

.....Musings of A. Hort Hound.....

I attended a depressing lecture at the University recently. Remind me to stick to plant talks in the future.

The presentation was by David Walsh, director of the National Institute of Family Media. His theme was that the popular media today is all about three emotions—violence, sex, and humor. (David doesn't watch the Home and Garden Channel.) If you think about the popular television shows (*ER* and *NYPD Blue* come to mind), the newspaper tabloids, and at least one local group of television newscasters, you know what he is talking about. Mr. Walsh noted that our children are continuously bombarded with this stuff, and, in fact, desensitized to it, such that this year's hit television show has seven homicides and three sexual encounters in ten minutes compared to last year's five and two.

Wouldn't we be better off if everyone just gardened instead? Wouldn't you rather hear about a new daylily that produces 60 buds on a four-foot stem, re-blooms three times in a season, and has gorgeous silver foliage? Wouldn't the world truly be a better place?

Well, maybe that is a little farfetched for a daylily, but how about a blue epimedium or a burgundy-leafed hosta? Why don't our children draw inspiration from their elders' love of gardening, rather than video games and television? Ok, I was a nerdy kid, and always preferred going to the local garden center to pick out fall bulbs with my grandfather, than watching "I Love Lucy" reruns and the "Mickey Mouse Club" on television. (Tough choice.) Besides, such trips always meant I got a handful of dried up bulbs (but the pictures on the wooden bulb boxes were so beautiful!) to try in my own little garden.

Every fall I also accompanied my grandmother to pick out pansies for her garden. These were field-grown plants which you were allowed to dig

yourself and place in a hand held wicker basket—the kind your grandmother always had on hand to hold the quart-sized boxes for picking blueberries. Oh, the choice of colors was just overwhelming to a four year old. At two dollars a dozen, we always came home with far more plants than we needed but always found spots for all the extras.

I always jumped at the chance to cut flowers from my great aunt's eye-popping flower garden, spilling over the edges of the long drive leading up to her home in upstate New York. Once, when sent out to pick flowers, I became so absorbed among the delphiniums and hollyhocks that towered over head, that I eventually fell asleep in a blanket of hardy geraniums (there has got to be a cultivar called 'Sleeping Beauty'). They sent out a search party when I failed to show up at the dinner table.

Then there was the time when I was in kindergarten, and I expectantly planted outside the kitchen door a package of red zinnia seeds, found as a freebie in a detergent box. How thrilled I was when they germinated! Their rapid growth gave me far more pleasure than any television show, and as the first "enormous" flower bud developed and slowly opened into a gorgeous five-inch, red velvety flower, it was truly miraculous.

Well, even I will admit the action was a little slower than a video game. I do remember being demoralized by the tragic ending, when the neighborhood bully spitefully picked my flower and left it lying on the ground for me to find. However, that act of violence was relatively civilized compared to what our children are exposed to today.

Again, on my way home from school one day (yes, kids did walk

to school once upon a time), I remember finding a large pile of bearded iris that had been violently uprooted and left to wither in the gutter (probably infested with borer). Of course, Goodie-Two-Shoes rescued the whole lot and planted them in his garden. How I ministered to those sick looking iris and how thrilled I was when the following spring I was rewarded with a dozen gorgeous, bearded white flowers.

Will my own grandchildren have memories such as these? Will I be able to inspire them in the way I was inspired by the important adults in my life? Or will they prefer to run the channels on the television set and furiously punch the control of the noisy video game of nonstop death and destruction? You know they won't be watching the *Antiques Road Show* or the Home and Garden Channel.

Can the lure of gardening compete with this? Is there any hope for the world, when the word columbine is associated not with a flower, but with a school yard tragedy? Pass the Prozac, please.

The visitor responds to the garden before her eyes—its colors, scents, mossy stones, pleasing curves, the shapes of the flowers, perhaps an inviting bench—and says quite sincerely, "How beautiful!" But the gardener sees the garden that exists in her own mind, where all the weeds have been pulled, the poppies thinned, the foxglove seedlings transplanted, the delphiniums staked, the saucer of beer set out to drown the slugs, the unhappy primula moved from that dry, sunny spot to a moist, shady one.

Excerpts from *Garden Heresy*, Susan Narizny, *Bulletin of The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon*, Fall, 1999

.....**The Scilla**.....

It's mid March and once again there is an outstanding flower out in the garden which I must tell you about.

