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Table of Contents

Heirloom or Old Garden Roses 1

Allium 9

Spring Blooming Shrubs That Aren't Forsythia 14

Heirloom Tomatoes 17

The Ornamental Garden in April 21

April Lawn Care 24

In the Vegetable Garden – April 25

Wilted Spinach Salad 29

Heirloom or Old Garden Roses

By Susan Martin | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



When I first started to read about heirloom or “Old Garden Roses,” I couldn’t help but wonder why anyone thought they needed to improve such a beautiful plant. The heirlooms are described as hardy, disease-resistant, carefree, prolific shrubs that don’t require much tending. But the show-stopper is their wondrous fragrance, mentioned over and over again. They also offer a wide variety of forms ranging from shrubs to climbers to tall, arching plants up to 20 feet in height.

The Old Garden Rose is defined as any rose that existed before 1867. After that, the “modern” rose came into existence when the first hybrid tea rose — “La France” — was discovered growing in a garden. Today, about 80% of all roses grown are of the modern classes of this rose. Just to put these rose groups in context, keep in mind that roses are divided into **three main groups: Species** (wild) and their hybrids, **Old Garden Roses** and **Modern Roses**. The purpose of this article is to familiarize readers with the different classes of Old Garden Roses so that you may be inspired to experiment in your garden.

So why did the modern hybrids largely usurp the position of heirloom roses in the landscape? Many, but not all, of the Old Garden Roses offer a single bloom period whereas modern roses, i.e. hybrid teas and floribundas, are repeat bloomers. The modern rose is also a prolific bloomer and offers lots of different colors and varieties. The hybrid tea is prized for the perfection of its bloom. They have been bred for long stems, which are especially suitable for cut flowers. Modern rose bushes offer a compact shape that is more labor intensive to maintain, but also better suited to smaller spaces or for large displays of numerous bushes.

But, if you love history, it is hard to resist an Old Garden Rose. Who wouldn’t want to grow a Gallica rose that dates from the time of the Greeks and Romans? Or a type of Noisette that was grown by Thomas Jefferson? Or a favorite Moss rose from the gardens of the Victorian era? It’s fun to think that the Centifolia or cabbage rose you enjoy was also prized by Marie Antoinette.

The care of heirloom roses does not differ from the care of modern roses, except that there may be less

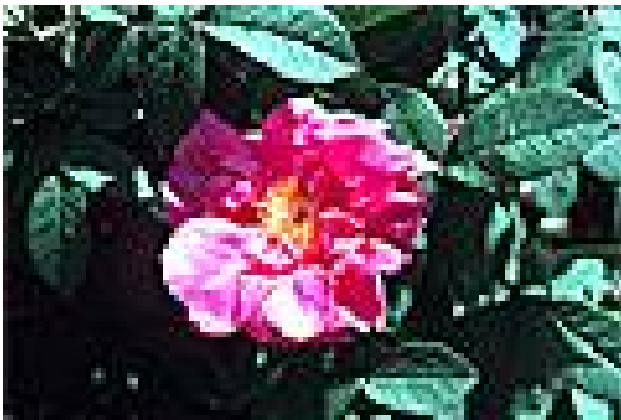
pruning required for some types of heirlooms and less need for chemical sprays. For a general discussion of roses and their care, please see an article written by Cleve Campbell, "Our National Flower — the Rose," that appeared in [the June 2015 issue](#) of *The Garden Shed*. In [the March 2016 issue](#), Pat Chadwick wrote an article, "The Ornamental Garden in March," in which she discusses how to plant bare root roses.

Old Garden Roses

This first group of Old Garden Roses contains five individual classes and all bloom only one time a year:

Gallica, Alba, Damask, Centifolia, and Moss.

Gallicas are the oldest roses, grown by the Greeks and Romans and later bred by the Dutch and French. They have a great color range that includes striped blooms, and some are intensely fragrant. They are compact in size but they sucker profusely and spread by underground runners, which means they can fill in an area quickly. Their foliage is dark green and roughly textured.



GALLICA ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Albas date from before 100 A.D. They are richly perfumed and can thrive under difficult conditions, even partial shade. They have a tall, slender upright growth habit with blooms of blush pink or white, and grey-green foliage. They are also disease-resistant.



ALBA ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Damasks are thousands of years old and it's said they were brought to Europe from the Middle East by the Crusaders. Others say the Romans brought them to England, and yet a third view is that Henry VIII's physician gave him a Damask rose as a present, around 1540. They are very thorny but so fragrant that they

are used for making perfumes. Their blooms are white, pink or red and the bush has an arching habit of up to 7 feet tall.



DAMASK ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Centifolia means “hundred petals” and is commonly referred to as a “cabbage rose” because of the size and shape of its blooms. Plants vary in size from 1 foot to 20 feet. They are very fragrant, very winter hardy, but not as disease-resistant as others. They do best in full sun. Colors range from white to deep purple.



CENTIFOLIA ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

The Moss rose is the rose of Victorian England. They have developed a moss-like growth on the sepals and calyx that smells like pine and is the result of a “sport” — a naturally occurring genetic mutation. The moss roses are very disease-resistant and tolerant of neglect; some are even repeat bloomers.



MOSS ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

The second group of heirlooms contains six classes and all are repeat bloomers: **Chinas, Bourbons, Hybrid Perpetuals, Noisettes, Portlands and Teas.**

Chinas

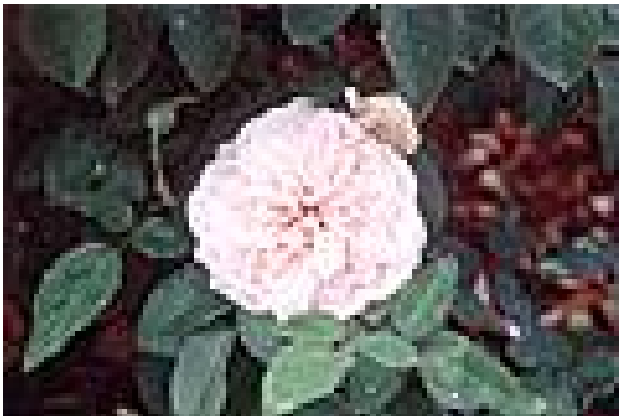
The original roses from this class were brought from China to Europe, where they were widely bred with other classes. The results were repeat-blooming plants that changed the Western world of roses. They are somewhat tender and may need protection in cold climates. They are fragrant and disease-resistant. The flowers are smaller and come in shades of pink, copper and red and have a sweet, fruity fragrance. The plant form ranges from dwarf bushes to vigorous climbers.



