

## Perennial Notes

December 10, 1996

Gardens are theaters; they are there to enchant, to exhilarate, to deceive and to captivate, and because they are transient, each visit is inimitable.

Mirable Osler, 1996

"The Garden", April, 1996

### COMING EVENTS

January 19, Sunday 11AM Perennial/Hosta Society Brunch. The Atrium, Olbrich Gardens. Guest speaker will be Pamela Wolfe, author of Midwest Gardens. Pam is now one of the editors of "Chicagoland Gardening" and hopefully will have some of her books for sale. If you already have a copy, bring it in for her to sign.

February 19, 1996 Wednesday, 7PM Upstairs meeting room, Olbrich Gardens. Our speaker will be Mike Heger of Ambergate Gardens near the Twin Cities. Mike spoke to the Hosta Society several years ago on Martagon Lilies. He will speak to us on designing with perennials in unconventional ways.

March 19, 1996 Wednesday, 7PM Upstairs meeting room, Olbrich Gardens. Our speaker will be Peter Nouse, owner of Second Nature Landscape, will speak to us on building and planting a natural stone retaining wall. Peter is presently restoring the natural ravine over which the Frank Lloyd Wright house on Lake Mendota Drive is cantilevered. This is a year long project and Peter plans an open house for the completion of his project this spring. Peter has also been restoring the Jensen Council Ring in the Arboretum.

April 16, 1996 Wednesday, 7PM Upstairs meeting room, Olbrich Gardens. A members' potpourri of favorite perennials organized by Tom Cottingham. Five or six members will show slides and discuss why up to 20 perennials are their favorites among all the ones that they grow. A list of the plants will be prepared in advance and distributed to the membership before the talk begins.

May 24, 1996 Saturday 9AM Members and friends annual sale. In the garden of Heidi Carvin. We will be having several work party meetings in various members gardens to pot up plants for the sale beginning in late April.

### OTHER EVENTS

February 15,16, 1997. WHA-TV Garden Expo, Dane County Expo Center. We will have a booth and sponsor a talk entitled "Great Wisconsin Gardens". Let us know at the January brunch if you can help us out.

April 25,26, 1997. Bus trip to Missouri Botanical Gardens. Sponsored by the Master Gardeners and open to everyone. This coincides with the Gardens annual "Garden Expo". Estimated cost is \$100. Call PS member Ann Munson for more details--224-3721 (work, 9AM to 1PM) or 221-9520 (home).

## PERENNIAL SOCIETY TO CHANGE NAME--A VISION TOWARDS THE FUTURE

For the forty members who attended our annual business meeting last month, you already know all about my long term dream for the organization. For many years I have been familiar with the Hardy Plants Society, Mid Atlantic Group (HPSMAG). Centered in the Philadelphia area with 900 members, they have a loose affiliation with the Hardy Plants Society, Pacific Northwest Group centered in the Portland area. There is also a similar group in Canada. The organization itself is a member of The Hardy Plants Society of Great Britain (founded by Alan Bloom, no in his 90's), but there are no common projects/meetings at present. The HPSMAG has a long range goal of organizing chapters across the US and Canada, with a North American newsletter beginning in 1998. A third US chapter was organized in Michigan this year.

At the November meeting, I proposed that we change our name to the Hardy Plants Society, Wisconsin Group (HPSWG). This will require a revision of our Constitution and By Laws and we will incorporate ourselves under this new name. The motion to pursue this idea passed unanimously. This will not cost us anything except a little extra input from the Board of Directors. As we have never incorporated, and had planned to anyway, this will not be an additional expense. There are no national dues of any kind and no contributions to a parent organization required at this time. I envision it becoming something like the American Hosta Society or the North American Rock Garden Society. Ultimately, there may be international, national, and regional meetings. This organization will have a much larger focus than any other amateur plant group--basically all hardy plants including herbaceous perennials and woody plants. And when you think about it, the notion of "hardy" will even vary by regions of North America.

The current chapters will exchange newsletters and ideas. The Mid-Atlantic Group has a published directory both of its members as well as a directory of members gardens. The latter includes a brief description of the garden's highlights and how you can arrange a visit. Standing committees include Long Range Planning, Membership, Program, Publications, Seed Exchange, Special Interest Groups, Ways & Means. They also publish a plant source book for the Mid-Atlantic region. The special interest groups (Geranium, Hellebore, Native Plants, Salvia/tender Perennials, Shade Gardening, Variegated Plants) have proven very popular and have their own smaller meetings. The Seed Exchange has been a great success and is the main reason there are so many members outside of the Philadelphia area. They host spring and fall members sales and this year had their first Vendors sale. They have an open garden tour for members. At this even four members open their gardens for an afternoon followed by an early evening reception in one of the gardens. They also sponsor a regional "Perennials Conference" annually with several other area plant groups.

