



FEATURED QUOTE :

"Every spring is the only spring--a perpetual astonishment. "

~**Ellis Peters**

Espoma

Organic 4 Step Lawn Food Program

Finally you can have an affordable, chemical free lawn program that is safe for kids and pets.

The Espoma Organic program is ideal for any lawn. It contains no pesticides or synthetic ingredients. It adds organic matter to improve your soil while providing long lasting nutrition.

In fact, it contains 2.5 times more Slow Release Nitrogen than the leading synthetic program. That means it lasts longer, won't burn or leach away, and you won't have to mow your grass as often. Each product covers 5,000 sq. ft. and is specifically formulated to optimize greening at the time of application.

Cleomes

All plants have their home country, where they grow as a native wild flower--and the cleome's home is found in South America. Because the seed pods are so noticeable on the plant and easy to collect, many early explorers picked the seed pods to bring back to their home to show what they saw during the exploration of the New World. Because the seed was easy to store and germinated in most soils, it became an instant hit for the gardeners around the world.

The cleome, or spider flower, is a wonderful annual flower that will grow to 4.5 or even 6 feet tall over the summer months in your garden. The plant is known for the beautiful long and slender seed pods, resembling miniature string beans, that it forms just below the flowers as the blooms fade. The seeds that are ejected from the dried pods will lie dormant in your soil. The following spring, it is not uncommon to have many germinate in your garden and produce new flowers for you to enjoy for a second year without replanting.

The plant will produce a terminal flower stem to get started; on this stem, a large flower cluster made up of small, scented, four-petaled flowers will continue to form from spring to late fall. Side shoots will develop on the plant once the main stem has matured and the flowers and seed pods become numerous. The pods that form below the faded flowers and the flower that continues to form above the pods form a wonderful combination on the stem; this combination is responsible for its name,

"spider flower." The flowers come in white, shades of pink and pinkish purple, on these long stems that continue to grow and flower all summer long.

You will love the foliage on this plant as it is clean-looking at all times. The leaf is compound and resembles the fingers on your hand. Each leaflet is oval in shape with a pointed end and there could be 5 or more leaflets that make up the leaf. Each leaf can grow to be 8 to 10 inches across--and you will love the wrinkled effect that the sunken veins give each leaflet. Where the sunken veins are on the leaflets it is a darker shade of green than the rest of the leaflet, helping to give it additional character. A very unique characteristic of this plant is that the stems are sticky and have small hairs growing on them also. At the base of the leaves there are short spines, so be careful when you're working around them as they will grab hold of you, but not hurt you. The foliage of this plant is a dead ringer for the marijuana plant.

Many years ago a friend of mine had a large piece of property in Massachusetts and while exploring he came across what he thought was a wildflower patch. There were cleome and other flowers growing among the real marijuana plants to help disguise the growing plants. He took pictures of the wildflowers to show me and to his surprise I showed him the hidden special plants growing on his land. The next day we removed the plants that did not belong on his property and disposed of them while they were young and nonproductive but the garden never looked the same after that--and we still talk about our find of "wildflowers" growing on his land.

When you go to the garden center or nursery looking for cleome seedlings to plant out in your garden, you will be disappointed because they do not set flower buds early on the young plants, just nice clean foliage. I think that this is why many of you have never grown this plant in your garden before--because you do not see flowers on the plant like petunias or marigolds have in the seedling boxes. The flowers will not develop until the plant is well established and 12 to 18 inches tall in your garden, so this year look for the plants and give them time to make these wonderful flowers in your garden.

I told you that the plants grow tall, up to 4 to 6 feet, but I did not tell you that the roots are very strong and anchor the plant to the ground so it will not move. The stems are also very strong, so you will not have to stake this plant in the garden. These strong-growing plants will tolerate the wind near the seashore and do well in a wide open garden with no protection from the wind and stormy weather.

Plant your cleome seedlings in a full sun garden. If you have a hot spot where nothing seems to grow due to the heat, this is your plant for that spot. The better you condition the soil before planting with compost, seaweed, or coco fibers (called coir) from Black Gold Soil Company, the larger and more productive the plants will become. The plants prefer a rich soil that is able to hold water but is also well-drained. When you set out the plants, give them room to grow and space them at least 2 feet apart so they have room to grow properly. What I do is plant short annuals like marigolds, zinnias, cosmos, and even petunias in-between them to fill in the spaces below the tall plants' foliage. I also plant a few seedlings in the perennial garden to help give it height in the background or right in the center of the garden for tall flower clusters all summer long.

Cleomes are loved by night-flying moths and will attract bees and hummingbirds to the garden, so be sure to plant some where you can enjoy the show of activity they will attract to the garden. I like to plant them in large and long drifts behind the garden for extra height; they work well in summer-flowering shrub gardens for summer color with potentilla, hydrangea, spiraea, and ornamental grasses.