CHINA ROSE Photo: American Rose Society

Bourbons

Named for the European royal house of French origin, these roses tend to have large flowers and are richly scented with rose perfume. The flowers are often three to a cluster. Growth habit is rather leggy though some may have a chunky shrub form.



BOURBON ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Portlands

Portlands were popular in the mid-1800s. They have a mixed heritage of China, Damask and Gallica roses. The flowers are multi-petaled, very fragrant, and usually pink with light green foliage. The shrub is small in size, usually less than 12 inches, and their blooms are petite, making them ideal for small gardens or containers.



PORTLAND ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Hybrid Perpetuals

This rose is the pre-20th-century equivalent of the hybrid tea. They have large, double flowers that come in pink, purple, red and sometimes white. They have a strong delicious fragrance and a stately, upright arching growth.



HYBRID PERPETUAL ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Noisettes

Noisettes originated in Charleston, South Carolina, at the plantation of John Champney and are the first roses bred in America prior to the hybrid tea. They are also important for introducing the colors of orange and yellow. Their ancestry includes the China rose. They are tall, bushy plants best treated as climbers with support. They are tolerant of clay soils, are fragrant, and somewhat tender to Zone 7.



NOISETTE ROSE Photo: University of Illinois Extension

Teas

These roses are similar in history and cultivation to the Chinas. They are a cross between a *Rosa chinensis* and *Rosa gigantea*. Roses in this class tend to form chunky, V-shaped shrubs and are well covered with foliage and flowers, most of which are pastel or some shade of red. Tea roses often have only five petals. This rose is uniquely scented with a perfume that reminds some people of tea. If pruned severely, the plant may sulk for a season and produce only a few blooms. This rose will grow slowly at first, but after two or three years, it will increase in size. It's disease-resistant but tender to Zone 8.



TEA ROSE Photo: American Rose Society

Selection

Once you decide to incorporate a bit of history and fragrance into your garden by planting an heirloom rose, where do you start? I would suggest visiting one of the specialty gardens in our area to see and smell these roses in a natural setting. Many of these gardens also sell roses that they propagate.

We are incredibly fortunate to have in our backyard the Léonie Bell Rose Garden at Monticello.

The Bell Garden was designed to tell the story of rose breeding and development that ensued from the first American rose hybrid, the Noisette. The garden was made possible by an endowment from Louis Bell in honor of his wife, Léonie Bell, a noted botanical illustrator who became the center of the American rose rustling movement from the late 1960s through the 1980s. (Rose rustlers search old cemeteries, abandoned gardens and other “wild” areas in search of Old Garden Roses, from which they can take a slip and then restore a piece of history in their own gardens.) The garden is reflective of 18th- and 19th-century Rosary Gardens which were planted generally in a circular design. The Bell Garden, however, is designed in an octagonal shape in homage to one of Thomas Jefferson’s favorite architectural forms. In addition to the historical ‘Champneys Pink Cluster’ and ‘Blush Noisette’, the garden includes many one-of-a-kind selections with fascinating histories, including the ‘Aunt Louisa Rose’ from the garden of President Garfield’s aunt and ‘Faded Pink Monthly,’ rooted from a slip by a slave before the Civil War. According to Lily Fox-Brugière, who is Garden and Outreach Coordinator with the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, Thomas Jefferson also grew roses at Monticello, as evidenced by an order for ten roses from William Prince Nursery in 1791. The order included a China rose, a Moss rose and a Scotch Briar rose. When I asked Lily to recommend some favorite heirlooms, she proposed ‘Old Blush China,’ ‘Scotch Briar’ and ‘Cecile Brunner.’ I could tell it was hard to narrow down the choices! Rose slips are available for purchase at the Monticello Gift Shop at the Visitors Center as well as at Tufton Farms. Monticello will also host the Wine and Roses Open House on May 28. Visit the [Leonie Bell Garden](#) website for more information.

A second nearby garden that features Old Garden Roses is the Gravegarden at Old City Cemetery in Lynchburg. The peak of bloom is in May, but visitors to the Confederate Section of the cemetery will find continuous scattered bloom throughout the summer until late fall frosts. The Antique Rose collection was planted in 1986 along the 500-foot remains of the old brick wall from the 1860s. The 60 varieties chosen are representative of rose history from before 1581 through the 19th century, and include the full range of classes and colors exhibited by these ancestors of modern-day roses. The plants were gathered from all over the United States and Canada, as well as from local gardens. Karen Bracco, Public Relations and Visitor Service Manager at the garden, describes the appeal of the heirlooms as “not being as fussy as the moderns and not requiring as much fussing.” Please see the [Gravegarden](#) website for a chronological listing of their roses as well as upcoming events, including the Mother’s Day Festival. Root slips are also available for purchase.

A third garden in our area is part of the Ben Lomond Historic Site in Manassas. The rose garden behind the house contains one of the largest collections of Old Garden Roses in the DC Metro area, including 200 bushes of 160 antique cultivars planted in a geometric design. This garden is significantly larger than and different from the garden that was present during the antebellum period. The garden contains many cultivars of Old Garden Roses, many of which could have been there during the antebellum period. Many of the cultivars in the garden today have been in cultivation for centuries. The garden’s main season of bloom is in late spring with some blooming throughout the summer and a second flush in the fall. Companion perennials, annuals, and bulbs ensure that the garden is in bloom all season. For visiting information see the [Ben Lomond Historic Site](#).

In summary, I’ll leave you with a simple quote from Jeri Jennings of Heritage Roses, “The right rose in the right garden can make your heart sing.” Happy rose hunting!

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Allium

By Patsy Chadwick | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



I knew I had hit a home run - landscape wise - when I discovered some visiting friends peering intently at some plantings in the far corner of my ornamental garden. As I drew near to join in their conversation, I found that their attention had been drawn to a swath of deep purple irises backed by tall, silvery purple alliums. The golden foliage of nearby shrubs provided a pleasing and harmonious contrast to the composition's various purple hues. Although quite lovely in their own right, it was neither the irises nor the shrubs that garnered so many comments from my friends. It was the alliums that had captured their fancy!