I grow a number of scillas, but none compare to *Scilla mischtschenkoana* (what a mouthful, and usually sold as *S. tubergeniana* and also known as *S. dziensis*). It is the largest of my scillas and has the most noteworthy flower display, for it has little competition at this time of year (*Adonis amurensis* is past its peak).

Obviously related to hyacinths, the flowerheads emerge right from the soil showing their color, and then slowly grow over the next few weeks into six inch high pale-blue, almost white pyramids.

Each stalk has five (occasionally six) one-inch, slightly-nodding, fully-opening flowers which can last for a month if the weather does not become too warm. They are similar in color to the much smaller flowers of *S. puschkinioides* with its more prominent dark blue marking down the center of each flower segment.


With time, *S. mischtschenkoana* forms clumps of 6-8 flower stalks. The flowers have tolerated temperatures into the mid teens and are not affected by periodic doses of snow and ice which invariably arrive during their blooming time.


It is native to the stony hillsides of Northern Iran and the Caucasus Mountains, and is very tolerant of dry shade.

Recently, having observed a patch of it in my mother-in-law's woodland garden near Philadelphia, she told me that the original bulbs had been planted more than 40 years ago.

The lance-shaped, slightly ovoid leaves emerge towards the end of the flowering period. The flowers have a very mild, nondescript fragrance, which is barely worth the effort it takes to appreciate it, in my opinion.

I am also pleased to relate that this spring bulb is readily available from mail order sources, and rarely seen in Wisconsin gardens. Impress a few of your friends next spring!

 *When we garden, whether we realize it or not, we bring to bear our previous life experiences, our memories of childhood and travel, our family relations, our reading, our dreams and aspirations, our moral standards and character flaws, our sensuality and grandiosity and spirituality. All of these are part of the invisible garden.*

 *I have become infected with my first bout of garden fever, a recurrent disease, like malaria: an obsessive state in which plan piles upon plan, project upon project, the more grandiose the better, and nothing, absolutely nothing, seems impossible.*

From **The Invisible Garden**, Dorothy Sucher, Counterpoint, Washington DC, 1999

Snow Drops and A Pink Geranium

I will always think of WHPS member Betty French at this time of year. Her seasoned two-acre garden in Middleton township would be awash with snowdrops—thousands and thousands of snow drops (*Galanthus nivalis*).

Indeed, over the years, many of us received a gift from Betty of a clump or two of these exquisite, jewel-like flowers for our own gardens. Frequently, we would have these plants for sale "in the green" at the annual WHPS plant sale, courtesy of Betty.

She also generously shared with many gardening friends a silvery pink geranium—*G x oxoninaum* 'A. T. Johnson', which in my opinion (since you asked) performs as well as *G. endressii* 'Wargrave Pink', with which it is often confused by garden visitors. It has an extended

bloom period and has a wonderful way of weaving in and out of other plants in the border. It is also one of the more shade-tolerant geraniums. Thanks to Betty, we always had a fair number of plants of this pink beauty at the annual WHPS sale.

It is sad to report that Betty will no longer be sharing these plants with us in person. Betty died on March 25, losing a battle with cancer. She passed away peacefully at home, looking out the window, just as the sun rose above the horizon. Her beloved snowdrops were all around her, nearing the end of their annual triumph over winter. And, as it was another mild one, beneath the rustling leaves, the pink geranium was yet breaking dormancy with its promise for her. When it begins to bloom its heart out in June, it will be for the memory of Betty, who will live on in our gardens.

Good-bye Betty, and thank you for the snowdrops and the pink geranium. Like the snowdrops, you will arise again from winter.



If this were my last day I'm almost sure I'd spend it working in my garden. I Would dig about my little plants, and try To make them happy, so they would endure Long after me. Then I would hide secure Where my green arbor shades me from the sky, And watch how birds and bee and butterfly Come hovering to every flower lure. Then as I rested, perhaps a friend or two, Lovers of flowers, would come, and we would walk About my little garden paths and talk Of peaceful times when all the world seemed true. This may be my last day, for all I know; What a temptation just to spend it so!

—Anne Higginson Spicer
(read at Betty's memorial service)

The Garden in Art

There is a wonderful display of thirteen garden quilts from the Ardis and Robert James Collection at the International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln.

The title of the show is *Fanciful Flowers: Botany and the American Quilt* and it will be on display at the Cooper Gallery of the University of Nebraska State Museum through January 2001. An exhibition catalog is available, edited by Patricia Cox.

In the 19th century, increasing numbers of American women cultivated flower gardens to benefit from "the genteel exercise gardening provided." In fact, women did most of the gardening in the 19th century and found inspiration in their gardens for quilt making.