Cleomes are drought tolerant, and if you can add 2 to 3 inches of compost, mulch or even pine needles they will thrive in a hot and dry garden, allowing you to water less during the heat of summer. Fertilize monthly with a good granular organic fertilizer or the new time release pellet called Dynamite at the time of planting. Too much fertilizer will force them to grow too tall and produce fewer flowers. The cleome is also a plant that has few insect and disease problems--a real positive factor for your garden. If your soil is on the sandy side, like the soils of Cape Cod, add a pinch of Soil Moist Granules in the hole before planting to help retain soil moisture during hot, dry spells of the summer.

Cleomes now come in shorter varieties for containers--and they look great when planted that way. Look for the Sparkler series for the best results. For the tall-growing varieties, look for 'Violet Queen,' 'Cherry Queen,' 'Pink Queen,' and 'Helen Campbell' (white) flowers. You can also cut the flower stems for flower arrangements and the special character they will add to the arrangement. So, this year, try this unique flower in your garden. You will be in for a special treat, as no other flower offers what the

Cleome plant has to offer in your garden all summer long. Every year I try a new flower in the garden. Some years they are a success, some do not make the cut and do not return the following year, but it gives me a chance to grow something new (and hopefully exciting) every year. The flower selection is so vast...don't plant the same thing every year; get creative and take a chance on something new. Enjoy!

Carrots

The carrot of today got its start in Europe and southwestern Asia. It has been domesticated and bred from the wild carrot and through selective breeding it has greatly enlarged in size. It has become more palatable, less woody in texture, and the nutritional value has increased tremendously.

The wild carrot ancestors of the carrot came from Iran and Afghanistan as a wild flower and were used for their aromatic foliage and seeds--NOT the roots. The root was bitter, so agricultural hybridizers worked for many years to improve the taste of the root to reduce its bitterness and increase its sweetness. They also worked to soften the central core, which was almost woody, to produce today's garden carrot.

Carrots are in the same family as Queen Ann's lace, so this summer, when that comes in bloom, look at the flower carefully, as it closely resembles the flower of the carrot. Carrots are a biennial plant and will flower and produce seed if left in the ground--for a second year only. The first year, the plant concentrates on producing foliage and a strong tap root that is able to store large quantities of sugar for the plant to be able to make flowers and seed the second year.

Other relatives of the carrot are parsley, fennel, dill, and cumin. The carrot root is best when eaten at the end of the first year while the sugars contend and vitamin levels are highest. Here is a very interesting fact I found about eating carrots.

If carrots are eaten raw, only 3% of the b-carotene is released during digestion. Take that same carrot and cook it in boiling water (fried, steamed or add them to soups and stews) and the b-carotene changes to 39% available during digestion--a big difference nutritionally. B-carotene gives the carrot its orange color and the characteristic that when eaten and digested, it produces vitamin A in humans--needed to improve better vision, including better vision at night. Carrots are also rich in fiber, antioxidants and minerals, so get your kids and yourself to eat carrots often to keep your eyes strong and healthy. If you have poor eyesight all you have to do is add it back to your diet and your vision will improve.

Carrots are a very popular vegetable around the world and it is estimated that 33.582 million tons are grown each and every year, with China growing over 15 million tons, followed by the United States at 1.342 million tons.

I love legends, and one I found states that if you eat large amounts of carrots it will allow you to see better in the dark. The legend came from stories from the British gunners during World War II, who were able to shoot down German planes in the darkness of night. The legend rose during the Battle of Britain when the Royal Air Force circulated a story about their pilots' carrot consumption that was an attempt to cover up the discovery and effective use of radar technologies against the enemy planes. This reinforced existing German folklore and helped to encourage Britons who were looking to improve their night vision during the blackouts to grow and eat more vegetables like carrots, which were not rationed--unlike other foods. The Battle of Britain started on July 10, 1940 and lasted until October 30, 1940; during that time period, it was estimated that thousands of planes were shot down by British gunners protecting their homeland.

Growing carrots was always a problem for me, until a few years ago when I discovered that I was planting them too close together. I was also not tilling the soil properly and not adding enough organic matter to the soil. I live in Maine, where rocks grow better than carrots do in the soil--and the rocks in the soil caused the tap root to multiply and produce several twisted roots instead of a single long and slender tap root on each plant.

So now I double-dig the planting row where the carrots are to be planted and I remove as many rocks as possible when preparing the planting area. I add several inches of compost, seaweed, and animal manure to help soften the soil and make it more pliable so the tap root can develop more easily and

without interference from small stones in the topsoil. Your goal should be to produce a rock-free soil that is rich in organic matter and--if possible--a raised bed or raised mound of soil will make the carrots grow even better in the loose soil.

Carrots seem to grow best when the weather is still cool, so plant them even as early as 3 weeks before the last expected frost--about the same time as you would plant peas and spinach seeds. Keep the soil moist at all times but be sure to water gently to prevent washing away the seeds or forcing them too deep into the soil, causing a lower germination of the seeds. Plant 3 to 4 seeds for every inch of row in a cluster and cover the seed with 1/4 inch of screened loam, compost, or planting mix. Space the rows 6 inches apart if you're trying to make a wide-row planting bed and stagger the seed planting to give them extra room to grow; wide row plantings can be 3 to 4 feet wide but keep the individual rows 6 inches apart!

