



Lanark Orchid

Renais

Perth & District Horticultural Society

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District #2 of the
Ontario Horticultural
Association

March 2009 Newsletter

 Unemployment
is capitalism's
way of getting
you to plant
a garden.
- Orson Scott Card



Presidents' Message

Don't let the mild spell or lack of snow fool you. You can't plant your garden yet. You can, however, plan your garden. But then, you never stopped planning, did you? While you are planning what seeds to start, why not plan to start a few extras for our annual plant sale on May 16. This year, more than ever, gardeners will be looking for quality plants at bargain prices. We expect our sale to be a bloomin' booming business.

Our apologies to anyone who was not reached by e-mail, phone or radio to notify of the February meeting cancellation. When school buses are cancelled due to inclement weather or icy roads (or threats thereof) the school is closed to us in the evening. Since our guest speaker, Judy Dempsey, was not able to defer her presentation, we did not reschedule our meeting. In future, bus cancellation means meeting cancellation. Listen to Lake 88 radio at 88.1 FM for information regarding our meetings.

*For those of you planning on entering
the flower shows, here are*

Some Winning Strategies

By Stu Nelson

Successful exhibiting at a regional or local horticultural show takes careful planning. Contestants should study the prize lists before the show to determine the entry specifications for the various classes. It is very disheartening to prepare a horticultural exhibit, only to have it rejected by the judges because an entry rule was broken. Contestants may find some of the following hints on showing helpful in avoiding common pitfalls:

Plant material - Make sure you show the type and varieties requested for the competition.

Items - Prize lists make reference to specific "items" that must be included in each entry. For example, a list may specify that each entry must have 5 blooms. If a contestant reads the rules hastily, he or she might submit an entry with 5 stems instead, risking disqualification.

Numbers - As the example above shows, the number of items in an entry

may also be specified. If you submit fewer than the specified number of items, for example an entry with 3 instead of the 5 blooms required, your entry will almost certainly be disqualified. Entries with more than the specified number of items may be assessed a penalty. Accordingly, with flowers, check for unopened blossoms that may be open when the judges see them.

Foliage - For certain classes, especially vegetables, entrance rules specify attached foliage to assure the freshness of the exhibit. For some flower classes, the plant's own foliage is allowed; others allow any live foliage, and in some cases "inert artifacts" such as artificial leaves are permitted.

Type of exhibit - For flower classes especially, check the type of exhibit required and prepare your entry accordingly. A "collection" includes a number of different items assessed mainly in terms of quality. A "bouquet" consists of a few different items assessed on beauty, suitability and quality. An "arrangement" is judged primarily on the basis of the artistic effect created.

Closing time for staging - Shows often specify that exhibits must be



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ready for judging at a given time. Most shows will reject late entries. Be sure to give yourself enough time to set up your exhibit.

Quality - Exhibit only top quality materials. A head of cauliflower all brown and ricey has no place in a competitive show. Unfortunately, such entries are occasionally seen. It is not wise to submit entries of inferior quality in the hope that you may have a chance of winning because other entries may be even poorer. Although judges tend to be lenient in amateur shows, they may not award a prize if they feel that all the entries in a particular class are poor. They may, in some cases, down-grade a particular entry to a lower prize.

Give it your best shot - Competing in a local or regional horticultural show can be an enjoyable and challenging experience. If you have good-quality material to exhibit and show it as specified in the prize list, it will be carefully considered by the judges. They will be looking for the typical size, shape, color and maturity associated with the particular class you have entered. In classes that require more than one specimen, for example, a plate of 5 tomatoes, uniformity of the exhibit is a major factor. You should strive, in other words for specimens that as close a possible to being identical. The specimens should also be mature, and free from insect, diseases and harvest injuries. The judges take all of these factors into consideration in making their decision.

Stu Nelson was a professor emeritus with the Department of Horticulture Science. This column is provided as a service of the Department of Horticulture Science and the Division of Extension and Community Relations, University of Saskatchewan.

Flower Show Schedule

April 12

1. African violet – 1 pot
2. Spring bulb – 1 stem
3. Forced branch – maximum 24" long
4. 'Reflections' a water viewing design
5. 'Cacti Garden' – minimum number of three, may be exhibited in one container or separate containers grouped together in a pleasing manner



MAY 12

1. Tulip – 1 stem
2. Tulip – 3 stems of one cultivar
3. Narcissus/daffodil – 3 stems of one cultivar
4. Asparagus – 3 spears
5. 'Teatime' - a design using pansies
6. 'Pin it on' – corsage
7. 'Victor Victoria' a line design

Getting the Dirt on when soil is ready to work...

