

December 4, 1998

It isn't the knowledge about plants and gardening that's of first importance. It's the passion.

Allen Lacey, The Inviting Garden.
Henry Holt & Co, New York, 1998

The Garden in Autumn by A. Hort Hound

It was a glorious fall for a gardener in Wisconsin.

Unlike the previous El Nino year, the oaks lost all of their leaves by Halloween. With the exception of a violent wind and rain storm on the 10th of November, during which I lost a massive white oak, there was no inclement weather to complain about. At least I got 5 cubic yards of "free" wood chips from my arboreal loss. And the wind damage to white pines in the neighborhood plus a fraser fur which was downed in the arboretum, made available an abundance of free evergreen boughs as a protective cover for the winter sure to come.

My clumps of *Miscanthus gracillimus*, somewhat out of place in my woodland garden, bloomed for the first time in five years and I enjoyed their pinkish spikes. Even the *Hakonechloa macra* (taller, green form of the more popular H. 'Aureola') put out inflorescences, though those darn rabbits reduced the size of several of the largest clumps with their dietary indiscretions. I had been so looking forward to their dances throughout the winter months and now these rodents had decimated the corps de ballet. Unlike the *Miscanthus*, which goes "splat" with the first ice or snow storm (when grown in shade), *Hakonechloa* maintains its elegant form till cut back time in April. A disappointment for the growing season was my inability to get the five additional plants ordered from Mileager's during catalog frenzy.

Every single bud on the *Aconitum Carmichaeli* displayed its rich bluish-purple before the first killing frost, and only the flowering *Cimicifuga* 'White Pearl' was cut short by the frost in early November.

Perhaps the highlight of the season occurred Saturday, October 24, when I pulled into the drive way on a warm, sunny afternoon. Thanks to the perfect weather conditions, hundreds of *Crocus speciosus* were in full glorious bloom throughout the garden in an unequalled display. The surre-

alistic beauty of these late October blossoms—pale lavender with streaks of white pointing to the reddish orange anthers—literally brought tears to my eyes. Unlike other bulbs, this crocus gives a sort of an instant bulb gratification. You can plant a hundred new bulbs in late August, and the reward for your efforts comes in October, not some indeterminate number of weeks after the spring solstice. And unlike other fall crocuses I have tried (and I've tried many), these persist and multiply in our damp and warm summer climate. I pulled in several passersby from the front walk to enjoy the show, but most couldn't understand why these typical appearing "spring beauties" had their seasons mixed up.

A second very rewarding event occurred a few days later when the late morning sun illuminated the autumn foliage of the climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* ss. *petiolaris*) outside the bedroom window. Its rich textured leaves of mottled green and gold fluttering in the dazzling sunshine made for an unforgettable display, though lasting for only a few minutes. The vine has climbed thirty feet up the sides of the massive white oak tree in the last ten years, and I have read that it can climb as high as 80 feet! In 2008, will it be 60 feet tall? I can hardly wait.

I had as many plants in bloom in the garden on the second of November as in the previous autumn. *Corydalis lutea* had completely rejuvenated itself and was throwing up flowers as if it were mid July (talk about a frost tolerant plant!),

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**Dues are Due for 1999--
see back of newsletter**

COMING EVENTS

DECEMBER 9, 1998, 7 PM Olbrich Gardens, Commons. ***FUN WITH FLOWERS AND FILM.*** Jerry Gerloff, leader of Madison's nature photography club. Come learn about photographing your garden and view Jerry's artistry with flowers on film.

January 17, 1999, 11AM-2PM, Olbrich Gardens, Atrium. ***Annual midwinter potluck brunch with the Hosta Society.*** John Cannon and John Frisch will present a slide and music show based on the WHPS summer trip to the glorious gardens of England. Pam Duthie (Chicago, North shore Garden Designer) will speak on ***What Midwesterners Can Learn from the Gardens of England.***

February 17, 1999, 7 PM Olbrich Gardens, Commons. Tony Avent, Plant Delights Nursery, will speak on ***The World of Hosta***, sponsored by the WHPS and the Wisconsin Hosta Society.

