

Perennial Notes

August 10, 1996

A garden is like the self. It has so many layers and winding paths, real or imaginary, that it can never be known, completely, even by the most intimate of friends. Anne Raver, Deep in the Green, 1995.

Coming Events

August 21 6:30 PM Potluck supper with the Hosta Society in the Commons at Olbrich Gardens. Please bring a dish to pass and your own plates and utensils. Ice, lemonade, ice tea and paper cups will be available. Jean and Walter Rideout will lead a tour of the hosta garden including the Eunice Fisher collection. Jeff Epping (Olbrich staff horticulturist) will tell us all about the newly restored sunken garden and other great plans for Olbrich.

September 14 & 15 We will be joining the Hosta Society for an out of town tour of gardens in the Stevens Point area. This includes an overnight stay in the Stevens Point Holidome. To reserve a room at the Holidome for the evening of Sept. 14 call 1-800-922-7880 by August 24-- mention the Wisconsin Hosta Society for the \$69 rate. We will leave from the Holidome parking lot at 11 AM Sept 14. If you would like to order a box lunch (\$8.75) call John Tallman at 231-1651 before August 31. Saturday afternoon will include a tour of 4 gardens in the Stevens Point Area, including rose, rock, and dwarf conifer gardens. After the Sunday AM brunch at the Holidome, we will visit Foxfire Gardens, a lovely Oriental garden in nearby Marshfield. From there we will drive to Loyal to visit the garden of Walter Hoover with its extensive hosta collection.

September 29 1 PM Olbrich gardens We will sponsor with the Northern Illinois-Wisconsin Rock Garden Society Alexandra Berkutenko speaking on "The Flora of Eastern Russia". Dr. Berkutenko is with the Herbarium of Russian Academy of Sciences, Magadan, Russia. She is on a national speaking tour sponsored by the North American Rock Garden Society.

October 16 7PM Olbrich Gardens. "Gardeners' Expectations" by Craig Bergman and James Grigsby of Craig Bergman Landscape Designs, Inc., Wilmette, IL. Creators of the "Secret Garden" at the Chicago Flower Show this spring, they are frequent contributors to Horticulture Magazine. They also own a nursery and garden design business which maintains 60 designer gardens in the North Shore suburbs of Chicago.

October 20 (Sunday) PM Olbrich Gardens We have been invited by the Daylily Society to hear their guest from Alabama--Sarah Sykes--renown daylily hybridizer, winner of the Stout Medal, and a fabulous speaker. The Daylily Society is having their annual dinner at this time as well, so the exact time of the talk has not yet been announced.

November 20 7 PM Olbrich Gardens. Annual business meeting, plus, highlights of the gardening year with Ed Hasselkus and Frank Greer. (Sorry, we were unable to get Vita Sackville-West--she had a prior engagement.) We will start at the great March bank at Winterthur and end with the gardens of Normandy in September.

January 18, 1997, 11AM Olbrich Gardens. Annual Sunday brunch with the Hosta Society. Our featured speaker will be Pamela Wolf, author of Midwestern Gardens and senior editor of Chicagoland Gardening.

Other events of interest

August 18 Sundae in the Garden, noon to 4 PM, Olbrich Gardens. We will have an information table along with the other societies. There will be live music and food for sale.

"Japonica Magnifica"--If you missed this at Madison's LVM Museum this past winter, you have one more chance. It will be at the Chicago Botanical Garden from October 4-November 17.

September 28 Wisconsin Woody Plants Society. Will meet at the Retzer Nature Center on the West side of Waukesha at 1000 to tour a private collection of woody plants on property owned by the Retzer family. As usual, a box lunch will be included. If you are not a member of the WWPS and would like to join in (annual dues are \$1), call Ed Hasselkus at 238-1451 for more information.

October 17 7 PM Olbrich Gardens. Hosta Society, Upstairs meeting room. Jim Wilkins (Jackson, MI) renown gardener with a fantastic slide collection will give a talk entitled "Living shade and loving it".

