonexistent. Digging it up and moving it to a sunny part of the yard led to its rejuvenation and the resumption of favorite rhubarb recipes.

Plant growth of the grapes on the pergola also became a problem. I had imagined that they would grow over the top of the pergola and provide shade in the summer. However, as the vines began to grow, they went everywhere. A garden tour during the summer showed me a possible solution; the homeowner had built a wire frame for a vining plant on a porch. I wasn't sure I could build a big enough frame for a pergola, but I could install a large net on the western side of my structure and install screens on the south side of the patio to provide shade and privacy.



In closing, our gardens are constantly changing, and most gardeners are "lemonading" whether they know or use this term. Some solutions are obvious, such as providing a method of plant protection for trees or replanting a favorite vegetable in a more suitable space. Others sometimes require more creativity or thinking about the problem differently. Share your favorite solutions with your fellow gardeners or take advantage of the resources that are freely available to you such as your local extension service, libraries, or farmers' markets where Master Gardeners eagerly await your questions. 🍋



Andrea Dunn, CSU Extension Master Gardener in Larimer County

WORD SEARCH

CAN YOU FIND THESE WORDS?



COMPOST

ROOTS

SPIGOT

SPRING

NITRATE

SEEDS

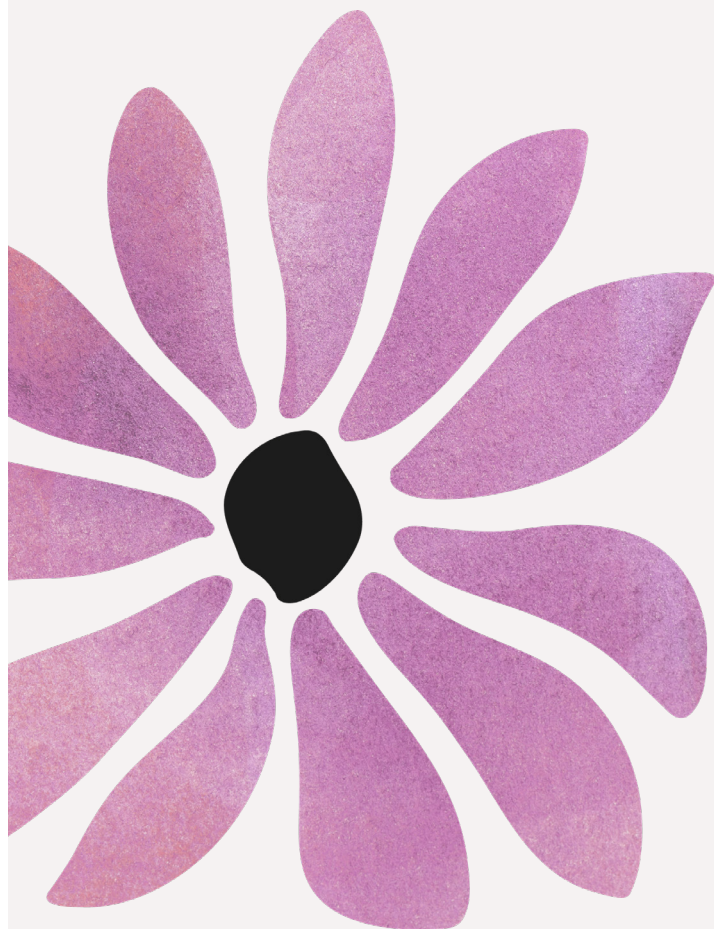
PUMPKIN

WILDLIFE



ANSWERS ON PG. 2

O	I	B	B	A	V	B	O	P	O
X	K	W	N	Q	E	X	S	U	J
P	S	J	I	J	E	J	E	M	N
E	P	P	R	L	O	W	E	P	I
S	I	X	D	O	D	U	D	K	T
F	G	T	X	P	O	L	S	I	R
C	O	M	P	O	S	T	I	N	A
U	T	N	O	C	E	Z	S	F	T
S	P	R	I	N	G	X	N	E	E
O	M	P	W	T	C	X	L	Y	Q



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SATURDAY, MAY 16 & SUNDAY, MAY 17



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BEFORE



AFTER



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