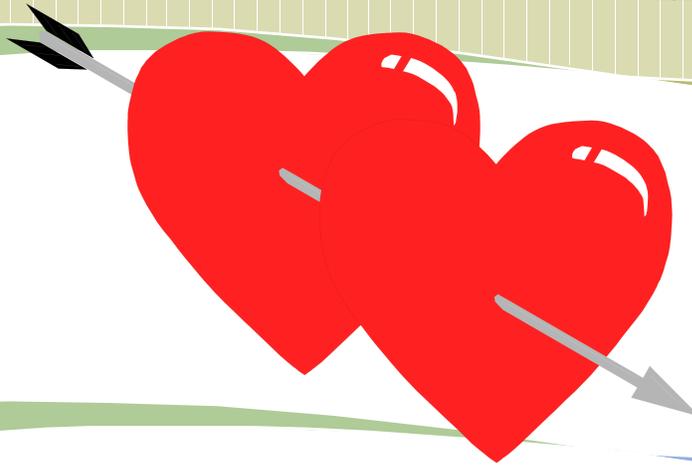


Village Garden Center & Landscape Service

www.villgc.com

ISSUE 120 February 2020
By Eva Soued

540-885-7342



Common Name: **Japanese pieris**

Type: Broadleaf evergreen

Family: Ericaceae

Zone: 5 to 8

Height: 4.00 to 8.00 feet

Spread: 3.00 to 6.00 feet

Bloom Time: April

Bloom Description: White

Sun: Full sun to part shade

Water: Medium

Maintenance: High

Flower: Showy

Leaf: Colorful, Evergreen



Best grown in organically rich, slightly acidic, medium moisture, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. In St. Louis, Japanese pieris doesn't seem to perform well in most locations. Summer foliage decline and reduced vigor results in weakened plants that may succumb to a harsh winter. It grows best in locations sheltered from wind with some afternoon shade. Remove spent flowers immediately after bloom.

Other: Winter Interest

Tolerate: Deer, Heavy Shade

Pieris japonica is a broadleaf evergreen shrub that typically matures to 9-12' tall with a dense, upright habit. It features drooping clusters (racemes to 6" long) of lily-of-the-valley-like white flowers in early spring. Serrulate, oblanceolate to obovate-oblong leaves (to 3.5" long) emerge orange-bronze but mature to glossy dark green. Leaves are evergreen. Bead-like flower buds are set in late summer for the following year and provide winter interest and contrast to the evergreen foliage. Many cultivars are available featuring flowers in various shades of white, pink and deep rose.

Synonymous with and sometimes sold as *Andromeda japonica*.

Genus name is the name of one of the Greek Muses.

Specific epithet means of Japan.

'Mountain Fire' is a popular cultivar that is particularly noted for the fiery red color of its newly emerging foliage and its heavy flower clusters. It typically matures in a spreading mound to 4' tall and 3' wide over the first 10 years. Over additional time, it may eventually reach 6-8' tall. It features large pendulous clusters (racemes) of urn-shaped, lily-of-the-valley-like white flowers in early spring. If spent flowers are not trimmed off after bloom, they are followed by small 5-valved capsules.

Serrulate, oblanceolate to obovate-oblong leaves (to 2" long) emerge bright red (hence the cultivar name), but mature to glossy dark green. Subsequent minor spurts of new growth in summer add interesting contrast to the foliage. Leaves are evergreen. Bead-like flower buds are set in late summer for the following year and provide winter interest and contrast to the evergreen foliage.

Problems

Dieback (phytophthora) and leaf spot are occasional problems. Lace bug infections can be a serious problem, particularly in the eastern U.S. Watch for mites, nematodes and scale.

Garden Uses

This cultivar is ideal for foundations and foreground placements in the shrub border. Also effective in open woodland areas. Effective when mixed with other broadleaf evergreens. May be massed, grouped or grown as small specimens.



Winter Heaths and Heather Plants

With their evergreen foliage and a large number of flowers at a time of year when few other things may be blooming, winter heath plants are valued by homeowners seeking year round interest in the yard. These tiny bushes are earning a place among the most popular acid-loving plants in the North American landscape.



