

## It may be Tomato Day, but I'm seeing white

I liken it to going to a restaurant where someone else does the cooking. If you're tired of fighting the water battle and have lost some of the joy in your own plants because of it, I recommend going someplace where the plants look fantastic and are taken care of by someone else.



**ANNIE CALOVICH**

A BIT OF EARTH

I went to two such places in the same day this week.

They're not new, but they may be overlooked in the hot weather, because we figure the whole landscape is as weary as we are.

Such is not the case.

First I went to the Extension Center, home of Saturday's Tomato Day festival, one of our community's biggest get-togethers of the year. When you go, sometime between 7 a.m. and noon, you will see that the signs at the building's entrances are frothing with a foam of white vinca. I heard some master gardeners marveling at the size and health of this vinca.

I called Charlene Schneider, the master gardener who heads up these particular plantings. She said the vinca are Titan Pure White, a recommendation from Ron Marcum of Dutch's Greenhouse. These are supposed to be the largest-flowered vinca.

"I said, 'They may be the largest-flowered vinca, but are they *large* vinca?'" Charlene said she asked Ron. "He said, 'Oh yeah.'"

And indeed they are. They have grown out

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and up about 16 to 18 inches, Charlene said. Not only that, they get watered – get ready for this – only once a week.

"Now that's how drought-tolerant vinca are," Charlene said.

She said they are planted in a mix of older compost and potting mix along with some Back to Nature chicken manure, a little slow-release nitrogen and "not enough" Soil Moist water-holding granules, because

vinca is susceptible to rot. Charlene also uses granular fertilizer during the season.

Growing alongside the Titan Pure White vinca are dark purple Jams 'N Jellies Blackberry vinca, "which have pretty well kept up with the white ones," Charlene said. The sweet-potato vines that also are part of the planting are just slips stuck in moist soil.

"I'm just amazed every time I see the darn things," Charlene said of the white vinca. They have surpassed anything she thought they would do, she said.

The master gardeners' new demonstration garden also is looking good and has some interesting plants to examine. The tomato vines aren't producing much yet: They got a late start because the garden was still under construction at planting time.

In the evening, I headed to Botanica. The gardens are open until 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays during the summer, and the lush vibrancy of the wildflower garden and the shady glades of the woodland give off a coolness that defies the temperature. On Tuesdays from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Tuesdays on the Terrace is taking place, with live music, drinks and Two Brothers barbecue for dinner – unless you bring a picnic. Regular admission is charged for nonmembers (\$7 for adults); members get in free.

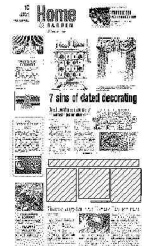
I once again was bowled over by a wave of white – this time, trailing white lantana and Pink Crystals ornamental grass, whose seed heads start out looking like clear or white crystals but that will darken to pink. These plants are among those alongside the sign at the entrance to the Downing Children's Garden.

I love white moonlight

gardens, but for some reason, white also is hitting me right during summer days. I went to a talk by native-plant-grower Benjamin Vogt at the meeting of the Wichita Organic Garden Club on Tuesday evening while I was at Botanica. He recommended, as an insect magnet, another white-flowered plant: mountain mint. This botanically named *Pycnanthemum virginianum* can grow in dry or wet soils, Benjamin said, and its leaves can be made into tea.

In case you're wondering why you'd want an insect magnet in your garden, Benjamin pointed out that insects are food for birds as well as pollinators for flowers. If you want a wildlife-friendly garden, you gotta love the bugs.

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Courtesy of [Ball Horticultural Co.](#)

**Titan Pure White vinca is making a refreshing splash at the entrances to the Extension Center.**