Good soil is gold. But working it when it is too wet ruins the soil structure. To test yours, shape a handful into a ball, and drop it onto the ground. If it sticks together, wait. If it breaks apart, it's ready for cultivation. – *Martha Stewart Living, March, 2009*

(supplied by Lynda Haddon)

Treasurer's Report

January 1 to January 31, 2009

Balance December 31, 2008 \$4,390.68

Receipts:

Bank interest	<u>.08</u>	
	.08	\$.08

Expenses:

Speaker Fees	75.00	
Social	<u>12.00</u>	
	\$87.00	\$87.00

Balance January 31, 2009 \$4,303.76

Bank Balance January 31, 2008 \$1,803.76

Reserve Fund	<u>2,500.00</u>	
		\$4,303.76

Overwatering Rescue

It's curious that no matter how accomplished we are at growing plants, most of us have killed at least one by overwatering it. The best plant caregivers are not infallible; we all make mistakes. However, a plant that's been overwatered does not necessarily suffer a death sentence — there are simple ways to treat this unfortunate mishap.

The roots of a plant absorb air, water and nutrients to support the stems and leaves above. Excessive watering cuts off the air and the roots begin to suffocate, rot and eventually die. Fungus and mold in the soil increases, causing trouble for the remaining healthy roots. The most common signs of overwatering are wilting leaves and a pot that feels heavy due to soggy soil. Yellow leaves, mushy or loose bark on the plant stems and molds that appear on the top of the soil are also indicators of overwatering.

There are ways to stop further damage. If you suspect your plant has been overwatered, the first thing to do is to remove it from its pot and wrap the root ball in a towel. When the towel is soaked, wring it out and place it around the root ball again. Keep doing this until the towel absorbs no further moisture.

Next, take a look at the roots to see if they are crisp and bright in color or brown and mushy looking. If

they are discolored and rotten, you may have to remove the damaged roots and repot the plant. However, removing the rotted roots can be tricky—you don't want to remove all the roots, just the deteriorated ones. Use a sanitized pair of scissors to cut away all dead and dying root material. When this is complete, you may also have to trim some of the foliage, since too many leaves and not enough roots to support those leaves can cause further problems. Trim away a very small amount of the top foliage to compensate for the root loss.

Once this step is complete, remove any dead or dying foliage or stems that appear to have rotted. They will be easy to identify, as they can be quite putrid smelling. Use a sharp hand pruner to cut away stems or branches that have loose bark or that are wilted and don't perk up after the above procedures have been completed.

Next, you will want to remove the soil from the roots carefully so as not to cause further damage. Repot the plant into fresh new soil and water the roots in gently; be careful not to soak the plant. Refrain from adding fertilizer at this time; forcing a plant into growth by fertilizing it only stresses the plant further and the roots are damaged and strained already. There are enough nutrients in the soil to help the plant along—the roots need to rest and recuperate, not work harder.

Never pot plants directly in non-draining containers. If you do use these types of pots, leave your plant in its drainable pot and then place that into the decorative container. When you water the plant, remove it from the non-draining container and place it in the sink. Let it drain completely before placing it back in the decorative pot. Also, never let a plant sit on the collected water of a saucer. Discard any water that remains on the saucer 30 minutes after watering.

Overwatering your plants can be a problem of the past if you learn to read the soil, so don't be afraid to stick your finger into the potting medium. Study the earth and how it appears in your hand. If it's moist, it will likely appear black and will stick to your finger. When the soil is dry on top, don't arbitrarily add water, instead, stick your finger down deeper into the soil. If there is moisture below, wait a few days and recheck. The soil should be dry about 25% of the way down the pot before you water again.

Of course, when it comes to treating overwatered plants, there are some exceptions to every rule—sometimes the solution may be to simply move the plant into the correct light. Familiarizing yourself with your plants' watering instructions and following the advice given can reduce your chances of damaging them by overwatering. Getting to know your plants' needs in-

timately should give you the confidence to continue caring for them with ease.

Mary Praznik, Lee Valley Newsletter

Testing Seeds for Germination

Although it is still a bit early, many of us are just itching to begin this year's gardening season. Being able to safely plant seeds outdoors is still some time away, but now is a great time to order new supplies of seeds and to assess the ones left over from past seasons.

It is not unusual for gardeners to find themselves with half-used and undated packets of favorite flower and vegetable varieties. How to know if these seeds are still viable when they are planted in the garden?

Viability is the seed's capability to grow and develop. One way to test a seed's viability, and thus to avoid wasting time and garden space (if the seeds prove to be no good), is to run a germination test. A germination test is a simple gardening technique that involves nothing more than the seeds, some absorbent paper towels, a spray bottle, water, a ziplock bag and a warm spot.

