

Green Garden News

Redbor Kale Receives 2005 Medallion Award

The recent cooler weather put a little spring in my step and gave me a fresh outlook. It is finally time to plant cool season flowers. One you may have noticed over the past couple of years is Redbor kale, a fall 2005 Mississippi Medallion award winner.

The Mississippi Plant Selections Committee has named only a handful of fall winners since 1996. Panolas, Bouquet Purple dianthus, Red Giant mustard and Shishi Gashira Camellia sasanqua are the others on this elite list. Redbor kale is equally impressive.

Considered among the best of all the cool-season plants, Redbor is a flowering kale that produces vibrant, dark purple foliage from October or November through April, bringing the winter garden alive. I have seen it still looking good in mid-May.

These plants are native to the Mediterranean and are related to broccoli, cauliflower and collards. The plants are a lot tougher than you may think -- once acclimated by cool weather, kale and cabbage can withstand frigid temperatures.

Select a site in full sun with fertile, organic-rich soil. If the planting area consists of tight, heavy clay, amend with compost or humus to loosen. While preparing the soil, incorporate 2 pounds of a slow-release, 12-6-6-

fertilizer with minor nutrients per 100 square feet.

Set out nursery-grown transplants 12 to 18 inches apart. In northern regions, they also can be planted in early spring. Add a good layer of mulch after planting to help stabilize soil temperatures and conserve moisture. Even though Redbor is cold hardy, completely cover it with pine straw if we have a record cold. Simply remove the pine straw once the weather has warmed.

Redbor kale needs good drainage yet must be kept moist and fed to continue growing vigorously. Pay close attention to dry, cold fronts which have a tendency to deplete significantly the available moisture. Feed with light applications of the pre-plant fertilizer every four to six weeks. During colder weather, they respond more quickly to water-soluble fertilizer than granular types. Redbor's color will intensify as temperatures get colder.

Unfortunately, the same cabbage loopers that attack broccoli can be a problem for these plants. Treat as needed with *Bacillus thuringensis*, an organic pest control that poses no threat to gardeners.

Redbor kale excels in beds with brightly colored pansies, violas, pa-

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November Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Cool season flowers which can be planted now include: carnation, foxglove, pansy, petunia, snapdragon, Shasta daisy, ornamental kale and ornamental cabbage.
- Prepare to move potted tropical and subtropical plants inside. Cold sensitive patio plants like schefflera and philodendrons should not be exposed to 40°F nights. Temperatures in the 40's and even 50's, though they might not result in frost-like damage, can cause long-term problems.
- Buy spring bulbs such as tulips and refrigerate them for 8 weeks.
- When mums have finished blooming, prune back to 3 inches above the ground.

Trees and Shrubs

- Now is a great time to plant ornamental trees and shrubs.
- Locate and order fruit trees so that they can be planted in December.
- Apply horticultural oil if scales, mites, and other plant sucking insects have been a problem on woody ornamentals.
- Plant camellias later in the month.
- Looking for fall color in the landscape? This is the time of year to identify local plants that yield the best fall leaf color. Take a look around and see what's showing up well this fall. Some to consider for planting include: black gum, hickory, dogwood, crape myrtle, sweetgum, oakleaf hydrangea and red maple.
- Avoid heavy pruning jobs this late in the year.
- This is one of the most ideal times for transplant-

ing trees and shrubs.

- Magnolia and dogwood seeds can be harvested and planted as soon as they are ripe. Remove the outer pulp and plant them immediately, before they dry out.

Fruits and Nuts

- Plant strawberries before November 15. Recommended varieties for North Florida include: Florida 90, Chandler, Dover, Florida Belle, Oso Grande, Sweet Charlie and Selva.

Vegetable Garden

- Start winter vegetables by planting beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, Chinese cabbage, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustards, onions, parsley, radish and spinach.
- Harvest gourds, butternut squash, pumpkins and other cucurbits as the vines begin to die. Clip, don't break about 2 inches of stem with each fruit.

Lawns

- In dry weather, water the lawn to keep it healthy during the winter.
- If desired, sow annual rye grass at the beginning of the month for a green lawn through the winter.
- Fertilize annual rye grass with a complete fertilizer after it has been mowed a few times. Apply at the rate of ½ lb of nitrogen per 1000 sq ft.
- Allow the permanent lawn (centipede and St. Augustine, in particular) to gradually go dormant by withholding fertilizer.

Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday in September: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic*. This free clinic is open to the public from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy. If you are having problems with your lawn or plants, bring in a sample and an Extension Horticulturist or Master Gardener will be available to discuss your gardening questions. For more information about what type of sample to bring visit our website at

<http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension/horticulture/diagnostics.html>.

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.
(850) 623-3868

A Ten-Step Planting Procedure

A properly planted tree or shrub is more tolerant of adverse conditions and will require much less management than one planted incorrectly. What is the proper planting procedure? Dr. Ed Gilman at the University of Florida recently published a web site that provides us with some new, and different, information about planting trees and shrubs.