Botanical Classification and Plant Taxonomy

Plant taxonomy classifies the winter heath plants discussed here as *Erica x darleyensis* Mediterranean Pink. The latter is the cultivar name.

Notice that, while sometimes referred to as heather plants, *Erica x darleyensis* Mediterranean Pink is more precisely termed "winter heath." That is because, technically, the true heather plants are classified as *Calluna vulgaris*. But the various types of *Erica*, which are closely related to *Calluna vulgaris*, are grouped with the latter and also loosely referred to as "heather plants." The two terms are used interchangeably here.

Winter heaths are evergreen sub-shrubs, displaying a mounding growth habit with dense foliage. *Erica x darleyensis* Mediterranean Pink is a hybrid, its parents being *Erica carnea* and *Erica erigena*. *Erica carnea* is native to central and southern Europe, *Erica erigena* to Ireland (which is why its common name is Irish heath). Examples of cultivars of the two parents are:

- E. carnea* 'Springwood Pink' (zones 5 to 7)
- E. erigena* 'Golden Lady' (zones 7 to 9)

'Springwood Pink' stays short (its maximum height is one foot, but it often remains shorter than that), suggesting that it be used as a ground cover. The same holds true for 'Golden Lady', with the added bonus that its evergreen foliage is golden in color.

Erica x darleyensis 'Mediterranean Pink' is very much its parents' child when it comes to height. It, too, reaches a maximum height of about 1 foot tall at maturity (with a spread of up to twice that). Its leaves take on the form of tiny needles (as opposed to the scale-like leaves of *Calluna vulgaris*). The pink flowers are bell-shaped and almost totally cover the shrubs when the plants are in bloom. The common name "winter heath" alludes to the blossoming period.

But exact flowering time will depend on your location. In New England, it begins blooming in November, so you could easily characterize it as a late-fall flower. But blooms persist through the winter (during mild winters), so you could just as easily think of them as "winter flowers" (which sounds like an oxymoron to a New Englander). Then again, the floral color is still there in early after the snow recedes, so it would not be unfair to call it an early-spring bloomer, vying with Adonis and witch hazel for "earliest" honors.

Growing Conditions

Scotch heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), indigenous to northern Eurasia, can be grown as far north as planting zone 4. Cultivars include:

- | 'Alba' (white flowers)
- | 'Alportii' (crimson flowers)
- | 'Aurea' (pink flowers, yellow leaves)
- | 'Cuprea' (purple flowers, yellow leaves)
- | 'Else Frye' (flowers white and double)

But *Erica x darleyensis* 'Mediterranean Pink' is not quite so cold-hardy as Scotch heather: zone 6 is listed as its northern limit, although it can be grown in zone 5 if it is provided with ideal soil conditions and protection. Meanwhile, zone 8 is listed as its southern limit.

Grow in full sun in the North for best performance. Like azaleas and rhododendrons and mountain laurel, for example, these small shrubs grow best in a moist but well-drained ground that has an acidic soil pH.

Care

Shear it after flowering. This plant is very forgiving when it comes to being pruned. It may become rather lopsided at some point; to correct this flaw, shear it heavily. The shrub will respond well, eventually regaining the shape that you want it to have.

When you fertilize, do so with the type of fertilizer you would use for azaleas and other acid-loving plants, or else use compost. But there is no need to fertilize every year. Irrigate in the absence of rain. Apply mulch to retain moisture in the soil.

Uses in Landscaping

As small shrubs with dense foliage, heather plants can be massed together to form a ground cover that will suppress weeds. Because they require good drainage, they are a candidate for rock gardens, but they do not tolerate dry soil as well as many other rock-garden plants, so choose their companions wisely (so that all your rock garden plants are "on the same page" when it comes to water needs).

There is also a cultivar of these small evergreen shrubs that have white flowers: *Erica x darleyensis* 'Mediterranean White'.



