



November/December 2007 Volume 6; Issue 6

M. Bloomers

A Garden Journal

Leaves, Leaves and More Leaves... M'Randa Miller, Staff

Although the first day of winter is not until December 22nd, autumn has already dropped much of its color in your yard. Now, what should you do with those mounds of leaves? You could haul them off, stuff them in your dumpster, allow them sit until the next big wind re-scatters them, or play in them, of course. These are all great options if you are into hauling off, throwing away or playing in free money. (Hey, I didn't say they are all bad options!) When given a little treatment, these fall leaves can become extremely valuable mulch for the perennials in your flower beds.

WHY SHOULD I MULCH?

The goal of winter mulching is to help the soil stay consistently cold and keep your plants dormant through the winter season. Winter mulching provides protection so your plants will emerge again in the spring. Mulching helps the soil stay moist and with a small application of a high nitrogen fertilizer in the spring, it will decompose and provide nutrients. Perennials, especially tender perennials and roses, benefit from winter mulching.

WHAT IS DORMANCY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Dormancy is much like hibernation. This is when the plant stores all of its energy allowing only essential functions to occur. Ok, let's have a

quick scientific moment. Your perennials are much like you in that they are made of cells. These cells contain a large portion of water. When the water in the cells is allowed to freeze and thaw over and over again, the cell membranes can become weakened, damaged, and punctured from the formation of ice crystals, ultimately killing the plant.

HOW DO I MULCH?

Alright, let's get back to those mounds of leaves in your yard. First, let your kids, grandkids and/or neighbor's kids play in your piles. Then, with a smile and maybe some warm cookies, recruit a couple of them to give the piles a few passes with the lawn mower to achieve a nice shredded consistency. Shredding the leaves prevents them from packing around and smothering the plants that you are trying to protect. Apply a 3-6 inch layer of the shredded leaves to your flowerbeds.

WHEN SHOULD I MULCH?

Mulch should be applied after there have been 2-3 hard freezes. A hard freeze is when the temperature dips to 20-25°F and remains there for two or more hours.

Winter mulching with your fallen leaves is an extremely practical method to protect your perennials, clean up your yard, and save some money along the way.

"In wilderness I sense the miracle of life, and behind it our scientific accomplishments fade to trivia." - Charles A. Lindbergh, Life, 22 December 1967

Flowering Cabbage and Kale... Sharon Marry, Staff

Flowering cabbage and kale, Brassica Oleracea, has been increasing as a great ornamental landscaping addition in the past few years. They still take a back seat to the ever popular pansies, violas and snapdragons in our area, but are slowly becoming more popular. These plants are among the easiest to maintain and remain colorful throughout the winter months.

The flowering kale and cabbage produce brightly colored foliage in shades of green, purple, lavender and white and excel in our winter temperatures and landscapes. While many of our flowering plants, including garden mums, lose their flowers and/or color after several frosts, flowering cabbage and kale will intensify in color and last until it is time to plant your spring bedding plants.

Plant breeders have hybridized these ornamental versions of the cabbage and kale that we use as edible vegetables. The name "flowering" cabbage and kale is really a misnomer since the ornamental parts of the plant we see are really just fancy leaves that resemble the petals of flowers. Flowering kale has frilly leaves and flowering cabbage has smooth leaves. Within the kale group there are two types: the most common are the "fringed leaved cultivars" which have finely ruffled leaf margins and a smaller number which are called "feather leaved cultivars" which have leaves that are finely serrated and deeply notched. The plants can and often will eventually produce real flowers if it is left in the garden. Long stalks bearing small yellow flowers will develop when the weather warms in the spring. The flowers are not especially attractive and the foliage is usually quite ragged after surviving the winter. Most people remove the plants and deposit them in a compost pile long before they bloom. If left in the ground when warm weather approaches, they tend to develop long stems.

Minimum care is required when using the flowering cabbage and kale in landscape borders. Prepare the soil by adding 3 to 4 inches of organic matter and a slow release 12-6-6 fertilizer. Set the plant in the soil just slightly below the bottom set of leaves. The plants will reach 6 to 12 inches in height and should be spaced 12 to 18 inches apart. There should be good drainage yet they must be kept moist and fed every four to six



While many of our flowering plants, including garden mums, lose their flowers and/or color after several frosts, flowering cabbage and kale will intensify in color and last until it is time to plant your spring bedding plants.

weeks to keep them growing vigorously. Water stress or the lack of Nitrogen will result in yellowing and dropping of lower leaves. The color of the kale and cabbage intensify as the outdoor winter temperatures get colder.

About the only insect problem you may have are the same cabbage loopers that attack broccoli and cabbage. Treat them with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). This is an organic pest control that is safe and poses no threat to gardeners or pets.

Flowering kale and cabbage are not eaten, but the leaves do make very decorative garnishes for holiday feasts.