MORE FOOD FOR CATALOG FRENZY

By popular request, I have been asked to share my favorite catalogs with the membership. As this is the fall bulb season, I can recommend the following two catalogs. Though neither contain any photographs, they offer a complete line of top quality bulbs at wholesale prices (quantities typically in 50's or 100's). You can always share the order with a friend. I can also testify to the bulb food sold by the Daffodil Mart--I have gotten wonderful results with their special daffodil food and the cricket crap conglomeration for other bulbs:

1. Van Engelen Inc.
Wholesale Price List
23 Tulip Drive
Bantam, Connecticut 06750
Ph: 860-567-8734
2. The Daffodil Mart
Wholesale/Retail Catalog
7463 Heath Trail
Gloucester, VA 23061

Ph: 1-800-ALL-BULB

(Their shipping and handling are now handled by White Flower Farm, but prices do not seem to have gone up very much.)

A. Hort Hound

As a child, I thought grandmothers grew in gardens. They were always out there in their old cardigan sweaters, watering the flowers.....Usually, they lived alone, because their husbands had died so long ago. Their men were just photographs on the highboy. So their companions were the bright colored faces of happy zinnias, and tall, exuberant hollyhocks. Ann Raver, Deep in the Green, 1995.

PASS ALONG THE PEONIES, PLEASE!

A couple of my favorite pass along plants are peonies from my Great Aunt Caroline's garden. She told me that *Paeonia tenuifolia* came from another Middleton gardener who brought roots back in his suitcase from trip to France. With large double red flowers, the delicate lacy fern-like foliage appears in early spring then seems to disappear by late summer.

She also cultivated two other 'mystery' peonies. A tall one, *Paeonia* 'Smouthii' syn. *P. laciniata* hort, is a hybrid between *P. tenuifolia* and *P. lactiflora*, known since 1843. Ed Hasselkus just told me he had found these plants flourishing in Sweden while visiting there this past June, so I finally know its correct name. The plant forms large clumps, is two to three feet tall, and blooms near Memorial Day before large double peonies bloom. The flowers are crimson-red, single, and scented. The side buds produce flowers about one week later than the first blooms, seed pods are smooth and foliage has a glossy sheen.

The real mystery is another *Paeonia* hybrid. This plant has matte foliage, grows only about 1.5 feet tall, forms a mound with delicate foliage not as fine as *P. tenuifolia* and finer than *P. 'Smouthii'*, with more crimson-pink flowers and blooms at least one week earlier than *P. 'Smouthii'*, seed pods have green velvet coverings. Could this peony be a *Paeonia anomala* hybrid, perhaps *Paeonia intermedia* var. *intermedia* (C.A.M) ? Anyone have any ideas what this plant is?

What is especially pleasing about these peonies is the early rich colored flowers that do not require staking. They have interesting, fern-like foliage, combine well with early spring wildflowers and bulbs, such as wild blue phlox, and will tolerate some shade since they blossom early before the tree leaf canopy matures. 'Burgundy lace' orchid fringed tulips beautifully reflect the crimson flowers. The peonies are also extremely hardy, to -20° or less.

Thomas A. Cottingham

Ed. Note: *P. 'Smouthii*, wherever it is found, is a pass along plant from previous generations of gardeners. Tom has shared his Great Aunt Caroline's favorite heirloom peonies with many PS members. Thanks Tom!!

The following article, submitted by Margaret McEntire, is from the July 26th online edition of The Wall street Journal. Reprinted here without permission:

The Titan Arum Seldom Blooms, And When It Does, It Stinks
Matthew Rose, Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

London--When one of the most splendid plants in the world is about to burst into bloom, what do most gardeners do? Run the other way.

The *Amorphophallus titanum*, or titan arum, is usually found only deep in Sumatra's lowland forest. It can grow up to ten feet high, and when it flowers, its purple ruff opens to reveal a single cream stem. Unfortunately, it hardly ever flowers--or fortunately. When it does blossom, it produces a stench so strong that the botanists of London's Royal Botanic Gardens have planned escape routes for visitors overcome by the odor. The plant is expected to bloom sometime between Sunday and next Tuesday. "Overall, it smells a bit like urine," says Peter Boyce, a researcher in the herbarium of the botanical gardens, who has nurtured the plant, which is thought to be between six and eight years old, for the past two years. Others say it smells like rotting meat or fish. In local Sumatran dialect, its name roughly translates as "the corpse plant."