It wasn't all that long ago that alliums, also known as ornamental onions, were a rarity in the landscape.

However, they're really catching on with gardeners, who appreciate their beauty and recognize their merits as an architectural contrast to the mounding or spreading forms of other ornamental plants. It's exciting to see these charming bulbs appearing in landscapes everywhere.

Ornamental onions belong to a large botanical genus that includes chives, shallots, leeks, onions and garlic. But, unlike their edible cousins, the ornamental varieties are grown strictly for their showy spherical flower heads. Ranging from 1 to 10 inches wide, the flower heads are formed from clusters of tiny, star-shaped flowers. The flower heads on some of the larger varieties may contain 100 or more individual flowers.

Depending on the selection, the flowers range in color from silvery lavender to reddish purple as well as white, yellow and blue.



Allium aflatunense 'Purple Sensation'

The flower heads on most ornamental onion varieties rise well above a clump of strap-like leaves. The foliage of the early bloomers emerges very early in spring and generally dies back just as the plants come into bloom. Late-blooming alliums maintain their attractive green foliage much longer into the season. It's wise to position the early bloomers in the landscape so that surrounding plantings hide the deteriorating leaves.

In addition to providing beauty and architectural interest to the ornamental garden, alliums attract bees and butterflies. If that's not a good enough reason to try alliums, here's more good news. Deer, rabbits, voles, squirrels, chipmunks and other critters avoid them because of the faint oniony taste of the foliage and bulbs.

A SAMPLING OF ALLIUM SPECIES

The ornamental allium family consists of more than 300 species. The bulbs vary considerably in size, generally in proportion to the plant's overall height. Some of the shorter allium selections grow to just 6 inches while some of the taller selections top out at around 4 feet. Most varieties grow to 18 inches or more in height and are good choices for the middle or back of the border.

A sampling of the more popular allium species and hybrids grown in American gardens include:

- ***A. aflatunense* 'Purple Sensation'** - While I like all ornamental onions, this selection is one of my favorites. I love the 4- to 5-inch wide, violet-purple flower heads that rise on 2- to 3-ft. tall stems in mid spring. The saturated color adds depth and drama to the landscape.
- ***A. Caeruleum*** - The smallish 1- to 2-in. flower heads on 2-ft. tall stems are a beautiful shade of sky blue.
- ***A. christophii*** - Also known as Star of Persia, this species has one of the largest flower heads of the allium family. A typical flower head consists of hundreds of star-shaped florets arranged in a loose, airy 10- to 12-in. wide configuration.
- ***A. Giganteum***—Topping out at 4 feet or more, this is one of the tallest members of the Allium genus. The long-lasting flower heads typically measure about 4 in. across.
- ***A. 'Globemaster'*** — Silvery purple softball-size flower heads bloom in May on 3-ft. tall stems. This is the variety that enchanted visitors to my garden.
- ***A. moly 'Jeannine'*** — This shorter species blooms on 12-in. stems and produces bright yellow flowers in mid-summer.
- ***A. schubertii*** — This is clearly one of the more extraordinary members of the allium family. The flower heads are quite large and flamboyant. Some sources describe it as a lavender fireworks display.
- ***A. sphaerocephalon*** - Commonly known as drumstick allium,

this later-blooming variety sports 1- to 2-in. wide egg-shaped, reddish-purple blossoms around June. This selection looks best planted in a large grouping. It can take a little more moisture than its siblings, particularly in the summer.



Allium sphaerocephalon (Drumstick Allium)

- ***A. stipitatum*** 'Mount Everest' — One of many white-blooming species, this selection produces 6- to 8-in. snow-white blossoms with dark green eyes atop 3-ft. tall stems.

USES FOR ALLIUMS IN THE LANDSCAPE

- Plant the smaller, low-growing varieties at the front of the mixed border or in a rock garden. Use medium-height varieties in the middle of the border to add texture and height. The taller species and hybrids provide attention-getting vertical elements in mixed borders. While they may grow 3 to 4 feet tall, they do not require staking unless the site is very windy.
- Use as a bridge between early spring-blooming bulbs and summer-blooming bulbs.
- Plant them to attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.
- Combine with plants that will help hide allium foliage as it dies back. Peonies, irises, roses, and catmint are a few suggested companions.
- Combine with other colors ranging from the palest lavender to the deepest purples. For example, plant reddish-purple selection *A. aflatumense* 'Purple Sensation' near *Salvia nemorosa* 'Caradonna', which echoes the same basic shade of purple. Plant 'Giganteum' with a deeper shade of purple Iris such as 'Swingtown.' For a more saturated color combination, plant burgundy-colored drumstick allium near the contrasting hues of golden Coreopsis.
- Combine the purple varieties with plants that have silver foliage, such as *Artemisia* or *Stachys*, or gold foliage, such as *Agastache foeniculum* 'Golden Jubilee', for a classic color combination.
- Try a white variety with pale pink roses or plants with variegated green and white foliage for a sophisticated and elegant combination.
- Stagger blooming times to keep the show going. For example, 'Purple Sensation' is one of the earliest to bloom in May, followed by *A. giganteum*. Drumstick allium picks up the baton in early summer and pink-blooming *A. thunbergii* 'Ozawa' blooms in late summer to early fall. *A. stellatum* (American prairie onion), a native selection, blooms from late summer into fall.
- After the flowers fade, leave the seed heads in place to provide interest in the garden for the rest of the summer.
- Use the dried flower heads in flower arrangements or even Christmas decorations.
- Allow alliums to slowly colonize to increase the display. Certain varieties are better colonizers than others, but the species commonly available for sale are not considered invasive.

HOW TO GROW ALLIUMS

Ornamental alliums are very easy to grow but they do have some specific requirements.

