



Digging in Dodge

Chocolate for the Garden



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Around Valentine's Day people turn to chocolate as the universally acceptable gift. Instead of going for the calorie laden type, consider trying giving the gift of plants or seeds to make a "chocolate" garden. Some of the plants look like chocolate, but others will even give off a fragrance of chocolate without adding any pounds.



Native and hardy to zone 5 is a native quarter-sized yellow daisy wildflower with chocolate-colored stamens, *Berlandiera lyrata*. It is a night bloomer that gives off a cocoa scent in the morning, is 1–2 feet tall, will grow well in full sun and dry to medium well-drained soils.

Another hardy perennial is 'Sweet Hot Chocolate' daylily. Although the flower buds are edible, they are grown for the chocolate-colored blooms. This 2-foot-tall plant is grown like any daylily, in full sun with average, medium to well-drained soils.

Perennial 'Chocolate Ruffles' or 'Chocolate Veil' heucheras (coral bells) have dark chocolate foliage with purple highlights and low growth (10 inches) making this plant perfect for garden edges or containers.

Annual Chocolate cosmos, *Cosmos atrosanguineus*, either 'Dark Chocolate' or 'Chocolate Mint', bring both the chocolate look and fragrance to the garden. The blooms are a very dark chocolate color, velvety textured, with a dark chocolate fragrance. They grow in full sun, well-drained soil, and will be around 2 feet tall.

Chocolate mint (*Mentha piperata*) has a minty-chocolate fragrance and taste.

However, like most plants in the mint family, it has a very aggressive growth habit and should only be grown in containers in sun to part shade.

There are chocolate sunflowers, hollyhocks, dahlias, sweet williams, coleus, Joe Pye Weed, nasturtiums. But, don't neglect the vegetables.

What would appeal to a child more than chocolate corn? It tastes like corn, but looks like remarkably like chocolate.

Chocolate tomatoes are available as cherry, pear, and full-sized varieties. All have the familiar tomato taste, but with a delicious chocolate appearance. The full-sized chocolate tomatoes include: 'Cherokee Chocolate', 'Black Krim', 'Chocolate Stripes', and 'Paul Robeson'.

One of the chocolatiest looking vegetables is a 'Sweet Chocolate Pepper'. This mild flavored, medium sized pepper starts out green, but ripens into a deep chocolate brown. It is a crispy pepper, a bit sweeter than a traditional bell pepper.

If a chocolate loving gardener is on the gift list this year, the Chocolate Flower Farm (http://www.chocolateflowerfarm.com/chocolate_garden_seed_kits) offers a Chocolate Garden Seed Kit with seeds for six of their most popular plants: Chocolate Cosmos, Chocolate Daisy, Chocolate Viola, Chocolate Morning Glory, Chocolate Pincushion Flower and Chocolate Sunflower. They also offer a kid's version with a few different plants if a younger gardener might be interested in this fun adventure.

Carol Shirk
Certified Master Gardener

Upcoming Educational Programs/Meetings

Master Gardener Educational Programs are held on the fourth Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. Unless otherwise noted, the meetings are at **Moraine Park Technical College**, Beaver Dam. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Note: New Venue
Moraine Park Technical College 700 Gould Street Beaver Dam

February 23—Cold Climate Grape Growing by Will Fulwider. An overview of grape growing for the home gardener, including variety and site selection, training and pruning, common pests and diseases, management, and harvest considerations. Will Fulwider is the Regional Crop and Soils Educator for Dane and Dodge County Extension. He works with farmers across the two counties on field and forage crop production. Prior to joining Extension, Will helped manage a vineyard in Dane County and worked on educational programming for grape growers in Napa.

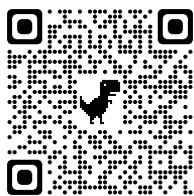
March 23—Spring Ephemerals by Chris Jacobs. Although brief, ephemerals are our first glimpse of spring. Learn more about the characteristics of spring ephemerals, their importance, and some of the common spring ephemerals in Wisconsin. Chris Jacobs has been a Certified Master Gardener since 2008 and has been an active member, serving as a Board member, Gardening for Gold chair, newsletter and Facebook editor and coordinator for many committees. She enjoys learning more each year and teaching others about the joys of horticulture.

April 27—Annual Business Meeting (members only). Association business, including presentation of certification cards, updates on all projects and new this year: a meal will be provided as appreciation to our volunteers.

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Dodge County Master Gardener E-mail

dcwimg@gmail.com

Master Gardener Websites

<https://mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu/>

<https://www.wimga.org/>

Chocolate



Approximately, thirty-six million heart shaped boxes of chocolate are sold each year for Valentine's Day. Have you ever thought about where chocolate comes from, or how it came about that chocolate and Valentine's Day go hand in hand?

