



FEATURED QUOTE :

In the spring, I have counted one hundred and thirty-six different kinds of weather inside of four and twenty hours.

~Mark Twain

Product Spotlight

Dynamite Plant Food

ONE EASY APPLICATION FEEDS SPRING THROUGH FALL! UP TO 9 MONTHS!

Simply shake Dynamite Complete Plant Food around your plants' roots for up to 9 months of feeding and nutrition. Our patented slow-release technology ensures that your plants get the nutrients they need, when they need them. Dynamite has all you need to keep your plants green and beautiful.

You Know Spring Is Close or Near When The Forsythia Starts To Bloom!

There is no more beautiful flowering shrub than the forsythia during April in the springtime. The forsythia is the most noticeable, most recognized, and most popular spring flowering shrub in America today, because of its bright yellow flowers that cover the plant from the ground to the top of every branch on the plant. Forsythia is planted for the vivid golden flowers that cover the plant and signal the arrival of spring. Forsythia will grow up to 8 to 10 feet tall and just as wide depending on the variety you select and how you prune them. This plant the Forsythia grows wild and has many tangled branches that give it much character if not pruned too heavily.

Forsythia will grow as a broad mound or spreading shape and are hardy to zone 5, 10 to 20 below zero during the winter. The flowers begin to open in April on branches with no foliage. The flowers develop in a whirl around the stem and are made up of 4 petals 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches long and wide. The flower petals twist and bend a bit to give them extra character, and a visible hole in the center is filled with pollen for early insect pollinators. The flower clusters are so numerous that when the plant is in bloom you will not be able to see through it. Flowers will last on the plant for 4 to 6 weeks, unless the weather gets hot and windy towards the end of the flowering cycle.

The foliage is oval, 3 to 5 inches long and 1 inch wide, with a pointed tip and serrated (like a saw) edges. The foliage has a great medium to dark green color all summer long. When the weather begins to cool off in the fall, it will develop a burgundy color that is quite showy.

One of the most often asked questions about forsythia is how to prune it, and when. I begin to prune my plants in January and bring the 2 to 3 foot long branches into the house for forcing. All you have to do is place the branches in a tall vase filled with water--and in 10 to 14 days, the stems will burst the buds open and cover them with flowers. Let it snow! I have Forsythia in bloom on the kitchen table all winter long, and the flowers will last on the stems for 3 weeks or more.

If you wait until the flowers fade and fall from the branches, leaves will develop on the stems, and if the stems are kept in a tall vase of water, roots will develop on the stems under water. Once the roots get to be 3 to 4 inches long, pot them up in fresh potting soil like Black Gold Potting Soil or Dr Earth Potting Soil. Place 4 to 5 branches in an 8 inch pot and keep moist until you're ready to plant in your garden in May. I like placing several stems together in the pot to give me a thicker and faster growing plant when I put it in the garden. When you put the rooted cuttings in the pot, cut the stem back by 3 to 4 inches to encourage side shoot development. When you plant in the garden, do not divide the plants--set them in the ground as one plant!

If you're not going to force the plant to bloom indoors than the time to prune is when the flowers begin to fall from the plant in May. It is best to remove the largest branches each year to encourage new shoots to develop on the plant. This type of pruning will control the size of the plant very easily, without destroying the natural shape of the plant. When you prune the plant use hand garden shears or loppers for the larger branches. NEVER use hedge shears, as you will create a shape that looks unnatural. Forsythia should be wild-growing with the many arching branches that give it its character, but many homeowners use hedge shears or electric shears and the natural plant becomes a ball-shaped shrub in the landscape planting, spoiling its unique character. The branches that you remove from the plant can also be rooted in a large pot 8 to 12 inches in diameter and kept in a wet potting soil just like when forcing indoors or dig a hole in the garden and condition the soil with compost or peat moss and place 5 or more stems in the hole; keep them wet and they will root easily.

Forsythia will grow in most types of soil--even sandy or moderate clay--as long as there is good drainage during wet weather and no standing water. When you plant forsythia, be sure to condition the soil properly with compost, animal manure, garden coir or peat moss. Water weekly unless the weather is warm; then water as needed. Adding a 2 to 3 inch layer of bark mulch around the plant will help to control weeds and keep the roots cool during the summer heat and protected during cold winter months.

Once you have planted the forsythia you will have to do one more thing that will be difficult for you--and that is pruning the individual branches by 20% to stop upright growth and encourage side shoot development. This will give you a much fuller plant in the long run and encourage new shoots to develop from the base of the plant, even the first year.