Flowering kale and cabbage work well with pansies, violas and snapdragons. For a bold display, try the purple or pink kale with drifts of the white accenting it with narcissus and daffodils behind the kale. The purple kale looks very attractive with yellow pansies. They also look exceptional in containers. Place three in a triangular design with daffodils in the center and pansies around the edges. If you haven't used flowering kale and cabbage before, try them this year for a gorgeous display of winter color.

"Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience." - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Poinsettias—Beautiful Beyond Christmas . . .

Poinsettias can remain beautiful far beyond the holiday season!

Care and Handling Tips

- ◆ Choose a plant with small, tightly clustered yellow buds in the center
- ◆ Look for crisp bright, undamaged foliage
- ◆ Avoid plants displayed in drafty areas
- ◆ At home, water the plant when dry, discard excess water in the saucer
- ◆ Place in room with enough bright, natural light to read a newspaper
- ◆ Keep out of drafts and away from appliances and radiators
- ◆ Do not put plant on the television set
- ◆ After a few weeks, fertilize with ordinary houseplant fertilizer

You can make the festive holiday spirit last all year... coaxing your Poinsettia to bloom again is a fun project when you tie it in with holidays on your calendar year round.

Christmas - Select plants with tightly clustered, yellow buds. Protect from hot or cold drafts, water when dry, and place in a room with enough natural light to read a newspaper.

New Year's - Use an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer. Continue light, water and fertilizer. Plant

will remain colorful for many weeks.

Valentine's Day - Do nothing unless your plant has become long and leggy. Then prune to five inches from the soil.

St. Patrick's Day - Remove faded and dried parts of the plant. Add more soil, preferably a commercially available sterile mix.

Memorial Day - Plant should be approaching two - three feet. Trim off two or three inches of branches to promote side branching. Re-pot to larger container. Move plant outside, first to indirect, then direct light.

4th of July - Trim plant again. Make sure it has full sunlight. Slightly increase amount of fertilizer. If you like, root cuttings – they root easily if kept warm.

Labor Day - Plant may have grown to three - four feet or more. Move indoors but make sure it has six hours of direct light from a curtain-free window. Reduce fertilizer.

First Day of Autumn - Starting on or near September 21, give plant 13 hours of uninterrupted darkness and 11 hours of bright light each day. Keep night temperature in the low 70's. Continue to water and fertilize. Rotate plant each day to give all sides even light.

Thanksgiving - Discontinue day/night treatment. Put plant in a sunny area. Reduce water.

Enjoy your poinsettias all year!

What's Cooking at the Café... Melissa Kirk

The taking of tea with friends is one of life's leisurely pleasures. Confidences and quiet laughter flow as freely as the tea itself, while bonds of friendship form over plates of bite-sized sweets and savories.

The tradition of afternoon tea, however, began as a solitary affair. Anna, the seventh Duchess of Bedford, and lady-in waiting to Queen Victoria, was troubled with a "sinking feeling" while suffering the long stretch between lunch and dinner. Her cure? A daily dose of tea and cakes.

We invite you to join us for the first 2008 Sunday dose of sweets, savories, and friends. This "Snowflake Tea" will be Sunday, January 13th from 2-4 pm. Gather together your friends and family and enjoy this quiet time after the holiday rush. Seating is limited, call Café M. Bloomers to

make your reservations (confirmed by credit card) today.



Calling all Brides... Café M. Bloomers is the perfect setting to make your bridal luncheon or shower most memorable. Surrounded by beautifully landscaped gardens, Café M. Bloomers can provide a very peaceful and tranquil bridal brunch as well as an intimate shower in our hidden Arbor Room. Please contact Bonnie Larsen to schedule your upcoming bridal event.

Café M. Bloomers

(936) 870-3277

Calendar of Events...

Saturday Seminars

(and they are Free!)

“Why Organic?”

Saturday, February 2 at 11 am. Presented by Isaac Smuin.

“To Prune or Not to Prune”

Saturday, February 16 at 11 am. Presented by John Warner, Texas Forest Service.

Teas

“Snowflake Tea”, Sunday, January 13 from 2 pm—4 pm. \$15 per person.

“Valentine Tea”, Sunday, February 10 from 2 pm—4 pm. \$15 per person.

*For tea reservations confirmed by credit card,
call Café M. Bloomers at (936) 870-3277.*

For more information on our seminars, visit us at www.MarthasBloomers.com.
To Register for Free Saturday Seminars: Call (936) 870-4044 or
email: registration@MarthasBloomers.com.

We welcome your suggestions for future seminars.
Please email to: suggestions@MarthasBloomers.com
For Luncheon and Tea reservations confirmed by credit card,
please call Café M. Bloomers at (936) 870-3277.



Store Hours Mon-Sat 9am - 6pm Sun 11am - 5pm Martha's Bloomers (936) 825-7400

Café M. Bloomers, a Tea Room (936) 870-3277

Cafe Open Tues-Sun (Closed Monday) Serving Lunch 11am - 3pm Desserts until 4pm