

THE REGION'S MOST COMPLETE CALENDAR OF GARDENING EVENTS

# Chicagoland

THE MAGAZINE FOR OUR REGION

# GARDENING

*Colorful*

## Clematis

And 17 Other Great Vines  
for Your Garden

May/June 2012

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How to Grow Basil  
Tips for Buying Plants





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## FEATURES

### 54 A New Twist on Clematis

New varieties give clematis expanded scope in today's gardens.

*By Patrice Peltier*

### 60 Estate of Bliss

In Barrington, a vast verdant setting provides a stunning backdrop for showcasing the year's top annual introductions. *By Nina A. Koziol*

### 66 Chicago By Design

The functional challenges of this linear space have been met by the designer's ingenious interplay of gently swirling circles and curves. *By Carolyn Ulrich*

### 70 Green Walls

It's new, it's cool, but even more importantly, vertical wall gardening can be practical and pretty. *By Beth Botts*

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Cover: Clematis 'Niobe' Courtesy of Brushwood Nursery

E-Zine: See page 81 for the access code to the digital edition of this magazine.



## Adele Kleine Answers Your Tough Gardening Questions

Send your gardening questions to [info@chicagolandgardening.com](mailto:info@chicagolandgardening.com).

### COMPOST vs. MULCH

**Q. What is the difference between compost and mulch? Are they used interchangeably? If I buy ready-made products, what kind or size should I buy?**

**A.** Compost is organic material, either animal or vegetable in origin, which is worked into the soil to enrich it and improve its structure as it decomposes. Mulch is a material, either organic or inorganic, that is placed on the soil surface to help keep soil temperatures even or to retain moisture during dry periods.

Another way of looking at it, says Greg Stack, University of Illinois Extension educator, horticulture, is that “compost is just a form of organic matter that is further down the decomposition line than mulch; mulch still retains its ‘identity’ but it too will turn to compost.”

Examples of compost materials are shredded leaves, decomposed plants, mushroom residue and manure. “Cotton burr is another organic material that has become popular for its nutri-

ents, especially in the last two years,” says Ken Ferraro, owner of Ferraro Garden Spot, Northbrook.

Straw, shredded leaves and grass clippings are three examples of organic mulch. Inorganic products could include fine gravel or crushed rock. If the mulch material is organic — for example, pine bark — it will eventually decay and be worked into the soil. Bark mulch comes in many sizes. It may be fine and crumbly, or it may come in 2-inch pieces that can also be packed to make paths. If it’s applied thickly, it can deter weeds.

Adding compost



### BIRCH TREES

**Q. Two river birch trees that I had for 15 years have died. They were in sun and deep root watered. What caused this?**

**A.** Without seeing the trees, it is difficult to know the exact cause of their demise. Borers are one possibility. But it is more likely that “the trees were chlorotic and needed iron chelate to help them out,” says Linda Proudfoot, sales associate at Lurvey’s Landscape Supply & Garden Center in Des Plaines. When grown in a heavy clay soil that has a high pH (an indication of alkaline soil), the leaves will turn yellow. If the tree’s soil had been amended with elemental sulphur to reduce the alkalinity, it would have helped the life span of the trees. In general, river birches prefer a slightly acidic soil. Also, as the name indicates, their natural habitat is along rivers and streams. Your soil might have been too dry.

### MINI-HOSTAS

**Q. Why are miniature hostas such slow starters compared to my usual ones? What can I do to help them along?**

**A.** Miniature hostas are only doing what they were meant to do — to grow slowly and shorter with fewer leaves. Because they are so highly hybridized, they are delicate plants that may need more TLC than the larger ones. Miniatures are meant to grow in rock gardens, containers and anywhere their small size can be appreciated. Andy Cuautle, nursery assistant at Pesche’s Greenhouse in Lake Geneva, Wisc., suggests some favorite mini-hostas: ‘Pandora’s Box’, ‘Amy Elizabeth’ and ‘Blue Mouse Ears’.



Heuchera ‘Plum Royale’

### HEUCHERAS

**Q. Everyone seems to grow heucheras except me. Mine die over winter. Aren’t they hardy?**

**A.** Coral bells (*Heuchera*) are hardy plants if you know how to grow them. The main reason heucheras die out over winter is that they’ve been planted in heavy clay soil that holds water.

Good drainage is the key to getting heuchera to overwinter successfully, so use ample amounts of good garden compost to amend the planting beds where heuchera are located. Some of the newer hybrids such as ‘Citronella’ and other light-leaved plants may be getting too much sun. They appreciate a little summer shade.

A soil amendment that’s relatively new on the market is cotton burr. You might try amending your soil with cotton burr when planting heucheras. Jeff Sibley, nursery manager at Red’s Garden Center in Northbrook also recommends surrounding the plants with 2 inches of cotton burr compost for the winter. During cold weather, heuchera roots tend to heave out of the soil, which can cause them to dry out and die. Push the roots back under the soil surface and cover them well.