February 19, 20, 21, 1999—GARDEN EXPO

March 17, 1999, 7 PM Olbrich Gardens, Commons. David Cavagnaro, nature/garden photographer from Decorah, Iowa, will speak on ***Creating a Kitchen Garden.*** David was formerly with the Antique Seed Savers Exchange and has a knock out kitchen garden which we will be visiting in July, 1999. His photographic work has been featured in all the major gardening magazines.

April 21, 1999 Olbrich Gardens, 7 PM, Commons. Kris Bachtel, Morton Arboretum. ***Searching for Plants in China Hardy to the Upper Midwest.*** Kris will enlighten us on new plants from far off places for Wisconsin gardens.

Summer, 1999. Garden tours. We are inviting members to open their gardens for a series of open houses. These can be planned for an evening or a weekend day and will probably feature a number of gardens grouped by proximity. You don't know you have something special until you let others see it!! The idea will be to have enough gardens open that it is impossible to get to all of them and no one garden will be overwhelmed with visitors. Each gardener will have to provide a brief description of their garden. Eventually, we hope to have our own "yellow book" with dates and times for garden open houses announced well in advance. If you wish to help out with this project, or are interested in sharing your garden with others, please call Stephanie Bloomquist at 274-8326.

Events For The Future

Travel Plans: Ed Hasselkus and Carol Schiller (WHPS Travel Committee) are planning a ***Bus Trip to the St. Louis Botanical Garden and Shaw Arboretum.*** It is

scheduled for **April 24-25.** Planning to depart early Saturday morning and returning late Sunday night. The cost will be about \$100 and include transportation, motel accommodations, and the evening meal. We will be limited to 40 persons.

The next ***WHPS Tour to England*** is scheduled for **July, 2000,** featuring Gardens of the West Country. Already on the agenda is a return visit to the Cotswolds, with Hidcote and Kiftsgate gardens on the itinerary. We will also be visiting a private garden in Shropshire and are considering several gardens in Wales (Powis Castle, Bodnant?). The Travel Committee is also considering attending the Hampton Court Flower Show near London.

November 6, 1999, Olbrich Gardens. **Second annual fall symposium —*Great Shady Gardeners***. Speakers include noted fern expert John Mickel (author of the new book *Ferns for American Gardens*), New York Botanical Garden, Darrell Probst, Hubbardston, MA, the leading US authority on the genera *Tricyrtis* and *Epimedium*, Fred Case, Saginaw, MI, rock garden guru, who has recently published a book on the genus *Trillium* and will give two talks: ***North American Trilliums*** and ***Outstanding Eastern Wildflowers for the Shade Garden***; and finally Robert Olson, former president of the North American Hosta Society, Minneapolis, who will be speaking about using *Hosta* in the shade garden.

November, 2000, Olbrich Gardens. ***Gardening from the Catalog***—Dan Hinckley Heronwoods Nursery, Tony Avent Plant Delights Nursery (committed), Roy Klehm, Klehm Nursery, and one more to be announced.

Past Events

October was a great month for the WHPS. About 80 lucky people enjoyed our first fall symposium, ***Gardening with Bulbs.*** The four speakers were outstanding. It was a gorgeous fall day and Olbrich Gardens was decked out in autumnal splendor, which we all enjoyed during the breaks. Mike Heger and Brent Heath sold lots of autographed copies of their newest books to attendees. Later in the month, the first annual seed exchange and workshop was attended by about 15 members. Many thanks to Jack Ferreri and Ruth Cadoret for organizing it. Everyone talked about the seeds they brought along (some were literally seed heads snatched from the garden as members went out the door) and we shared information on how to clean them as well as to successfully germinate them. Everyone agreed that we would meet again in the spring for our first annual seedling exchange, so we could all share in one another's successes!!

Common Witchhazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*

by Ed Hasselkus

Witchhazel has the distinction of being the last shrub to bloom in autumn. Its tardy yellow flowers with four twisted ribbon-like petals are revealed as the leaves drop in late October and November. Fall foliage color is bright yellow. If you are on the UW campus this fall, note the stunning specimens along Linden Drive on the north sides of the Horticulture and Nutritional Sciences buildings. Their blooms are particularly striking this year.