The plant hails from a family of aroids known for their baleful bouquet. Related varieties include the dead horse arum, the skunk cabbage, the stinkhorn and poisonous dumb cane, or dieffenbachia. The most delicate specimen, the arum lily, is associated with funerals and actually smells good.

What distinguishes the titan arum, exciting aroid enthusiasts around the world, is its rarity and its infrequent blossoming. Even in the wild, it doesn't flower. The Royal Botanic Gardens has had only three bloomings this century, the last in 1963. When it does flower, the bloom usually curls up and dies after three or four days. So London's titan arum is attracting a great deal of attention. The plant is behind ropes in a large wooden box in the Princess of Wales Conservatory, where pipes spraying mist hang from the ceiling to stimulate rain-forest conditions. The temperature is kept in the 90's, the humidity at 80%.

Officials of the gardens, which have more than a million visitors a year, can't estimate how many people will come to see the bloom next week. Currently in its final growth spurt, the London specimen is growing four inches a day and could ultimately be five feet high. What the visitors will see is a plant that resembles Audrey, the man-eating plant in the musical "Little Shop of Horrors." It stands out from the palms and pineapples that surround it. The long creamy-green central

part--the phallic appendix that gives the plant its name--tapers to a point and is wrapped at the base by a large, darker green cabbage-like leaf that will turn purple and splay out to form a ruff when the plant blooms. Hundreds of stinky flowers will appear, though mostly out of sight at the base of the appendix.

To protect the curious, the curators at the gardens have devised a one-way route through the greenhouse to keep the crowds moving. At two points there are exits through which the nasally challenged can escape to the sanctuary of orchids. But the smell is part of the appeal, explains Tim Walker, the curator of the University of Oxford Botanical Garden. "Scent is totally subjective. There are people who think these smell wonderful."

Like Dutchman Wilbert Hetterscheid. Mr. Hetterscheid, who donated the plant that is about to bloom, works as a horticultural taxonomist for the ornamental-flower-trade. He has collected more than 500 specimens of *Amorphophallus* and is one of the few people in the world to have had the pleasure of smelling the blossoms. "I really stick my nose into the thing and try and smell really deep what is going on there," he says.

Back at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Geoff Kite is the lucky researcher who will try to capture and preserve the bouquet of the titan arum in an absorbent trap and analyze its chemical makeup. He has done the same with a number of other members of the genus and has found one that smells of chocolate, one of fried fish and one of bananas. He know the titan arum is different; he has a test tube containing year-old essence of the plant. "I once left a chicken in the fridge and went away. And when I came back, I got the same sort of gut-wrenching feeling," explains Dr. Kite. But examining this plant is the high point of a research project that curators at the gardens have been sweating over for months. So is he looking forward to his imminent field work? "Not really," he says.

I see where my garden leads--down the path and through the woods and across the water, and who knows, to other continents and other forests, where leaves and plants are doing nature's business--and, just as a sideline, really, giving us life. Ann Raver, Deep in the Green, 1995

More A. Hort Hounds Favorites

Again by request, I have been asked to list some of my favorite gardening books:

Reference

1. Herbaceous Perennial Plants, by Allen Armitage, 1989, Varsity Press. This is my all-time favorite perennial "how to" book. Armitage is a professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia, and he describes

his book as a "treatise on the identification, culture and garden attributes of herbaceous perennials." Perennials are listed alphabetically by genus and usually each genus is depicted by one or more line drawings. Pronunciation, culture, and a listing of various cultivars and related species are included. Selected references for additional reading are also given. Thinking of dividing your Aconitum or sowing its seed? Armitage has the information you need.

