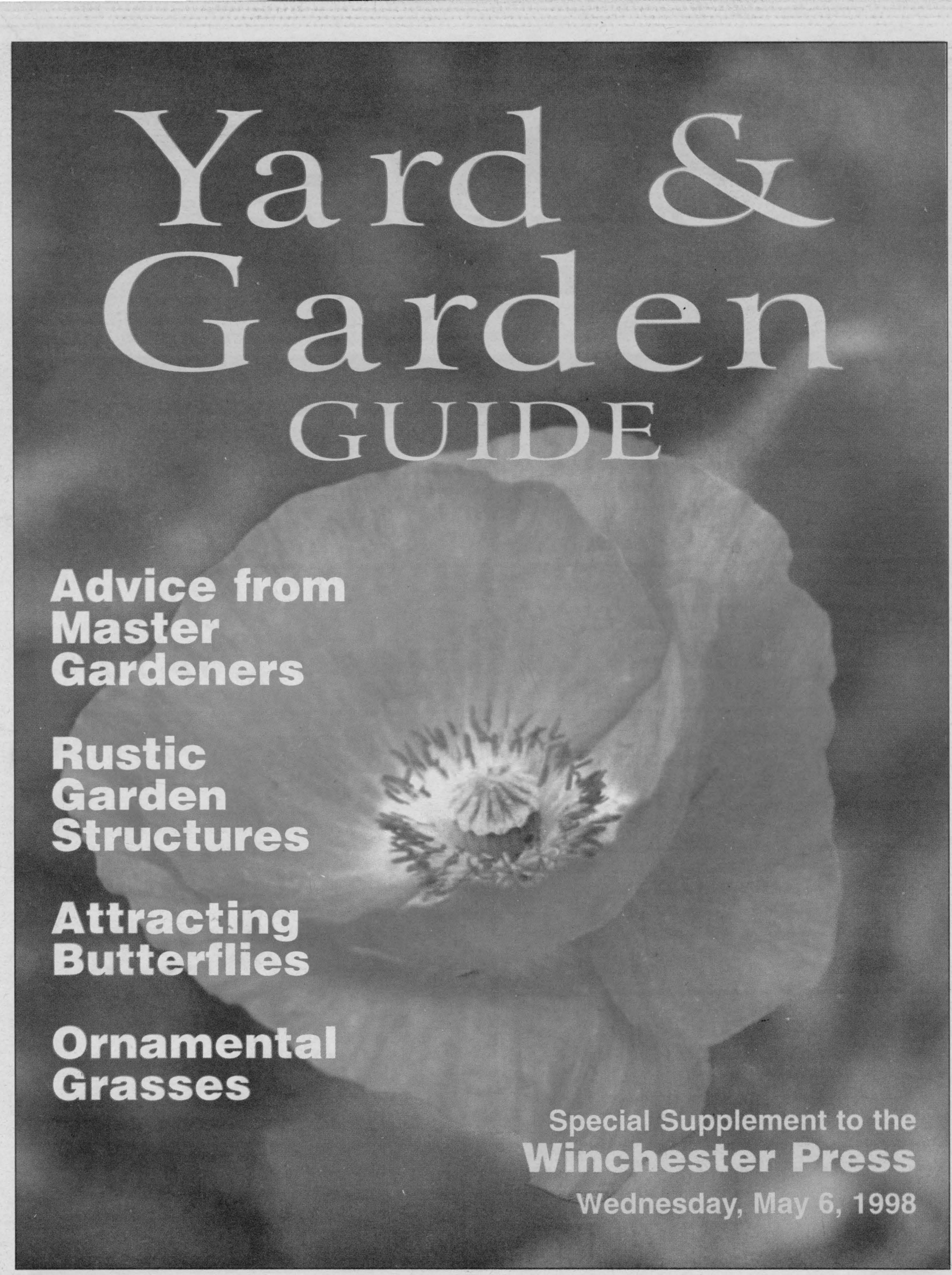
Yard & Garden GUIDE



Advice from Master Gardeners

Rustic Garden Structures

Attracting Butterflies

Ornamental Grasses

Special Supplement to the
Winchester Press
Wednesday, May 6, 1998

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Attract butterflies to garden with native plants

By Eileen Johnston

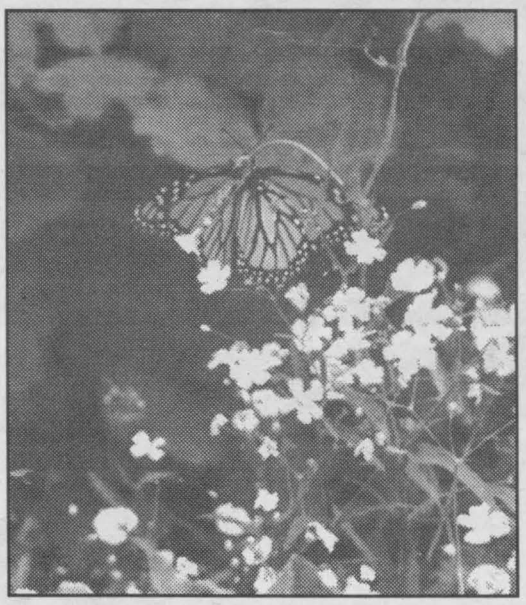
Whether you garden on a balcony or in a large backyard, you can attract butterflies provided you meet a few requirements. Plan to locate your butterfly garden in a sunny sheltered spot.

Butterflies prefer direct sunlight and heat. If you have an exposed windy sight, plant your garden next to a fence, building, hedge or larger plants such as sunflowers, which will form a windbreak as they grow.

By doing a little research you can find which butterflies are native to your area, decide which ones you aim to attract and find out what their food preferences are. We have noted more than 30 different butterflies in a single warm summer day in our own backyard.

While butterflies will feed on an assortment of flowers and trees, the larvae, or caterpillars, usually require particular and often highly specific host plants on which to munch. We need to accept what we perceive to be the bad with the good; the youth, with the adult butterfly.

The monarch sips nectar from many flowers but will only lay its eggs on members of the milkweed family because the caterpillars that emerge will only feed on these plants. As an alternative to the common milkweed, which many would find objectionable in their flower beds, consider planting swamp milkweed (asclepias incarnata) or butterfly weed (asclepias tuberosa).



We watched with daily fascination the transformation of two monarch caterpillars into butterflies last summer on a swamp milkweed plant in our garden. The leaves they ate as they grew were barely noticeable.

When planting your butterfly garden remember to include nectar plants for each season so there will be a sequence of flowering from spring to fall. Butterflies are perching feeders, thus prefer plants which offer them a large landing pad to alight on.

Favorite butterfly annuals include zinnia, cosmos, French marigolds, strawflowers, globe flowers and sunflowers.

Favorite perennials include butterfly weed, lavender, purple coneflower, yarrow, asters, helianthus and sedum.

Large swaths of single species will also attract more butterflies to your garden. Butterflies find their food sources largely by sight through compound eyes and single plants may be lost on them.

In small gardens try to add more dual purpose plants. Lilacs will provide nectar and play host to swallowtail larvae. Choke cherry will offer nectar and play host for the white admiral. Plant some extra cabbage, dill, fennel and parsley to feed hungry caterpillars.

Reserving a section of your yard for native flowering plants (ones that haven't had the nectar and perfume bred out of them) and weeds should also help guarantee a good variety of butterflies. Goldenrod, Queen Anne's lace, nettles and the lowly dandelion, which provides nectar for at least eight types of butterflies in this area, are good choices.

Provide some flat stones or a board in your garden in a sheltered spot for butterflies to warm themselves on.

