



Perennial Notes

October 2001

Remember the Armitage credo of gardening: "This is gardening, not brain surgery. On balance, gardening should always provide far more pleasure than pain."
From Allan M. Armitage, *Armitage's Garden Perennials. A Color Encyclopedia 2000*

COMING EVENTS!

October 17, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens Commons—*John Elsley, Song Sparrow Nursery*, formerly of Wayside Gardens. A great plantsman will talk about his garden in Greenwood, SC. Many of you may recall that John is a transplanted Englishman and spoke at last fall's symposium on *Gardening from the Catalogue*, and greeted us at Song Sparrow Nursery on our tour there last June.

November 14, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens Commons—*Members' Potpourri and Annual Business Meeting*.

December 5, 7:00 p.m. Olbrich Gardens Commons—*Mark Dwyer of the Janesville Rotary Gardens* will be our speaker.

January 20, 2002, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens Commons—*Annual Potluck Brunch* with the Hosta Society. Our speaker will be *Craig Bergman of Bergman's Nursery*. He will speak on his autumn garden, featured in *Horticulture* magazine Sept. 2001. *Note: the WHPS will sponsor a trip to this garden on Saturday, October 13.*

February 8-10, 2002, WHA Garden Expo. We'll be needing volunteers at the WHPS display table, and if you would like to help plan the display, please call Stephanie O'Neal at 256-6108.

February 20, 2002, 7:00 p.m., Olbrich Gardens. *Water Gardening*, with speaker **Bob Rieser**, one of the founders of the Madison Pond Society and owner of The Frog Bog in Verona, the first Madison area business solely devoted to water gardening.

March 20, 2002, 7:00 p.m. Olbrich Gardens. *Roy Diblick, Northwind Perennial Farm*, Springfield, WI.

April 17, 2002, 7:00 p.m. Olbrich Gardens. Topic to be announced.

June 14-23, 2002, *WHPS Biannual trip to the British Isles*. Trip oversubscribed. Waiting list only.



Other Events of Note

February 21—Hort Magazine Symposium at Olbrich Gardens.

June 8—North American Peony Society meets at Olbrich Gardens.

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• Being largely housebound in winter is something I have
• learned to accept and rather enjoy. A gardener's
• patience grows well in fine winter weather, weather of
• the expected brutal, forward sort. It is in the months of
• winter that he reviews his errors and lets them sink in. It
• is then that the planning goes on, then that projects are
• outlined, erased, and redrawn, like so many beginnings
• on a painting before it starts to take hold.
• —Robert Dash, *Notes from Madoo, Making*
• *a Garden in the Hamptons, 2000*
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AN ODE TO INSECTS

by Joan Severa

This summer, I have been taking my walks in the evening, when the sun is low and there might just be a faint breeze to discourage the mosquitoes. It's been a hot one, and I don't stir up much air on my own these days, at my speed.

Walking at about eight o'clock, every day or every other day, the slow changes of the season are very noticeable. Now, in August, it has definitely turned. There is something in the air that tells us summer is ending, coming to a perfect climax and going out with glory. It's so nostalgic. Maybe it's the light—lower and richer and darkening a bit earlier every week. Maybe it's the smells—that mown hay smell in the park, the chrysanthemum-whiff of meadow weeds baking in the sun, the late-blooming fragrant hostas at home. Maybe it's the sounds—cicadas and even a few katydids, robins and jays calling good night, and, of course, the crickets!

Crickets are loud in the August twilight, just after the sun goes down. I can discern several different cricket "voices," from small, hesitant squeaks, to double squeaks; from long, steady trills to the loud, strident "chirp-chirp-chirp" that seems to be all most people hear. Sometimes I hear them all at once, as though many kinds of crickets share the same territory, but sometimes there are whole neighborhoods of just one kind of chirp, fading into another kind as I pass a couple of houses on the edge of the park. A cicada whirrs loudly and insistently here and there, audible in a surprisingly short range. Katydids too seem to have a short sound reach, though their monotonous triple buzz makes your skull ring when you are right under their tree. In one spot, I am thrilled to hear the early, quavering call of a little screech owl. Maybe it is the same one I hear out my bedroom window in the wee hours.