Autumn is also the season of fruit maturation. The dry capsules that have been developing for almost a full year split open to catapult their two shiny black seeds for distances up to forty feet! Capsules collected in a paper bag and brought into a warm room will produce a sound like the popping of popcorn as the seeds are expelled with explosive force.

Hamamelis virginiana occurs as an understory tree in moist shaded woods throughout Wisconsin. In the shaded understory, the horizontal branches are stratified in a picturesque manner. When planted in full sunlight, plants take on a dense, broad, vase-like form. Their ultimate height is 15 to 20 feet, so that witchhazels may serve as either tall shrubs or speci-



men small trees. As a landscape plant, it is a natural choice for shaded locations. Avoid sites with dry soils. Old established plants in the Longenecker Horticultural Gardens of the U.W.-Madison Arboretum have suffered branch dieback during years of severe drought. Witchhazel is generally free of insect or disease problems and seldom requires pruning.

In addition to its value as a landscape plant, a variety of medicinal properties have been attributed to witchhazel. Fragrant extracts of the leaves and bark have been used as a home remedy for cuts and bruises, and when mixed with alcohol, as a soothing after shave lotion.

In my own garden I have no paid labor. I do it all myself. This is partly because I am tight with money, partly because I am not rich, but mostly because I don't like other people pawing over my treasures.



— Henry Mitchell On Gardening,
Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998

More on Epimedium and Tricyrtis

Darrell Probst (Hubbardstown, MA, speaker at the WHPS 1999 Fall symposium) informs me that the tricyrtis virus he is talking about only affects the flowers. It causes dark purple or reddish purple mottling, or even some solid color flowers. It may vary from flower to flower on the same stem. Coming into the garden from new Japanese varieties, it is only noticeable at blooming time. It can spread to other plants throughout the rest of growing season, long before you ever know you have it. He has seen it affect *T. hirta*, *T. affinis*, *T. macropoda*, *T. formosana*, *T. latifolia* as well as the hybrids produced from these plants. The cultivar *T. 'Sinonome'* seems to be one of the main carriers.

Darrell also says that earlier this year he visited all four of the national collections of epimediums in Great Britain. Only Teyl de Bordes collection in Scotland was worthy of the name and he was the only real epimedium enthusiast he met. The other three collection holders weren't even positive on the identity of many of the specimens in their collections. He saw a pink flowered form of *E. pubigerum* as well as another form of that species that reached three feet tall. Robin White's nursery had an interesting selection and Kew Gardens had some very interesting forms.

At Kew, he had the pleasure of meeting and spending the day with Professor Stearn (author of the 1938 monograph on Epimediums and now into his 90's).

Dan Hincely (Heronwood Nursery) should have *E. 'Black Sea'* for sale soon. It has very dark almost black leaves in the spring and he believes it originated as a hybrid of *E. pubigerum* and *E. pinnatum*.

The wonder of gardening is that one becomes a gardener by becoming a gardener. Horticulture is sometimes described as a science, sometimes as an art, but the truth is that it is neither, although it partakes of both endeavors. It is more like falling in love, something which escapes all logic. There is a moment before one becomes a gardener, and a moment after—with a whole lifetime to keep on becoming a gardener.

—From Allen Lacey, *The Inviting Garden*. Henry Holt & Co, New York, 1998

The Graveyard by A. Hort Hound

In the crawl space under the rear of the house sits a weathered peach basket into which are tossed garden labels from departed plants. Needless to say, most of these were once upon a time ordered with excitement and anticipation from distant nurseries. It is a sobering experience to sort through the mortuary's contents from time to time, while offering up a few prayers to St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardeners.

Goodness, here is *Alchemilla faroensis* 'Pumilla' ordered from Roslyn Nursery in 1996. Could this be the same extremely dwarf alchemilla I fell out over in the rock garden at Bressingham Gardens in England this past July? I had forgotten I had ever tried it, and certainly it must have done nothing for me, for it made absolutely no impression prior to its expiration. I must give it a second chance for life in the garden, perhaps after a few "Hail Marys."

