



April 2010

Plants of the Month

Amaryllis

Pink and white in spring, red for Valentine's day—why not? Amaryllis aren't just for Christmas. After that first holiday bloom, you can raise them two different ways. Always keep them watered and fertilized in a sunny location through the summer either indoors or out, and stop fertilizing in fall. If you want to manipulate them for a December bloom, at the end of summer force dormancy by placing them in a dark, cool spot for 6 weeks. Then move them to a sunny window and begin watering. Alternately, you can continue to water them all fall. They will keep some green leaves and bloom in late winter or spring. To speed up bloom, place in a warmer room.



Moss phlox

Phlox subulata

What a surprise that this ubiquitous ground cover is a native of Eastern North America that attracts butterflies and hummingbirds. Who knew something so common could be so beneficial? In spring, mounds of moss phlox are smothered with blossoms in shades of pink, violet, and white, which can run together creating puddles of color. Reaching 4-6 inches in height, it spreads into a thick mat about 2 feet wide with the wonderful advantage of being evergreen. Its narrow leaves, only about ½" long, give it an unusual prickly look, but it can tolerate occasional foot traffic. Moss phlox wants lots of sun and must have well-drained soil.



Do you have a plant or insect pest question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center 1-800-342-2507

Leatherleaf mahonia

Mahonia bealei

They don't call this "leatherleaf" for nothing-- and the spiny, holly-like leaves don't make it a candidate for a spot close to the front door either. But don't let that keep you from this interesting evergreen shrub. As early as forsythia, the 6 foot Mahonia blooms bright yellow with fragrant 6-12" wide clusters. They are followed by bright blue berries with a white waxy film resembling grapes. While edible, they are mainly relished by birds. Easy to grow in shade-semi shade in at least moderately moist, acid soil. Choose a protected spot so the long compound leaves don't get wind burn.



Asparagus

Asparagus officinalis

A 12-15 year harvest makes this vegetable mighty tempting, not to mention the health benefits of its succulent spears. In March-April, plant asparagus crowns in a full sun, well-drained bed enriched with manure, compost, or a combination. The edible part is an emerging shoot from the perennial roots. Do not harvest the first season after planting, harvest lightly for 3-4 weeks the second year, and 8-10 weeks each year thereafter. When harvest is over, spears grow into tall ferny plants. After foliage turns yellow from frost, cut it down before the red berries fall off. (Purchase all male crowns to avoid the berries.) Control weeds by hand pulling in early spring and using mulch. Read more at the Grow It Eat It website: www.growit.umd.edu under Vegetable Profiles.



Summer Snowflake

Leucojum aestivum

Leucojum's crisp white bells dangle atop foliage a good foot or more high, so that this bulb makes a much stronger statement in the garden than the similar but diminutive snowdrop bulbs of late winter-early spring. Leucojum first sends up graceful strappy leaves, glossy and green. The nodding blooms face downwards, all the better to show off a distinct green dot on each petal point. Bloom time coincides with azaleas and provides a delicate contrast. Plant leucojum in drifts or clumps for best affect. In sun to part shade and most any soil, they will multiply and can be divided after a few years.