Walking quietly along, I feel transposed back to my childhood, where I was possibly the only kid who walked around the neighborhood of my small town at dusk, listening and watching. Hawk moths came to feed on the neighbor's dahlias as I sat still under the tall plants. Bats swooped through the air. All the bird and cricket sounds are those of my memory. How dull, and how poor, the world would be without them!

But I had a new experience this August, a lifetime blessing. It was August 8, and the blast of the recent heat wave had ended about an hour before I went out to walk, about a quarter to eight. I turned up the street that takes me to Seminole Glen Park, and took the bike path along the woods, to where the two ponds drain the high neighborhoods to the north. The front that had cooled the weather rose up in a glowing peach-colored wedge in the eastern sky. Just out of the shadow of the trees, I noticed birds, or something, darting over the marsh plants on the east. LOTS of them, I suddenly saw, but what were they? Hummingbirds? They darted up, down, here and there, silently, almost colliding, incredibly fast, and never resting, from about a foot off the water to about thirty feet in the air. I could not get a focus on any one of them, but I could see that they were longer than hummers, with a thick thorax like a helicopter body, and a body nearly a half-inch wide and up to four inches long. Then I could easily see the wings, two pairs, five inches across and perfectly transparent. Dragonflies! When one or two came close enough to observe, I heard a soft "hrrrrr" of wings, and there was possibly a flash of pale blue iridescence on the top of the body, but not one of them stayed in place long enough for me to be sure.

I stood stock still for a half hour, grinning like an idiot, watching these impossible flyers dart, shoot out in straight flights, maneuver around one another, and—was it possible?—feed on something in the air! I could only hope it was mosquitoes, but I didn't really care. The beauty of that flight, the mystery of it, will be a lifetime memory, as I will most certainly never see the like again. How did they come here? Where did they come from? How did they know where to feed? Where did they go? The next night they were all gone.

*If you want to be happy for an hour, drink wine. If you want to be happy for a day, run away.
If you want to be happy for a year, get married. If you want to be happy forever, be a gardener.*

—From *Don't Throw in the Towel*, by Texas Bix Bender

Notes from A. Hort Hound...

A snippet from the newsletter of the The Pulmonaria Group of the English Hardy Plant Society's Newsletter

The Pulmonaria Group of England hosted its spring meeting in the garden of Daphne and John Chappell, Cinderdine Cottage, near Gloucester. For readers of *Perennial Notes*, you may recall that the WHPS toured John and Daphne's garden in June of 2000 and we hosted this charming couple for dinner. One of Daphne's many obsessions is pulmonarias. (That's PUL-MON-ARE-E-Ahs) Her two favorites are P. 'Dagley's White' and P. 'Cotton Cool.'

Daphne's comments on P. 'Dagley's White,' "Its fresh green, faintly spotted, rounded leaves and compact heads of flowers has proved fairly vigorous here. As yet it seems hard to come by, which is a pity as it beats 'Sissinghurst White' spots down!" She does not comment on whether it comes true from seed ('Sissinghurst White' does not, even though it has won the RHS AGM—that is the Royal Horticulture Society's Award of Garden Merit), but even the monograph published by the English Hardy Plant Society states that Dagley's White's leaves are "inconspicuously spotted," its white flowers have pink eyes, and it is lower growing than 'Sissinghurst white.'

As for P. 'Cotton Wool,' Daphne says that this her absolute favorite pulmonaria. "I fell for its glorious summer leaves and it has proven to be one of the most useful border plants, thriving in sun and shade. It readily passes on its good looks to offspring (if you're tardy with deadheading like me)." This pulmonaria is available from Heronswood Nursery for \$10 and is described as follows by Dan

Hinkley, "I brought this back from Europe several years ago, and it remains one of my favorites in the garden, possessing elegant long and narrow foliage of pure platinum that reflects the dim light of the woodland where it grows. Though this is touted as offering pretty blue flowers in April, it is inarguably a plant grown for its foliage. Absolutely first rate. (The original name was 'Ankun,' selected by Coen Jansen of the Netherlands.)" (Also available from the Flower Factory for \$7.50.)

By the way, just in case you were in the area, The Pulmonaria National Collection Open Day was Sunday April 22, Stillingfleet Nurseries, Stillingfleet (near York). For those of you going with the WHPS to Scotland and England in 2002, we hope to visit Vanessa Cook (holder of the national pulmonaria collection) in Stillingfleet.