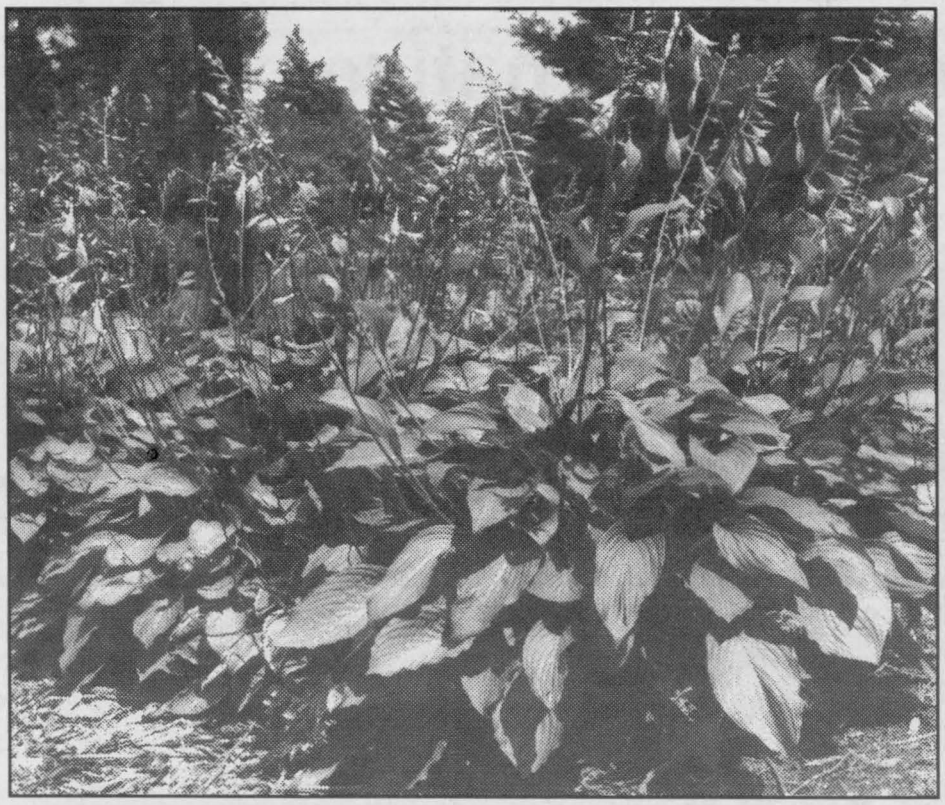
Butterflies don't drink water like birds or mammals but do take up nutrients and minerals from moist soil. A shallow birdbath or pan filled with sand or pebbles and kept damp will be especially appreciated.

Perhaps the most important consideration in gardening to attract butterflies is that no pesticides or herbicides should be used on your lawn or garden. Even slug pellets and some "organic" pest control methods have been found to be harmful to butterflies. Butterflies prefer weediness and will be encouraged by a few dandelions and clover in your lawn.

Far too many neat, tidy "perfect" gardens are also biological barrens. A compromise would be to plant the weedier plants and grasses in beds adjacent to, but separate from, other flower beds.

The beautiful fluttering butterflies of summer are not only a delight to behold but, when highly visible, signal that your backyard ecosystem is relatively sound.





Shade-lover

Hostas are a great plant for shady areas. They are available in a range of varieties -- from blue to green shades to variegated. Press Photo -- Fetterly

Spikes make fertilizing easy

If you want to have a great looking yard this summer, you need to tend to your trees and shrubs at the first sign of spring.

The experts say that one of the best ways to ensure beautiful plants is by feeding them early and adequately.

Spring feedings encourage the development of sturdy, deep root systems and strong, more wind-resistant plants. Keeping plants on a regular feeding schedule throughout the summer will encourage this healthy and attractive growth.

What's the best way to feed your trees and shrubbery? There are a lot of garden products available for feeding, but some professionals say that it's best to purchase those items that nourish at the root.

One of the most popular products on the market is fertilizer spikes. Gardeners have been using these spikes for years because of their ability to feed at the root, where it counts.

Specially formulated for a variety of trees, shrubs and other plants, these spikes provide the continuous supply of nutrients they need. Once they're inserted, the plants will receive the right amount of nutrients for three months or more.

The spikes are easy to use. All you have to do is water the area where the spikes will be placed, and then hammer the spike one to two inches below the ground's surface around the plant's drip line.

Because the spikes feed underground, they eliminate the mess, hazards and smells of sprays and chemicals, making the yard safe for children, pets and other animals.

Another effective product that nourishes plants underground is a gardening tool called the root feeder. Made with a molded plastic body with a clear fertilizer chamber and a steel feeding tube, this product makes fertilizing and watering easy, even for the novice gardener.

To use this feeder, connect it to a garden hose and insert the feed tube into the soil around the drip line of a tree or plant. Water flows through a chamber filled with fertilizer, through the feed tube and then into the ground where the feeder roots are located.

The root feeder fertilizers are available in a variety of formulas for several types of trees, shrubs and other plants, to make sure they each get the particular nutrients they require.

Nourishing your plants well in the spring will help them look great and stay healthy throughout the summer. Early feedings supply trees and shrubs with the moisture they need — moisture that can help them fight off drought damage and malnutrition later in the year.

Both the spikes and the root feeder can be used throughout the summer, as well as in the spring. The products can be found at most garden centers, hardware stores and chain retailers.

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GEGGIE'S

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Ornamental grasses add year-round interest

by Eileen Johnston

Most of my perennials this year have been reduced to spindly stalks and mushy, disintegrating mounds under the receding ice and snow.

What amazes me as I gaze from my windows are the number of stately skeletons of many of my ornamental grasses, dancing in the wind and still waving airy seed heads. Some stand as solitary sentries amidst a tangle of broken limbs and foliage, that somehow missed the January Ice Storm's wrath.

The rigors of winter have once again failed to diminish the magnificence of many of my ornamental grasses.

My love affair with ornamental grasses began nearly 20 years ago while touring the grounds of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton. It was during the hot, humid dog days of summer that their bold textures, many shades of colors and luminous variegation grabbed my attention. They were beautiful, they were unusual and I have been searching for new members of the family "graminea" to add to my own gardens ever since.

The one constant in a garden is change and the more grasses I grew, the more clearly I realized how especially suited ornamental grasses are to express and embrace this seasonal rotation. One of the first ornamental grasses I grew was calamagrostis acutiflora "Karl Foerster", commonly called Foerster feather reed grass. Three tiny clumps quickly became a soft green four-foot vertical accent to a bold swath of black-eyed Susan (rudbeckia fulgida 'goldstrum') and sedum 'autumn joy'.

As the summer passed, white-colored flower wands rose from the clumps even higher. As fall approached, the color drained from their leaves leaving a bright buff color, while the flowers faded to rose followed by tan-colored seed heads, providing a matchless background for the blackening fat seed heads of the black-eyed Susans and rich wine tones of the sedum.

So effective was this combination, especially when backlit by the afternoon sun, I decided to leave it up for the winter. The combination continued to change. The perennials deepening to dark chocolate while the grasses continued to bleach. I began to notice other gardens neatly tidied up for winter seemed quite boring and lifeless, while mine was alive with chickadees and finches feasting on the black-eyed Susan seeds while sheltered from early winter winds by the waving grasses.

As the next few years passed, more grasses were added along with perennials and shrubs with winter interest in mind. Such plantings seemed more spontaneous, more natural and more satisfying to me, than their traditional one-season counterparts. My winter garden was not and is not especially neat. Winter storms shred the leaves of grasses, breaking stems and tossing them all over the garden. It is, however, full of daily surprises and much of its beauty is accidental. Absolutely no summer garden awash in brilliant color can match the look of a garden under a brilliant blue winter sky the morning after a heavy hoar-frost has transformed every branch, seed head and blade of grass into a fragile new world waiting to be discovered.

Ornamental grasses have become one of the backbones of my winter garden. In our land of ice and snow, with its short growing season, I have had to change my earlier, admittedly narrow notions of a beautiful garden as being one in full bloom, to include the stark beauty of a garden in winter.

Certain grasses have proved to be more winter worthy than others. All of the miscanthus (at least a dozen varieties) or maiden grasses persist a long time into winter, weathering the worst Mother Nature throws at them.

My favorite, miscanthus sinensis purpurascens or Flame grass is a handsome, compact (4-5'), early blooming variety. The strongly upright clumps of green leaves develops a combined glowing coloration of burgundy, orange or rust foliage in the fall, highlighting the silvery gleam up the upright flower panicles. I use it as a windbreak for more delicate plants in the summer and to buffer the prevailing winds howling across the garden in winter.