THE WONDERS OF WEIGELA

Grow this easy-care shrub for its cheerful spring bloom and fabulous foliage

For sheer romantic charm, few ornamental plants rival the character and beauty of weigela. This old-fashioned deciduous shrub, which bears profuse clusters of flowers in spring, is virtually carefree, save for a bit of pruning and watering. The tubular-shaped flowers, which come in various hues, are especially attractive to hummingbirds and butterflies. With a wide range of foliage colors—from creamy variegation to nearly black—and an array of sizes, there's a suitable variety for nearly any landscape need.

A member of the honeysuckle family, weigela is native to parts of Asia, and was first imported to Europe in the 1800s. Hardy in many regions of the US, breeding breakthroughs have resulted in newer cultivars with different colors, increased vigor, and compact sizes that are suited for smaller yards.



Zones:

4-8, with a few exceptions.

Height/Spread:

Arching, upright, mounding or spreading habit; size varies from 12 inches tall and 18 inches wide, up to 10 feet tall and 12 feet wide.

Exposure:

Plants will bloom most prolifically in full sun, but can tolerate partial shade. Varieties with gold, chartreuse or purple foliage will hold their color better in full sun. Those with variegated foliage can burn with too much afternoon sun in hotter climates.

Bloom time:

Mid-late spring, with sparser rebloom in summer and fall.

Color and characteristic:

These deciduous shrubs produce tubular five-lobed flowers, 1-2 inches long. Flowers come in shades of red, pink, white and yellow. Foliage is 2-6 inches long, sometimes glossy, and oblong-shaped with a slightly serrated edge. Leaves are green, chartreuse, gold, variegated, burgundy or deep purple. Fall color is insignificant.

Toxicity:

Weigela is not considered toxic to pets or children.

Ninebark Shrub



Common ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) is a versatile flowering shrub widely used in landscaping. It gets its name from its bark, which can be peeled off in several (potentially nine) thin layers.

Ninebark features dark green or reddish leaves that form an attractive cascading mound. It flowers in late spring with clusters of white or pink blooms, and it bears red fruit in late summer and autumn that often attracts birds.

Ninebark is available in many sizes, with a mature height ranging from 5 to 10 feet with a spread of 6 to 8 feet. There are also dwarf varieties that reach only around 3 to 4 feet in height and spread.

How to Grow Ninebark Shrubs

Ninebark is very easy to grow in USDA hardiness zones 2 through 7, but it might struggle in the heat of zones 8 and 9. The low-maintenance shrub is remarkably tolerant of many growing conditions, including drought, and it is generally free of pest problems and diseases. Occasionally, fireblight and leaf spots might occur, and powdery mildew can strike if the leaves stay wet for a long period. Thinning out older branches can help to improve airflow and prevent mildew.

In landscaping, ninebark is used for specimen planting, foundation planting, hedges, screens, and to prevent erosion on slopes. Many cultivars are available. It's important that a ninebark shrub is given enough space, as well as regular pruning, so its arching branch pattern can be fully appreciated. When used in a mixed shrub border, it works well with lilac and spirea.

Light

Plant ninebark in a location that receives full sun to partial shade, but be aware that it will flower best in full sun. In the northern part of its growing range, the shrub prefers around six hours of direct light each day, but the farther south it grows, it tends to appreciate some afternoon shade.

Soil

The shrub can grow in either alkaline or acidic soil, which it prefers to be moist and well-draining. Mulch can help to retain moisture and hold down weeds. As its native habitat includes stream banks, hillsides, and damp thickets, ninebark tolerates clay and loam soil, as well as shallow and rocky

Water

Ninebark will grow in both dry and wet locations. Its water requirements are generally low, but it will handle poor drainage and occasional flooding if necessary. Once established, ninebark is a very good drought-tolerant shrub for dry areas.

Fertilizer

Spring is the best time to lightly fertilize the ninebark with compost and organic plant food that's designed for shrubs and trees.



Smoke Bush

Smoke bush, *Cotinus coggygria*, is a deciduous shrub that's also commonly known as royal purple smoke bush, smokebush, smoke tree, and purple smoke tree. Smoke bush is often used as a garden specimen thanks to its beautiful purple-pink smoky plumes and the purple leaves found on some cultivars. It grows best in USDA Hardiness Zones 4 to 9 and is highly drought-tolerant.



