

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

It has been a challenging gardening season for everyone this year. First we had the longest, coolest, wettest spring in years (I'm still recovering from it) and then once the warm weather arrived we went for 7 weeks without any rain. The poor plants didn't know whether to stay dormant or to grow like crazy or move to Hawaii, not to mention us gardeners trying to cope with the vagaries of all this crazy weather. What this has meant is that the gardening season has really been extended quite a bit and now that we are into August, a month that is usually a time to relax in your garden, you can still be planting and growing. All those perennials, trees & shrubs that you were thinking of planting but had put off doing because of the weather can now be added to your garden. August is rarely very hot and it tends to have cooler evenings, perfect for the newly planted in your garden. Just keep them well watered and they will be growing and added colour and texture to your garden right up to the first frost, which better be a long way off.

In this month's newsletter I will be talking about Herb Preserving, the 2008 Garden Tours Wrap Up, Spring Bulbs, the Plant of the Month, Manure Tea and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob

“My Green Thumb Came Only as the Result of the Mistakes I Made While Learning to See Things From the Plants Perspective”

AUGUST TO DO LIST

- Sow seeds of fall veggies and annuals
- Plan perennial beds for fall and winter colour with ornamental grasses, fall-blooming bulbs, heucheras and hardy heaths and heathers
- Divide and transplant bearded iris
- Harvest vegetables continuously to stretch their season
- Prune summer-blooming shrubs (hydrangea, clethra, caryopteris) after flowers finish
- Plant garlic now for spring harvests
- Look forward to something different next spring: try alliums in your bulb garden
- Sow seeds of cool-weather herbs (chives, parsley)
- Harvest vegetables continuously to stretch their season
- Sprinkle compost starter to speed up composting for fall soil building
- Dig gently to harvest potatoes a few plants at a time
- Sow seeds of cool-weather herbs (chives, parsley, garlic chives, cilantro and dill)
- Keep cool during summer's dog days with a shade garden embroidered with hostas and hardy ferns
- Colour up your bulb garden with fall bloomers (fall crocus)

PRESERVING HERBS

In the last couple of years I have noticed a marked interest in growing herbs in the garden, either in their own little area, incorporated into the garden bed or in containers. This is an excellent development as there really is nothing quite like being able to go out into your garden or onto your patio and snip some rosemary or chives to add to your dinner.

Most herbs are easy to grow, in fact some can be downright invasive. Mint comes to mind. However with some careful thought you can have fresh herbs nearly all year round.

Most herbs like a sunny, well-drained site in the garden. Since many of our commonest herbs come from around the Mediterranean area they do best in poor soil in full sun. In fact I don't recommend fertilizing most of your herbs more than once a year. If they get too much fertilizer they tend to be overgrown and the flavour is not as good. The exception to this is mint and chives which do like to be fed several times a season with a good organic fertilizer. Most herbs will also do very well in containers, in particular thyme, mint (which should only ever be grown in a container I think), parsley, bay, basil, rosemary and French tarragon.

Now that you have all your herbs growing wonderfully what are you going to do with them all. After all you can only eat so much at any one time and it would be nice to enjoy your herbs throughout the year not just in the summer. That's where preserving your herbs comes in. There are several different ways to preserve your herbs. You can preserve them in vinegar, dry them, preserve them in alcohol or in honey.

Preserving in Vinegar

This is an easy way to preserve herbs. Fennel, parsley, garlic, rosemary, basil, Greek oregano, coriander tarragon, bay and savory are suitable.

Crush your herbs then place in a jar with the vinegar. I like to use a white wine vinegar. Leave for two weeks, shaking daily then strain the contents. The herbs strength of flavour dictates how much should be used. For example, in red wine vinegar a single bruised rosemary stem the height of the bottle makes an exceptional herb vinegar. Two or three cloves of garlic will flavour up to 500ml.

Making Bay or Tarragon Vinegar

You will need: A 500ml bottle of white wine vinegar, four leaves of bay or 6 to 8 sprigs of tarragon.

