

Garden Thymes

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center

Winter 2018



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Contact Us

North Carolina Cooperative
Extension, Ashe County Center
134 Government Circle, Suite 202
Jefferson, NC 28640

Phone: (336) 846-5850

Fax: (336) 846-5882

<http://ashe.ces.ncsu.edu/>

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2018 Perennial of the Year

Try an award winning perennial for your sunny garden. The Perennial Plant Association has awarded the title Perennial Plant of the Year® 2018 to *Allium 'Millenium'*. This herbaceous perennial, relative to the common onion, is a workhorse of the late summer garden. Bred by Mark McDonough, a horticulture researcher from Massachusetts, 'Millenium' was introduced through Plant Delights Nursery, of Fuquay Varina, NC in 2000 where it has proven itself year after year earning rave reviews. 'Millenium' is spelled with one "n", as registered, but is occasionally incorrectly listed with two "n"s.



This cultivar is the result of a multigenerational breeding program involving *Allium nutans* and *A. lusitanicum* (formerly *Allium senescens* ssp *montanum*), selected for late flowering with masses of rose-purple blooms, uniform habit with neat shiny green foliage that remains attractive all season long, and for its drought resistant constitution. The genus *Allium* contains more than 900 species in the northern hemisphere, but is perhaps best known for a dozen or so species of culinary vegetables and herbs: onion, garlic, leeks, shallots, scallions, and chives. The genus is also known for a few dozen ornamentals that grow from bulbs and sport tall stems with big globe shaped blooms in spring. The vast majority of the genus is little known and absent from horticulture, yet possesses significant ornamental potential.

Allium 'Millenium' has numerous virtues to add to the landscape setting. Growing best in full sun, each plant typically produces an upright foliage clump of grass-like, glossy deep green leaves reaching 10-15 inches tall in spring. In midsummer, two to three flower scapes rise above the foliage with each scape producing two or three showy two-inch spherical umbels of rose-purple florets that last as long as four weeks. The flower umbels are completely round (spherical), not domed or hemispherical as they are in some *Allium* species. They dry to a light tan often holding a blush of their former rose-purple color. While other alliums can look scraggly in the heat of the summer, 'Millenium' does not let the heat bother it! Easily grown in zones 4-9 (possibly zone 3) makes it a great perennial in the mountains of North Carolina. In very hot summer climates it does appreciate afternoon shade.

No serious pest problems have been reported. Deer and rabbits leave 'Millenium' alone. Alliums are sometimes avoided due to their reseeding behavior. Fortunately, 'Millenium' exhibits 50% reduced seed production, raising less concern for self-sown seedlings. *Allium 'Millenium'* has a fibrous root structure forming an ornamental herbaceous clump easily propagated by division. Once in the garden, 'Millenium' can easily be lifted and divided in either spring or fall. Cut back foliage in late fall. This low maintenance dependable perennial will not disappoint! Blooming at a time when most of our garden begins to decline in the tired excess of the season, 'Millenium' offers much needed color. It is truly an all-season plant that offers attractive shiny foliage spring through summer and caps off the season with its crown of perfectly round rose-purple flower umbels. Try one in your garden in 2018!

Sincerely,

Travis Birdsell
Extension Agent, Agriculture



Why Mulch?

Spring is still over a month away, but our bulbs will soon be poking their heads up. There will most certainly be warm days between now and then, and you may want to get outside and work. Before our January deep freeze, I was mulching and I thought that it would be worth sharing the benefits of this wonderful garden blanket.

Mulching is one of the most important ways to maintain healthy landscape plants. What is mulch exactly, you ask? Well, mulch is simply any material applied to the soil surface for protection or improvement of the area covered. People can't take the credit because mulching is really nature's idea. Nature produces large amounts of mulch all the time with fallen leaves, needles, twigs, pieces of bark, spent flowers, fallen fruit, and various other natural materials.

What are the benefits of mulch? Well, I'm glad you asked because when applied correctly, mulch has the following benefits:

- It prevents loss of water from the soil during hot and dry periods
- Mulch reduces the growth of weeds, when your mulch is weed free and when applied deeply enough to prevent weed seeds from sprouting and smothering existing weeds
- Mulch keeps the soil cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter, think of it like the insulation in the walls of your house (very important in cold winters)
- Mulch prevents soil splashing during heavy rains, this stops erosion and keeps diseases in the soil from splashing onto plants
- Natural mulch also helps improve soil. As it decays the material becomes topsoil and adds nutrients to the soil and plants
- Mulch can also provide a barrier between trees and your lawn mower, it's easier to mow around a mulch bed than the trunk of a tree. It also keeps you from compacting the soil around the roots
- Mulched plants have more roots than plants that are not mulched, more roots equal healthier plants
- At the end of the day mulch adds to the beauty of the landscape. Who doesn't want something good to look at when they pull in the driveway at the end of a hard day, we call that curb appeal

Some easily available types of mulch in our area include double ground hardwood and other types of bark mulch, wood chips, pine needles, and chopped leaves. The amount of mulch you apply depends on the material you use. Many wood and bark mulches are made up of fine particles and should not be more than three inches deep. Excessive amounts of these types of mulch can suffocate plant roots. Coarse-textured mulch like pine bark nuggets allow good air movement and can be as deep as four inches. So the next time you've worked up a good sweat mulching your landscape, take a break and remember all the great benefits it provides.