Smoke bush has an upright, multi-stemmed habit. The leaves are waxy green except for those cultivars with purple leaves, and are 1 1/2 to 3 inches long, ovate in shape. They turn yellow, orange, or purplish red in fall, depending on variety. The name "smoke bush" derives from billowy hairs that are attached to the flower clusters and which remain in place through the summer, turning a smoky pink to purplish pink as the weeks progress. Purple smoke bush is dioecious, meaning it has staminate and pistillate (male and female) flowers borne on different individuals.

Smoke bush is often used as an individual specimen plant, and in larger landscapes, it can be massed or planted as an informal screening hedge. The plant is drought-tolerant, so it's useful in xeriscaping and other applications where water conservation is important.

How to Grow Smoke Bush

Smoke bush should be planted in full sun, but it does well in almost any soil type and most any pH level. The ideal circumstance is slightly sandy loam, but they also do well in rocky soils. The only soils not well suited are dense, soggy wet conditions. In zone 4, plant them in slightly sheltered locations to protect from winter winds. When grouping plants, they should be spaced 10 to 15 feet apart.

Young plants should be watered deeply and regularly, but once established, smoke bush has good resistance to drought. Mulch the base of the shrubs with wood chips or bark mulch to keep weeds away and soil moist.

The only mandatory pruning is to remove dead or damaged wood, but the shrubs will tolerate hard pruning to shape them or rejuvenate them.

Light

Smoke bush should be planted in full sun. In part shade conditions, foliage will be sparse, requiring regular pruning to keep the plants dense.

Soil

Smoke bush does well in nearly all soil conditions provided the soil is well drained. It does not tolerate damp, soggy soils.

Fothergilla

The effusive spring froth of fothergilla flowers brightens shady green garden corners and sparkles when planted to catch the backlighting of morning or afternoon sunlight. Long after the flowers are gone, these multi-interest North American shrubs end the season in a blaze of sunset-orange foliage.

Fothergilla's invitingly fluffy flowers—white with exquisite chartreuse tips—appear on naked branches before they leaf out, making the shrubs especially striking. The blooms do not have petals.

Their showy softness is all about their stamens: white filaments and yellow anthers. Shrubs planted in full sun bear the most flowers and will appear more compact and dense in terms of branch structure, while very shaded plants will develop a graceful and more slender habit.

Dwarf fothergilla (*Fothergilla gardenii*) is native to the low coastal regions south of North Carolina.

For petite gardens or for simple structural variation within a mixed border, it is an excellent choice, rarely growing taller than five feet.

Specific cultivars (such as 'Harold Epstein') can be much more compact. This species generally flowers a little earlier than its larger cousin *F. major*, so planting cultivars of both species will extend your enjoyment of their fragrant white blooms. Dwarf fothergilla requires ample moisture and will be unhappy if it dries out. Hardy in USDA growing zones 5 to 8, it grows especially well in its native range and in the Pacific Northwest.

Fothergilla major is a large shrub, sometimes exceeding 12 feet. In smaller spaces it is an excellent alternative to a tree. And in a large space a group of three (odd numbers works best in informal gardens), it makes a stunning spring and fall backdrop for smaller shrub and perennial plantings.

Unlike dwarf fothergilla, this shrub is more tolerant of soils that are near-alkaline, and it can handle some drought stress too. It is hardy from USDA zones 4 to 8.

- Fothergillas belong to the same family as witch hazel.
- On paper, fothergilla's common name is witch alder, but no one uses it.
- Fothergillas were introduced to England in the 18th century.
- The shrubs are named for Dr. John Fothergill (1712–1780), an English physician whose 18th-century garden included one of the earliest collections of North American plants.



Redbud

REASONS TO LOVE THEM

- Clusters of tiny magenta buds swell into showy rosy pink flowers in early spring before the leaves appear, with the long-lasting blossoms putting on a show for two to three weeks.
- The buds appear to emerge right from the bark of twigs and branches and even on parts of the trunk, adorning the entire tree with miniature clusters of flowers.
- The trunk of the redbud commonly divides close to the ground, creating an interesting multi-trunk shape with graceful arched branches and a rounded crown.
- Heart-shaped leaves 2 to 6 inches in length emerge a reddish color, turning dark green in summer and then a bright canary yellow in autumn. The flowers also give rise to clusters of beanlike pods that remain on the tree into winter.
- The redbud adapts to a wide range of site conditions and thrives in most types of soil and levels of sun exposure.