Chocolate has been around for thousands of years, but not in the sense that we know it. Originally it was a bitter drink used for sacred rituals and special ceremonies. For many years, cacao was considered a delicacy or luxury. It wasn't until the 1840's that sweetened chocolate bars were developed.

Chocolate comes from a tropical tree, *Theobroma cacao*, native to tropical rainforests of central South America. It is a large shrub or small tree that grows 10 to 20 feet tall and requires hot, humid conditions, regular rainfall, and some shade for best production.

Trees begin bearing fruit at 3-4 years old, but don't really come into full production until reaching about 10 years. Plants produce pods that contain seeds called "beans." Once ripe, the pods are harvested by hand. It will take several different processing steps to produce the chocolate we know and love.

To learn more about chocolate, check out the articles by Susan Mahr, UW-Madison and Cynthia Haynes, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.

<https://mastergardener.extension.wisc.edu/files/2015/12/chocolate.pdf>

[For the Love of Chocolate | Horticulture and Home Pest News \(iastate.edu\)](#)

Romantic Houseplants



String of Hearts (*Ceropegia Woodii*)

This plant has trailing stems dotted with small, heart-shaped leaves that are usually green and silver but can sometimes have a touch of pink.

More delicate looking than the heartleaf philodendron, but almost as durable in bright light with regular watering.

String of Hearts is a long-lived and fast growing plant that is native to South Africa.

It loves plenty of sunlight—so place in a western or south-facing window. It thrives in well-drained cacti potting mixes and can cope with periods of neglect relatively well.

This is a good plant for inexperienced houseplant growers.

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/string-of-hearts-ceropegia-woodii/>



Heartleaf Philodendron (*Philodendron hederaceum*)

This plant has glossy, dark green leaves on twining stems that will trail or climb when trained and tied to a support.

It is an easy to grow popular houseplant native to Mexico, West Indies and Brazil.

Keep in part-shade and out of direct sunlight.

Be aware it is toxic to pets as it contains calcium oxalate crystals.

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=b611>



Anthurium (*Anthurium andraeanum*)

This is a show stopping plant with heart-shaped leaves and flowers. The waxy red, pink, or white flowers last for a long time indoors.

It grows in bright, indirect light. Make sure to water it whenever the soil has dried out.

It brings an exotic tropical punch to home décor.

Toxic to humans and pets.

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/anthurium/>

Black History Month

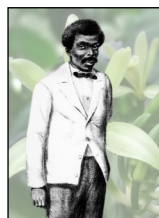
February is Black History Month. There are many famous black botanists, agriculturalists, and gardeners that have made a difference in the way we garden and farm. These are three of those individuals that have made such an impact over the years.



George Washington Carver (1860's—1943) is one of the greatest inventors and agricultural scientists in American history. He is best known for developing hundreds of uses for the peanut plant. He also revolutionized farming, developed crop rotation methods to improve soil health, improved conditions for poor farmers and promoted environmentalism. He educated farmers by developing simply-written brochures, urged farmers to submit soil samples, and designed the Jessup Wagon – a demonstration laboratory on wheels.

Dr. Carver was the first African American to earn a Bachelor and Master of Science Degree in Agriculture from Iowa State University. He joined the faculty of Tuskegee in 1896 and stayed there the rest of his life. He was both a teacher and a prolific researcher, heading up the institute's Agricultural Experiment Station.

For more details about the life of George Washington Carver visit: <https://www.sciencehistory.org/historical-profile/george-washington-carver>



Edmond Albius (1829-1880) revolutionized the cultivation of vanilla by inventing a technique of hand-pollination that changed the vanilla industry forever. In the wild, vanilla orchids are pollinated by bees and hummingbirds. With commercial vanilla production, pollination needs to be done by hand. Albius discovered that he could pollinate the vanilla orchid by manipulating the flower and gently moving the pollen to the flower's stigma with his thumb. He was 12 years old at the time of the discovery and enslaved on a plantation on an island in the Indian Ocean. His pollination technique is still used today.

Find out more at: <https://thesherman.org/2022/02/24/edmond-albius-and-the-story-of-vanilla/>



Dr. Marie Clark Taylor (1911-1990) was the first African-American woman to gain a PhD in botany, and the first woman of any race to gain a Ph.D. in science from Fordham University.