For a colorful, all-season ornamental grass, it's hard to beat helictotrichon sempervirens. Blue oat grass is an incredibly popular dome shaped, clump forming grass whose intense blue leaves look good all year and in a variety of situations. It does require careful placement in the garden, as it takes a few years to reach its mature height and spread of nearly three feet.

The stiff, arching blue stems are a wonderful contrast to the soft white snow which inevitably tries to hide it every year. It will bleach out to a bright almond color by spring and, like all the other grasses, is disease resistant and requires only a hair cut several inches above its crown in early spring.

Now that most of my grasses have attained quite a large girth, this exercise is quickly accomplished by two people. One person gathers the stems together while the other person saws them off with a Japanese pruning saw. A Japanese pruning saw cuts on both the pull and the push. (I have been told a hedge trimmer can be used to accomplish this too).

Native grasses big and little bluestem, (andropogon gerardii and scoparius) are valuable in the garden for their late season interest and ability to recover after snowfalls.

Big bluestem as the name suggests has blue tinged foliage often tipped with red. Interesting turkey foot shaped seed heads are great for dried floral arrangements and the fall coppery red foliage persists long into winter.

By developing a sensitivity to the unique attributes of ornamental grasses and using these features to full advantage, it is relatively easy to extend garden interest right through winter.

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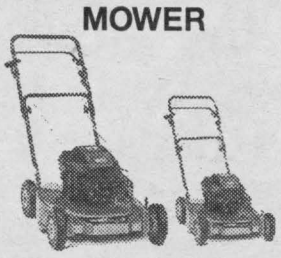

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Blooming splendor

Day lilies are a great perennial for naturalizing or in beds. Today's newer varieties come in a large variety of colors. Press Photo -- Fetterly

Ask a Master Gardener

Potting up pond plants

QUESTION: How do you pot up pond plants?

ANSWER: by Dorothy Adlington

Remove pot from pond and let drain. Cut off any dead leaves and flowers stems. To remove plant, tap the side of the pot, remove plant and root ball, gently rinse off soil.

Check to see if the roots are healthy and not tangled. Gently untangle the roots and cut off any damaged or unhealthy roots with a sharp knife, place in bucket of water while you get the new pot ready. Use a larger pot that has holes to allow water to pass through.

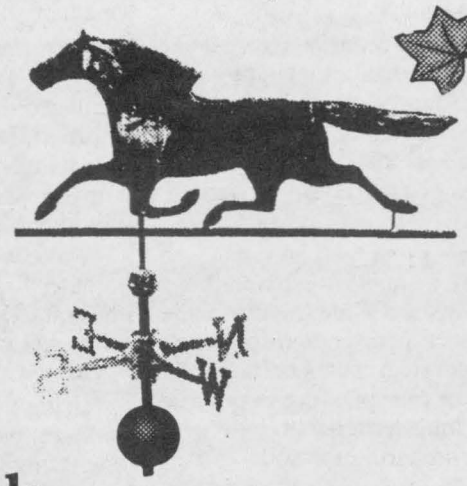
Line the pot with landscape fabric, leaving extra fabric to drape over the edges. Fill the container 1/3 full with a damp mixture of 1 part sand to 3 parts clay soil, (that is free of vermiculite, peat moss and fertilizer).

Place the root ball in the pot making sure that all the roots are facing down. Add more of the soil mixture, gently press the soil down around the plant and roots so there are no air pockets. Insert a pond tab down into the soil away from the roots and add soil to 1/2 inch from top of container. Tuck the remaining landscape fabric back into the pot trimming away excess so as not to cover the plant shoots.

Lastly, put a layer of pea gravel or small smooth stones over the soil and landscape fabric. This is used to keep the fish from rooting in the soil and helps keep the soil in the pot. Slowly lower the pot down into the pond allowing the water to fill the pot and any air bubbles to escape.

Questions for ask a Master Gardener, c/o Eileen Johnston, R.R. #1 Lakeshore Drive, Morrisburg Ont., K0C 1X0.

Get A Good Thing Growing This Spring!



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A full-servicing dealer will guide consumers throughout the season. Experts in the field, these dealers will:

• demonstrate the product so consumers can "try before they buy";

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Give your yard a new look

You know that yard down the street you've always admired? The one that looks like it belongs in a magazine? You too can create this great look.

A good start to your makeover is as simple as adding a shrub or two. Shrubs can pull together your entire yard, hiding unattractive areas and giving it a finished look. Shrubs offer a splendid variety of shapes and sizes, beautiful blossoms, colorful berries, and attractive foliage.

Try a globe cedar or variegated dogwood to cover an unsightly concrete foundation. A creeping juniper strategically placed will provide a soft transition from the hard lines of your house to your yard.

Whatever type you choose, shrubs are a small investment that will add instant value to your home and enhance your garden for years. So, take a few minutes before planting or transplanting to provide for their long-term health by properly preparing the soil.

The best way to do this is by using Canadian sphagnum peat moss — a natural soil conditioner with a unique cell structure that creates ideal growing conditions by regulating moisture and air around plant roots and helping to retain the nutrients vital to plant health.

Ready to start planting? Dig a hole three times as wide and just as deep as the shrub's root ball. Angle the sides of the hole outward to 45 degrees, and loosen the bottom soil with a garden fork.

Mix one part peat moss with two parts of the dug-up soil. (If your shrub is a type that prefers acidic soil, like a rhododendron or conifer, use one part peat moss to one part soil.)

Remove the shrub's packing material, and prune off any damaged or rotted roots. Place the shrub in the planting hole, ensuring that its trunk is straight. Backfill with the soil and peat-moss mixture and lightly pack.

Water well, then wait about 15 minutes for the water to soak in and the soil to settle. If necessary, add more soil mixture, but don't backfill above the shrub's bark line.

Using the remaining soil mixture, build a rim, like a saucer, encircling the planting hole, and then mulch the inside area. This helps to hold water where it is needed most. Water your new shrub twice a week for a month after planting and enjoy the new look.



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Keeping the lawn in shape makes a yard look beautiful

With the return of spring, homeowners begin to work on their yard, planting everything from beautiful floral borders to huge vegetable gardens. However, if their lawn doesn't look lush and green, the yard can lose its appeal and all of the work put into it could be for naught.

To help homeowners maintain a healthy lawn, professionals recommend that they have a lawn-care program that works.

Many lawn-care experts believe that a majority of lawn problems are a result of not mowing at the proper height and not keeping the lawn-mower blade sharpened throughout the mowing season. Every type of grass has a specific height for optimum performance. Keeping grass at its best growing height will increase a lawn's density and attractiveness — and reduce problems.

A simple rule of thumb to follow when mowing is never to remove more than one-third of the leaf surface each time the lawn is mowed. Leaf surface, or cutting height, refers to the length of grass above the soil. Cutting below the optimum height impedes root development, which is essential to having a dense, healthy lawn.

Also, homeowners don't have to collect the grass clippings after they finish mowing. These clippings decompose quickly and put nutrients back into the soil, like a built-in fertilization program.

When it comes to watering a lawn, lawns grow best when they are watered heavily at infrequent intervals. On average, a lawn needs about 1 inch of water a week, either from rain or irrigation during the growing season. This inch of water normally will soak the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches, which allows the water to reach deep into the root system.

Homeowners should determine the rate of application of their sprinkler system to set up any irrigation program. An easy way to do this is to set out a series of cans if they have an underground sprinkler system or a couple of cans if they use a single sprinkler. After running the system for 30 minutes, they can measure the water in the cans and determine the length of time it will take to apply 1 inch of water.

The best times to water a lawn are in the early morning or early evening, when there generally is less wind and heat. The least desirable times are in the heat of the afternoon, when water evaporates too quickly, and very late in the evening, which can cause the lawn to stay wet all night. This encourages disease development.

With these tips, homeowners can be well on their way to a healthy, lush lawn — and a beautiful yard.

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For a garden that keeps giving – plant perennials

Perennial gardening is a hobby for anyone who enjoys a garden that changes with the seasons. From the first delicate crocus flowers that break through the melted snow, to the hardiest mums of autumn and all the many colored beauties that appear throughout the summer, a perennial garden truly is a garden for all seasons. Perennials are becoming increasingly popular as more seeds and bulbs become available and as gardeners appreciate the fact that a little extra effort up-front will result in a continuously changing show of flowers that return year after year.