WHERE TO PLANT THEM

The eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) grows throughout most of the eastern U.S, extending as far west as Oklahoma and Texas and north into Canada. This tree is not picky when it comes to soil preference, but it does best when grown in a moist, well-drained location. Because of their modest size, redbuds work well as understory trees and are particularly stunning when planted in groupings. The horizontal branching pattern adds architectural interest to the garden and makes an attractive canopy for spring bulbs.

- Zones: 4-9
- Height: 20-30 feet
- Spread: 25-35 feet
- Soil: Tolerates acidic or alkaline soils as well as heavy clays
- Exposure: Full sun to light shade
- Annual growth rate: 13 to 24 inches

Redbud trees tolerate moderate dry spells, but when planted in full sun, they should be watered regularly. To keep the soil cooler and evenly moist in the summer, apply a layer of mulch out to the drip line of the limbs.



WITCH HAZEL

A large deciduous shrub with colorful, fragrant flowers during the winter, witch hazel is virtually maintenance-free and resistant to most pests and diseases. Witch hazels perform best in full sun (or filtered shade in hotter regions), where the flowers glow like fiery embers in the backlight of the low winter sun. They prefer well-amended soil and regular water and are tolerant of acid or alkaline conditions. Native forms are hardier, while most hybrid cultivars grow in USDA Zones 5-8. A more heat tolerant variety, *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Diane', can be grown in Zones 5-9. Once established, they are virtually maintenance-free and resistant to most pests and diseases. Witch hazel extract is commonly used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes.

WITCH HAZEL CARE

While most varieties reach 10-20 feet high and wide at maturity, witch hazels can be kept smaller with pruning once they are finished blooming. Prune before summer so that the following year's buds can develop. Suckering twigs that form around the base should be removed. Once new flower buds appear, branches can be cut and forced to bloom inside.

SUCCESS TIPS FOR GROWING WITCH HAZEL

- Witch hazels require a winter chill to attain full flowering.
- They also need summer water.
- Mulching is beneficial for retaining moisture.

DESIGNING WITH WITCH HAZEL

- Companion plants such as hellebores, winter heath, and bulbs of hardy cyclamen and snowdrop can be naturalized around the base. To extend seasonal interest into summer, smaller forms of clematis such as *C. viticella* are attractive when trained through the branches.
- The spidery flowers and heady fragrance are best appreciated when sited near a doorway or well-used pathway.
- Scott Canning, director of horticulture at Wave Hill, recommends siting them for maximum wintertime drama: put them in a spot where they'll be backlit in the afternoon and the warm sun will encourage their flowers and scent to unfurl.



Quick-Braised Greens and Beans With Bacon

Ingredients

- 2 bunches dark and sturdy leafy greens, like collards, kale or mustard greens (about 1 pound)
- 4 bacon slices
- 1 large red onion (about 1 pound), finely chopped
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- 6 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 1 cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 2 (15-ounce) cans red kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce, plus more for serving



Preparation

Step 1 Prepare the greens: Cut the tough stems out of the greens and discard. Stack the leaves, roll tightly crosswise and slice into 3/4-inch-wide ribbons. Transfer to a large bowl, cover with cold water and swish to remove grit. Transfer greens to a colander, cleaning them a second time if the water remaining in the bowl is visibly dirty.

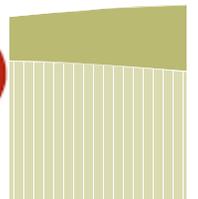
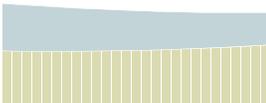
Step 2 Cook 2 bacon slices in a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium heat, turning occasionally, until browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Transfer the cooked bacon to a paper towel lined plate. Meanwhile, cut the remaining 2 bacon slices crosswise into 1/4-inch-wide strips.