And here are the labels of the ferns *Asplenium ebenoides* (Flower Factory, 1993) and *Asplenium platyneuron* (Flower Factory, 1994), one of which the Nedviks called dragontail's fern as I recall. They were beautiful little ferns, neither of which made it through their first winter. Just didn't like the conditions I provided them, I suppose.

Ah, *Festuca pilcarlitii* (hey, just guessing on the spelling as I can no longer read the label) given to me by Cheryl Eberle in 1993, just to try in the garden. She called it bear paw's grass and it made a wonderful low, grassy, spreading hummock that persisted for three or four years. What ever happened to that plant?

Here is also *Hosta* 'White Shoulders' from Coastal Gardens (Myrtle Beach, SC). Ursula Hertz had a dozen plants on display that day in July of 1993 and I fell for it. Unfortunately, after a year or two, it lost its "white shoulders" and was ultimately sacrificed to the God of compost.

The leaves of *Ajuga* 'Arctic Fox' in Roy Klehm's 1994 catalogue were more white than green in the gorgeous color photograph. An introduction from a plant nut near Cleveland, Ohio, (Henry Ross) it produced one or two minute leaves the first year and then beat a hasty retreat. An example of "too much" variegation I guess.

There were two labels with Dodecatheon, *D. puchellum* 'Redwings' and *D. hendersoni*, both purchased from Siskiyou Rare Plant Nursery in 1992. 'Red wings' bloomed for several springs before mysteriously taking its leave. There is some solace in knowing that this gorgeous reddish-purple shooting star did the same thing for my mother-in-law near Philadelphia. *D. hendersoni* emerged for several springs but never flowered.

And here's a label for *Carex muskingumensis* (palm sedge). OOPS!!

This plant has thrived and still has a significant presence in the front garden. I

wish I could say the same thing for *Ophiopogon* 'Silver Dragon', a

lovely low growing liriopie type grass I purchased in both 1993 and 1994 from We Du Nursery, as I was so taken with the plant on my visits there.



Alas, here is *Blechnum spicant* (deer fern), which brings back memories of a visit to a friend's house out at the end of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington in 1994. I collected a number of plants from his rain forest property that spring, and this baby fern made a vain attempt to pull through several Wisconsin winters, unlike *Oxalis oregonia* from the same site and yet another label in the peach basket.

Miraculously, in its second season, a very small fern of a different species appeared from the midst of the waning crown of the deer fern. From this tiny beginning, the new fern grew rapidly and in the summer of 1998 it was the largest fern in my garden. I have now identified it as *Athyrium cyclosorum* (Western lady fern). Interestingly enough, John Mickel (fern curator at the New York Botanical Garden), notes that even in his suburban New York City garden it is the largest of the lady ferns.

And then there are labels for *Viola rotundifolia* (low growing yellow violet) and *Goodyera pubescens* (rattlesnake orchid) brought back from the woods of my family's summer home in the mountains of North Carolina, sometime back in the early 90's. I suspect the soil in my garden did not have the proper acidity and or the summer heat got to the viola which is found only in the higher reaches of the Appalachians.

And, finally, here is a label for *Bergenia* 'Bressingham white' from 1988. After seeing the Blooms display garden this past summer in England, I don't believe that any plant of less than stellar qualities should have the name Bressingham attached. But to be truthful, this was a miserable *Bergenia* for me. Its foliage looked terrible after enduring a Wisconsin winter and the flowers were a dirty pinkish off-white. Actually, there is a remnant of this plant in one spot in the garden, but I'm doing nothing to encourage it.

Perhaps I should offer it up as a sacrifice at a local plant sale next spring, along with a peach basket full of used zinc plant labels. After all, one man's trash can be another one's treasure!!

College Shopping (?) with A. Hort Hound

Speeding down Interstate 90 through northern Indiana last September, my memory was jogged by the exit sign for Niles, MI.—Niles, Michigan, Niles, Michigan—Yes! Home of Fernwood, the public garden with the largest display of ferns in the upper Midwest. And only 8 miles away!!! My companion, A. Hort Hound, Jr. (just a slight misnomer) was already focusing on the next exit up the interstate for South Bend, IN, home of Notre Dame.