- Planting Time — Plant the bulbs in autumn. Like most spring-flowering bulbs, alliums require a period of cold weather in order to bloom.
- Soil – Most alliums are native to sandy, dry soils but will grow in clay provided it is amended to improve drainage. Good drainage is particularly important in the winter. Most alliums prefer soil on the dry side and cannot tolerate soggy soil.
- Light – Alliums will tolerate a little shade but they perform best in full sun. Make sure their foliage is not shaded by other plants.
- Plant Depth — Plant alliums at a depth of 3 to 4 times the diameter of the bulb. Poor flowering may result if bulbs are planted too shallowly.
- Plant Spacing — Space smaller species of alliums about 3 to 4 in. apart. Space large species 8 to 12 in. apart, depending on the selection.
- Foliage – As the strap-like foliage emerges in spring, it may suffer frost damage. That won't keep the bulb from blooming but the damaged foliage may detract from the plant's appearance. The foliage of spring-blooming species dies back in late spring or early summer.

ALLIUM PROPAGATION

If they are happy in a sunny, well drained spot, alliums may form colonies or self-seed. Overcrowding may hinder flower production. That's the bad news. The good news is that you now have the opportunity to grow additional alliums for your garden or to share with friends. Alliums may be propagated in several ways:

- Division – Many allium bulbs develop offsets. When dividing overcrowded alliums, lift them from the soil after the foliage has died and the flowers have faded. Gently detach the offsets from the “mother” bulb. Replant both the “mother” bulb and the offsets.
- Bulbils — A few alliums, such as *A. roseum* and *A. sphaerocephalon* produce aerial bulbils in the flower head. Those may be carefully separated from the flower head and planted in freely draining compost. Cover them with a thin layer of compost about ¼ inch deep.
- Seeds — Alliums may also be started from the seeds but this method will produce plants that won't reach flowering size for several years. To plant seeds, either plant them as soon as they are ripe or store them in the refrigerator until spring and plant when soil warms to at least 55 degrees. The seeds should sprout within about 12 weeks. Note that seeds from hybrids will not come true. A word of caution: The seeds of some species may be poisonous. Please don't let pets or children ingest them.

ALLIUM PESTS AND PLANT DISEASES

Ornamental onions are normally trouble free, but they are subject to the same pests and diseases as their culinary cousins. They may suffer from onion white rot, downy mildew, and onion flies. Pests include slugs, snails and allium leaf miner.

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Spring Blooming Shrubs That Aren't Forsythia

By Susan Hall | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



I'm always ready to enjoy forsythia as long as it's in someone else's yard. The spring bloom is wonderful, but for the other 50 weeks of the year, the plant is often a ragged mess. Even worse, it's a ragged mess that spreads, and as the canes get thicker, it gradually stops blooming. The solution is to prune it from the inside out every year. This means crawling into the shrub and cutting out 1/4 to 1/3 of the oldest canes after the flowering is over, i.e., when it is getting warm enough for short sleeves. BUT, heavy, heat stroke-inducing clothing is required to avoid bloodshed. A head scarf or hat is recommended unless you don't mind leaving chunks of your hair behind. Happily, there are other choices for jaw-dropping, early spring flower displays.

One alternative to forsythia is red buckeye, *Aesculus pavia*, which is a real gem. In part shade it usually forms an open, multi-stemmed shrub. In nature it is an understory plant, so while it can be grown in full sun and will flower better there, you have to remember that a full sun location stresses the plant. All those flowers are a ploy to spread its DNA around before all that sun kills it. In part shade with morning sun, you'll get a graceful, more delicate looking plant that will reach perhaps 20' tall and that will still provide a gorgeous display of flowers. It also requires moist soil and will quickly start to look sickly during droughts in full sun. Like other buckeyes, the nuts are toxic to humans.



Aesculus pavia grown in the shade

The show starts in early spring when the leaves emerge heavily tinged with red that gradually fades as the season progresses.

They are palmately compound (think hand-shaped with leaflets for the fingers), which gives them something of a tropical appearance. The flowers follow shortly after the leaves in colors ranging from a deep scarlet to a lighter salmon.

The flowers are small and tubular, held on panicles at the tips of the branches. In summer the fruits ripen and the nuts split their leathery brown husks. The nuts look like those of the standard buckeyes but are orangey brown rather than chestnut brown.

The nuts are highly toxic, so plants should be sited away from children's or dog's play areas.

There's a yellow-flowered variety, *Aesculus pavia* var. *flavescens*, which might be labelled as *A.p.var. flavescens*, so when shopping, make sure you know what you're getting.

Fall is the only season where *A. pavia* disappoints. The fall color is drab at best.

Fortunately, the plant has the good sense to drop its leaves early.

Purists will want to avoid *A. pavia* because while it is native to parts of Virginia, it does not usually occur in



Red buckeye (*A. pavia*) grown in full sun.

the Piedmont region. I don't know why. Like virtually every other plant one encounters, *A. pavia* grows best in moist, well-drained soil. If you have clay soil, regularly incorporating compost, dead leaves, or mulch into the top 2" or so will do wonders to improve soil structure and drainage. Ideally you would start this soil enrichment program a few years before planting, but I've never had that kind of patience. I mulch around my red buckeye, add some chopped up leaves in the fall, and let nature takes its course. Plants will grow in less than ideal conditions. With this plant, remember that keeping the soil moist, not waterlogged, is key.

A number of native perennials will complete your part-shade planting. Spring ephemerals — plants that bloom early before trees leaf out and then go dormant — will fit right in. *Dodecatheon meadia*, a/k/a shooting star, is a good choice. Its white flowers are held on long stems over the foliage, making them easy to see. The whole plant dies back by early summer. *Tiarella wherryi* is another possibility. The flowers bloom in early spring and are held well above the foliage, which is often attractively mottled and looks good all season long. For an easy ground cover, try hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*). This one is very hard to find, probably because it spreads very enthusiastically. If you have the space for it, or don't mind the constant effort of keeping it in check, it makes a beautiful ground cover of delicate fronds 15-30" tall. *Dryopteris marginalis* (marginal woodfern) is another possibility. Unlike *D. punctilobula*, it has a clumping growth habit and will not run rampant through your garden. The fronds, up to 2 1/2 ' tall, are bluish-green and arch gracefully. All these perennials, like *A. pavia*, do best in moist soil.

Red buckeye does have some drawbacks, but for gorgeous spring flowers in shades of red, plus glossy, green foliage all summer, followed by the leathery brown fruits breaking open to reveal orangey-brown nuts, a small grove of red buckeye is still worth planting. For me, it beats forsythia by a mile.