Forsythia will make a wonderful privacy hedge plant when planted every 5 to 6 feet apart in a single row. You can control the height and width by pruning to give you the privacy you are looking for, and the plant grows so thick it will also keep down most road noise. Forsythia is an inexpensive plant for this ; once established, it will grow 2 to 3 feet every year, giving you quick cover and privacy. Forsythia will also grow in a full sun location to half a day of shade; when planted in partial shade the fall foliage will not be as colorful.

Insect and disease problems are rare with this plant so its trouble-free. Because it does grow so thick, it will also make a great plant for birds to nest in when the plant is mature. The plant does well on the side of the road and will tolerate salt during the winter months. Plant forsythia on the corner of a garage to soften the building, in groups for a show of color in a planting bed, on the side of a hill to prevent erosion problems and near a lake or ocean where wind can be a problem for most flowering plants.

Best varieties are:

'Lynwood Gold,' with lighter yellow flowers, more open growth habit, and spreading 6 to 7 feet wide.

'Spring Glory,' soft yellow flowers, fast growing, hardy, and will grow 8 to 10 feet tall and wide.

'Northern Sun,' clear yellow color, fast growing, and will grow to 8 to 10 feet tall and wide.

'Courtasol,' lemon yellow flowers, 1 to 2 feet tall, 4 to 6 feet wide and great for embankments and slopes--also a great ground cover.

'Kumson,' a new variegated leaf hybrid, green with yellow veins and bright yellow flowers that grows to 5 to 6 feet tall and wide. Not recommended for northern New England but it will do fine from Boston on south.

Forsythia is a must to motivate you to get out in the yard after a long and cold winter indoors. Enjoy!

Garden Grown Celery Is Full Of Flavor!

Celery is a vegetable that grows wild all over Europe and Asia in fields where the soil is rich and moist. It was not grown as a cultivated vegetable plant until the 16th century, when the Italian gardeners discovered its unique flavor when added to soups and stews. By the end of the 17th century, it was being grown in most gardens all around the world where the climate was cooler--55 to 75 degrees during the heat of summer--or as a winter crop in warmer climates.

Celery was a staple in most gardens back 50 years ago but the extra work needed to grow the plant has forced gardeners to purchase it from the supermarket rather than grow it in the garden.. Today, even though the consumer has sacrificed much of the flavor from the fresh-grown celery, it is still a very popular vegetable--and I want you to try growing it this year in your garden for the flavor you're missing.

If you're going to grow celery in your garden, follow these easy steps for the best results. First, condition your garden soil with compost, animal manure, seaweed, peat moss, or garden coir. You should add 3 to 4 inches of organic matter to the planting bed. A mixture of the soil conditioners mentioned will work the best. If your soil is on the sandy side, like my garden, always add Soil Moist water holding granules in the bottom of the planting hole to help hold moisture in the soil, all you need is a good pinch to keep the moisture around the roots of the plant for the entire growing season. Lime the garden every other year to keep it as close to neutral as possible.

Next, till to a depth of 10 to 12 inches and blend all the products together with the soil, until uniform. Use a rototiller or for a small garden; look into the Turbo-Tiller at www.turbotiller.com that attaches to your drill and works like a mixer you'd use when cooking.

Celery is a heavy feeder, so I also add Dynamite time release pellet fertilizer in the hole at the time of planting to get the plants quickly established when planting and fed for the next 9 months (lasting three times longer than Osmocote). I also add a couple teaspoons around the perimeter of the plant a couple weeks after planting to push the plants to develop and grow large faster.

Celery will grow best with a soil that stays moist, so you will have to water the plants weekly. If temperatures reach eighty degrees or warmer, water the garden a couple times a week. If celery does not get enough moisture, the stalks will grow small and have a dry, stringy center. I like to add 2 to 3 inches of garden straw in between the plants to cover the ground; this helps keep out the weeds and helps hold moisture in the soil. Growing celery in a block rather than a row will give you a better crop, as plants in a block shade the ground and keep it cooler. When you plant celery in a block, space the plants about 12 inches apart to encourage taller stems; otherwise the plants will bush out and grow spreading out with shorter stems.