"Son, maybe they've got a Subway shop in Niles (heh! heh! I was sure that Fernwood had an eating place). Perhaps we should get off here."

"Forget it Dad. South Bend is the next exit and it has one of everything," exhorted Jr.

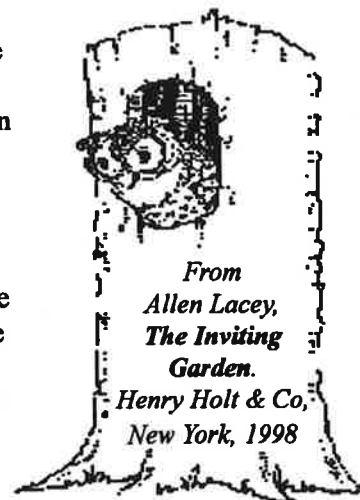
The two of us were on the first of several fall college trips. The next weekend we would be in Colorado and I had already figured out that in going from Colorado College to the University of Colorado you could arrange the route to pass by the Denver Botanic Garden. If we could just spare an hour or two, or even twenty minutes.....I had tried unsuccessfully to interest him in Fordham University (literally overlooks the New York Botanic Garden) and Duke University (home of the Doris Duke Garden, and Plant Delights Nursery a mere stone throw away) as well Washington University in St. Louis (don't they have a botanical garden there?). He was fairly interested in the University of Washington (just a ferry ride from Herronswood Nursery) as well as the University of Oregon. (Ah, Eugene, so many nurseries in the area it must be like horticultural heaven.)

Continuing our conversation: "Son, after we've visited Oregon and Washington, you might be interested in looking at something a little further away from home. How about a visit to the University of Capetown (home of the incomparable Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden) or the University of New Zealand (Auckland, horticulture paradise)?"

"Aw, Dad get real! And pull over. There's the Subway shop you were looking for!" said Jr., abruptly ending my horticultural fantasies. The sticks of privet protruding from the narrow, pebbled strewn islands of the parking lot, ornamented with gum wrappers and wind blown plastic baggies, bespoke of more good things to come on this pilgrimage.

Any garden, even a small one like ours, offers more than enough to occupy the mind, in an intellectual quest with no stopping point. To understand everything that goes on in our garden would be to understand virtually the entire universe. I would have to be intimately acquainted with botany and geology and entomology, and with the complex interrelationships between plants and their

environment and its other inhabitants. I would need to know about DNA; about atmospheric gases; about photosynthesis; about nastic movements and thigmotropism—and all of these just for starters. I would have to learn French and Russian and Chinese and Japanese, at a minimum. I would have to brush up on Latin and Greek and considerably improve my scientific German. I would have to haunt libraries for years, subscribe to hundreds of learned journals, attend dozens of symposia and conferences each year. Recent technology would require much frequenting of the Internet—and of whatever may come along to supplant it. Even then, I would still understand only a tiny fraction of what plants and gardens invite the mind and intellect to explore. The topics that arise in the effort to understand what goes on in a garden are, quite simply, inexhaustible.



Modern times make us all savage and I know no-one who is not frayed at the edges by the pace of life today; but step outside...The garden is for peace and space. It is a window on the natural world, a place to watch the birds fly and the grass grow. Leaves fall, spring comes, the pace of life slows almost to a standstill. It is that quality of timelessness of 'other-worldness', that never fails to grab me and which seems to me at the heart of garden making.

— Mary Keen, *Spiritual Growth, Gardens Illustrated*, November 1998

The Emperor's New Plants

by Dr. Fenton Fescue

What do hosta, hemerocallis, and heuchera have in common besides the obvious H? All three genera, as well as others we can name, are involved in feverish breeding programs throughout the horticultural world, feeding the frenzy for anything new. Mass marketers and micro-propagators waltz hand in hand, luring plants collectors, blinded by green greed, to buy, buy, buy, even if new introductions look remarkably like the old reliable forms. Just because a plant has premiered more than five years ago does not mean it has lost one bit of its garden-worthiness.

And are these "new" plants really new, and more importantly, are they sufficiently different and improved from what has come before to merit so much fuss? The answer is most often a resounding no!