The new constitution and a proposal for the general reorganization of the society will be presented at the February meeting. If you have any questions or concerns please do not hesitate to give me a call in the meantime.

Frank Greer 233-4686

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PERENNIAL SOCIETY

The Perennial Society began with a brief invitation to a meeting which appeared in the Neighbors Section of the newspaper in January of 1989, if my desk calendar is correct. This organization was conceived by M. L. Mancheski, who no seems like some mystical birth mother from the distant past. After acting as our organizer and group leader she soon left her job with the UW Extension to join the Peace Corps in the late summer of 1989. Steve Lesch and I served as directors until officers could be elected and Bylaws written and approved. There have been only two presidents besides Steve Lesch, John Cannon followed by Frank Greer who started our newsletter, Perennial Notes, in April of 1994. There were forty-four names on our membership list published at this time which has now expanded to over 200.

From its inception, the organization has had two main goals. The first is to further educate our members about perennials, their care, upkeep, and use in good garden design. This is to be done through regularly scheduled programs and trips to area gardens and businesses. An early workshop in August of 1990, held at Chris Bylsma's home in Nakoma, dealt with plant division, mulches, fertilizing, and fall cleanup. Our second goal is to evangelize the use of perennials as plantings throughout our growing community. One of our early ideas was to sponsor an annual award (similar to the Orchid/Onion Awards) for best use of perennials in the landscape by a public institution or private business. We never have made any awards, though this idea has come up periodically over the years. Our successful civic projects have been to help a Boy Scout with his Eagle Scout Badge and relandscaping and continuing maintenance of the historic building which houses the Madison Urban League on Gorham Street.

The mid-winter brunch has been an annual event since the beginning of the Society. Our brunch has now become an unforgettable with John Fritsch's and John Cannon's Multi-Image Garden Show featuring members gardens. While we all enjoy programs, tours, and various other events, the opportunity to share our interest in gardening with wonderful people is what brings members back year in and year out.

Pamela Mather

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I am sick of good taste, spreading a banal similarity over a hundred gardens. Vita\* has a lot to answer for. Oh, those cursed white gardens that for years strewed the more plushy counties with an anemic rash. I long for corrosive vulgarity at times, for outrageous curdling where the colours rasp; for coarse intruders sheltering the rarest viola, or for a sense of humour breaking through the mystique of sensitive discrimination. Gertrude\* and Vita\*. Oh Lord, how their shades have seeped through the compost.

Mirabel Osler  
"The Garden"\*\*, July 1996

\* Vita Sackville-West, Gertrude Jekyll

\*\*"The Garden" is the quarterly journal of the Royal Horticulture Society

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## THE 1996 GARDENING YEAR--LOOKING BACK

The most lasting memory of this year was the very late spring--everything came up two to three weeks late and bloom time was likewise delayed. I never dreamed that the lily flowered tulips Ballade, China Pink, and Elegant Lady would still be in bloom on June 8th,

the day my daughter graduated from high school, adding a real touch of class to the party we had for her at the house that morning. The heavy rains of June and early July set records, only to be followed by a dry August and September. There were only 4 or 5 days that the temperature reached 90°F or higher, all of which occurred between the 28th of June and the 10th of July. Where were those dog days of August?

I did try a few new annuals including a yellow flowering, procumbent tropical lysimachia with unusual variegated leaves. In fact, I was so taken with this plant, that I have propagated it under the grow lights and may have a few cuttings to sell at the spring sale so others can help me make the exact identification. The other "hit" of the summer was *Nicotiana sylvestris*. I had been wanting to try this for years having read somewhere that it is one of the tobacco plants that is shade tolerant. To be honest, it really got out of hand, reaching heights above six feet in the front garden by the end of August. It bloomed non-stop for three months and its white flowers perfumed the night air. Never has any plant attracted so much neighborhood notice from non-gardening types. Well into November, while I was raking leaves, passersby were still inquiring about those giant plants, weeks after were relegated to the compost pile (R.I.P.). People commented all summer, too, about the nighttime fragrance as they walked past the house, and were puzzled by its daytime absence.