Bulbs—*Ornithogalum magnum*, *Eremerus*

In the June issue of the RHS *The Garden*, imminent plantsman Roy Lancaster wrote about visiting a specialty nursery in Essex, England—Beeches Nursery. In the first hoop house he entered, *O. magnum* was in bloom, and he was taken with the large, stately flower head. He had never seen this bulb before, and has not been able to find anything about it in any book. This concurs with my own frustrations in finding any information on this spectacular June flowering bulb (available from Van Engels). The nursery owners reportedly received seed from Romania??

As to *Eremerus*, though the large octopus-like bulbs I planted last fall broke dormancy this spring, the very large plants produced no flowers. I was very envious when I saw Rita

Dupuis' blooming *Eremerus* on our June tour of her garden. When asked about it, Rita said she had planted them several years ago and this was the first year that they had bloomed. Very good timing, I'd say. Perhaps there is hope for mine if I can wait that long!!

News from England

The Royal Horticulture Society now has 6000 US members, as announced by Sir Simon Hornby, RHS President, who attended the Cincinnati Flower Show, which has close ties with the RHS. The RHS plans to establish several "Friends" groups in cities around the US—hey, I think they want to ask us (America's amateur gardeners) for money? What do you think?

The death of William (Willie) Stearns was also recently reported. Dr. Stearns was another holder of the RHS Victoria Medal of Honor. He is responsible for developing the taxonomic concept of the "cultivar"—a cultivated variety, distinct from a naturally occurring and self-perpetuating variant in the wild. He is author of **Botanical Latin**, the standard work of reference on this subject, summarizing the grammar and syntax of botanical Latin. He has 470 publications in the field of horticulture and botany, and in 1938 published the first significant monograph on the genera *Epimedium* and *Vancouveria*.

With Rosemary Veery's death earlier this year, there are now vacancies for two new attendees of the RHS annual VMH (Victoria Medal of Honor) awards luncheon next spring. As you may recall, total membership is limited to 64, one for each year of Queen Victoria's reign. (Isn't this a bit much?)

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Shade Tolerant Cannas?

According to a June article in the *Christian Science Monitor*, several cannas are somewhat shade tolerant. These include Pretoria, with its gold-and-green striped leaves. Also somewhat shade tolerant are 'Stuttgart' (up to 7 feet tall whose green leaves are striped with white) and 'Intrigue' (have no idea what this one looks like).

Garden Burglary

From the *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 2001

Garden burglary is becoming more of problem in the US, especially around businesses and public buildings and gardens.

When the verbena in Steve Pankow's Medford, Oregon, front yard began dripping deep purple blooms last year, temptation overtook one plant lover. While Mr. Pankow was at work, a neighbor spotted a woman pull up in her station wagon to his flower bed, open the tailgate, dig up the plants, and toss them in her car. The neighbor told police it looked as if other plants were already in the car. Police tracked the car's license plate number to a home about 10 miles away, where a woman admitted she had lifted the plants. She said she did it to fulfill a deal to landscape her mother's business, which was only two blocks from Pankow's home.

Downtown Minneapolis high rises have been the scene of many a horticulture crime this year, with thousands of dollars worth of plants taken from lobbies and atria.

Some apartment buildings in NYC chain down trees and shrubs. Along the Long Island expressway, government workers planted shrubs and evergreens—all were stolen

within 6 weeks.

To make evergreens unattractive to saw-wielding Christmas tree scavengers, a Cornell University gardener invented the "ugly mix." The gooey mixture of hydrated limestone and food coloring turns the trees temporarily pink. For bonsai owners, computer chips can now be inserted into their trees. If the tree ever wanders away, it can be recovered.

Though no one has any idea the extent of garden rustling in the U.S., in the U.K. Scotland Yard has a special "Plants Division." It is estimated that one in seven gardens is burglarized in England every summer. You can go away for a weekend, and return to find your garden stripped of plants and decorative material, including hardscaping.

Speaking of garden burglary, the famous 16th-century urns (set of eight) in the Dutch Garden at Hestercombe (visited by the WHPS in June, 2000) were stolen. These had been imported by none other than Gertrude Jekyll in the early 20th century from Italy, specifically for the garden. Actually, as it turns out, these were mere copies, as the originals were discovered some years ago in the secret garden at Lord Bath's estate, Longleat. They were subsequently reproduced for the Dutch Garden.

