

Ghoulish Gardening for Halloween

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Conway, SC — October 6, 2008 —Halloween is quickly approaching and you can get into the “ghoulish” spirit by creating a garden with gothic accents. This can easily be done by incorporating a few spooky details and adding a few plants that provide a creepy characteristic and bloom at night. Several scary details would be to include gargoyles, originally created to ward off evil spirits, they are the perfect accents to use in any Halloween garden. Placing iron fence arches as entrances to your garden, protected by several gargoyles or gnarly trunked trees would be an ideal start. Even better would be loosely hanging iron gates that swing and squeak in the night breeze providing the added benefit of sound to your garden. Also, include concrete or metal containers, urns and possibly even fake headstones planted with drooping vines. What respectable ghost would not like a wispy vine such as Virginia creeper, honeysuckle or jessamine draped over their epitaph? Enhance the visual nighttime eeriness by placing candle holders, such as small ghosts or ghouls, with holes that allow light to glow through creating creepy shadows. Set some jack-o'-lanterns out around the garden using white varieties such as 'Baby Boo' or 'Casper'. Large hanging, wire baskets can become witches cauldrons. Plant these cauldrons with ornamental grasses that will move in the breeze then watch mannequin witches stirring their brew.

A true Halloween garden would not be complete without its creepy creatures. The first creature to come to mind for a spooky garden is, of course, the bat. Bats are very important in nature and can be the crowning touch to a Halloween garden. When encouraging bats, be sure to never touch or try to handle bats, no matter how cute they are, as they are very susceptible to rabies. To increase the bat population around your garden, there are two basic things you can do: First, provide a roosting area for bats by building your own bat roost or purchase one at a local garden center. Second, grow plants in your garden that will attract night-flying insects such as salvia, campion, phlox, stock, cornflower and spearmint. The most commonly found bat households about a dozen bats. Male bats, which like cooler temperatures, prefer the smaller houses due to their single, narrow, bottomless chamber. The bat condo has four chambers and appeals more to females and her young as they prefer warmer temperatures. The bat condo will hold between 30 and 50 bats. It is also bottomless. If you would like to make your own bat roost, plans are available from Clemson Extension at: <http://www.clemson.edu/psapublishing/Pages/AFW/IL45.pdf>.

Whatever method you choose, it is important to use rough-cut lumber and to turn the rough side inward. The grooves will help the bats to climb and roost. Be sure to place the roost near a water source and away from any predatory animals such as cats. Hang the house 12-15 feet above the ground on a pole facing the south or south west so it will receive at least seven hours of sunshine. Other creepy creatures you might want to encourage are the praying mantis, dragonflies, toads, anoles, skinks, spiders and be sure you don't forget the black cat.

If you like the idea of a Halloween garden, you could start planning for next year. At night, plants all look black so starting is easy. Since white glows in the moonlight, look for plants that have white flowers such as white roses, four o' clocks, ginger lilies or moon vines. These will reflect ambient light casting an eerie glow. Finally, don't forget to enhance the other senses such as hearing and smelling by encouraging noisy critters and using aromatic plants.