

Perennial Notes

April 15, 1994

Tax returns have been mailed and gardening has not yet begun in earnest, except for checking things two times a day to see what has come up since the last time you looked ("Wow! Here's *Carex morrowi* "Gilt" purchased at that steamy nursery in Myrtle Beach last July-- never thought it would survive a Wisconsin Winter!!"). Now, there is also time for what I hope will be the "occasional" newsletter of the Perennial Society.

Meetings

The next meeting of the Society will be at 7 pm on Thursday, April 21 at the upstairs meeting room of Olbrich Gardens. Our featured speaker will be Sherri Combs of the Soil and Plant Analysis Laboratory at U.W. She will be telling us all about fertilizers (organic, inorganic, importance of pH, typical fertilizer applications for area gardens), soil types commonly found in Madison gardens, and soil testing (how to interpret the results and what to do with them). Hope to see you there!!

For those of you who missed our February and March meetings, all I can say is, too bad!! In February Neal Diboll of the Prairie Nursery in Westfield told us all we wanted to know and more about prairie plants for the perennial gardens. It is hoped that a future meeting of the group will be held at the nursery. Mike Heger, from Ambergate Gardens near Minneapolis, gave a wonderful talk at the March meeting. As many of you now know, his specialty is martagon lillies, the premier lilly for the shade garden. He supplies more varieties of this bulb than any other nursery in the U.S. His talk was very informative and included information about his other favorite plants for the shady garden. (That slide of *Pachysandra procumbens* in full bloom was of special note!)

The next meeting of the *Wisconsin Woody Plants Society* will be hosted by Ed Hasselkus at the Allen Centennial Garden on the UW campus on June 18th from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. The featured speaker, who will lead a tour, is Dennis Beuttner the landscape architect from Milwaukee who designed the garden. Following lunch (\$6.85), there will be a walking tour of the campus featuring outstanding and unusual woody plants. There will also be the usual plant exchange among members. Please contact Ed's office at 262-1450 if you want to receive the official notice and registration form. There is no cost except for the lunch.

Plant Sales

There will be a plethora of wonderful plant sales this spring and summer. Here are a few that I know about:

May 28 9:00-12:00 noon The Perennial Society's very own, and first sale. This will be held at Tom Cottington's garden in Middleton. Relevant information is enclosed. All proceeds will go to our speaker's fund which has been somewhat depleted. We are hoping that members will bring many treasure's from their own gardens for the sale! (How about a piece of *Carex morrowi* "Gilt"?) Labels for pricing will be available. Come, bring a friend or two, and enjoy seeing Tom's garden as well. See the attached information and directions.

July 9 10:00-12:00 noon The Hosta Society will hold its second annual sale in the garden of Walter and Jean Rideout in Nakoma. Last year's sale was a smash and there were many bargains for the true shady garden connoisseur. And of course, there was every hosta imaginable, including a few you hadn't imagined! It is also a great opportunity to take a peek at Jean and Walter's garden.

April 23 1:00-3:00 pm The Dahlia Society's annual sale at Olbrich Gardens.

May 13 & 14 8:30 to 4:00 "An elite-echelon and very special plant sale" featuring perennial plants from the gardens of Marlyn Sachtjen, Jean Halverson, and Lois Kinlen. This sale will be held in Marlyn's garden "Wind-N-View" at 5181 West River Road in Waunakee (out beyond the Yahara Center--you can't miss this garden--you usually drive off the road just passing it!)

May 13 & 14 8:00 to 4:00 and May 15 10:00 to 3:00 25th annual Olbrich Gardens plant sale, featuring annuals and perennials. A great opportunity to buy perennials and annuals at reasonable prices, and to help support all the future improvements to the Olbrich Botanical Garden. You can make a nice morning of attending these two sales and seeing some wonderful gardens as well.