Dr. Gilman's website (<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/planting/index.htm>) is an excellent resource for planting and pruning trees and shrubs. Following is a summary of his 10-step planting procedure.

1. Pick the right site. Plant the right plant in the right place. One of the most frequent mistakes made in landscape installation is not considering the mature size of the plant. When planting trees be sure to look up! Avoid planting under electrical lines or house eaves that will cause problems later on. For shrubs, ensure that you know the mature height and width of the plant.

2. Dig a shallow hole as wide as possible. A hole 1½ to 3 times the width of the root ball is recommended. The depth of the hole should be LESS than the height of the root ball. Ensure that the top 10% of the root ball is above the landscape grade. If you happen to dig the hole too deep, be sure to fill the hole to the proper level and compact it with your foot. Planting too deep is a leading cause of death in newly planted trees and shrubs. In addition, planting too deep encourages the development of stem girdling roots that can kill trees later in life.

3. Find the point where the top-most root emerges from the trunk. Don't assume that plants you purchased have been planted correctly. Even with container plants, gently scrape away the soil until you can clearly identify the top-most root.

4. Place the plant gently into its new home. Handle plants by their root ball, not their trunk or stem. Recent studies have shown that slicing the root ball from top to bottom can be advantageous. While it doesn't increase root growth after planting, it does enhance the distribution of regenerated roots.

5. Position the plant so that the top-most root emerging from the trunk is slightly above ground level. It is better to plant a tree or shrub a little higher than too deep.

6. Straighten the plant. Before backfilling, take the time to view your new plant from several different perspectives and ensure that it looks right to you.

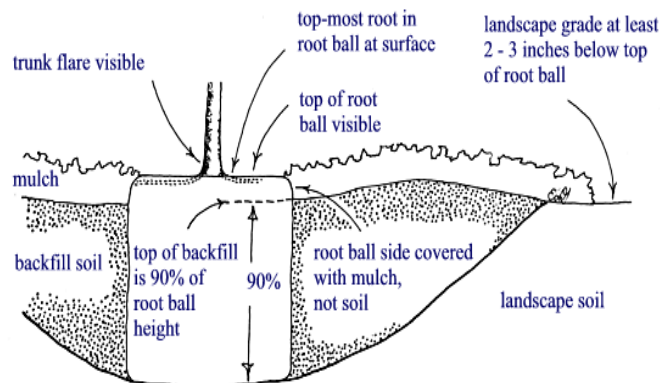
7. Remove all synthetic materials. String, rope, synthetic burlap, strapping, plastic, and other materials that will not decompose in the soil must be removed at planting.

8. Backfill. Unless planting a "bed" of shrubs, do not amend the soil. Extensive research on trees clearly shows that there is no need to incorporate any amendments, fertilizers, gels, powders, etc. into the planting hole. When the hole has been filled, and the root ball is slightly above the soil surface, use a shovel and make 20-30 slices to settle the soil. DO NOT pack the soil down with your feet in an attempt to eliminate air pockets because this could cause too much soil compaction. Water thoroughly and add more soil if needed.

9. Cover the SIDES of the root ball with mulch. Do not put mulch on top of the root ball. As always, we highly recommend creating a mulched area around trees and shrubs. Using mulch (NOT soil) create a berm or catchment basin around the plant. This will help direct water to the root ball.

10. Stake the plant only if necessary. The purpose of staking is to keep the root ball from moving while the tender roots are growing. Trees establish more quickly and develop a slightly stronger trunk and root system if they are NOT staked at the time of planting. Trees with trunk diameters of 1.5 inches and greater usually do not need staking. If large trees require staking to prevent the trunk from bending, it probably indicates a lesser quality tree.

—by Theresa Friday, Extension Faculty, UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension



What's In Bloom

Lion's Ear: Lion's ear has the scientific name of *Leonotus leonurus*. It is also known as lion's beard, lion's tail and wild dagga.

Lion's ear is a shrubby perennial. It can get quite large; normally reaching heights of 4-5 feet with a 4-5 feet spread. This one does require some space in our flowerbeds.

It is a member of the mint family, Lamiaceae. And, like most mints, it has opposite leaves with the young stems being distinctly square in cross section. The unique feature of this plant is, of course, its flowers.

Lion's ear has many erect, straight stems which in the fall bears whorls of orange flowers. The flowers are also representative of the mint family. They are bilabiate (two-lipped), tubular flowers that are about 2 inches long in rounded clusters about four inches across. The flowers themselves are beautifully orange and somewhat hairy, and are said to resemble a lion's ear, thus the name.

Lion's ear does well in full sun, and once established, is fairly drought tolerant. It is hardy in zones 9-11. In our area, it will lose its leaves after a frost but does reliably come back in the spring. It is also fairly salt tolerant so it makes a good shrub for those coastal gardens.

Lion's ear makes a great addition to a mixed bed or a butterfly garden. It is known to attract both butterflies and hummingbirds.