It was also the summer of the grass cutting revolution. For my 50th birthday in March my mother-in-law presented me with a Smith & Hawkins push-type, reel mower. It was a real pleasure to use, took up little storage space, required no oil changes or trips to the gas station, and what a relief was the sound of operation. I could mow the lawn at 6AM on Sunday if I wanted to. The peaceful whirring sound took me back in time to the summers I spent in the early 50's in my grandmother's garden in northern Florida. It became even more enjoyable after I read that the gasoline powered lawn mower is the most environmentally polluting machine in the American home today. In fact, 89 million of them belch out ten percent of all airborne pollution in the US. (6.8 million tons!) In just an hour, the lawn mower produces more air pollution than the average car traveling 500 miles! I am also proud to relate that its use impacted positively on the neighborhood. By August, two other house on the block sported similar lawn mowers, and another neighbor was borrowing mine regularly. Ah, the sound of silence. Now if we could just get something done about those ear splitting leaf blowers!!

This was my second full season of water gardening. This has been a challenge as the pond gets no direct sunlight once the oak trees don their leaves. On a trip in April, I had noticed the six foot high, magnificent royal ferns (*Osmunda regalis*) in the Audobon Society's Big Cypress Swamp Preserve in southwest Florida. These grew on hummocks created by their own root systems, directly out of the water. This gave me the idea of submerging a pot an inch or two below water planted with royal ferns, and the results were a big success. The ferns thrived in these conditions. Joan Severa also pointed out to me that *Houttuynia* (hoo-tie'-nee-a) 'Chameleon' (common name = chameleon plant), thought my most of us to be an invasive, multi-colored ground cover, was really a water plant, and sure enough the few sprigs she gave me from her rather dry garden along her front walk, when placed in submerged pots, grew out across the water spectacularly. And in the shade, the garish red splashes of the leaves became a rosy pink. The most beautiful of the new plants this year was Bowles Golden Sedge (*Carex elata* 'Bowles Golden'). I had seen a photograph of it growing in water in some gardening book and tried it out this year. This is the most showy of sedges with a very narrow, golden green/dark green variegated leaf. Against the nearly black water of my pond, it literally glowed, particularly in the early morning filtered sunlight. This plant gave me as much pleasure as any in my garden this summer. Finally, the "big" hit of the water garden this year was *Colocasia esculenta* 'Black Magic' (a purple elephant ear, or taro). Each leaf as it unfurled was a light greenish purple with a striking

deep purple vein pattern initially. Within two to three weeks each leaf became a solid, deep purple color. The back lighting from early morning rays of sunshine through the young leaves was magnificent and made for some good photo opportunities. The plant's only draw back was that as each leaf unfurled larger than its predecessor and by the end of September, the new leaves measured 30" by 20". With October's gusty winds, the potted plant literally set sail off the submerged wall shelf and promptly sank to the bottom of the pond. It was impossible to prevent this from happening. Thus my success in "shade" water gardening, has been primarily with foliage. In fact, the only plant that has reliably bloomed for me in this situation was water hyacinth, and this only before the middle of July. You can forget about trying to grow any of the water lilies with which I am familiar in these conditions.

As with 1995's year end note, I feel compelled to comment on late blooming plants under the oaks where frost generally does not occur until the leaves are down. This year on October first there were more than 25 perennials in bloom: three different lamiums ('White Nancy', *alba*, and 'pink pewter'), 3 hostas ('Green Fountain', *Yingeri*, *plantaginea*), *Dicentra exima* (white), *Corydalis lutea* and *Corydalis ochroleuca*, 6 *Tricyrtis* (*macranthopsis*, *tojen*, 'White Towers', *hirta*, *hirta variegata*, *tamagawa*), 4 *Cimicifugas* (*atropurpurea*, *japonica*, *acerina*, *simplex* 'White Pearl'), *Cheloni lyoni* (pink turtle head), *Anemone japonica* (pink), *Aconitum Carmichaelii* (deep blue), three thalictrums (*aquilegifolium*, 'Hewitts double', and *kiusianum*), *Begonia grandis* (pink and white forms), *Kirengeshoma palmatum*. *Tricyrtis formosana* did not flower until October 15th and the woodland *Aster cordifolia* (pale blue/pink flowers), *Crocus speciosus*, and *Crocus goulimyi* were in full bloom on November 1, following the killing frost of October 30. For the third year in a row *Hosta tardiflora* was frozen before the blooms opened.