Future Events

22 June 7 PM Perennial Society's tour of Windy and Todd Meicher's Garden in MacFarland.

24-26 June Midwest Hosta Society's Annual meeting at the Dubuque Arboretum

15-16 June Olbrich Garden Tour--Monona neighborhoods

17 August 7 PM Perennial Society's tour of Marlyn Sachtjen's garden, Waunakee

Books

Last weekend I was pleased to find Marlyn Sachtjen's new book "Marlyn's Garden" in a prominent spot in the garden section of the University Book Store (It was 20% off day too!) Soft bound, approximately \$17, it's a bargain by one of Madison's gardening gurus. I perused it from cover to cover in matter of hours. It includes much of the history behind the planning of her garden as well of lots of "how I do it" advice. The list of plants is an excellent reference for what is hardy in a very exposed site in southern Wisconsin. I will have to try the *Oxalis adenophyllum* which I have long admired in East Coast gardens and was told, obviously incorrectly, that it was not hardy around here. As I do not do much cooking, I found the garden recipes section of less interest, but it seems to include many novel recipes using rather uncommon herbs. The style is typical of Marlyn's exuberance and folksiness, and at times it is as if you are puttering around behind her in the garden. Be sure to pick up a copy and get her to autograph it during our tour of the garden in August. It is utterly delightful reading, even if I do find *Lysimachia clethroides* terribly invasive in my own experience!

Plants That Merit Attention--*Sedum ternatum*

A couple of Saturdays ago, I was resting momentarily on the steps leading down into my garden, mesmerized by a brown creeper a few feet away poking around in the bark of *Quercus alba* with his thin, long, slightly curved bill. It was only after it had passed out of site around the trunk, that I noted the small rosettes of sedum popping up between the bottom step and the first stepping stone. Have you ever noticed how special a plant becomes to you by its association with people and places? So it is with me for *Sedum ternatum*. I once looked up the word "sedum" in the dictionary and found out that it was derived from the Latin for "house leek", which has always seemed strange, for a leek it is not! (Hmmm! I wonder what my mother-in-law would think of cream of sedum soup?) As for "ternatum", it obviously refers to the whorls of mostly three leaves. As alluded to, my association with this plant is a special one. For many years my family has summered on Big Bald Mountain northwest of Ashville, North Carolina, along the Tennessee border. The summer house is located at an elevation of 5,000 feet and the property is both steep and heavily wooded. On the wooded, rocky slopes, the sedum is found everywhere (often in association with Halberd's yellow violet) and I was always surprised to find a sedum flourishing in such a shady site. In the early part of June it flowers rather heavily with branches of white flowers, which form interesting seed heads if allowed to ripen. The local mountain folks call it rock cress, stone crop, and sometimes stone wort, which seems much more appropriate than "house leek". However, it wasn't until a few years ago that I learned its true identity. That brings me to the association of persons.

The finest American woman garden writer of the twentieth century is without a doubt, Elizabeth Lawrence (1910-1985). The garden columnist for many years for *The Charlotte Observer*, her book, *A Southern Garden* (1942), is an absolute gardening classic. Even if your garden is in Kotzebue, Alaska, this is must reading, and is the finest bedtime reading there is. For many years Mrs. Lawrence corresponded with Rosa Violet Hicks of Banner Elk, North Carolina, a mountain woman who dealt in native wild flowers. In another of her books, *Gardening for Love*, Mrs. Lawrence describes a visit to Rosa's farm 14 miles from Banner Elk deep in the Pisgah National Forest, and gives a description of the native sedum which they both loved so much. Needless to say, from the description it was clear to me that they were talking about my Bald Mountains sedum! After reading this book a few summers ago, I returned home with a nice clump of *Sedum ternatum*. It has thrived in my shady Wisconsin garden, growing to a height of 3-4 inches, and has competed very successfully with a dwarf white violet on one side and a very common blue flowering ajuga on the other. Every time I take note of it, as I did a couple of Saturdays ago, I think of Elizabeth Lawrence, Rosa Hicks, and the blue mists of summer in the Bald Mountains. Sometimes I swear I can even hear the call of the Veery thrush. I have also recently come to the conclusion that there are plenty of other places in the rocky walls of my garden where I could use this wonderful plant, whose foilage contrasts so nicely with ferns and dwarf hostas. This summer I plan to bring back a boat load from Big Bald Mountain. As for those less fortunate, I have seen it forsale at both the Flower Factory and CR Stephenson.

DUES, DUES, DUES

For those of you who just haven't gotten around to it, please send a check for \$5 made out to the Perennial Society to Scott Gordon, 2210 Calypso Road, Madison, WI 53704. We need your continued support and value your membership.