A perennial is any soft-bodied plant that survives for more than one growing season, becomes dormant during the winter and returns the following spring. The advantage of this type of plant life cycle is that you don't need to plant flowers every spring only to lose them to the first killing frost. Most perennials multiply by naturalizing (flowers that reseed and multiply in masses without human help or maintenance).

The challenge of perennial gardening is to plant enough different varieties of plants so that your garden remains colorful throughout the growing season.

If you're just getting started with a perennial garden, you might want to consider planting perennials in a certain color scheme. Pink and purple flowers are popular this year, and you could work in some of the 1998 Perennial of the Year, the purple coneflower. A member of the sunflower family, this is a bold, sun-loving plant that is easy to grow and blooms for a long time. Also consider pinks, bachelor buttons, hollyhocks, anemones, asters, lavender, pansies and delphinium.

Remember that perennials generally take a year to get established. But there are exceptions, so if you can't wait for next year, plant gloriosa daisies, shasta daisies and delphinium — all will bloom the first year.

Perennial gardens can be planted in a wide variety of settings, from borders and established beds to roadside plantings and containers. There aren't any natural limitations because nature has provided plant varieties that will thrive under almost any natural condition.

There are vast assortments of plants to suit the conditions of each garden. To choose the right plants, first you'll need to determine the amount and type of sunlight, moisture and soil conditions in your garden.

The garden that receives full sun all day has the widest assortment of plants available for planting. Among the easiest to grow are the purple coneflower,coreopsis, gaillardia, evening primrose, Stoke's aster and daylily.



Coneflowers are an easy care perennial, that flower over a long period of time beginning in late summer.

Shady gardens can be a beautiful invitation to add some extra color along a mossy stone path or stone wall. Hostas and ferns thrive in the shade, as do bleedinghearts, columbine, creeping phlox, Virginia bluebell and jack-in-the-pulpit.

A garden with some sun and some shade offers the opportunity to mix and match many different types of plants, but also challenges you to know just how much sunlight is available at what time of day. Some plants that thrive in part-sun/part-shade include bee balm, corydalis, cardinal flower, sweet william and violets.

After you decide what perennials to plant, you need to focus on where to plant them. In general terms, the shortest plants go in front and the tallest plants to the rear.

A good idea is to mix your perennials so that all the plants that bloom at the same time are not side by side, and differently textured plants are intermixed.

Perennials offer a vast variety of colors, textures and scents to suit nearly any garden condition. Whether your yard gets full shade, full sun or a little of each, all you need is a little bit of knowledge and planning and you can grow a successful perennial garden.

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Elephant Garden offers a variety of plants

Dianne Fetterly
Agricultural editor

MOUNTAIN — Mountain Orchard partner Shelley Lyall is branching out. This Saturday is opening day of Shelley's Elephant Garden, a greenhouse operation featuring a variety of herbs, annual and perennial flowers as well as hanging baskets and planters.

Located at Mountain Orchard, west of Mountain Village, the greenhouse features all the popular annual flowers — petunias, pansies, geraniums, impatiens and begonias — as well as a few harder-to-find varieties such as, datura and wave petunias.

Herb varieties range from sage, parsley, oregano, rosemary and dill to coriander, French sorrel, lemon grass, scented geranium and more.

Lyall says she wants to carry more of the unusual varieties and maybe even heritage plants — depending on what customers ask for. She also has flowers which dry well. Strawflowers and nigella (love-in-a-mist) are a couple of varieties which make nice dried flowers, she explained.
Because of the short time frame to set up this year, Lyall was only able to start about one-third of her plants from seed but she hopes to grow most of them from seed next year. The remaining two-thirds were grown from tiny seedlings this year.

GROWING OPPORTUNITY

According to Lyall, the greenhouse business wasn't something she was looking for, but the opportunity sort of 'fell into her lap'. She's always loved flower gardening and when a neighbor offered to sell Lyall her greenhouse about a month ago, she took it.

And she's very happy she did.

Since getting the greenhouse, Lyall says she's spent seven days a week working there. Being in the greenhouse is peaceful and is especially beautiful in the evening when the sun is setting, she said.

Lyall credits the support of family and friends for getting her venture off the ground.

"(The family) thought it was a good venture. I couldn't have done it without them," she said from the 60 by 20 foot greenhouse brimming with greenery.

The garden's name also reflects another of Lyall's passions — collecting elephant mementos. A clay, elephant-shaped planter greets visitors at the entrance to the greenhouse.

Shelley's Elephant Garden officially opens Sat., May 9.



New venture

Shelley Lyall's new greenhouse business officially opens this Saturday at Mountain Orchard. *Press Photo – Fetterly*

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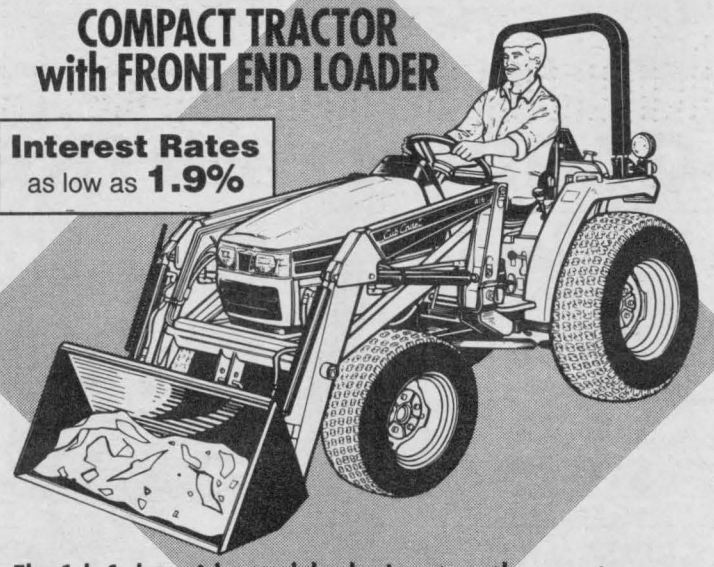

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Add a rustic touch to today's home garden

by Eileen Johnston

A rustic garden structure can be an incredibly romantic addition to the garden. An intricately woven, willow arbor covered in vines can be a restful spot on a hot summer afternoon to visit with a friend. Rose covered arches of cedar entice us to stop and smell the flowers for a moment.

Open gazebos built of twisted branches can give us the feeling of enclosure without isolating us from the rest of the garden. They are special human places within the natural setting of the garden.

Garden structures have been around for centuries. In ancient times, simply built structures of local materials served as places of refuge, shelter from the sun and wind, places for secret rendezvous or quiet reflection.

In China and Japan, garden structures draped with wisteria lent their reflections to quiet lagoons. Claude Monet, a French Impressionistic painter and gardener early in this century, appropriated this idea in his now famous garden at Giverny.

In the centuries leading up to the present, garden structures became increasingly contrived, mass produced and highly decorative, often built simply to imply social standing; the connection to nature being lost somehow.

Today's gardeners often use gardening as a means to get back in touch with nature, to relieve the stress of our modern lives. The garden structures of today often reflect the simpler charm of bygone days.

On a recent trip to Canada Blooms, an incredible garden and flower show in Toronto, I was amazed to see the number of rustic garden structures included in the over six acres of romantic garden displays with "Spring Dream" as the theme.

Romantic reasons aside, the rustic garden structures included in the displays lent a vertical dimension to the gardens while furnishing support for a wide range of flowering plants.

Looking natural is the point of rustic construction. Arbors, arches and pergolas built of materials native to the region allows them to blend plants they will ultimately support. In keeping with the split rail cedar fence we built a number of years ago to divide a large property, we built our first rustic structure.

A simple, free-standing arbor, built with leftover fence posts adds focus and with the addition of an arched gate built from scrap wooden palettes, it invites passage to a wilder area beyond the fence. John Cabot and William Baffin, two hardy Explorer series roses, clamber up the sides of the arbor and along the fence rails.