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Heirloom Tomatoes

By Cleve Campbell | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



Heirloom tomatoes began showing up in farmers markets several years ago, and somewhat later they started making their appearance in grocery stores. Today, heirloom tomatoes are very popular. On a recent visit to a local farmers market, I explored this phenomenon with a vendor who was selling heirloom tomatoes. First I asked, “Why do people pay double the price for your heirloom tomatoes?” His answer was short and to the point: “**They just taste better** than modern tomatoes.” Naturally I just had to ask, “What in the world IS an heirloom tomato?” Again, his answer was short and to the point: “It’s an old-fashioned tomato.”

“Well,” I said, “why do they cost more?” The vendor responded, “They are harder to grow and are not as productive as the new hybrids.” Thinking that I had finally put all the pieces of the puzzle together, I decided that an heirloom tomato is an old-fashioned tomato that tastes better than modern tomatoes, and that costs more because it’s harder to grow. But I got that familiar feeling that I might still be missing a couple pieces of the puzzle.

Now I must admit I have often been disappointed by the lack of flavor in those bright red, uniformly-sized, vine-ripened tomatoes in the supermarket. For some reason they always look better than they taste. But why do heirlooms taste better? And what exactly is an heirloom tomato? There had to be more to it. Thus, began my journey to solve **the mystery of the heirloom tomato**.

Prior to World War II, tomatoes were grown both at home and by farmers who provided fresh tomatoes to the local markets. As new varieties were developed, seed companies often dropped older and less popular varieties from their catalogs. As a result, home gardeners began to save seeds of their favorite varieties to plant the following year.

After World War II, the country experienced a major expansion in the nation’s transportation infrastructure, highway and railroad systems. The ability to ship produce over greater distances increased the desire for tomatoes from warmer regions with longer growing seasons. This led to the consumer’s desire

for year-round “vine-ripened” tomatoes. Unfortunately, the fragile tasty tomato of yesteryear was not a good shipper, so major hybridization programs were started to breed a tomato of uniform size and shape with a thicker skin to withstand shipping. Hybridization goals were expanded over the years to develop brighter red varieties that ripened at the same time, were robust enough to withstand mechanical harvesting, and were resistant to diseases and pests. Appearance, durability, volume and shelf life were the major attributes the plant breeders and growers were seeking — not flavor. One tomato farmer was quoted as saying, “**I don’t get paid a cent for flavor.**” I learned this from a fun-to-read book by Barry Estabrook, *Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit*. Another reason often cited for the loss in the flavor of tomatoes is the customer demand for “fresh” tomatoes year around (Estabrook). So that’s where all the flavor went!

Trying to find a concise, agreed-upon definition of an heirloom tomato is akin to “nailing Jell-O to a tree.” In general, most would agree that an heirloom tomato is (1) “open-pollinated,” meaning if you collect the seeds and plant the seeds, the plant will be “true” to type — the offspring will be identical to the parents, and (2) at least 50 years old or developed before 1940. Here’s a definition I like, and it’s worth quoting:

First of all, heirloom tomatoes are nonhybrid, open-pollinated plants. That means seed collected from a particular fruit will produce similar tomatoes crop after crop.

Second, heirloom tomatoes are typically defined by age. Depending on whom you ask, an heirloom tomato must be at least 25 years old. Some say 50 years or more. Others define them as seeds dating from before 1945. After World War II, hybrid development became more prevalent.

I’m of the opinion that age doesn’t matter when it comes to heirloom tomatoes, as long as the variety is open pollinated.

Third, families pass heirloom varieties down through the generations just like they do antique furniture. Any vegetable can become an heirloom when families collect their seeds and pass them on. The Nebraska Wedding tomato is a prime example. Tomatoes are also called “love apples,” and seeds were given to young couples as a crop to help start their farms.

msucares.com/news//sg14/sg20140217.html.

One thing that everyone seems to agree upon is the heirloom tomato’s superior flavor: sweet, tart, juicy or just that good old fashioned tomato taste. The various aesthetic values include a wide range of colors (red, black, brown, green, purple, orange, yellow and mahogany brown), unusual shapes and sizes (pear-shaped, round or lobed fruit, and a size range up to a two-pound beast). The names are unique giving one a sense of each tomato’s unique heritage. Because they are open-pollinated, they are great for saving seeds.

With the increased interest in old varieties of heirloom tomatoes, seed saving organizations with seed banks became popular and seed companies began growing “heirloom” seed for specialty catalogs. No one knows the total number of heirloom varieties available today. Amy Goldman states in her book: *The Heirloom Tomato from Garden to Table* that she generally has around 500 varieties under cultivation in a given growing season. Baker Creek Heirloom Seed catalog lists 200 varieties of rare heirloom tomato seeds. There are a lot of varieties to choose from!

Of the many popular heirloom varieties, the “**Mortgage Lifter**” is one of the best known. A West Virginia auto mechanic — “Radiator Charlie” — grew and sold this variety for \$1.00 each in the 1940’s. It is rumored that he sold enough plants to pay off his house mortgage, hence the name!



Mortgage Lifter Tomato
Photo Source: Flickr

Red Brandywine is a tomato that was so beautiful and tasted so wonderful that the taster was reminded of the beautiful Brandywine Valley in Pennsylvania.



Brandywine tomato. Note that leaf is similar to a potato leaf.
Photo Source: Flickr

The “**Giant Polish Beefsteak**” — the seeds were rumored to have been smuggled into this country on the back of a postage stamp.



Giant Polish Beefsteak Photo
Source: Flickr

The “**Cherokee Purple**” tomato — said to have been discovered in the 1880s on a Cherokee Indian reservation.



Cherokee Purple tomatoes Photo
Source: Flickr

I hope that you have a chance to taste a little tomato history this growing season. On your next trip to the supermarket or to your local farmer’s market, you may hesitate to buy heirloom tomatoes because of the cost. They will cost more than “regular tomatoes.” But think about the superior taste you may be missing out on as well as that bit of history that each heirloom will bring to your plate. Better yet, think about adding an heirloom tomato plant to your garden this year.

Thanks for stopping by The Garden Shed. We hope to see again you next month.