Method: Set aside 10-15ml of vinegar. Pick herbs on a dry day choosing the undamaged leaves. Wash free of insects and pat dry between tea towels. Tear the leaves and push them into the bottle of vinegar, allowing air bubbles to reach the surface, until the bottle is full. Set the tightly closed bottle on a sunny windowsill. Gently shake the bottle each day and after two weeks test for fragrance and flavour. If it is to your liking, strain out the herbs and top up with vinegar then label and date the contents. Use in salad dressings and marinades.

Drying

Drying is perhaps the most widespread way of preserving herbs but it is important to harvest the herbs at their peak. Cut on a dry day discarding poor quality leaves. Hang stems in bunches of six to eight stems in an airy room away from direct heat or the sun. Thick leaves such as bay can be laid on cheesecloth stretched over a frame. Once dried store in airtight dark glass jars or tins.

Some herbs are better preserved by simple freezing such as mint, chives and basil. What I like to do is chop the leaves, place them in icecube trays and fill the trays with water. When you want to

use them just pop one or two out of the tray and add to your sauce or dressing. You can also freeze them in ziplock freezer bags.

Preserving with Honey

Herbs such as rosemary, sage and thyme can be added to honey infusing flavour and in some cases antibacterial qualities. Put the herb in the honey and warm over a low heat for 20 minutes. Remove the herbs after cooking and pour the honey in labelled jars.



No two gardens are the same. No two days are the same in one garden.
~Hugh Johnson

How To Make Manure Tea

Manure tea is an excellent way to add vital nutrients to your plants. It's easy to make and easy to use, just don't use too much on any one plant as it is pretty powerful.

- Fill a bucket or garbage pail 1/3 full with manure (mushroom, steer or llama) and top up with water.
- Let sit for 3 – 4 days.
- Strain through cheesecloth into another bucket or pail.
- Dilute the liquid with more water until it looks like weak tea.

Spring Bulbs

Once again my bulb supplier has stepped up to the plate and come up with some new and exciting spring bulbs that I am happy to be bringing in for you. Here is a sampling of some of the bulbs that will be coming at the end of this month:

Tulip “Peppermint Stick”

Hybridized from wild tulips found in Northern Afghanistan this cute little tulip is just as sweet as it looks. For those seeking a truly natural look these miniature beauties are the right choice. Derived from wild species and commercially propagated, they naturalize well and you can leave them in the same spot for years. They are perfect for rock gardens or in the border.
Height: 10 inches



Tulip “Peach Blossom”

Tulip Peach Blossom is an excellent early blooming tulip with fragrant big double flowers that resemble peonies.
Height: 12 inches



Tulip “Fantasy”

Tulip “ Fantasy” is a late blooming, parrot type tulip that is salmon pink with green highlights and is fragrant which is unusual for parrot type tulips.
Height: 22 inches



Narcissus “Sound”

Bright orange-yellow, frilly cups of this large-cupped Daffodil look smashing against pure white petals, beckoning you to gather them in armfuls. A great perennial with lots of 4in flowers. Early midseason.
Height: 18 inches



Hyacinth “Peter Stuyvesant”

Vivid, with great depth of colour, Peter Stuyvesant is a hyacinth worth finding a little space for - you'll congratulate yourself come

spring. It is named for the famous Dutch governor of the colony of New York (then New Amsterdam) in the 1600's.
Height: 12"



Narcissus "Suzy"

"Suzy" is a jonquilla narcissus. Sweetly fragrant, she has single flowers with yellow petals and red cups. It will return year after year, and the clumps will multiply, spreading naturally over time. Late-blooming jonquilla daffodils usually produce 2 to 6 fragrant flowers per stem and are characterized by small flowers with spreading outer petals and dark-green grasslike leaves.
Height: 17 inches



Muscari "Mount Hood"

Plant of the Month



This attractive, striking muscari looks amazing naturalizing in your garden or in containers.