When the tops begin to form and grow to be 2 inches tall, thin the clump of seedlings to just one plant. In just 2 more weeks, thin the row so seedlings are now 2 inches apart. This is the most difficult part of growing carrots because you're removing good plants but if you do not space them properly they will produce crooked roots, short stocky roots and roots that branch out with multiple tap roots.

Once the thinning has been done (at 6 weeks after germination) you can help to maintain the planting bed by adding compost, straw, or finely chopped seaweed around the seedlings. This also covers the planting bed to keep out those summer weeds and help keep the planting bed moist during the heat of summer--or some of your carrots will begin to split or crack when the soil becomes dry. Make sure that the crown of the carrot is also covered with soil or a garden mulch to prevent them from turning green and bitter near the foliage as it forms on the plant. Water weekly and keep the soil moist to a depth of 6 to 8 inches deep to help to encourage longer carrot roots.

Before planting ,add Turf-Turbo from Bonide lawn and Garden or Magic-Cal from Jonathan Green to help sweeten the soil, as carrots prefer a sweet soil to grow in. A potassium-rich fertilizer will also help give the carrots a sweeter taste. Also at the time of planting, sprinkle a timed released fertilizer called Dynamite that can be found at your local garden center; one application will feed your plants for the *entire year* --or if you want to grow organically use Dr. Earth vegetable fertilizer with Pro-Biotic or Vegetable Tone with Bio-tone nutrition's at time of planting, with a second application in early July.

If the spring weather is cold, cover the planting bed with a piece of clear plastic until the plants begin to germinate--this will speed up germination by as much as 5 to 7 days. Normal germination time is 10 to 14 days, so your plants will get a good head start when the spring weather is still cool. Also stay away from fresh animal manure; use composted or dehydrated manure, as the fresh manure will cause the roots to branch out and become hairy and fibrous, so they will not keep as long in storage.

One last thing--pick the carrots when they are dark orange in late summer or fall, as they will contain a higher level of vitamins than those that are pale in color. Enjoy!

Alaska Trip

Paul Parent will be hosting a tour that includes:

Vancouver, BC

- Butchart Gardens--55 acres of floral display!
- Cruising the Inside Passage:
- Ketchikan
- Icy Strait Point

- Juneau
- Skagway
- Hubbard Glacier Cruising
- Seward
- Scenic Drive to Anchorage
- Denali National Park
- Fairbanks City Tour, a tour of the Gold Dredge # 8 and a cruise down the Chena river on the Riverboat Discovery Sternwheeler.

This Week's Trivia Question:

Which of these continents represent the natural habitat of the cactus?

- A. Asia and Australia
- B. Europe and Africa
- C. Europe and Asia
- D. North America and South America
- E. South America and Africa

this Week's Prize:

Bio-tone® Starter Plus
All Natural Plant Food Enhanced with Bacteria and Mycorrhizae

- Microbe-enhanced all natural plant food
- Includes both endo and ecto mycorrhizae
- Grows larger root mass to help plants establish fast
- Promotes bigger blooms
- Reduces transplant loss

Last Week's Question:

Which of the following countries is the *second* leading producer of tomatoes?

- A. Argentina

- B. China
- C. India
- D. Turkey
- E. USA

Last Week's Winner:

Valerie Dornan

Last Week's Answer:

E. USA

Last Week's Prize:

Bio-tone® Starter Plus

One winner per question - we choose winners from the list of those who answer correctly. Winners must be newsletter subscribers. We'll ship you your prize, so be sure to put your address in the form in case you win!

Garden Journal

Are you looking for a great gift for a gardener (or yourself)? This garden journal helps make planning and organizing easy. This journal, *autographed personally by Paul*, makes a perfect gift for gardeners. The cover holds a 5x7 or 4x6 photo and a heavy-duty D-ring binder.

Also included:

- 8 tabbed sections
- 5 garden details sections with pockets for seeds, tags...
- Weather records page
- 6 three year journal pages
- Insect & diseases page - 3 project pages
- 3 annual checklist pages
- Plant wish list page
- 2 large pocket pages
- Sheet of garden labels
- 5 garden detail sheets
- 5 graph paper pages for layouts
- 5 photo pages, each holding four 4x6 photos in landscape or portrait format

FEATURED RECIPE:

Banana Spring Rolls



This is wonderful served with vanilla ice cream!

Ingredients:

- 2 large bananas
- 8 (7-inch square) spring roll wrappers
- 1 cup brown sugar, or to taste
- 1 quart oil for deep frying

Step by Step:

- Preheat the oil in a deep-fryer or large cast-iron skillet to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
- Peel bananas, and slice them in half lengthwise, then crosswise into fourths.
- Place one piece of banana diagonally across the corner of a spring roll wrapper, and sprinkle with brown sugar to taste.
- Roll from the corner to the center, then fold top and bottom corners in, and continue rolling. Dip your finger in water and brush the last edge to seal. Repeat with remaining banana pieces.
- Fry a few banana rolls at a time in the hot oil until evenly browned. Remove to paper towels to drain.
- Serve hot or cold.

Yield: 8 servings

Contact Information: