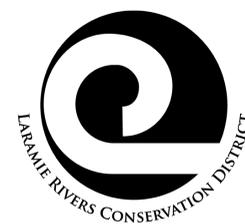


# HIGH COUNTRY CONSERVATION



2017

LARAMIE RIVERS CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Summer Edition

## HIGH PLAINS TEST GARDEN - Exploring Uncommon & Heirloom Vegetable Plants by Laura McGinley



Over the past few summers I have enjoyed experimenting with vegetable plants. After years of growing typical plants such as lettuce, spinach, radishes, zucchini, and hybrid tomatoes. I decided to broaden my range and test out different varieties not usually found in our gardens or local markets. From easiest to more challenging, the following are some of the vegetables I tested.

### GREENS



Greens, that include any plant with edible leaves, are some of the easiest plants to grow. We typically think of greens as lettuce, cabbage, or spinach but this vegetable group actually has over 400 varieties of plants. I tested 20+ greens, including: Arugula Pronto, Chinese Kale Oros, Corn Salad-Mache, Miners Lettuce, Orach (pictured left), Iceplant, two types of Purslane, five types of basil, Common Borage, three types of head cabbage, Watercress, two types of Kale, and two types of Broccoli Rabe (not a true broccoli—is more related to turnip). All of these grew easily in the cooler weather of spring/summer and late fall. A good approach for growing greens is using cold frames, hoop covers, or hoop houses which allows taking advantage of the cooler weather of spring, yet protects the plants from freezing in our unpredictable high plains climate.

### ROOTS



Another relatively easy group of plants that all did well are root vegetables, or more specifically, taproot vegetables. Root vegetable include over 50 types of plants that fall into categories of bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, taproots, and tuberous roots. Onions and garlic are examples of bulbs, white potato's are tubers, yams are tuberous roots, and ginger or turmeric are rhizomes. Taproots are vegetables such as carrots, beets, and radishes and are the category that usually thrive in our gardens. Roots I planted included: Cosmic Purple Carrot (pictured), two types of yellow carrots, Lunar White carrot, two types of purple carrots, Golden beets (very mild, sweet flavor), Chioggia beet (pictured left), Chinese Luobo green radish (pictured), Malanga Violet radish, black radish, and Rat Tail radish that one eats the very long seed pods (children also love this unique plant, pictured right).



### PEAS

Peas are another vegetable, in fact a legume, that does best in cooler weather of spring or fall and does well in cold frames or other season extended spaces. There are many varieties to choose from but in looking for something unique I went with peas that have prolific tendrils that are edible and look great in salads or types that have colorful seed pods. The varieties I grew are: Magnolia Blossom Tendril (pictured left), Spring Blush tendril, and Bluawshokkers pea (violet pods).



### EGGPLANT

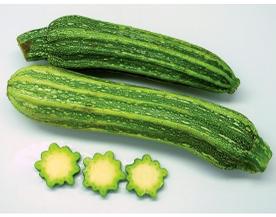
This was one of the most surprising plants for me. Part of the Nightshade family—along with tomatoes, peppers, and potatoes, these plants became a quick favorite. I started them inside 6-8 weeks before transplanting and they did very well in the garden. I found the plants attractive and easy to grow. There are many interesting and beautiful varieties to choose from and with flavors and textures that differ from the grocery store standard Black Beauty. I grew Antiqua, Applegreen, Purple Stripe (pictured left), Little Finger, and Thai Lavender (pictured right).



**POTATO** - Fun and easier to grow than you might imagine. I raised Purple Viking last year (pictured left) . These are striking purple & red tubers that taste delicious and have great texture.



Continued next page...



## HIGH PLAINS TEST GARDEN Cont....

### SQUASH

I have always liked Zucchini and as anyone who has had to find homes for their bumper Zuch crop knows, they do very well here. Wanting to try something new, I



went with very attractive Costana Zucchini (pictured) and a few types of Patty Pan (pictured). Both did well but I was most impressed with the Patty Pan. If you have not tried one, they are similar to zucchini but milder and denser, so they take on flavors (spices) well yet do not get as mushy as a zucchini when cooked. They are so tasty that I am amazed they are not common in stores and it is definitely a crop that I recommend for your summer garden.



### MELONS

Now onto the more challenging end of the gardening spectrum. A few years back I came across Baker Heirloom Seeds that has so many varieties of heirloom melons from around the world, it can make your head spin. Traditional melons such as watermelon, honeydew, or cantaloupe do not do well here due to the cool nights and short growing season so I wanted to see if I could find a smaller, shorter maturation date, melon that folks can grow here.



I tried numerous seeds—starting indoors 8 weeks prior to transplant—as well as tested different environments. I was able to eliminate varieties that did not fruit and narrow down choices to a handful of possibilities. What I found was small types ranging from 1/2 - 2 lbs. will produce numerous melons when in the right environment. Melons like heat, sandy-loam soil, pH 6.0-6.8, and regular watering with careful attention to not getting leaves wet, which promotes powdery leaf mildew.



The melon plants in our greenhouse did best because of the day heat and warmer nighttime temps. If you don't have a greenhouse /hoop house, I recommend creating a bed just for the melons with the proper soil and pH, installing drip hoses, and using black mulch material to retain moisture and increase nighttime warmth around plants. Outdoor plants will also do best with a row cover. For both environments, having enough pollinators is essential. Planting a pollinator garden nearby can help make sure your plants set plenty of fruits, but if you want to make sure, you can always pollinate by hand as the male and female blossoms are easy to identify.



Melons vine and when happy, will vine a lot. They can be trained up a trellis to save space, which also keeps fruit from sitting on the ground where it can develop a rot spot. In the greenhouse, my plants spread out horizontally along metal grate shelves so I did not trellis them upward, but I did provide the individual fruits little places to sit (pictured).

If you have never experienced a growing melon plant, you are in for a treat. Many varieties like the Tigger Stripe have an intense sweet scent that is wonderful and wafts through the garden. No wonder so many animals in the world follow the scent of the melon for a tasty and favorite snack. The varieties I recommend trying are: Prescott Fond Blanc (top 2 photos—the larger pile is last year's harvest), Tigger (top photo with an heirloom tomato), Kazakh (3rd), Golden Crispy, Minnesota Midget Cantaloupe, and Queen Anne.

**HEIRLOOM TOMATOES and PEPPERS**—this final category of research included the most amount of plants and experiments with environments, planting medium, and pots. Due to newsletter space constraints, I will present the results in a future article, but it gives gardeners something to look forward to!

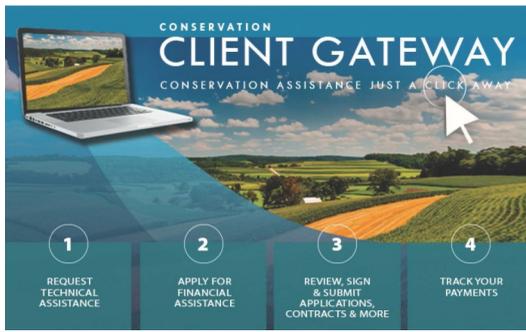
### Bonus - two other fun varieties to try out

**Bitesize Brussels**—just as they sound, these mini Brussels have a sweet mild flavor and do well in our climate.



**Honeynut Mini Butternut Squash**—Developed at Cornell Univ. for Farmer's Market growers, these 1/2—1 lb. sweet tasting winter squash can be grown in our short season.





## Conservation Assistance Just a Click Away Online Access Now Available to LLCs!

*by Brenda Ling, public affairs specialist, USDA/NRCS Division*

Remember the time you had to drive to your local NRCS office to sign some paperwork? Sure, you probably still had to run into town anyway. However, as a busy rancher and/or farmer, you have many things that need to get done and you only have so many hours in a day.

NRCS offers Conservation Client Gateway, a secure website that allows you to request assistance, sign documents and interact with field staff online. This service is

available not only to agricultural producers, but also to business entities, such as LLCs.

With Conservation Client Gateway, you can:

- ⇒ Request conservation technical assistance;
- ⇒ Apply for financial assistance through the Farm Bill's conservation programs;
- ⇒ Review and sign conservation plans and other documents;
- ⇒ Document completed practices and request practice certification;
- ⇒ Request and track payments for completed contract items;
- ⇒ Store and retrieve your conservation files, including documents and photographs.

This is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All the information you need will be at your fingertip.

NRCS field staff will still come out to your operation and provide one-on-one personal assistance with conservation planning and delivery. Using Conservation Client Gateway is voluntary. You are free to continue working with NRCS as you always have. This online tool allows you to have more options.

Questions? Visit with your local district conservationist or go online: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/clientgateway).

## Cost share funds are available for tree thinning, pruning, and fuels removal ~ by Tony Hoch

Various kinds of bark beetles have come and gone leaving houses and properties with dead trees that are extra-susceptible to wildfire and blowdowns. Wyoming State Forestry (WSF) offers federal cost share funds through the federal Western Stated Wildland Urban Interface Program, administered on the ground by the Albany County Fuels Coordinator.

If you are concerned about beetle-killed trees around your house the first step is to have a Wildfire Mitigation Plan written by a certified professional. With the plan in hand you can then apply for three different cost shared practices:

- 1) Defensible Space - thinning, pruning and tree removal within 100' of structures; 50% cost share up to \$2100 on a \$4200 project,
- 2) Fuel Treatment – thinning, pruning and tree removal in areas other than defensible space; 50% cost share up to \$800/acre for \$1600/acre treatment,
- 3) Fuel Breaks – thinning pruning and removal to strategically reduce or stop spread of wildfire. Treatments must be on three contiguous acres to qualify; 50% cost share up to \$900/acre for \$1800/acre treatment.

How to start? By getting a Wildfire Mitigation Plan written for your property by Albany County Fuels Coordinator, Lane Lindley (307-760-9285). After you have the Plan, Lane can also help you apply to the cost share programs.

## USDA Rural Development Programs of Interest to Small businesses ~ by Tony Hoch

Rural Energy America Program, or REAP grants are available for agricultural producers or small businesses in Albany County. These are 25% grants for renewable energy systems or to make energy efficient upgrades. Of particular interest to our producers, these funds could be used as match against our rural cost share program for solar stock tank systems. These funds can also be used as a match for EQIP projects which have an energy efficiency component. The total project size needs to be at least \$10,000 for a \$2,500 renewable energy system grant – maximum grant amount is \$500,000. For an energy efficiency grant – funding ranges from \$1,500 to \$250,000 for the 25% grants.

Non agricultural small businesses are also eligible for this program which along with solar power, also covers wind power generation and hydropower. Under the category of energy efficiency upgrade funds may be used for the high efficiency HVAC systems, insulation, lighting, doors and windows, high efficiency irrigation, and replacement of energy-inefficient equipment.

In addition to the grant program, REAP funds are also available as loan guarantees for up to 75% of eligible project costs spelled out above.

More information can be found at:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/rural-energy-america-program-renewable-energy-systems-energy-efficiency>  
or by contacting the Wyoming USDA-RD representative, Tim Brooks, at [timothy.brooks@wy.usda.gov](mailto:timothy.brooks@wy.usda.gov), or 307-233-6716.

This program is part of the current USDA Farm Bill, which is set to expire in 2018, so act now if you are interested!

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## **Regular Cost Share Program**

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- Drip irrigation/water conservation
  - Low-water landscaping
  - Beautification Projects
  - Conservation education
  - Energy Conservation

For more information and to download an application  
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