Frank Greer

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**GARDEN MYSTERIES**

With the winter season upon us, hopefully our gardens have been put to bed. Now is the time for curling up by the fire with all those catalogues the mail person has delivered and the plans for reworking those unproductive areas of your garden. I would like to share with you an opportunity for another pleasant diversion--a mystery story. Not just any kind of "who-done-it", but one with a horticultural theme. I was familiar with the Ellis Peter's series about Brother Cadfael, a medieval herbalist, but when I stopped by Booked For Murder in the Lakepoint Commons (University and Farley), I was surprised to find that the helpful folks there have a whole folder on books with plant themes.

I purchased a random selection of authors whose works were mentioned in that folder and am reading my way through the titles. Author Ann Ripley's sleuth, Louise, is an organic gardener. In her second book, *Death of a Garden Pest*, Louise is hired as the host person of a PBS gardening show, which sounds like a good read. (Shelly Ryan are you reading this?) Author Rebecca Rothenberg had created a series about a California County Agriculture Department microbiologist. The weather in this series could compete with the BTU's from your fireplace and the plots give the reader more than a passing glimpse of the flora of the San Joaquin Valley. In his Celia Grant series, British author John Sherwood combines something that those Brits are famous for, a good mystery story with good gardening. And these authors and titles are just scratching the surface if you will. Whether it is one book or a whole series, there are many good mysteries to distract you until the growing season returns.

Pam Mather

## THE ELEGANCE OF EPIMEDIUMS

What graceful thing is this which lies  
 At gardens edge and multiplies  
 Its clouds of stars in May  
 And which in summer sets its leaves  
 In gently overlapping sheaves  
 Like roof tiles in Cathay.

The Epimedium is she  
 Who fills her space so daintily  
 With such delightful flowers  
 No gardener can succumb to care  
 While Epimedium is there  
 To charm away the hours.

Joan Severra, 1996

As I read and reread this poem of Joan's, it really sums up the pluses of this genus. Superb edging plant, very long lived, hardy to zone four (at least), magnificent and persistent evergreen foliage with red coloration in both spring and late fall, a striking shower of spring flowers, no diseases or pests, and does extremely well in dry, woodland conditions. What more could one ask of a plant? As far as I know, deer are not fond of epimediums either. They all like woody soil, the more humus, the better. They can be readily divided at almost any time of the year, and a few clumps of the more vigorous hybrids can be turned into a long border with relatively little effort.

I must confess that I was not familiar with this plant until about 15 years ago, when my mother-in-law got into them in a really big way. She eventually lined all the paths of her woodland garden with them. By this time I was also in love with the plant and her design idea, and began importing them from her Philadelphia garden to my own with the aid of a sharp edged knife and a battered brown American Tourister. As some of my friends say, they are "Frank's suitcase epimediums".

Though I too have now gone nuts over them, growing about 25 different ones, there are four, must have varieties which are the staples of my garden: *Epimedium x rubrum*, *Epimedium x versicolor* 'Sulphureum', *Epimedium perralderianum*, and *Epimedium x youngianum* 'niveum'. As for the remainder, most of them I have only had a few years. I can highly recommend *E. x warleyense* for its uniquely colored tangerine flowers and *E. grandiflora* for its gorgeous, large, long spurred, pink flowers.

*E. x rubrum*, a cross between *E. alpinum* (central Europe) and *E. grandiflorum* (Japan), is by far the most vigorous epimedium I grow, clumps doubling in size every year. Originating as a deliberate cross at the Ghent botanic garden by Dutch gardener A. Donckelaer, it appeared in the literature by 1844. It is the most commonly available epimedium. It is listed as a ground cover by some authors and generally assumes a height of 12". Its heart-shaped leaves are prominently marked with red each spring and develop reddish overtones in the late fall. It is evergreen for me, though the foliage is pretty much flattened by a typical winter's snowfall. Therefore, in early spring all the foliage is cut to the ground in order to highlight the loose inflorescences of 15-20, 3/4" flowers. The stary blossoms have crimson red sepals and pale yellow petals. The petals have relatively short cream colored spurs held closely against the sepals. When found as a large,

uncrowded clump, this very floriferous epimedium is a site in early spring when in full bloom. The flowers proceed the development of the new foliage.