Harvesting Sweetpotatoes

Sweetpotatoes need to be harvested before the roots are exposed to periods of cold weather, so usually harvest begins about the time of the first fall freeze. Freshly dug sweet potato roots are fairly tender, so the skin can be easily damaged. A process called curing solves this. Curing involves putting the roots in a warm, humid location for 5 to 10 days immediately after digging. A location about 85 to 90 degrees F works best. A small area heated by a space heater and misting the area several times a day is ideal.

The curing process heals over scratches in the skin but also prompts another important reaction,

converting starches in the roots to sugar. This improves the texture and flavor of the roots resulting in the moist, sweet flesh we associate with quality sweet potatoes. Always store sweet potatoes in locations where temperatures will be above 55 F. Cold temperature storage causes injury that can be irreversible, shortening storage life, turning the inside of the roots dark, giving them a strange alcoholic flavor, and causing premature rotting.

—Kansas State University



Ipomoea batatas : Sweet potato

Questions and Answers

Q: Are acorns edible?

A: If you have an oak tree, you have probably noticed that acorns are starting to drop. They usually don't last long because they are a favorite food of various wildlife species including squirrels and deer. However, they are not as popular with people as some of our other native nuts such as walnut. Although all acorns are edible, some are better than others. Many are quite bitter due to high levels of tannin. The level of tannin in the acorn meat varies with the oak species. Some species have acorns that have naturally sweeter meats than others. Oak species can be split into two groups: the white oaks and the red oaks. The white oaks usually have acorn meats with a lower tannin content than the red oaks and, therefore, are sweeter. Individual oak trees can usually be placed in one of these two groups by looking at specific characteristics. White oaks tend to have leaves with rounded lobes rather than the bristly points normally found with red oaks. Also, red oaks typically have deeply ridged, dark-colored bark as opposed to the grayish-brown, scaly bark of white oaks. Examples of white oaks includes the White Oak and Post Oak. Red oaks include Pin Oak, Red Oak, Black Oak, Chinquapin Oak and Shumard's Oak.

Although the white oaks tend to have sweeter acorn meats than the reds, all oaks may have to be treated to leach out some of the tannin. To do this, place shelled acorns in a saucepan and cover them with water. Bring the water to a boil. Change the water when it becomes yellow with tannin. Repeat until the water remains clear. After the tannins have been removed, drain the water and place the meats on a cookie sheet and dry slowly in the oven on low heat. Taste test to make sure the tannins have been removed and the nuts are sweet.

Q: I would like to grow a live oak tree from an acorn. How is it done?

A: The live oak belongs to the white oak group, meaning that the acorns begin the germination process soon after they fall and without any special treatment. Pick up several from beneath a selected tree and plant them about an inch deep in

pots or in the ground. Roots emerge from the live oak acorn during the fall and winter, followed by shoot growth in the spring.

Q: How do I protect my plants from freezing temperatures?

A: Wherever practical, the best way to protect home plantings from freezing temperatures is to heat them with an ordinary light bulb under a sheet, plastic or some similar covering.

Even if you don't use a light bulb or other heat source, you can reduce the amount of cold injury your plants will suffer by covering them. Coverings will help keep plants from cooling off as fast as they would otherwise.

And, if the coverings reach the ground, they can help make better use of ground heat. Surprising as it may seem, covering a plant also helps prevent cold damage by providing shade during the day.

However, in spite of these benefits, covering a plant without additional heat is primarily a method of providing against frost rather than hard freezes. Also, be sure you remove the coverings when the weather warms up - even if it's only for a day or two. Otherwise, your plants may suffer burning.

The use of mulch is one cold protection measure that causes a lot of confusion. If the temperature drops below freezing for just a few hours, a good layer of mulch often will lead to increased cold damage to the tops of your plants. This top injury results from the mulch keeping ground heat in the ground away from leaves and branches.

So, if a brief, overnight freeze is forecast, you might want to pull the mulch back from your plants.

But longer periods of very cold weather are a different matter. If you expect it to get so cold that the tops of the plants may be killed regardless of what you do, leave the mulch in place. It may hold enough ground heat to keep the plant's roots from being frozen.

A plant may come back from considerable cold damage to foliage and branches. But if the roots are frozen, you may lose the entire plant.

Redbor Kale

(Continued from page 1)

nolas and snapdragons. Since it has dark purple leaves it is exceptional when grown with yellow pansies or those with apricot colors. Try interplanting with a large bed of narcissus.

Redbor kale is well suited to planting in large containers where you might place three in a triangular design. Plant a tall dianthus like Bouquet purple, the new double Dynasty dianthus or the Amazon dianthus in the center of the triangle, and then place pansies around the edges.

Even though Redbor is the Mississippi Medallion award winner and my favorite, there is a white form called Winterbor that also makes a nice companion plant.

When Thanksgiving arrives, don't be afraid to harvest some leaves for a beautiful, decorative garnish. Consider planting some Mississippi Medallion award-winning Redbor kale and a flat of pansies this weekend.

—by Norman Winter, MSU Horticulturist
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