A second rustic structure, a three-sided peak roofed arbor, was built to serve as a focal point over a split in a pathway into two directions in our bird garden. It also gave us a structure upon which to grow grapes and American bittersweet vines, two favorite treats of birds in the fall. Inspired by rustic structures we have seen in other gardens, this arbor was built of local cedar posts with the bark still intact.

To give more support and add interest, the connecting rafters on the roof were of large twisted pieces of very old grapevine rescued from an old fence row that was being demolished by a local farmer. The grapevine was nailed in place in its original shaggy knotted glory. The birds strip bits of bark off every spring for nest building.

While rustic structures are often better situated away from modern homes, the peaked roofed arbor sited only metres away from the riverside home of Tom and Dorothy Adlington, Lakeshore Drive, Township of South Dundas, is an exception.

Its four by four metre size creates an outdoor room large enough not to be dwarfed by the main house. The arbor's cedar and vine construction reflect the shape, materials and color of the dark stained, natural wood siding of the house. The well-integrated structure seems to have grown quite naturally out of its surroundings.

A natural flagstone patio offers a nice textural quality underfoot the white cast iron table and chairs. The arbor is perhaps the most breathtaking at night when hundreds of tiny white lights subtly light up the garden of white flowers surrounding the entire structure.

The appeal of a rustic, naturally inspired garden isn't for everyone. They can, however, fit into almost any setting. Building one out of materials that nature supplies in irregular shapes is challenging, but satisfies the need to make something homemade.

Dale Mullen, owner of the "Secret Garden Willow Works" in southern Ontario, sums up my feelings toward rustic garden structures as "naive and primitive, but what they lack in refinement, they more than compensate with soul."

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New ways to landscape with lattice

Across the country, homeowners are discovering the practicality and versatility of lattice as it makes its way off the deck and into the garden.

Lattice is a framework of strips made from plastic, wood or metal that are interwoven to form beautiful patterns. It is available in a variety of styles and colors that complement any home.

Traditionally, lattice has graced decks, porches and patios where it provides privacy and adds a more finished appearance to outdoor areas. It also creates depth and dimension and is especially effective at capturing and centering attention.

However, the aesthetic benefits of lattice are only one part of its appeal. Try these ideas and experience the splendor of landscaping with lattice:

- Support climbing plants like roses, grapes with a trellis made from lattice.
- Protect plants from overexposure to sunlight with a lattice sun screen.
- Create an attractive edge around gardens while guarding plants from furry pests with lattice fencing.
- Hang lattice on walls or fences to spruce up otherwise dull facades.
- Build an arbor with lattice for added emphasis around walkways.

Landscaping with lattice is fun to do and creates eye-grabbing results. For easy installation and maintenance, try plastic lattice. Made from the same material as truck bed liners, this long-lasting lattice never needs painting.

Enhance a springtime meal with flowers

Flowers decorate your yard, beautify your home — and flavor your meals?

Edible flowers have been used to enhance dishes since ancient times. From sweet to peppery, each flower possesses its own characteristics, making food refreshing and beautiful.

Whether with the bitter taste of the dandelion or the peppery tang of the nasturtium, a few petals can add the perfect touch to any meal.

If you'd like to enhance a dish with the beautiful flowers from your garden, but aren't quite sure how, consult Kitty Morse's "Edible Flowers: A Kitchen Companion With Recipes" (Ten Speed Press).

This volume offers the botanical origins and characteristics of more than 40 flowers, as well as the blooms' cultural significance and culinary uses. It also provides nearly 30 recipes for everything from appetizers to desserts.

Morse offers one important warning: Make sure the flowers you choose have been grown naturally — without the use of pesticides.

For this reason, flowers from a florist and most nurseries are not acceptable. For best results, you should pick fresh edible blossoms with care at the peak of their bloom, preferably early in the day.

If you're uncertain of whether a flower is edible or not, Morse recommends that you consult a horticultural specialist or an encyclopedia of edible plants.

With that in mind, let flowers enrich one more part of your life by adding beauty to your meals.

ROSE

A symbol of beauty, the rose is thought to have originated in Persia. The fruit of this flower, the rose hip, is a popular ingredient in herbal teas. Rose water and rose syrup, made from rose petals, are used in numerous Middle Eastern and Indian pastries and confections. Both liquids are available in large supermarkets and specialty stores.

Rose petals are best picked in summer, at the height of the blooming season before the flower opens completely.

To detach the petals, grasp the flower by the stem, and pull off the petals all at once.

Rinse them lightly under running water, and set them on paper towels to drain. You must handle them gently so they don't get bruised.

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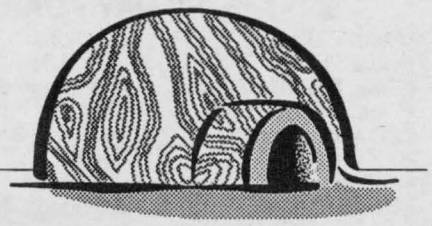

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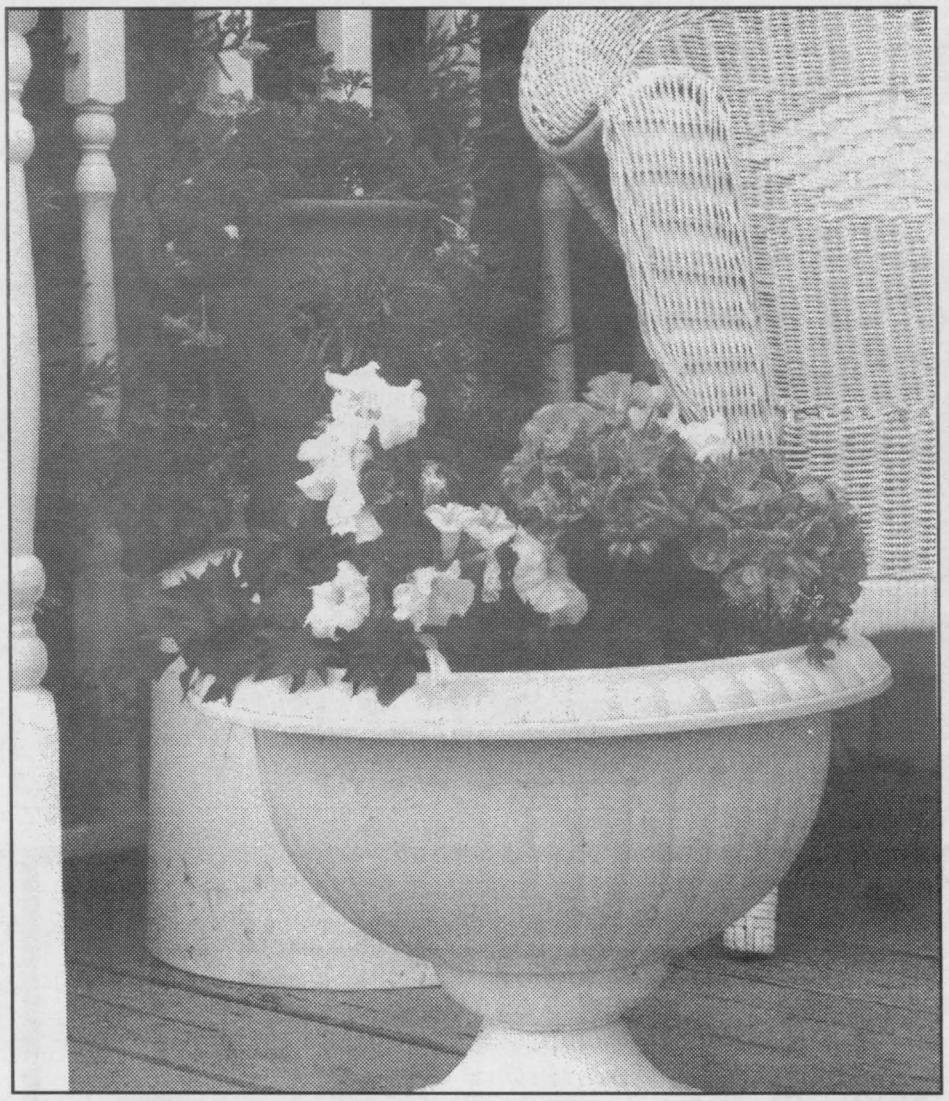

Potted beauty

Containers filled with flowers or herbs can add interest and color to a deck or patio. *Press Photo -- Fetterly*

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Check under and around the controls, valves and burners for dirt, leaves, cob webs or anything that would affect the flow of combustion or ventilation of air.