Sources:

Tomatoland, “How Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit (Estabrook, 2012)

The Heirloom Tomato: From Garden to Table: Recipes, Portraits, and History of the World’s Most Beautiful Fruit (Goldman, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008)

“Try heirloom tomatoes for a unique gardening experience,”
Miss.St.Ext. <http://msucares.com/news/print/sgnews/sg14/sg20140217.html> (2014)

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Coop.Ext, http://ucanr.edu/sites/sacmg/What_are_Heirloom_Tomatoes/

Additional information on tomatoes may be found in our May, 2015 article, [Garden Shed: “Poison Apple”?](#)

The Ornamental Garden in April

By Patsy Chadwick | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4

To borrow a line from E. E. Cummings, “It’s spring when the world is puddle-wonderful!” April is truly one of the most delightful months in the ornamental garden. But it’s also one of the busiest for a gardener. To be sure, there’s lots of work to be done — fertilizing, amending, sowing, transplanting, dividing, staking, re-potting, and the never-ending task of weeding. Just remember to pace yourself. Take time out from all those chores to visit a neighborhood plant swap, plant sale, or garden center. If you’re looking for further gardening inspiration, plan to visit the properties featured later this month during Historic Garden Week in Virginia. Meanwhile, about those aforementioned chores....

Top dress established ornamental flowerbeds with about an inch of compost. If you’re digging new flowerbeds, work compost or aged cow manure into the loosened soil before you start to plant. A slow-release fertilizer and lime may also be added to the soil if a soil test indicates the need for either.

At this time of year, garden centers are overflowing with the best selections of landscape plants. If you plan to shop for **azaleas and rhododendrons**, select them while they’re in bloom to make sure (a) you like the color and (b) the color harmonizes with your other landscape choices. For example, some pink selections have an orange or coral undertone that, while pretty as single specimens, may clash with other spring-blooming plants located nearby. Tip: Azaleas generally look best planted as a grouping in part sun or filtered shade and acidic, well drained, organically rich soil with a pH of 5.0 to 6.0.

As you peruse the goodies at the garden centers, **buy bedding plants** (begonias, petunias, pentas, geraniums, and marigolds, etc.) while selections are plentiful. Don’t plant them, however, until the danger of frost is past. Wait until night-time temperatures are consistently above 50° F and soil temperatures are above 60° F to plant. Depending on the weather, that may be toward the end of April or even early May. If you just can’t wait that long, be prepared to protect those tender seedlings from frost if temperatures threaten to turn chilly.

For the gardener who prefers to **start seeds indoors for bedding plants**, you can still sow them during the early part of April if you didn’t get around to it during March. For the new or inexperienced gardener, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) Publication 426-001, “Plant Propagation from Seed,” (ext.vt.edu/426/426-001) provides good information on sowing seeds. If you prefer not to start seeds indoors, simply wait and direct sow them in your garden in early May.

Plant some everlastings in your garden this spring. The term “everlasting” refers to a flower, seedpod, or other plant part that can be dried or preserved without the loss of its shape or color. Everlastings are used in dried flower arrangements, wreaths, bridal bouquets, and many craft projects. In addition to strawflower (*Helichrysum*), baby’s breath (*Gypsophila paniculata*), and statice (*Limonium*), all of which are easily preserved, try experimenting with other flowers such as:

- Bells of Ireland (*Molucella laevis*) - Annual
- Blazing Star (*Liatris*) — Perennial
- Cockscomb (*Celosia*) - Annual. The plumed, crested, and spike types (*C. plumosa*, *C. crestata*, and *C. spicata*) all dry well.
- Globe amaranth (*Gomphrena*) — Annual
- Globe Thistle (*Echinops*) - Perennial
- Lavender (*Lavendula*) - Perennial

- Love in a Mist (*Nigella*) - Annual. The beautiful maroon seed pods make a great addition to a dried flower arrangement.
- Love Lies Bleeding (*Amaranth*) — Annual
- Money Plant (*Lunaria annua*) - Annual. The violet-color flowers are very attractive but the dried silvery white disk-shaped seed pods will last for years in an arrangement.
- Paper Moon or Starflower (*Scabiosa stellata*) - Annual. Grow it for its interesting buff-color seed heads.
- Sea Holly (*Eryngium*) - Perennial
- Wormwood (*Artemisia*) - Perennial
- Yarrow (*Achillea*) — Perennial

Plant new container-grown roses after the danger of frost has passed. Make sure the planting hole is at least twice as wide as the root ball. Keep the plant well-watered until it is fully established.

Fertilize established roses using a slow-release organic rose fertilizer as soon as new growth appears.

Using the amount recommended on the fertilizer instructions, scratch it into the soil around the plant and water it in well. Roses are heavy feeders and benefit from being fertilized on a regular basis. If you are new to growing them, the American Rose Society's website (www.rose.org/rose-care-articles/fertilizers-when-and-how) provides guidance on fertilizing and amending soil for roses based on the needs of the casual gardener, the dedicated rose grower, and the expert who grows roses for exhibition.

Cut canes of hybrid roses back to just above a strong new shoot when bud growth starts. If the plant is not a strong grower, prune out diseased or damaged wood only and pinch back the top.

Divide fall-blooming chrysanthemums and asters as they start to put out new growth. As a general rule of thumb, divide them every 3 to 5 years. You'll know they need to be divided when (1) the clump spreads beyond the space allocated for it, (2) the center of the clump dies out, or (3) the plant does not produce as many blooms as in past years. Using a shovel or sharp spade, divide the clump into sections about a foot wide. Plant the new divisions in a sunny site in soil that has been amended with compost. Throw away or compost the woody or dead-looking centers. Tip: Try to complete this task at least 6 weeks before hot weather sets in so that the roots have a chance to become well established. Also, try to divide the plants on a cool, cloudy day.

Did your peonies flop over from the weight of their blossoms last year? If so, take pre-emptive action this spring and **install an open or grid-type support ring before the peony foliage emerges**. Position the ring about 6 inches above the ground. As the foliage emerges, work it up into the ring. The ring will not be noticeable once the plant fills out. Don't delay doing this. Peonies leaf out incredibly fast once they start to sprout and are impossible to cage once they have filled out. If you don't have peonies but would like to add one to your garden, look for selections that have been bred with stronger stems. Another option is to select a specimen with single flowers. Because of their lighter weight, the blossoms are not likely to flop over. A third option is to plant a tree-form peony, which is sturdier than the herbaceous varieties.