2. Perennials, by Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix, 1991, Random House. This two volume, paper back set (Volume one, Early Perennials; Volume two, Late Perennials) has the wonderful color photographs not contained in Armitage's book. Short on cultivation information, it does give the country from which each species originates, overall geographic distribution, and flowering time in the wild. If you come across a perennial your not familiar with, a quick consultation from these volumes will give you an idea what the plant looks like in flower. Plants are arranged in four groups by season of flowering, and within the seasons by family. If the same genus has members blooming in two different seasons, the genus appears in two separate groups. The photographs (often of the plant blooming in its native habitat) are very good considering each volume is only about \$25.00

Just Good Reading

1. Deep in the Green, by Ann Raver, 1995, Knopf, New York. This book, though not so much about gardening, but what gardening tells us about life, is a wonderful collection of essays by the garden columnist of the New York Times. It is delightful! I took it on my recent Maine vacation, and if I set it down, I was always able to relocate it as my mother-in-law had her nose buried in it. Ms. Raver was a guest speaker at the Chicago Botanical Garden this summer to rave reviews.

2. Green Thoughts, by Eleanor Perenyi, 1981, Random House. This book is available once again. In fact the half price book store in Nakoma Plaza has a few copies. Another collection of horticultural essays, it is described by Allen Lacy as "...quite simply a treasure...I suspect it may turn out to be one of the classic garden books of the century." Eleanor's first garden was on the family's vast country estate in the part of Hungary which was incorporated into the Soviet Union after World War II. Her second garden is in coastal Connecticut. Her account of Miss Ellen Willmott of Warley Place is far more frank than that of Charles Elliott's in the most recent issue of Horticulture. Eleanor says quite frankly, she was a most disagreeable bitch. My mother-in-law brought this book out with her for Christmas last year, and every time she put it down, her son-in-law had his nose in it.

The following piece is contributed by Doris Kistler, PS member. Doris has been gardening on the WEB for a few years now and knows the "connections". For those of you with a computer hooked up to the Internet, you'll love this informative piece which will give you an opportunity to "garden" even in the worst of weather conditions.

GARDENING ON THE WEB

The World-Wide Web is an unparalleled resource for information on agriculture, horticulture, botany, landscape design and gardening. The WEB provides up-to-the-minute information from nearly every country in the world. From your home computer you can access information from libraries, university botany, horticulture and extension departments, and government agencies. USDA bulletins and databases can be accessed (<http://www.usda.gov/>). You can also order seeds, plants, tools and garden furniture with a click of the mouse button from the many "online" nursery and seed catalogs and garden centers. There are "electronic" magazines and even scientific journals that exist only on the Internet.

Currently there are over 1000 plant-related websites and that number grows daily. Because of the extent and diversity of these sites, it is useful, especially for the Web novice, to use one of the Web Garden Centers (WGC) as a home base. These are Websites that organize other more specialized Websites into subject categories and of course provide "links" to them. One of the nice features of the WGC's are their "What's New" sections which alert you to new sites that have come online recently. Two of the oldest and the best WGC's in the US are the Garden Gate & Prairie Net. (<http://www/.prairienet.org/ag/garden/homepage.htm>) (<http://trine.com/GardenNet/>) Both of these sites provide links to many of the same Websites and whether the Garden Gate or the Garden Net has the best organization is mostly a matter of personal preference. One feature of the GardenNet that I find very useful is their Index to Internet Resources.

Another of my favorite WGC's is the award-winning Ohio State U WebGarden (<http://hortwww-2.ag.ohio-state.edu/hvp/Webgarden/Webgarden.html>) In my opinion the WebGarden is the model university horticulture department website. It not only provides extensive links to other sites, but it provides specialized information for Ohio gardeners, farmers and landscapers. You have access to the University's extension bulletins, online insect identification and disease diagnosis, a database of plant information and images, local internet garden forums, and expert evaluation of the impact of recent weather conditions on plants.