Celery can be planted in late April--about the time you begin to see pansies for sale at your local garden center. It is also the best time to set out seedlings of Cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and to plant your lettuce and pea seeds. All these plants are considered cold weather crops and will do much better than when planted in middle to late May, after the soil and air temperature warms up. I also have found that if you can plant the celery seedlings in a trench or in a hole 3 to 4 inches deep below the garden surface, they will grow better and it's easier to water the plants; the trench acts like a bowl to catch the water. Also when it comes time to "blanch" the celery, it will be easier for you to do.

What is blanching of the celery and why do we do it? Blanching is the process of blocking the sunlight from the green stems to destroy the chlorophyll in them, softening of the stringy fibers in the stems, and giving the celery a sweeter flavor. When the celery stalks turn white, it's ready to eat. Celery is ready to blanch and harvest once it reaches 9 to 12 inches tall or taller, depending on how large you like the stems to be when harvested.

To blanch the celery stems, pull all the stems together and tie up loosely in a bunch. Now wrap the stems from the soil line to 6 inches from the top of the plant with felt, waterproof paper, poster board or even cardboard. This will keep out the soil so the stems are clean when you harvest later. Next build a mound of soil around the protective collar around the Celery to keep it cool and hold the collar in place. Three weeks later, the plant will have grown an additional 6 inches or more, and you should add to the plant collar with additional wrapping material--again to 6 inches from the top foliage. Now wait 3 more weeks and you're ready to harvest the celery. Celery can stay wrapped in the ground for up to a month before harvesting. You should protect the foliage against a frost with material or straw when frost is predicted.

Harvesting and storage is done several ways, such as cutting the plant at the base just above the soil line in the fall. Cut celery will last for several weeks when kept in a plastic bag in the refrigerator. You can also dig the celery with its roots and place them in a box with moist peat moss around the roots, and the plant will keep for up to 3 to 4 months in your garage or basement --but the plant cannot freeze. If you want to use celery during the winter for soups and stews chop it in pieces and freeze it in a freezer bag. When you thaw it, it will be mushy but the flavor is there, so add to your soups and stews for its flavor.

You can also plant self-blanching celery; all you have to do is mound straw around the stems of the plant and also plant them closer together, 9 inches apart instead of 12 inches apart, so each plant shades the other (and the straw also keeps out sunlight). Also available is green celery; this type do not need to be blanched but I found that if you add straw around the stems it does give them better flavor and whiter stems.

Here are good varieties to look for this spring.

Blanching varieties:

'Giant White', 'Martine,' 'Hopkins Fenlander,' 'Ventura' and 'Utah.'

Self-blanching:

'Celebrity, Golden Self-blanching,' 'Ivory Tower,' 'Victoria,' and 'Lathom.'

Green celery:

'Greensnap,' 'Imperial' and 'Tall Utah.'

So, get out the Bloody Mary mix this coming fall, and you will be in for a great treat. 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.

Trivia

This Week's Question

"Where flowers bloom, so does hope." Which First Lady said this?

- A. Eleanor Roosevelt
- B. Jacqueline Kennedy
- C. Lady Bird Johnson
- D. Nancy Reagan
- E. Rosalynn Carter

This Week's Prize:

Monterey Lawn and Garden Agri-Fos Systemic Fungicide

Agri-Fos is based on the potassium salts of Phosphorous Acid. It is very effective against Phytophthora (blights - including late blight on potatoes and tomatoes) and Pythium disease on agricultural, horticultural and ornamental plants. It also controls fire blight on apples, pears, and ornamentals and downy mildew on impatiens.

Can be used as both a preventative and curative spray.

Last Week's Question:

In the Wars of the Roses, what color was the Lancastrian's rose?

- A. Orange
- B. Purple
- C. Red
- D. White
- E. Yellow

Last Week's Winner:

David Brainerd

Last Week's Answer:

C. Red.

Last Week's Prize:

Espoma 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: Green Bean Casserole

What You'll Need:

- 1 can (10 3/4 oz.) condensed cream of mushroom soup (for variety, or if you don't like mushrooms, you can also use other "cream of" soups like cream of celery, cream of potato, etc.)
- 4 cups cooked green beans
- 1/8 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. soy sauce
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 1/3 cups French fried onions (split)

Step by Step:

- Mix the soup, milk, soy sauce and pepper in a 1.5 quart casserole dish.
- Add in beans and 2/3 cup of the fried onions, and mix well.
- Bake for 25 minutes at 350 degrees F.
- Remove from oven and stir again.
- Top with the remaining 2/3 cup fried onions.
- Return to oven and bake until the onions are golden brown--about 5 minutes.

Serves 6