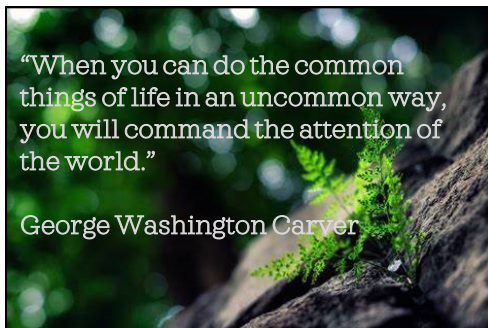
She later became Head of the Botany Department at Howard University.

She helped pave the way for Black women in science and her contributions to science education are still used in classrooms. She encouraged teachers to include using botanical materials during their lessons and light-microscopes to investigate living cells. Her teaching methods eventually reached the White House, where President Johnson asked her to implement them nationally and internationally.

To learn more about Dr. Marie Clark Taylor check out: <https://www.wowstem.org/post/marie-clark-taylor>

"When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world."

George Washington Carver



Forcing Branches to Bloom Indoors

Spring-flowering trees and shrubs such as Forsythia, redbud, dogwoods, crabapple, lilacs, pussy willows, and viburnums, form their flower buds in late summer or fall before the plants go dormant for the winter. The buds can be forced into bloom indoors in late winter or early spring to make a beautiful display for your home.

When selecting branches to use, find branches that have a lot of flower buds. Flower buds tend to be larger and plumper than leaf buds, which are often narrow and pointed. Select younger branches as they tend to have more flower buds than older branches.

The best time to cut branches for forcing is when temperatures are above freezing. Use clean, sharp pruners to cut branches that are about 1 to 2 feet long. Use proper cuts to protect the rest of the plant being left behind. Cut branches on the diagonal to ensure water uptake.

Take a few cuttings from each shrub/tree. Cut off only those branches that are not essential to the plants shape or spring flower display. Do not use suckers or water sprouts as they most likely won't have flower buds.

Place cut branches in a container of warm water. Four to 5 inches of water is deep enough to keep the cut end of branches submerged. While holding each stem underwater, make a fresh, diagonal cut 1 inch from the base. Cutting stems underwater will help prevent air from entering the stem through the cut end and blocking water uptake. Remove any buds and twigs that will be underwater.

Place the container in a cool (60- 70 °F), room out of direct sunlight. Change the water every few days to prevent the buildup of bacteria. Additionally, misting the branches several times a day will help prevent the buds from drying out.

Inspect the branches daily and once flower buds begin to open, place in a large vase with water. The bloom period will last longer in a cool room out of direct sunlight.

Depending on the type of plant you are trying to get to bloom, it can take from one to five weeks for the flowers to begin to open. Once they do begin to bloom, the flowers will typically last about a week.

If a branch doesn't bloom after three or four weeks, try again. The branch may have been cut too early. The closer to a plant's natural flowering period, the less time it takes to force the cut branches indoors.

Continuing to take cuttings for the next couple of weeks will provide continuous indoor blooms and an early spring to your home.

[Bringing Spring Indoors - Forcing Branches : University of Illinois Extension](#)

[Forcing spring flowering trees and shrubs to bloom indoors - MSU Extension](#)



?? Have a Gardening Question ??



Ask a gardening question year round to Wisconsin Horticulture at UW-Madison Division of Extension. Click on the link: <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/ask-a-gardening-question/>, complete the form and attach relevant photographs concerning your garden issue. Your inquiry will be responded to by an Extension staff member or a Master Gardener Volunteer in your area.

Dodge County Master Gardener Scholarship

The Dodge County Master Gardener Association will award a \$1,000 scholarship to a graduating high school senior who is planning a career in some area of horticulture.

The recipient must live in Dodge County and be a graduating from any public high school, parochial high school, or home school.

The student must have applied to a two or four year accredited college or technical school that has a program leading to a degree or certification in a horticulture or related area. Careers may include, but are not limited to, horticulture, plant science, soil science, agriculture, environmental science, landscaping, forestry, science education.

Application forms are available in the guidance offices or from Agricultural teachers and FFA sponsors of Dodge County and area high schools. They include Beaver Dam High School, Central Wisconsin Christian School, Columbus High School, Dodgeland High School, Hartford High School, Horicon High School, Hustisford High School, Lakeside Lutheran High School, Lomira High School, Mayville High School, Oconomowoc High School, Randolph High School, Waterloo High School, Watertown High School, and Waupun High School.

Interested individuals can also obtain an application by email from dcwimg@gmail.com. The deadline for applying for the scholarship is April 1, 2023.

“No winter wind shall chill my gardening heart.” – Blake Schreck

PBS Wisconsin Garden & Landscape Expo 2023



Gae Bergmann—Magnificent Monarch presentations



Carol Shirk—answering gardening questions at the Wisconsin Horticulture booth.