In any event, the story has a happy ending as the reproductions were recovered in a London architectural salvage store. This summer they were planted with Gertrude's favorite Pelargonium 'King of Denmark.' If anyone is interested, you can have one of these reproduced beauties (about 4 feet tall and 2.5 feet wide) for your own garden for about \$5000

(www.thomasoncudworth.com).

Thank you!

Many thanks to Linda Brazill for her wonderful article on the WHPS fall symposium in *The Capital Times* on September 1. (Never mind that the event was cancelled.) The color photos were fabulous, and you could not ask for better coverage of the event. After reading it, how could anyone who has any interest in plants have bothered to attend the UW barbecue of Western Kentucky? (Yeah, I know, it was cancelled, too.)

Misc.

Did everyone see the article on Sally Reynolds of Brentwood, Tennessee in the October issue of *Fine Gardening*? Sally is pictured on page 4, and the article she wrote on "Framing Views" features her garden, which a group of WHPS members were treated to on the Nashville trip in April. It looked very different in April, however.

Also, the October issue of *Horticulture* featured Craig Bergman's autumn garden, which the WHPS will be visiting on October 13. With over 20 different species and cultivars of asters, the principal colors are said to be burgundy, silver, and gold. As Bergman says in the article, "All too often we think of gardening as a spring and early-summer activity. Then, as the garden wanes later in the year, we drop in a few chrysanthemums and call it quits. But there are so many other options. In our autumn garden, we focus attention on plants that really come into their own in the fall."



From A Member...

Margaret Welke



GOD: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature, what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What in the world happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. They are called the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it is so boring, it's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing it and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and the warm weather probably makes the grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites very happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it-sometimes two times a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now let me get this straight: They fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You'd better sit down, Lord. As soon as the leaves fall, the Suburbanites rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No way!! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing the leaves away they go out and buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where to they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

GOD: Enough!! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?


ST. CATHERINE: *Dumb and Dumber*, Lord. It's a real stupid movie about...

GOD: Never mind — I think I just heard the whole story from Saint Francis!


Making a garden is not just an end in itself; it can be a journey to something beyond. Gardens are places where we take the rough, sore and awkward bits of our psyche, and work through problems as we plant and water. The process takes us from our particular piece of earth into a landscape that knows no boundaries.

—From "A Sense of Place", Jo Munro, *Hortus*, Spring 2000

From the spring *Oregon HPS Bulletin* Vol 16 #1, Spring 2000

 Once upon a time I believed that if I worked very hard and was persistent enough I would ultimately have a perfect garden. Here was my innocent plan: each year I would open one or two new beds in my two-thirds of an acre garden until eventually it would look like Alan Bloom's Bressingham, a vision of colorful perennial islands adrift in an ocean of verdant lawn. I pictured mixed borders all along the perimeters that would knit together in perfectly harmonious color schemes, a la Gertrude Jekyll with flowers in bloom for each day of the year, a la Margery Fish. I would follow Rosemary Verey's advice and never be dull. I would take Christopher Lloyd's recommendation and add more vertical thrust to the shapes. I would follow Beth Chatto's example and triangulate my plants. Surely then, it was just a matter of time and effort, in just another year or two or three, I would have a garden that would make people sigh with envy and faint with pleasure.

Nothing, however, went according to plan. It's been 14 years now and the garden grows more and more imperfect each season. My early vision of planting the garden so chock full that I wouldn't have to mow or weed has backfired. The more I plant, the more there is to tend: to fertilize, mulch, deadhead, prune and whack back in the fall. And despite the most intensive planting, weeds still manage to sneak in and root down, right in the middle of a perennial crown if that is the only space available. New weeds, even more noxious than the endemic ones, have traveled in on the coattails of seed exchange arrivals. "The Perfectly Imperfect Garden," Barbara Ashman

 The seed catalogs are arriving by the bushel, teasing-tempting-tormenting; shall I not order this and this and this. Remember how much work it takes to turn those seeds into those pictures on the cover—and don't forget the heat bills. But, if I don't, just think what I might miss and what if the nurseries don't have the plant with the longest blooming season ever, or the strongest new scent or the truest blue color ever grown and on and on? Well, we all know which argument will win out. I'd better get to the telephone with my order before they are out of stock and I won't be ready for the year 2000. "Gardening Chronicles—1999," Joan W. Stone

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society



October 2001 Newsletter
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