Stake tall ornamentals, such as delphiniums and hollyhocks, that become top heavy when they bloom and flop over. This should be done in April or May when the plants are about a foot tall. Thin bamboo stakes are good for this purpose. Be careful not to damage roots when you insert the stakes into the soil beside each plant. Tie the plant loosely to the stake with twine. A good way to do this is to loop the twine into a figure eight around both the stem and the stake so that the plant stem can still move somewhat but will not be pulled too tightly against the stake. As the plants grow taller, you may need to secure them to the stake once or twice more.

If you fed the birds over the winter, don't stop now just because it's spring. **Continue to keep bird feeders full** for hungry migrating and nesting birds. Many of the plants that birds rely on for nectar are weeks away from blooming and the birds need a source of food in the meantime. Remember to keep feeders clean and also provide a source of fresh water. If birdseed gets wet or moldy, throw it out! As the weather turns hotter, remove suet because it may spoil quickly.

Speaking of birds, who doesn't love hummingbirds? These fascinating little migratory birds return to Virginia around mid-April. If you want to attract them to your garden, **install a nectar feeder** by mid-month, preferably near flowering plants and out of the sun. To make nectar for the feeder, heat four parts water to one part sugar just long enough to dissolve the sugar. Do **NOT** add any red food coloring to the solution. Fill the feeder with the cooled solution. Refrigerate any unused solution for up to 2 weeks. Change the nectar in the feeder at least every 3 days or more often as needed. The frequency actually depends on how hot the weather is and how quickly the birds drink the nectar. Important: Clean the feeder every time you change the nectar. This sounds like a lot of work but it's worth it for the show the hummers provide. They will be delighted to hang out in your back yard all summer if you provide them with plenty of nectar-rich flowers. Red blossoms with tubular corollas are particularly attractive to hummingbirds. Insects that are attracted to these plants also serve as food for many birds.

Finally, as you **take a break from your gardening chores**, take a moment to fully appreciate all facets of your landscape. In the sunny areas, look at the myriad shapes, textures, and habits of daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, dogwoods, redbuds, crabapples, azaleas, and more. In the woods and shadier landscaped garden, allow yourself to be enchanted by bloodroot, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Dutchman's breeches, Hepatica, trilliums, Virginia bluebells and a host of other spring-blooming plants that are emerging from the humusy woodland soil. **Look** around you at the rich tapestry of colors and textures. **Breathe** in the perfume of a thousand species in bloom. **Listen** to the joyful, life-affirming music of migratory and nesting birds. **Feel** the warm sun and gentle breezes on your face. To end on a quote (this one from a beer commercial): It doesn't get any better than this!

April Lawn Care

By Melanie | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



This is a perfect time to get your lawn mower ready for summer. Hopefully, it has been put away with the fuel emptied, but if not....

1. **Remove the gasoline.** Leftover gasoline from the previous year can become stale, choking the carburetor and causing rust.
2. **Disconnect the spark plug.** Do this if you decide to service the mower yourself. It disables the engine, making it safer to perform service on the machine.
3. **Remove the blade(s).** While this piece is removed, sharpen it using a metal file. Sharpen blades now, and then once in the summer and probably in the fall, too.
4. **Drain the oil.** Four-cycle engines will need to be drained of oil and refilled with fresh oil.
5. **Clean the equipment.** Use a putty knife and wire brush to knock off accumulated grass and mud, then reattach the blade if you removed it earlier.
6. **Replace the air filter.** This improves airflow to the engine, allowing it to run more smoothly.
7. **Replace the spark plug.** Although your old spark plug may still work properly, installing a new one is a cheap and easy way to ensure optimal performance.

For the lawn:

1. **Maintain proper soil pH** - A soil test should be taken every 3 years to determine pH. Soil pH should be in the 6.0 to 6.8 range for optimal turf growth. Amend the soil according to soil test results to achieve the desired pH
2. **Fertilize at the proper time** - Fall fertilization is recommended to encourage root development. If turf lacks dark green color and is weak and thin, a light late-spring application of fertilizer is also beneficial.
3. **Aeration** may also be beneficial in the spring

The Charlottesville-Albemarle Extension Office now offers a new program called **Healthy Virginia Lawns**. A trained Master Gardener will come to your site, measure your lawn and assist with collecting the soil test. When the results are received, they will contact you with a nutrient management plan. For further information call 434-872-4580 or email hvl.albemarle@vt.edu.

In the Vegetable Garden – April

By Cleve Campbell | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4

After a long cold winter, April can be a “teaser” month. Some years April appears to have all four seasons rolled into one month; we can have days with 70-80° temperatures, followed by night temperatures dipping below freezing. And once in a blue moon, like in April 1971, we are even blessed with snow. Along with the **roller coaster temperatures** and more than enough rain to keep us out of the garden, April can be a trying month. It is a month when patience is truly a virtue. April is also the beginning of the busy season for the vegetable gardener.

According to [VCE Publication 426-331](#) the **average last killing frost** in our area is May 10-May 15. Assuming May 15th as the last killing frost, I used the chart found in that publication to develop the following April planting schedule for our area. Note that the schedule covers both seed-sowing and transplants. If you want to identify transplants that can be planted outdoors this month, look for the vegetables marked with an asterisk.

April 1-11

Asparagus

Beets

Cabbage*

Chinese cabbage*

Carrots

Swiss Chard

Collards

Leeks

Lettuce, Bibb

Lettuce, leaf

Mustard

Onions (set)

Peas, garden

Potatoes

Radish

Spinach

Turnips

April 12-18

Asparagus

Beets

Broccoli*

Brussels Sprouts*

Cabbage*

Chinese cabbage*

Carrots

Cauliflower*

Swiss Chard

Collards

Leeks

Lettuce, Bibb

Lettuce, leaf

Mustard

Onions (sets)

Peas, garden

Potatoes

Radish

Spinach

Turnips

April 19-25

Asparagus

Beets

Broccoli*

Brussels Sprouts*

Cabbage*

April 26-May 2

Beans, Bush

Beans, Pole

Beans, Wax

Beets

Broccoli*

Carrots	Brussels Sprouts*
Cauliflower*	Cabbage*
Collards	Carrots
Leeks	Cauliflower*
Lettuce, Bibb	Leeks
Lettuce, leaf	Lettuce, Bibb
Onions (set)	Lettuce, leaf
Mustard	Swiss Chard
Swiss Chard	Onions (set)
Turnips	Radish
Radish	

*** Denotes
Transplants**

The suggested dates may vary in different parts of our region.