As is pointed out in the catalog, the quilts mirror the evolving garden styles of the 19th century. Quilt designs include a Pots of Flowers Quilt featuring the oriental poppy, a Cockscomb Quilt with a tulip border, a Basket of Flowers Quilt (dahlias, star flowers, tulips, roses and berries), an Album Quilt (combination of pieced and appliqued floral patterns), and my personal favorite, the Rose of Sharon Quilt.

If you're in the Lincoln area, be sure to enjoy this exhibition in the coming year, and tell me all about it.



Gardens have many metaphorical incarnations. They are often likened to paintings, wall hangings, sculpture and architecture. But lately I have been thinking of gardens as music, with mine in particular being somewhat reminiscent of the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth symphony. I guess that is a rather bold assertion, but in reality, many perennial-based gardens could make the same claim. Things start off calm and steady with the introduction of various themes and variations, then work up to a crescendo and finally dwindle off with the hint of more to come. Now that I think about it a bit more, this is actually a compressed time view of the entire growing season. The day to day reality is more like the minimalist compositions of Phillip Glass or Steve Reich, with subtle tonal variations of green, yellow, and brown foliage providing a basic drone, with the occasional brief flurry of color counterpoint breaking through.

—Peter Ray, *Ten Years After*, Heronswood Nursery 2000 catalogue.



But I don't want someone else to design my garden for me. I want it to be mine, faults and all. Now, don't get me wrong. I appreciate viewing and visiting well designed gardens, in the same way I enjoy art; I can't do it, but I can appreciate it. And, of course, I can learn from it, especially when I have someone to point out principles of good design and how they've been incorporated into what I've been looking at. I know, though, that just as I will never be an artist, I will never be a garden designer. But I don't want to be; that's not what I want out of gardening.



I have to keep reminding myself that I don't garden to keep up with the Joneses and that I don't need to feel guilty that my garden doesn't measure up to someone else's garden. It's my garden and I love it. No one else can look at my one foot tall seedlings, envision them as a forest, and feel my happiness that they are here. They can do this perhaps in their own gardens, but not in mine, because this, this gardening process, is an intensely personal experience.

—Excerpts from *Garden Heresy*, Susan Narizny, *Bulletin of The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon*, Fall, 1999



Gardens give their owners so much joy and discontent that sometimes they seem to be a metaphor for life. There is more to them than meets the eye; all sorts of memories and emotions cling to them. The clump of lemon lilies recalls the day it mysteriously appeared on the doorstep, left by an anonymous caller; the delicate, finely-cut ferns of asparagus bring to mind the memory of a beloved grandfather; the sumptuous globe of a peony, bending under its own weight, serves as a reminder of a child's wonder at what seemed to be drops of blood on the white petals. I think of this complex of conscious and unconscious associations as an "invisible garden" that each of us, gardeners and garden visitors alike, carries around... We can never know in advance how walking through a garden will make us feel. Sometimes the fresh perceptions of childhood come back to us for a few glorious moments. Sometimes, seemingly for no reason at all, we become sad. Always it is the invisible garden that gives the visible garden its deepest meaning.



In a way, it surprises me that I do so little advance planning in the garden nowadays. I've read books on landscape architecture, the kind that urge you to get out the graph paper and draw diagrams of beds filled with amoeba shapes representing "drifts" of different kinds of flowers. I resist this advice. Garden planning, like family planning, takes some of the spontaneity out of the act. Now that my life has room in it for the unexpected, I don't care to chase it away.

—Excerpts from *The Invisible Garden*, Dorothy Sucher, Counterpoint, Washington DC, 1999

WHPS Comes of Age

It was about ten years ago that I went to my first meeting of what is now the Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society. It was in the upstairs meeting room at Olbrich Gardens and the subject was dried flower arranging. Hmm! (No comment needed.) I remember that the members all had name tags decorated with hand drawn floral motifs that were put out at each meeting. (No one ever made me a nametag, so I suspect this tradition did not continue too long, or perhaps I never made the grade.) At the time there were about 35 members.

Indeed, we have grown considerably over the last ten years, as our membership is now approaching 400. I believe that first newsletter was in the spring of 1994. Our first plant sale was held in May of 1994, from which we made about \$300. Since then, the sale has expanded substantially in size. Though the sale is limited in scope to plants from members' own gardens, we made over \$2000 in 1999. Yes, I know, we could have made even more, but A. Hort Hound's philosophy has been that the plants should be a bargain for our members.