Step 3 Add the 1/4-inch bacon strips to the hot bacon fat and cook, stirring, until the fat in the bacon strips starts to render, about 1 minute. Add the onion and a pinch each of salt and pepper and cook, stirring often, until golden brown around the edges, about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and sage and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute.

Step 4 Stir in the stock, scraping up any browned bits on the bottom of the pot. Cover, reduce the heat to low and simmer, 5 minutes.

Step 5 Increase the heat to medium, add the greens, season with salt and pepper and stir until just wilted, about 2 minutes. Cover and cook until tender with a little bite, about 3 minutes.

Step 6 Uncover and add the beans and hot sauce. Stir until the beans are heated through, 2 to 3 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide among serving dishes and crumble the cooked bacon slices on top. Serve with more hot sauce.

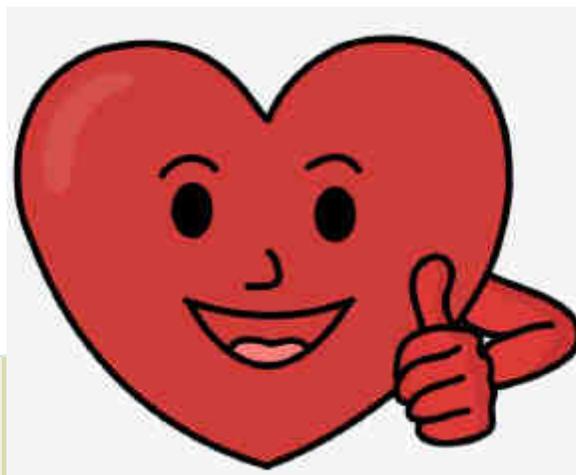


February is a month of mixed emotions. On one hand, it feels a bit celebratory because we made it through January, but on the other hand, it's the very middle of winter and spring still tends to look pretty far away. Luckily the kitchen can provide comfort during this chilly month to make it not only tolerable, but also delicious and fun.

Curried Vegetable and Chickpea Stew

Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt, divided
- 2 medium red or yellow potatoes, diced
- 1 tablespoon curry powder
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon peeled and grated fresh ginger
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
- 2 cups low-sodium vegetable broth, divided
- 2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 medium green bell pepper, diced
- 1 medium red bell pepper, diced
- 1 medium head cauliflower, cut into bite-sized florets
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes with their juices
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 (10-ounce) bag baby spinach
- 1 cup coconut milk



Instructions

1 Heat the oil in a large frying pan over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion, season with 1 teaspoon of the salt, and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes and 1 teaspoon of the salt, and sauté until just translucent around the edges.

2 Stir in the curry, brown sugar, ginger, garlic, and cayenne if using and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Pour in 1/4 cup of the broth and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pan. Transfer this onion-potato mixture into the bowl of a 6-quart or larger slow cooker.

3 Add the remaining 1 3/4 cups broth, chickpeas, bell peppers, cauliflower, tomatoes with their juices, pepper, and remaining 1 teaspoon salt. Stir to combine. The liquid should come about halfway up the sides of the bowl; add more broth as needed. Cover and cook on the HIGH setting for 4 hours.

4 Stir in the spinach and coconut milk. Cover and let sit for a few more minutes to allow the spinach to wilt. Taste and season with salt and other seasonings as needed. Serve on its own, or over couscous, Israeli couscous, or orzo pasta.

Recipe Notes

Smaller slow cookers: Cut this recipe in half for a smaller slow cooker.

Dutch-oven version: Instead of cooking in a slow cooker, simmer the stew in a large Dutch oven or soup pot over low heat on the stovetop or in a 350°F oven for 45 to 60 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender. Add the spinach and coconut milk and stir until the spinach has wilted.

This is a great clearing-out-the-fridge recipe.

I have also made versions with parsnips, sweet potatoes, turnips, winter or summer squash, extra carrots, and Swiss chard.

Since this makes such a large batch, you can freeze what you don't think you'll eat in a week. Just freeze it before adding the coconut milk since that can separate and become grainy once frozen.





We publish a monthly Newsletter to inform you of our specials and to share planting information for the current season. Join us @

www.villgc.com



Like us on Facebook

Follow us on Twitter