After moving barbecue in position, if portable, check screws, bolts and nuts for tightness. If stationary, also check screws, bolts and nuts for tightness.

Clean the cooking grill before each use by using a brass grill brush or piece of crumpled aluminum foil.

Don't locate the barbecue near combustible materials, gasoline and other flammable vapors and liquids.
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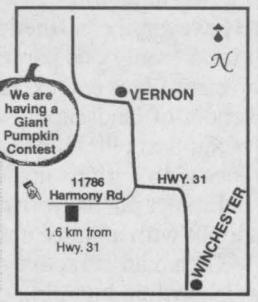

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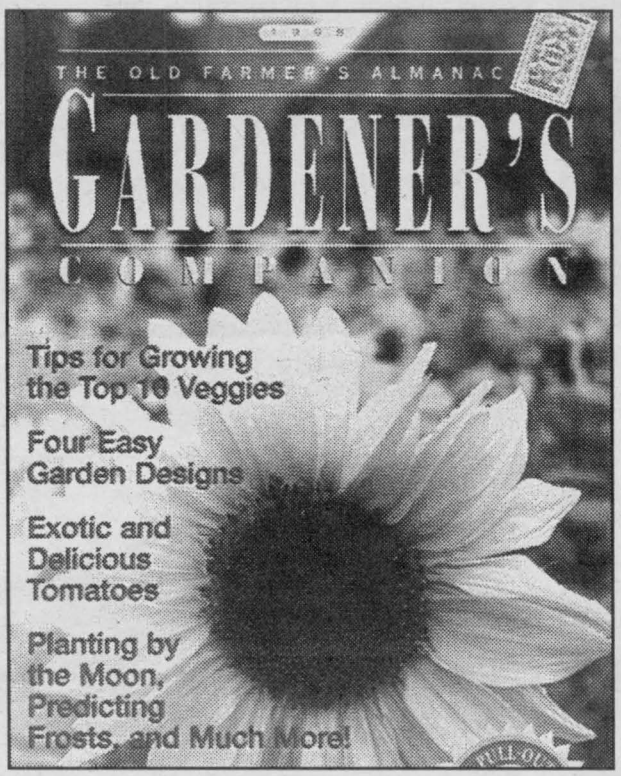
Make your garden dreams a reality

In this fast-paced, computer-oriented world, gardening provides an opportunity for folks to get back to basics, working with Mother Nature to produce beautiful flowers and healthy vegetables and fruits. Oftentimes, the "bigger is better" mentality of the business world doesn't compute for many home gardeners, who end up with large, unmanageable plots of weed-ridden land.

In an effort to keep America's No. 1 hobby enjoyable, peaceful and rewarding, The 1998 Old Farmer's Almanac Gardener's Companion (Yankee) — which stems from The Old Farmer's Almanac, America's oldest and trusted authority on all good things that grow — offers a bumper crop of sage advice on simplifying your garden plans, growing tried-and-true garden favorites, and even watering your garden. (Would you believe that the best time to water may be during a rainstorm?)



Bring your garden to life with tips and information from The 1998 Old Farmer's Almanac Gardener's Companion.

Following the old adage, "Admire a large garden, but tend a small one," this book offers complete plans for four easy flower gardens. All the designs rely on readily available perennials and annuals, feature five varieties of plants, and are no larger than 10 feet by 5 feet. There are three plans for sun (including a butterfly-loving English-style cottage garden) and one for shade, plus advice on preparing the ground before you plant, and tips for achieving the best results.

The Companion's Editor, Georgia Orcutt emphasizes the importance of renewing appreciation in the basic components of gardening. "Many people get too caught up in the latest fads and trends, only to be disappointed later," says Orcutt. "We're advocates for gardening that doesn't have to be formal and fancy to be satisfying."

One of the highlights of the 1998 edition is a feature called "Growing America's Favorite Vegetables," which provides secrets from experts on growing the top 10 most popular garden vegetables, with tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers topping the list. Tips include planting your tomatoes in a different part of the garden every year to lessen the threat of soilborne diseases, using cone-shaped wire tomato cages to support pepper plants, and keeping cucumbers picked to prevent a slowdown in production.

"Whether you're a master gardener or a weekend enthusiast, we believe any gardener benefits from good, sound advice," says Publisher John Pierce. "We've made sure this year's Gardener's Companion has the tips, suggestions and articles that will help you have the best garden ever."

In addition to useful, everyday advice, The 1998 Gardener's Companion offers a sprinkling of quirky hints that longtime readers have come to expect from The Old Farmer's Almanac. For example, give your freshly picked strawberries a hot bath to help prevent gray mold; and use coyote urine to keep deer out of the garden. Other out-of-the-ordinary advice includes using the edge of a clay flowerpot as a handy sharpening stone for your pruning knives, and forgetting compost "activators," since studies show they don't speed up the process. (The most important garden additive is still the cheapest: hard work.)

On sale at newsstands, supermarkets, home stores and garden shops everywhere, it also is available through mail order for $3.99, plus $1.95 for shipping and handling. Orders should be sent to The Old Farmer's Almanac P.O. Box 520, Dublin, NH 03444.

Pressure treated wood needs protection too

Many homeowners have the misperception that pressure treated wood is protected from the elements. While it is true that pressure treated lumber is protected against insects, all new wood is still vulnerable to the effects of sun and moisture, particularly during the first year of exposure to weather.

In fact, pressure treated wood especially requires protection during weathering because it contains the most moisture. The wood is more likely to split and cup if it dries too quickly or unevenly.

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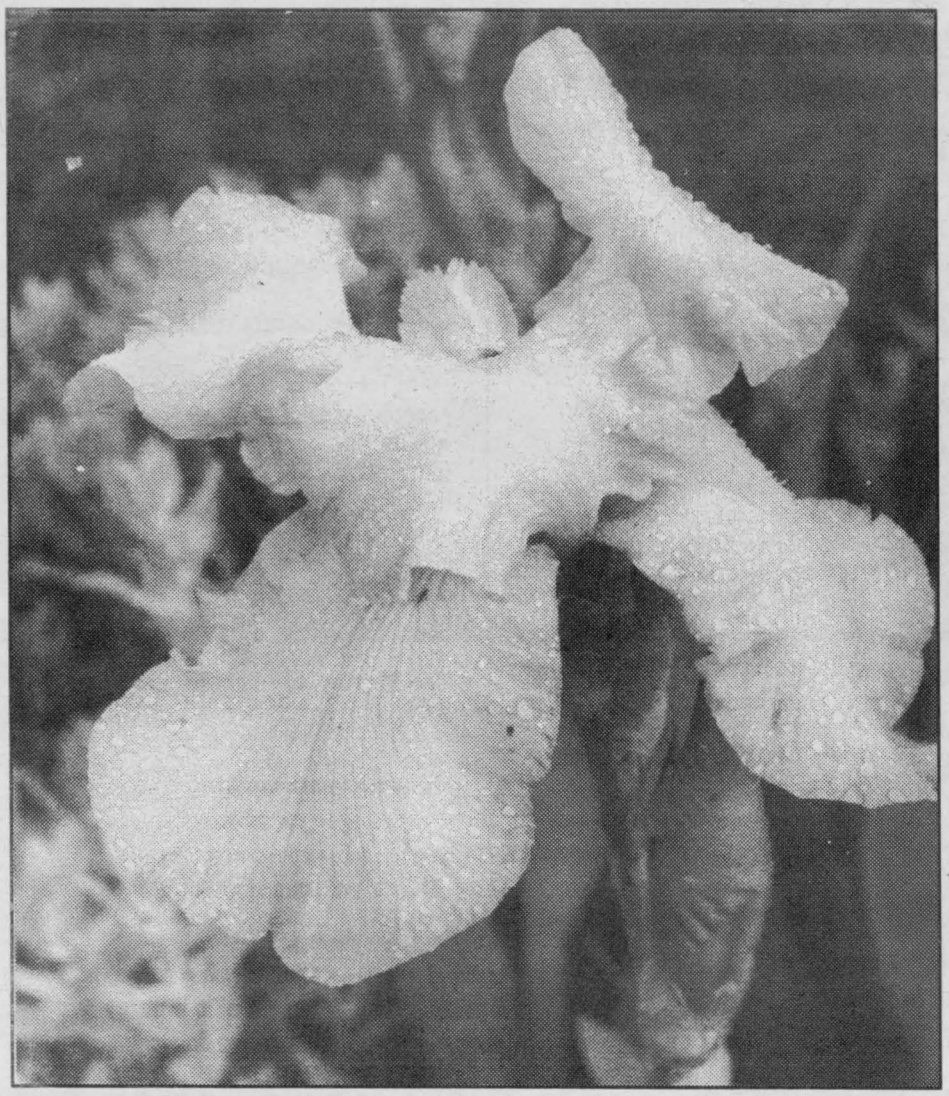