We sponsored our first overseas trip to England in 1998. Our first bus trip was organized in April of 1999 to the St. Louis Botanical Garden. One thing I have found members are extremely good at—suggesting more places we should go to see and buy plants for our gardens. Our first fall symposium with the Olbrich Botanical Society was held in 1998—*Gardening with Bulbs*. Even I have to admit that today we have so many organized activities, that hardly any of us can do them all.

The activities take lots of effort on the part of the membership—at least some members, anyway. As with most new organizations, a few core people kept the organization going in the early years. In fact, the same darn person has been president for nearly 8 years, even though this isn't allowed in the bylaws.

Richard and Stephanie Bloomquist have been right there at the top of the elite group of core members. Richard was our Secretary Treasurer for many years and Stephanie was the needle

and thread which held all the WHPS activities together. The two of them were always there—setting up for the annual brunch, cleaning up the annual brunch, showing up at Kinkos to put together and mail the newsletter, manning (Margaret, there is no such word as womanning) our booth at the garden expo, and doing a lion's share of work in pulling off the annual sale.

Other key members have been Tom Cottington, without whom our annual sale just wouldn't happen, for not only does he contribute a significant number of the plants, but also helps others to dig and transport plants from their gardens for the sale.

Ed Hasselkus and Joan Severra have also been mainstays—always willing to open up their gardens, give their advice, and help via their many contacts to obtain the fabulous speakers we have had at the monthly meetings.

For a while there, I was truly worried that the relatively few people doing all the work were going to burn out (isn't that always the way it is?) The only reward most of these folks received, was just more work.

However, I am elated that new faces are finally beginning to come forward. Barb Herreid has assumed the Secretary-Treasurer's position from Rich Bloomquist.

Sandy and Dennis Allen have offered the use of their place of business, the Middleton Pet Lodge, for our annual sale.

Carol Schiller, with guidance from Ed Hasselkus, has organized a number of fabulous bus tours and seems to have boundless energy for the task. (Carol, just no more pit stops at the Ponderosa Steakhouse.)

Stephanie O'Neal has stepped forward to help with the newsletter and her skills in this area have given it a few professional touches.

Stephanie as well as Lisa Johnson took on the responsibility for our booth at this year's Garden Expo.

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you all. There are many other folks out there that have helped in smaller ways. You know who you are, and if you aren't one of them, I hope you are feeling a little guilty.

Where are we going? Our mission to promote the love and appreciation of hardy plants is clearly established. I mean, let's face it. Every plant is hardy somewhere! Do we want to keep growing (members, not plants)? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

As I look over the membership roster, there are only 125 names of the nearly 400 members that I can put a face to. Who and where are the rest of you? My own personal goal is to meet each of you. I am sure that you all have something to give to the WHPS, if only someone would ask you? Right?

There are lots of things to be done.

I dream that the WHPS will become incorporated.

I dream that we will enter the electronic age with a listserver for communicating with members and even have a web page.

Why not organize a study weekend in the dead of winter devoted to plants?

We have a fair number of members from outside of the Madison area. Why not have regional chapters within the state of Wisconsin? We could share speakers and have an annual meeting, visiting gardens and nurseries in different parts of our beautiful state.

For that matter, why not team up with HPS in neighboring states to have regional meetings? (Michigan is the other Midwestern state with an HPS.) It should be possible to interact with our sister organizations in Oregon and Pennsylvania to share speakers and even have a national meeting, or even a national journal. And what about the English Hardy Plant Society?

The sky is the limit. There is so much to be accomplished and we have so much more that we could share with each other.

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society

Membership Renewal 2000

Please submit this information along with your dues check.

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CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

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Type of Membership: () INDIVIDUAL.....\$8.00; () FAMILY.....\$12.00; () BUSINESS.....\$25.00 (includes 1 free ad in newsletter); () I have included a few extra dollars for further support to the society's programs.

I am interested in helping out with the following activities: () Programs; () Plant Sale; () Mailings; () Community Projects; () WHA-TV Gardening Expo; () Publications; () Tours; () Hospitality

Other local plant societies I belong to: _____

Expertise I have that may be useful to the Society: computer, journalism, publishing, public relations, horticulture, landscape profession, etc.: _____

Please mail completed form and checks made out to The Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society (WHPS):
Barb Herreid, 2788 Florann Drive, Fitchburg, WI 53711; 271-9483

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society



April 2000 Newsletter

925 Waban Hill

Madison, WI 53711

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Vice President—Dick Eddy

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