



International Herb Association - Herb of the Year

By Sarah Robinson

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

The International Herb Association has named *Humulus lupulus* - the common hop - its Herb of the Year for 2018. Used primarily for the flavoring and preserving of beer, the vine is quite vigorous in USDA Zones 3 through 9. In winter, the foliage dies back to the ground while the roots remain alive under the soil. Dormant roots are hardy to minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit, but new growth is susceptible to frost. Planted too early in the growing season, a late frost could kill the plants. All they need to grow is decent soil, lots of sun, water, and something to grow on as they are a climbing plant. Their tendency to grow quickly and spread, if not trimmed and given a structure to climb, is where the second part of their latin name “lupulus” is derived, meaning wolf-like. The cone flower of the female plant contains a yellow powder known as lupulin. This contains the bitter resins and essential oils that brewers use for adding flavor and aroma to their beer.

The vines grow from thick rhizomes, similar to ginger or irises. The root and rhizome system is known as a crown. New plants are typically propagated by dividing rhizomes off an existing crown. The plant is a vining perennial, which means vines will grow from the same roots year after year. If you’re starting a hop garden you may want to plant different varieties to see which plants do best in your soil and sun. In some areas of El Dorado County, our long growing season allows us to choose varieties that are early, mid, and late season harvest which gives the home gardener time to space out the harvesting and drying of the crop.

Hop plants benefit from a well drained soil that is rich in organic matter and a pH range of 6 to 7.5. They can grow a foot a day and up to 30 feet in a season. A sturdy structure to hold the vines is a must. A few vines need to be selected early in the season as “keepers,” the rest will be trimmed off as we want the energy of the plant going towards cone production. Plants take around 3 years to produce a harvest that is meaningful. In addition to harvesting cones for your beer brewing, the hop plant can be grown to create a shaded space. Herbalists use the hop cone as a calming agent and there have been studies which show a mild sedating effect.

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Are you interested in taking your home brewing hobby to a new level? Add some unique character to your recipes by growing and using your own hops and brewing herbs? Join MG Sarah Robinson and Kelly Auville, along with Placer County Master Food Preserver Roger Dillon, in a presentation of growing, harvesting and drying hops and herbs. Saturday, January 27 from 9am to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Bldg C, 2850 Fairlane Ct in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:(530)621-5512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorf.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.