A touch of color

Irises add a gorgeous array of color to early summer perennial beds. Once the blooms are spent, the leaves provide a great backdrop for other flowers. Irises should be divided when blooms are finished. Press Photo -- Fetterly

Do's and don'ts of screen repair

Repairing window screens is really much easier than most homeowners think. It is only a matter of a few simple steps and it takes little time. There are certain mistakes that many people make that make the job harder than it need be.

Don't forget to buy everything you need!

Most people rush to the hardware store and buy just the screening and rush back home. This spells trouble. To repair a screen you will need the following. Screening, new spline (the old spline will not hold the screen in place), a spline roller (nothing else works), a utility knife and a screw driver.

Do clean off a large work area with a solid surface—it really makes the job easier. A handy tip is to block the frame with small pieces of wood screwed to the work surface so that the frame can't move. This prevents you from putting in the screen to tight causing the frame to bow.

PROJECT CHECK LIST

- Aluminum or Fiberglass Window Screening
- Screen Installation Tools
- Spline
- Utility Knife
- Screen Frame Kit (if frame is damaged) (NC)

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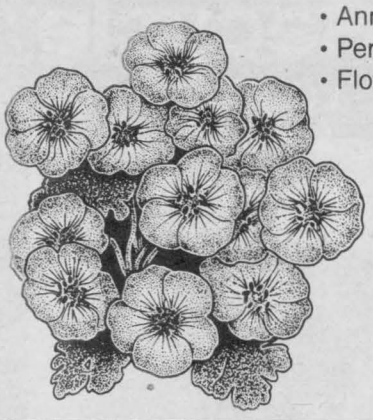

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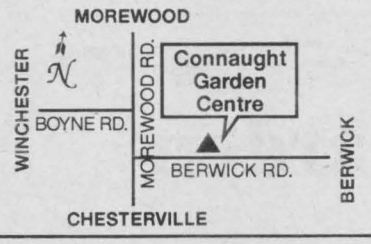

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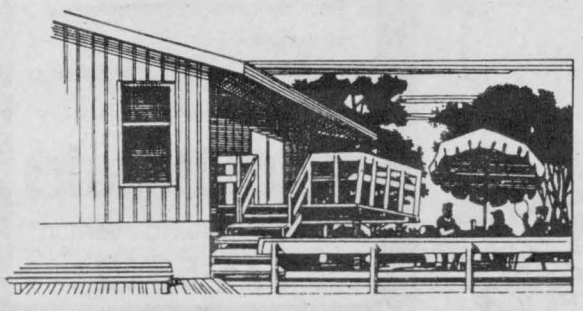

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Don't let allergies keep you from enjoying your garden

For many people, gardening season also is sneezing season. If allergy anxieties have kept you from bringing the beautiful bounty of your flower garden indoors, you may be relieved to learn that garden flowers rarely are the cause of allergies.

According to research, plants with brightly colored, fragrant flowers are unlikely to cause allergies because they have large pollen grains with waxy, sticky coatings and are primarily carried by insects, not the wind.

However, be careful about adding weeds, grasses or blossoming tree branches to your floral arrangements. Because they are much smaller, the pollen of weeds, grasses and trees is more likely to get into your eyes and nose where it can trigger allergies. So, if you love flowers but hate allergies, there are a number of things you can do to help keep your home pollen free.

- Stick to large bright flowers for your bouquets; avoid decorative touches like flowering branches, dried weeds and grasses.
- Keep your windows closed to keep pollen outside. Use an air conditioner to help stay comfortable.
- Install a whole-house air cleaner to clean the air that circulates through your home's heating and cooling system. A media air cleaner removes up to 99 percent of pollen, and unlike electronic models, doesn't produce ozone, which can aggravate breathing problems.
- Never bring flowers with mold or fungus indoors.
- Leave your gardening shoes outside to keep grass and tree pollens out of indoor air.

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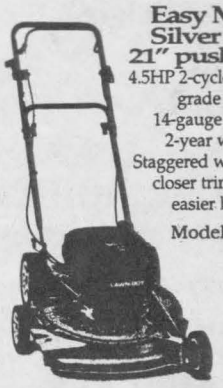

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Natural gardening

Moisture loving plants beautify problem areas

by Eileen Johnston

As the snow slowly disappears from our landscape and puddles form in all the hollows and low spots of our yards, it is the perfect time of year to rethink some of our garden practices.

Natural gardening or gardening with nature are two currently popular descriptions of garden management. They imply we work with nature rather than against it. Perhaps then, these low wet areas can be looked upon as exciting opportunities to grow an incredible range of plants which rely on wet conditions rather than as "problem areas".

The term wetland generally applies to larger expanses of permanently wet areas. A true bog is the result of millions of years of geological evolution. It typically is filled with layers of decaying plant material, has a constant source of water and acidic soil.

A wet meadow on the other hand is more likely to be similar to our backyard wet spots. It is not as wet, less acidic but remains damp all year due to a high water table, poor drainage, compaction, barriers to water movement or a combination of the above.

I blamed a wet area in my own yard years ago simply on the heavy clay soil and its low position compared to the rest of the yard. I figured the only way to have a flower border in that area was to improve the soil structure by adding copious amounts of organic material and sand and to build beds higher than the level of the spring meltwater, but the spring waters still came and stayed.

The beds dried hard as concrete in the summer. For several years I persisted in trying to grow plants not truly suited to the site and lost them each year. It was not a total failure however.

While digging holes for a play structure for my children in an area adjacent to this particular bed, my husband discovered a layer of hardpan several feet below the surface. Hardpan is an incredible hard, dense impenetrable layer of cay-like material or subsoil.

The spring meltwater collected in our low spot and because of the hardpan water was blocked from moving away quickly. Correcting this subsurface drainage problem would have involved heavy equipment and considerable expense. To make the best of this and several other similar areas in our yard we decided to accept our spring lakes and choose plants that could tolerate and thrive in these conditions.

In this particular area our focal point became a cutleaf weeping birch, (betula pendula 'gracilis'). This shallow rooted, upright, graceful tree with pendulous branches and luminous yellow fall color was under planted thickly with a variety of cranberry bushes (viburnum trilobum), perennials and grasses. The cranberry have showy, white, flat topped flowers followed by red fall color and bright red berries that persist into winter.

The dozens of daffodils planted many years ago in this area have naturalized rampantly throughout the bed and bloom brilliantly every spring. Orange globeflower (trollius europaeus), marsh marigold (caltha patustris), and violets (viola cornuta) add their color and serve as important food sources for insects early in the year. As the summer passes we look forward to the changes of focus in this and other adjacent beds, as a host of plants take their turns being center stage.

The daylilies bloom in a myriad of yellows and golds beside feather reed grass (calamagrostis x acutiflora 'Karl Foerster' which skyrockets straight up to 1.5 m. Geranium and tradescantia with their blue and purple flowers surround the brilliant red cardinal flower (lobelia cardinalis).

Fall brings on more brilliance as the massive heads of bronzy-red sedum x 'autumn joy' on higher ground glow against backdrops of pink and purple New England asters (aster, novae-angliae 'alma potschke', 'hella lacy', and 'purple dome'.