*E. x versicolor* 'Sulphureum' is one of a series of hybrids between the Japanese *E. grandiflorum* and the Caucasian *E. pinnatum*, thought to have originated again in the Ghent botanic garden in the mid 19th century. The young spring foliage is delicately marked with red, and matures into a good green color. It looks wonderful all summer but is usually bedraggled after winter snows so I always cut the foliage off before spring growth resumes. Its maximum height is 12". The lovely inflorescences consist of 15-20 flowers, with pale yellow sepals and butter yellow long spurred petals. Flowers are held well above the developing spring foliage. This particular variety blooms sporadically for me well into July, long after the initial spring flush.

*E. peralderianum*, native to the Atlas Mountains of Algeria, is one of the few African plants hardy in Wisconsin gardens. It closely resembles *E. pinnatum* from the Transcaucasian region of Georgia and Iran, and I suspect that the plant that I am growing (one of my "suitcase" series) is a cross between these two, being either *Epimedium x perralchicum* 'Wisley' or more likely the German cultivar 'Fröhnleiten'. At any rate, its heart shaped foliage has minimal red highlights in the spring, but by midsummer develops into a beautiful glossy green color which makes it a favorite among all the varieties that I grow. It is about 10" in height. The sepals are a bright yellow. The very small brownish petals are unspurred and inconspicuous. As with the other epimediums, I cut off the old foliage in early spring.

If I could grow just one epimedium, it would be *E. x youngianum* 'Niveum'. With a maximum height is 6-8 inches, it is the latest blooming of the four in my garden, usually blooming until mid-June. The lovely, white flowers are held well above the bright green foliage which highlights the inflorescences in a way not appreciated with the other three. It is thought to be one of the crosses between *E. diphyllum* and *E. grandiflorum*, both brought to Europe from Japan by von Siebold in the 1830's. Its foliage looks terrible in the winter, and if I get to it before the snow falls, I got it back to the ground in the late fall. *Epimedium x youngianum* 'Yenemoto form', which I have recently acquired, has all the virtues of 'Niveum', but the delicate white flowers are much larger with very long spurs. This is the loveliest flowering epimedium of all the ones I grow, and would certainly inspire a poet.

There are now more than 40 species of epimediums described in the literature, with many new, recent introductions from China. In addition, there is much hybridization going on between the species and I certainly hope epimediums do not become like hostas and day lilies, with thousands of cultivars but relatively few with truly, great distinctive garden qualities. There are no species native to North America, the nearest relative being the *Vancouverias* of the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. If you want to see good color photos of epimediums, I refer you Phillips' and Rix's Perennials, vol 1 (Random House, 1991) or the recent article in the publication of the Royal Horticulture Society, The Garden: "Epimedium: dawning of a new era" by Robin White, April, 1996. If you really want to learn something about epimediums see Richard Weaver's article entitled "In Praise of Epimediums" in Arnoldia, vol. 39. If you are lucky enough to find it, the magnum opus on epimediums was published as a monograph by Dr. William Stearns (Journal of the Linnaean Society, Botany, Volume 51, pages 409-534, 1938). Rumor has it the Dr. Stearns, now an octogenarian, is working on an update of his monograph, due out in 1997.

## THINKING OF SPRING

The freshness of spring unfolds with some of my favorite pass-along-plants in my shade garden, including wild blue phlox, trillium, *Sedum ternatum*, Jack-in-the-pulpit, wild ginger, lady fern, and native columbine. The wild blue phlox has beautiful and fragrant sky blue flowers and evergreen foliage. Trillium adds large white patches, *Sedum ternatum* starry blossoms with pepper spots. Jack-in-the-pulpit has interesting foliage, flowers and fruits. Wild ginger is fun to see growing as it pops up from the ground early in the spring. Later its round leaves expand adding contrast in green. Look for its hidden brown flower jugs. Lady fern adds feathery green and finally native columbine with its red and yellow spurred flowers is in striking contrast to the others. The latter also attract the ruby-throated humming birds.

Tom Cottington



DUES, DUES, DUES. It is that time again Please send them in today!!!!!!

**THE PERENNIAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP 1997**

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( ) INDIVIDUAL.....\$5.00

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Please mail completed form and checks made out to The Perennial Society to:

Richard Bloomquist  
5743 Wilshire Dr  
Madison, WI 53711 (274-8326)

I am interested in helping out with the following activities:

( ) Programs ( ) Plant Sale ( ) Mailings ( ) Community projects

( ) WHA-TV 1997 Gardening Expo

Frank R. Greer  
925 Waban Hill  
Madison, WI 53711



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