The genome of hemerocallis is obviously still being explored. Like rose breeders, daylily hybridizers search for the expression of the elusive blue chromosome. Whether our gardens are enriched by this effort is surely debatable, but a lot of strange shapes and colors are being introduced to the trade in the meantime, just because something new has been achieved. The combinations are mind-boggling: purple with darker eye, cream with darker eye, ruffled and tall, red with watermark and yellow throat, miniature. Or spider-formed, late blooming. It seems that each color must be combined and recombined with each separate characteristic, named (often idiotically so) and publicized. Yet each bloom lasts, at the most, 18 hours. Now there is a problem worth solving. We have enough very good yellow, orange and red daylilies, and as my mother always said, "Enough is enough."

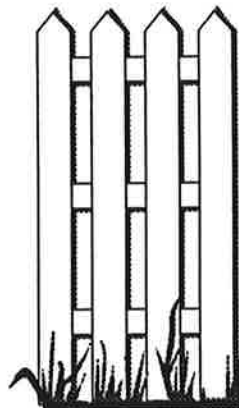
With daylilies we are simply dealing with flowers while for hostas, the thrill is in the leaves. Although the odd mention is made of flower height, color or doubleness, hosta collectors only talk bloom when their breeding lines have become otherwise muddled. The search for a pink flowered hosta continues. Are we deprived because there are no pink flowered hosta? No, of course not. So we have leaves little and blue, big and variegated, heart shaped and chartreuse, held upright, twisted or crimped edged, tiny mound, huge heaps, puckered and smooth. With the advent (a word formed naturally when you combine Aden and Avent) of plant patents, growers now have become opportunists, seizing species variants that have been around for decades, naming them, and charging royalties to their peers. Crosses made by nature are re-made by breeders, and every seedling gets named and registered. This drives plant prices up for gardeners, but we are actually paying good money for plants we may already have under another name. And, not every difference is deserving of praise, let alone a name.

As for heuchera, ditto. Breeders come up with goofy names, then create a goofy plant to match.

Perhaps a word of praise is due for one woman who sings as a voice in the wilderness regarding hardy geraniums. It is to our credit as Americans that Australian Robin Parer has chose to live and garden among us. We have done nothing to deserve this honor, but here it is. Through her California nursery, Geraniacease, and, we suspect, through sheer force of will, Robin is trying to call a halt to the mad naming and introductions of every geranium seedling that cares to germinate. Different isn't always better, and sometimes it isn't even really different. What is new can be sterile or invasive, prone to mildew, not winter hardy, or too similar to current cultivars, in short, not a good garden plant, and certainly not worth naming. Robin knows this, and scrutinizes each introduction that comes her way. She fearlessly points to fraud when it presents itself. It is hoped that one day a grand and eminently garden-worthy species will be found and named for her. We suspect rather a lot of pretenders to that throne have passed her way already, told they were naked, and been sent packing.

This complaint has become fragmented, but is basically a cry for ethical behavior from plant breeders and propagators, and judicious self restraint from plant buyers. If a new hybrid does not create a breakthrough for its genus, or if modest research shows that the creation has already been replicated in the wild and given a variant name, don't waste our time and money. If the new plant has not been garden tested, then wait until it has. If its characteristics are not stable enough to withstand micro-propagation, why disappoint gardeners and ruin a reputation in the bargain? With gardening becoming such a justifiably popular hobby, and the public becoming more knowledgeable, do be cautious and patient. Introduce fine plants when they prove themselves.

Editor's note: Heaven only knows where Dr. Fescue lives and gardens. Used with permission from the Fall, 1998, Bulletin of The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon.



Gardeners are, in their hearts, a race of competitive plagiarists....And although gardeners are generous, they are by the same coin acquisitive....Do not feel guilty about weeds. If you grow plants well, you grow weeds well, too.

—Linda Beutler, "The Joy of an Open Garden," *Bulletin of the Hardy Plant Society of Oregon*, Fall 1998.

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society

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Please mail completed form and checks made out to The Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society (WHPS): Richard Bloomquist, 5743 Wilshire Drive, Madison, WI 53711; 274-8326

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society

December 4, 1998 Newsletter

925 Waban Hill

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