Adapted from "Vegetable Planting Guide and Recommended Planting Dates," Va.Coop.Ext. Pub. 426-331.

There's still time. Tomato, eggplant and pepper can still be started indoors from seeds.

April is the time to set out **cool-weather crops** such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce and onions. But we have to wait until the danger of frost has passed to transplant tender plants such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant.

Having trouble with **plant markers fading**? I have always had trouble when labeling with a "permanent" marker; it still manages to fade before the end of the gardening season! Several years ago, I found a "paint marker" in a local building supply store that does not fade during the growing season. I also discovered a Sharpie marked "paint" at a local craft store that also holds up well through out the growing season.

April is a good time to invest in a soil thermometer. The cause of poor seed germination is often cold soil. If the soil is too cold, seeds of some plants will rot before they have a chance to sprout. A chart providing information on soil temperatures for optimum germination of vegetable seeds can be found in [VCE Publication 426-316](#), titled "Seed for the Garden."

Feeling unsure about what varieties of vegetables to plant? [VCE Publication 426-480](#) "Vegetables Recommended for Virginia," provides a list of recommended varieties.

To save space in your garden, you can construct temporary or permanent woven wire "fences," which will provide vertical support for runner varieties of beans, as well as for cucumbers. Plants can be trained to climb the fences; saving not only space, but also making harvesting easier as the vegetables will be hanging down. For additional information on vertical gardening, see [VCE Publication 426-335](#) titled "Intensive Gardening Methods."



Saving Space! Sequential planting of “pole” limas following snow peas at the base of the fence.

Saving Space: Snow peas growing up a temporary fence. Note the sequential planting of “pole” Lima beans at base of fence.

One of the most **important steps** in planting comes before seedlings even get near the garden. This is the process of **hardening off**, or gradually acclimating seedlings to outdoor conditions. These little plants have spent their short lives in a warm, sunny, protected place and won't fare well if they are not exposed slowly to the elements. **Start the hardening off process about 2 weeks before you intend to plant them outside.** A few days before you are ready to begin hardening plants off, reduce the amount of water you give them, and cease fertilizing until they are planted in the garden. Then put your transplants outdoors in an area where they'll be protected from the direct sunlight and wind. Leave them out for a few hours and bring them back inside. Repeat this each day, gradually increasing the amount of time they are outside and the degree of exposure to sun and wind. After a week or so, leave the transplants out overnight. If frost threatens, bring the seedlings indoors. Additional information on hardening off can be found at [VCE Publication 426-001](#) titled “Plant Propagation From Seed.”

When transplanting seedlings in peat pots, gently tear off the top inch of the pot; the upper edges of the pot should be covered with soil to avoid wicking water away from the soil surface. Wicking may reduce the amount of moisture available to the roots of the plants.

The best time to transplant is on a cool cloudy day or late in the afternoon to avoid the hot sun. The plants then have time to acclimate themselves to their new environment. If the following day is hot and sunny, **a row cover** may be used to reduce the stress on the plant. A row cover may also be used to help protect young transplants from a late frost.

Swiss chard is a soft-textured, mild-flavored green. It will give repeated harvest from spring until fall because it does not tend to bolt or go to seed in hot weather as does spinach. There are multicolor varieties of Swiss chard, red, yellow, green; not only do they add color to the vegetable garden, they hold up well in flower arrangements. Give it a try this spring.

Don't be in too big of a hurry to add **mulch** to the vegetable garden. Delay organic mulching to allow the soil to warm deeply, but mulch before weeds become established.

Resources:

Adopted from the Albemarle County Extension Office, “Monthly (April) Horticulture Tip Sheets”, <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/albemarle/>

Wilted Spinach Salad

By Cate Whittington | April 2016-Vol.2 No.4



My mother and I shared a love of all things food. Many of the cookbooks that line my shelves were gifts from her. One of my favorites is *The Greens Cook Book*, subtitled *Extraordinary Vegetarian Cuisine from the Celebrated Restaurant*.

That celebrated restaurant, offering a spectacular panorama of the Golden Gate Bridge, is Greens Restaurant in San Francisco. Deborah Madison, author of my treasured copy, was the restaurant's original chef when it opened its doors in the late seventies.

I scarcely cracked her book's spine the first few years that I owned it, thinking its sophisticated recipes too complicated for the mother of young children. But as my interest in feeding my family "more of the right stuff" grew, the pages of *The Greens Cookbook* became increasingly dog-eared, food-splattered with notes scribbled in the margins.

I want to share a simplified recipe that proved just the right balance between cooked and raw spinach for my toddlers. Visiting the restaurant last summer with these same grown men, they were delighted to discover Wilted Spinach Salad still on the menu!

Wilted Spinach Salad

Modified from *The Greens Cookbook*

1 small onion

8-12 Kalamata olives

1-pound bunch spinach

1 clove garlic, finely chopped

1 Tablespoon mint leaves, finely chopped

2 Tablespoons sherry vinegar

6 ounces feta cheese, crumbled

3-4 Tablespoons olive oil

Croutons

1. Soak the onion slices in ice water for 10-15 minutes to take the bite out of them.
2. Pit the olives and tear them apart.
3. Wash and dry the spinach, removing stems if desired.
4. Toss the spinach in a large metal bowl with the onion, olives, garlic, mint, vinegar and feta cheese.
5. Heat the olive oil until hot, but not smoking, and immediately pour it over the salad. Use metal tongs to coat and wilt the spinach with the hot oil.
6. Add additional vinegar, as needed, and serve with toasted croutons.

Other greens that respond well to this method are curly endive, escarole, or thinly sliced cabbage.

Resource: *The Greens Cookbook* (Deborah Madison, 1987)