To begin testing for germination, spread a paper towel on a water proof surface and wet down with warm water, using a spray bottle or some similar spraying device. Don't make the towel too wet. If water beads up around your fingertip when you press on the towel, it is too wet.

As few as ten seeds are usually sufficient to accurately test for germination, although you can use more if you have them. Evenly space the seeds on the paper towel keeping them about two inches from the edges. Carefully roll or fold them up in the towel so they are encased in a long, narrow strip of wet paper and slip the whole thing into the ziplock bag. Seal the bag and mark it carefully, especially if more than one kind of seed or variety is being tested at the same time.

Place the bag in a warm spot. The most rapid seed germination occurs when temperatures remain consistently between 70 and 80 degrees. Suitable places for seed germination in the average home include the top of a hot-water heater or refrigerator, near a wood stove or on a high shelf near a hot-air vent. Make sure the paper towel inside the plastic bag remains damp during the entire testing period, moistening it if it shows signs of drying out.

Make the first germination check after two or three days. Keep checking at regular intervals to note the rate of seed germination. Most viable seeds will germinate within two to three weeks, and some will sprout much sooner. For example, seeds of the cab-

bage family will often sprout in two days while carrot seeds can take up to three weeks. It has also been my observation that the seeds of cold-weather plants like broccoli and cauliflower will sprout earlier than the seeds of more heat-loving plants like tomatoes and peppers if seed-tested in March or April.

The test is completed when the majority of the seeds have germinated and several days have passed since the last sprouting. A germination rate of 70% or more indicates that the seeds are viable and can be planted normally in the garden.

Any number below that should throw up a caution flag. This doesn't mean that the seeds cannot be planted, only that they need to be given some extra considerations.

For one thing, these seeds should be given high priority for planting in this year's garden as they will only be less viable next year. Some experts say that seeds lose 30% of their viability each year. Another way these seeds can still be used successfully is to over plant them. Using this technique, more seeds are planted in a given space increasing the germination rate significantly.

Seeds with germination rates of 30% or lower should probably be discarded. Not only will the germination rate be low, but even the seeds that do manage to sprout will probably be less vigorous and more prone to pests and diseases.

In deciding whether to use older seeds, it is also a good idea to know the various longevity rates of different seeds. For example, seeds of the cabbage family, cucumber, eggplant, spinach, squash and watermelon can be used up to five years from packaging, while corn is best used within one or two years. Seeds of larkspur, Sweet William, and aster are relatively short-lived, too, and not usually viable after two years. Marigold seeds can last for three years, and zinnia and nasturtium seeds for up to seven years.

The unsettled weather of late March may keep gardeners from working outside, but now's a great time to get a jump start on the gardening season and check the viability of seeds that will produce this year's perfect garden.

Betty Jakum, Adams County Master Gardener



Reasons for Growing Heirloom Plants

Heirloom plants are becoming more and more popular among home gardeners. There are many reasons to try growing heirlooms, and it's a hobby that can quickly become addictive.

What is an Heirloom Plant?

While some people try to define "heirloom" by age, such as saying that any plant that originated before 1951 (after which hybridization became popular) is an heirloom, the most widely accepted definition of what constitutes an heirlooms is that it is open-pollinated and was grown in an earlier era. Some heirlooms are hundreds of years old, and others originated around the turn of the 20th century.

Why Grow Heirlooms?

Heirloom plants have a large following among home gardeners, and organic gardeners in particular. Some of the most common reasons for growing heirlooms are:

- **Wider Variety.** When you have access to plants that were grown by previous generations, you also get to experience the thrill of having a huge variety of plants available to you. For example, the Seed Savers Exchange, which deals solely in heirlooms, has 77 varieties of tomatoes in this year's catalog. Unless you have acreage, it would take years just to try them all. And among those 77 varieties are every color, size, and flavor of tomato imaginable.

- **Better Flavour.** In many cases, hybridizers have chosen properties like disease resistance and heavy yields over flavour. Fans of heirlooms will argue that many of the best-tasting crops come from heirloom plants.

- **Biogenetic Diversity.** Plant species are dying out at an alarming weight. Heirloom gardeners, through growing and saving seeds of treasured crops, are ensuring that these plants won't become extinct. In addition, keeping diversity in our food chain protects us against large plagues or crop failures.

- **Frugality.** Growing heirlooms is a frugal way to have a bountiful garden. Each season, you can grow the crop, harvest the food, save the seeds, and store them to grow next year's garden. If you save a lot of seed, you can even get involved in seed exchanges with other heirloom gardeners to get more diversity in your garden.

Growing heirlooms is a fun, educational experience that every organic gardener can try. Just don't be surprised if you become hooked on heirlooms!

By Colleen Vanderlinden, About.com