One of the bonuses of these and the many other carefully chosen moisture loving plants is that many seem to attract a variety of wildlife. We observe butterflies, bees and other insects on these plants from early spring until late fall.

In fact some of the most irresistible nectar plants seem to be in our wetland gardens. Joe pye weed (eupatorium purpureum), swamp milkweed (asclepias incarnata), meadowsweet (filipendula rubra 'venusta' and fireweed (epilobium angustifolium) all happen to bloom pink, fare well in wet spots and are important nectar sources and host plants to butterfly larvae.

In other wet areas of our property deciduous hollies, elderberries, other viburnums and serviceberries have been planted. They are thriving in their moist locations, adding color and providing habitat and feed for wildlife throughout the year. To further increase the diversity of these mini wetlands we will be adding and trying out dozens of new plants that we have carefully researched. I am particularly excited about the development of a wet meadow area in a formerly useless area of our yard.

These naturally wet gardens as all gardens, will continue to evolve, to grow, to change. We expect some disappointments and set backs such as the tree limbs snapped off during the recent ice storm. However now that we have a greater understanding of these wet areas and changed our approach to them, they have become sources of endless pleasure in our busy lives.

Healthy soil makes garden beautiful

Everyone enjoys a beautiful flower garden. However, no one likes the weeds that come with it. Now, there's hope for the once backbreaking chore of weeding. The secret is healthy soil, which acts like an immune system, keeping all flowers stronger so they're better able to crowd out weeds.

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Readying pond for spring

QUESTION:

How do I get my pond ready for the season?

ANSWER: by Dorothy Adlington

This is the method that I find has worked for getting my pond ready for the season. Once all the ice has left the pond, remove 25% to 100% of the water.

While the pond is draining scrub the sides of the liner with a soft bristled brush to remove the algae. Remove potted plants and trim off any dead leaves and flowers. Transplant and divide any plants that have out-grown their pots.

This can be done now or wait until the temperature warms up. Insert a pond fertilizer tab down inside the soil, place potted plants in the shade and cover with wet newspaper or burlap to keep the plants from drying out while you get the pond ready.

Remove all organic matter (silt and leaves) from the bottom of the pond by using a fine mesh net. Remember to check the organic matter for snails, frogs and fish before you toss it out.

Once the pond has been drained, check the liner for any damage and make repairs.

Make sure the filter and pump are clean and running properly. Check to make sure the hoses are not clogged or crimped and are securely clamped.

Refill the pond placing the plants back at their proper levels except the water lilies. Place them six inches below the water surface to encourage earlier growth, as the leaves rise above the water, you can gradually lower them back to the bottom of the pond.

Do not move fish from indoors to the pond until the water temperature has risen to four to five degrees Fahrenheit (two to three degrees Celsius) of the temperature of the indoor aquarium.

If you over-wintered your fish in the pond, only begin to resume feeding once the water temperature is above 54 degrees Fahrenheit (12 degrees Celsius). By this time their metabolism will be able to digest food again.

Questions for ask a Master Gardener, c/o Eileen Johnston, R.R. #1 Morrisburg, Ont., KOC 1XO.

Add style to your deck

With two million decks being built each year, it hasn't taken Canadians long to find creative ways to add style, charm and personality to their new outdoor living areas. Wood care experts, offer the following tips.

Add Color. Stain spindles with a contrasting color. White washes look stunning with natural wood and natural green tones complement redwood to give a warm, woodsy feel.

Accent with plants and flowers. Try hanging flower boxes along railings or anchor wooden planters around the perimeter of the deck to add color. To add privacy, add a wooden trellis and hang plants and wind chimes.

Create moods with lighting. Paper lanterns strung along railings or white Christmas lights can create a festive feeling for evening parties. Also try citronella candles and torches. They will keep the bugs away while creating a romantic atmosphere.

Keep your deck in shape. Decorating can't make up for a deck that is neglected. Clean your deck with an environmentally friendly cleaner once a year. Coat the deck every other year with an oil-based penetrating finish to protect the wood from sun and moisture and keep it looking natural and healthy. Try a finish with a cedar or redwood toner for a new look. (NC)

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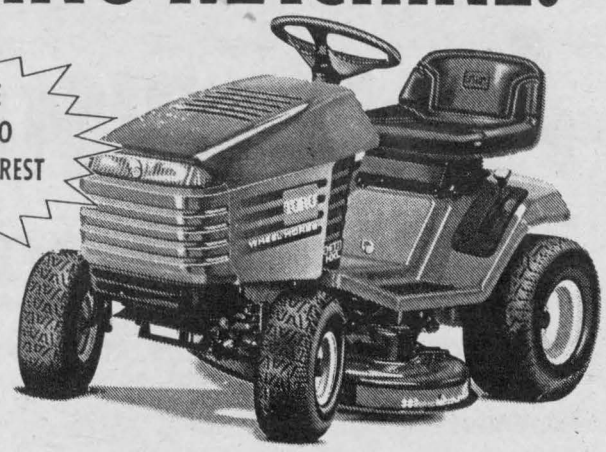

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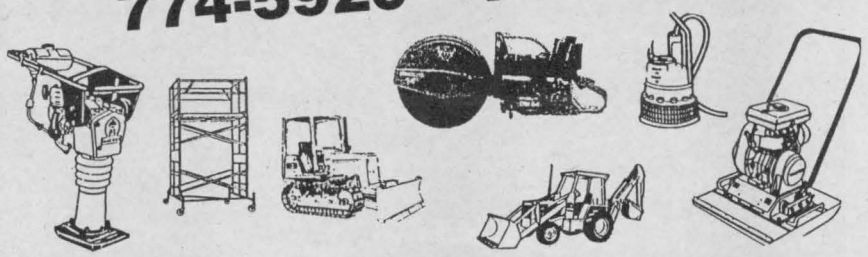

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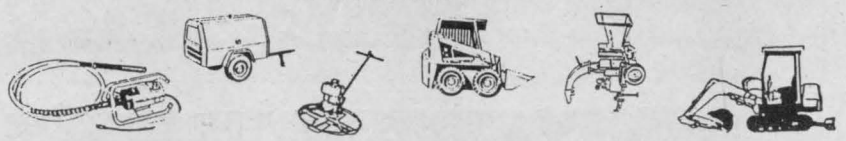

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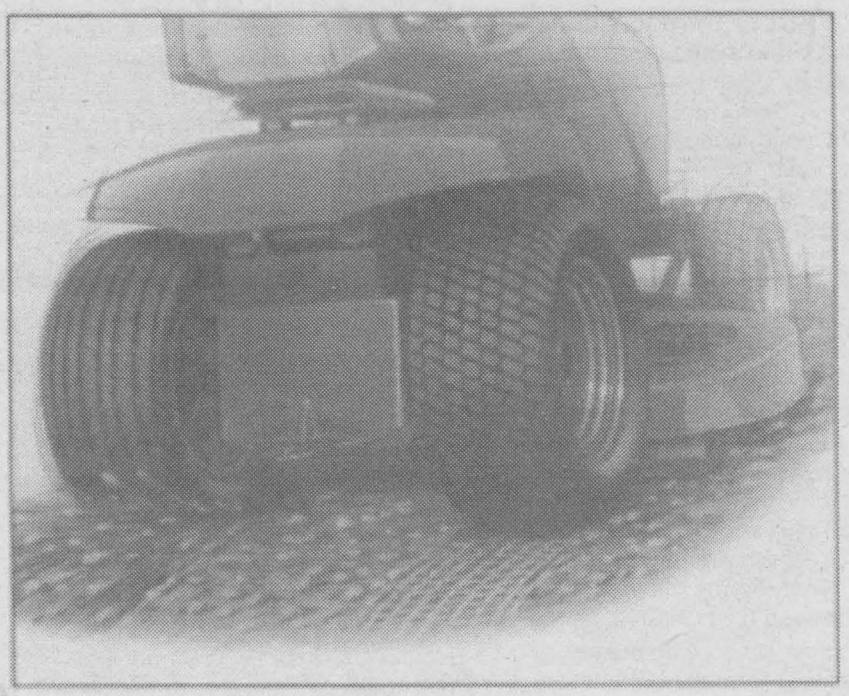



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