Height: 6 inches

Galanthus woronowii

This species of snowdrop is sometimes called the 'green snowdrop', because of its very distinctive leaves, which are broad and deep, waxy green. It is native from Turkey up through the Caucasus to southern Russia and it is particularly common on the eastern shore of the Black Sea. Because its native haunts are rather dry, it tolerates dryness in the garden, and a fair amount of sun. The flowers are rather small in proportion to the lush foliage, and ghostly pale. The green marking on the inner petals is also distinctive, looking somewhat blocky, like a molar tooth rather than the more common upside down heart seen for example on Galanthus elwesii. Also noteworthy is the prominent notch on each inner petal at the base of each green spot.



Brunnera “Dawson’s White”

This is a superb woodland perennial that forms a clump of heart-shaped green leaves boldly edged with creamy-white. Sprays of bright blue Forget-me-not flowers appear in mid to late spring. The leaves start out small during flowering then double in size for the summer. This is a choice collector’s plant, much in demand, but often in limited supply. It is excellent in the shade garden and I particularly like how it adds a touch of brightness to shady areas. Do keep it out of hot, dry winds as the edges of the leaves may turn brown and curl up. It is stunning in mass plantings and looks perfect beside a pond or stream. Plants may be divided carefully in early fall, but very small pieces have a tendency to revert to plain green.

Zone: 4

Light: Shade to partial shade

Soil: Cool, moist

Height: 15 inches

Spread: 2 feet



One of the most delightful things about a garden is the anticipation it provides. ~W.E. Johns

Garden Tours 2008

August 2008

This was a great year for garden tours in spite of the weather. We saw some wonderful public gardens and due to the generosity of everyone who opened their private gardens for viewing we had an opportunity to see, enjoy and learn from some of the nicest gardens in the city.

Here's a list of the gardens we saw:

The first one of the year was to **Dart's Hill Garden Park** in South Surrey on April 19th. In spite of the fact that it snowed the night before!!! we had a wonderful walk through this lovely gem of a garden.

On May 7th we travelled out to Langley to visit **Free Spirit Nursery** to see Lambert's private garden and to wander through his nursery looking for choice plants The Natural Gardener can't get. It's a stunning garden and lovely nursery.

May 22nd we visited the beautiful **Katherine Nicol Garden** in Dunbar. Katherine's garden is just a year old but already it is filled with interesting plants and beautiful hardscaping. I can hardly wait to see how it develops over the next few years.

On June 7th we had a very special opportunity to visit the roof top garden of **Glen Patterson**. WOW is all I can say.

June 12 **Susan Koelink** once again very kindly opened her gorgeous garden for us and once again everyone was blown away by it.

On June 18 we had the privilege of visiting the garden of **Lisa O'Donnell**. This is a plant collectors dream garden and everyone was wowed by the number of rare and unusual plants Lisa grows.

The **Glendale Gardens and Abkhazi Gardens Tour** in Victoria happened on June 29 and it was a perfect day. Not having been to the Glendale Gardens before we were all pleasantly surprised by what an interesting, beautiful garden it is. Abkhazi as always was stunning. I love this garden and if you can please join us next year when we visit it again.

We wrapped up the tour season on a high note with the **Bowen Island People, Plants and Places Garden Tour**. It was another perfect day and we had the opportunity to visit 6 fascinating gardens and meet the people who created them. On top of all that we had a perfect lunch at Carol Corrells who went above and beyond in hosting a delicious lunch and we finished the day with dinner at Tuscany Restaurant in Snug Cove.

I'm already planning tours for next year so I hope you will be able to join me. If you have any suggestions for garden tours please let me know as I'm always looking for new places to take you to.

It takes a while to grasp that not all failures are self-imposed, the result of ignorance, carelessness or inexperience. It takes a while to grasp that a garden isn't a testing ground for character and to stop asking, what did I do wrong? Maybe nothing. ~Eleanor Perényi, *Green Thoughts*, 1981

Enjoy this month of August. Spring bulbs will be here at the end of the month so you can start thinking about what to plant where. Putter in the garden adding a plant here and there and take time to enjoy its beauty.

Happy Gardening!

Bob