Vegetable Highlight

Krazy for Kohlrabi



It's a funny sounding name (pronounced cole-rob-ee) and an interesting looking vegetable. Kohlrabi is a member of the Brassica family of vegetables that include broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, Brussel sprouts and collards. Depending on the variety, I have heard kohlrabi described as looking like an above ground turnip. The edible white, green, or purple "bulbs", which are actually swollen stems, have a flavor reminiscent of cabbage/turnips. But this vegetable is both milder and sweeter.

Kohlrabi is becoming more available as a spring transplant. If you cannot find any transplants, you can direct sow seed 4-6 weeks before the last average frost (in Ashe County, sow seed the first of April). You can also start your own seeds in your house and transplant beginning to mid May in your garden. Seedlings should be around four inches tall, which is roughly 6-8 weeks old. In the garden, thin plants or transplant at six inches for small varieties and twelve inches for large varieties. You can plant regularly every two weeks for a consistent supply or wait and plant another crop in the fall (plant around beginning to mid-August for best results in Ashe County). While growing, be careful cultivating around kohlrabi as they have delicate, shallow roots. You will see this first hand when you pull one to eat. Kohlrabi is susceptible to the same cabbage worm complex as other brassicas. When "bulbs" are sizing, too much water can cause them to split, similar to an overwatered tomato.

Young leaves can be used in salads and stir fries. Most varieties will be harvested when bulbs are around two inches in diameter. This usually occurs in 40-50 days after planting. Waiting too long can cause a very fibrous core to develop. If you think two inches is too small, grow kossak, which can grow five to six inches in diameter and feed a family of four. Once harvested, cut the stem one inch below the "bulb," remove the leaves and stems, and you are ready to cook or store for several weeks in the refrigerator or for several months in a cold, moist, root cellar.

My family enjoys peeling and cutting Kohlrabi into 1/4 inch thick round cross sections. Place in a bowl with olive oil, salt and pepper to taste and throw on a hot grill. Cook on each side till you start to see a bit of charring. Your Kohlrabi "steak" makes a great side dish or try it on a burger. Kohlrabi is also great cut into strips and used in stir-fry. Recommended varieties: Terek, Winner (early), Kossak (large), Kolibri (Purple), and Quickstar.

High Country Seed Swap and Growers School

On **Saturday, March 17, 2018**, all aspiring and practicing area gardeners are invited to Ashe Family Central (the former Ashe Central High School) in Jefferson to the High Country Seed Swap. The event features a day-long open exchange of seeds, plus gardening workshops. **Beginning at 8:30 a.m.**, gardeners will be able to display their own surplus seeds and view the offerings of others on tables set up in the cafeteria space. The seed swap will continue throughout the morning and wind-down in the early afternoon. The event is expanding this year to include multiple gardening workshops in the afternoon, as well as a season favorite in the morning, apple grafting with Big Horse Creek Farm (\$10 fee for this class). More information on workshops will be posted later on www.ashe.ces.ncsu.edu.

Gardeners are encouraged to bring any surplus seeds, bulbs, corms, cuttings, plants, and fruit scion wood they can to exchange. Seed swaps operate on the honor principle that gardeners will bring what they can this year, grow what they take from this swap, and bring more seeds from their crops to next year's seed swap.

The Seed Swap takes place in the Community Center (former cafeteria) of Ashe Family Central, located at 626 Ashe Central School Rd, Jefferson, NC 28640. North Carolina Cooperative Extension sponsors the event, with support from the Ashe County Farmers Market (ACFM) and the Ashe County Extension Master Gardenersm volunteers.

The event is free and open to all gardeners and farmers in the area. For more information, e-mail richard_boylan@ncsu.edu or call the Ashe or Watauga Cooperative Extension centers at (336) 846-5850 or (828) 264-3061.

North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center

Extension Master GardenerSM

Information & Orientation Session

March 21, 2018

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

**Agriculture Service Center
Conference Room**

There is no charge to attend orientation. The Extension Master Gardener program will have a registration fee of \$125.00.

We encourage all who are interested in participating in the Extension Master Gardener program to attend this orientation session. Applications for the Extension Master Gardener training will be available at the orientation session.

The Extension Master Gardener program extends horticultural education to an ever-increasing gardening audience and provides a visible and viable way to meet the public demand for horticultural information. The Ashe County program will follow the state guidelines while tailoring its program to the unique conditions of mountain gardening.

- * Open to any resident of Ashe County
- * All applications and information obtained are confidential and the privacy of the applicants is respected
- * Selection is based on the volunteer needs of the program and on the qualifications of applicants
- * Key factors in the selection process include: Previous volunteer experience, Communication skills, Ability and desire to learn, Interest in helping people, Willingness to provide unbiased, research-based information and operate in a team atmosphere, Gardening experience and expertise (not required)

**The application period will be open from
March 21-April 11, 2018.**

**Limited to
16
Participants**



**Classes will begin on Wednesday, April 18, 2018.
The program will then be held every Wednesday
from 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. for 13 weeks.**

For more information contact Travis Birdsell, Extension Agent, Agriculture with the NC Cooperative Extension, Ashe County Center at (336) 846-5850.

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