Without a doubt, the gold medal for WGC's has to go to the Internet Directory for Botany in Helsinki, Finland. It is truly a world-wide information resource for the professional and the serious home gardener. (<http://www.helsinki.fi/kmus/botmenu.html>) In addition to having links to more sites than any other WGC, it has an excellent search tool that allows you to enter a plant cultivar, for example, and receive a list of links to all sites that have information on that cultivar. The resulting information is usually overwhelming! If you are interested in searching plant databases and scientific journal abstracts or viewing (and "capturing") plant images, this is the best place to go.

The WGC's also provide information about Internet news groups, mailing lists and garden forums which allow you to exchange information and ask questions of other gardeners. There are plant and seed exchange sites

such as the Garden Exchange (<http://www.gardenweb.com/gardenxchg/>) and the Seed Guild (<http://www.gardenweb.com/seedgd/>). Sites such as these enable gardeners to trade or buy rare seeds and plants that you cannot find in most nursery seed catalogs. The WGC's provide reviews and descriptions of gardening and landscape design software as well as access to software for mapping botanical garden and arboretum collections. Some of this software is free and can be downloaded to your computer just by clicking on its name!

The major subject categories and some example links available from the WGC's are:

1. Arboreta, Botanical and Public Gardens, Botanical and Garden Associations
 - a. Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University
<http://arboretum.harvard.edu/>
 - b. Butchart Gardens, Victoria BC
<http://www.dataflux.bc.ca/butchart/>
 - c. Norfolk Botanic Garden, Virginia
<http://www.communitylink.org.nbg/>
2. Botanical databases, plant factsheets and images
 - a. Grey Herbarium Index of New World Plants
<http://www.herbaria.harvard.edu/Data/Grey/>
 - b. The Intraagency Taxonomic Information System
<http://trident.ftc.nrcs.usda.gov/itis/>
 - c. Biota of North America
<http://www.mip.berkeley.edu/bonap/>
 - d. Images of Weeds
<http://picked2.agn.uiuc.edu/weedid.htm>
 - e. UW botany image database
<http://www.wisc.edu/botany/virtual.html>
3. Internet magazines, journals, and newsletters
 - a. The Cyber Plantsman
<http://www.gardenweb.com/cyberplt/>
 - b. The Ardent Gardener
<http://trine.com/GardenNet/ArdentGardener/ArdentGardener.htm>
4. Nursery/seed catalogs, Internet garden stores
 - a. The Cooks Garden
<http://www.cooksgarden.com/>
 - b. Wayside Gardens
<http://trine.com/GardenNet/WaysideGardens/>
 - c. The Garden Escape (an internet garden store)
<http://www.garden.com/>
 - d. The Garden Store
<http://www.gardenstore.com/>
 - e. Timber Press (garden books)
<http://www.timberpress.com/>

I hope you will find this information helpful and entertaining. If you have any question, you can reach me at <http://www.Waisman.wisc.edu/hdrl/>

or my EMAIL address: Kistler@pop.waisman.wisc.edu

Doris Kistler

You've been gardening, an activity that doesn't necessarily lead directly to its supposed goal. This used to bother me, until I realized that this meandering--a kind of free association between earth, tools, body and mind--is the essence of gardening. What is supposed to be a practical, goal-oriented activity is actually an act of meditation.
Ann Raver, Deep in the Green, 1995

The following quotes are taken from The Gardener's Gripe Book, Abby Adams, Workman Publishing, New York, 1995:

A perennial is a plant that, had it not died, would have returned the following year.

Snuggled into a splintery Adirondack chair, dressed in our authentic Japanese farmer's togs, an Italian market umbrella shielding us from the sun, we flip through the latest Smith & Hawkins catalog looking for ideas to pull it all together. All of garden history has come down to this, to me, to now. So...How about a meadow? Or a lily pond, or a grotto, or a knot garden...No, a meadow it is. Call the contractor, alert the landscaper, it's meadow time....It won't last. Nothing ever does, in the garden.

Plant nurturing demands almost as much of a commitment as child nurturing. There's always something you ought to be doing, and something you're probably doing wrong. Like one's offspring, one's plants don't always turn out as expected.

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