

GARDENIAS

By Kit Smith

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Is there anything more gloriously fragrant than the lovely gardenia? Here are a few tips to keep your gardenias thriving throughout the year.

Gardenias are evergreen and thrive in full or partial sun. Gardenias need heat to bloom and will bloom from May until the end of the warm weather. Plant the gardenia high, as all shrubs and trees should be planted. They need well draining soil in the warmest areas of the yard or in containers on the patio. Plant them far enough away from other plants or in larger pots so the surface roots can spread and not compete with other plants. Fertilize with 4-8-5 fertilizer every three to four weeks during the growing season, which is April through November. Add in iron chelate or iron sulfate if the leaves yellow.

Gardenias also like magnesium and iron. Gardenias can stand low temperatures to 20 degrees Fahrenheit. If your gardenia sustains frost damage – wilting and burning – prune the damaged twigs and leaves after the last frost date has passed.

For higher elevation gardens, protect gardenias through winter's harshness by bringing them indoors. Keep them in bright light, preferably in a southern exposure. Direct sunlight for half a day is fine. Grow lights are a must to give these plants ample light. The indoor temperature range should be between 55 and 65 degrees with high humidity. The elevated humidity is very important especially in the dry indoor air during the winter. Do not forget to water when the roots dry out and fertilize. The most typical problem for indoor gardenias is bud drop, and this is caused by very low humidity, insufficient light and either over or under-watering.

Favorite varieties of the gardenia include the following:

'Mystery' – this gardenia grows to be 6 to 8 feet tall. Heaviest bloom is May to July; sometimes flowering continues to November. The blossoms are 4 to 5 inches and are corsage standards. Prune 'Mystery' to keep its ranginess under control.

'Chuck Hayes' is both heat and cold tolerant. It has double three-inch flowers.

'Kleim's Hardy' is a profuse early summer bloomer and can reportedly withstand cold temperatures in winter down to zero degrees Fahrenheit.

'August Beauty' resembles 'Mystery' but stays a little shorter. This heavy bloomer, true to its name, will flower a second time, between August and October.

'Veitchii' is a free-flowering, bushy plant 3 to 4-1/2 feet high. It is the easiest to grow in cooler climates and has a long blooming season, from May to November, and even longer in warm-winter areas.

'Radicans' is a miniature, growing to between 6 to 12 inches tall, with variegated foliage and inch-wide flowers. It does well in containers, as a border or in smaller spaces.

Saturday, August 25th, Master Gardeners present their "Perennials" class. Perennial plants come back year after year and add texture, color and flowers to your landscape. This free three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. and is held in the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville.

A good selection of perennials will be featured at the Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale on Saturday, September 15th from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. in the parking lot of the Veterans Memorial Building. It's also a great opportunity to purchase winter veggie starts and lots of other interesting plants for your garden and landscape.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook. Master Gardeners are available to answer questions most Saturdays at the Placerville Farmers Market and most Sundays at the El Dorado Hills Farmers Markets.

Do you have 1-gallon plant containers to recycle? Master Gardeners will gladly take them at the Master Gardener Office. Call before dropping them off and thank you for the donation.