

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

Well, February is here which can only mean one thing, besides Valentines Day that is. **Spring is just around the corner.** We just have to get through the dull days of February and then we get to indulge in our gardening passion once again. One of the nicer things about February compared to January is that the days are getting noticeably longer. Longer days mean longer growing conditions for all those seeds you are starting and for the early spring perennials that are starting to come up in your garden. Not to mention it does wonders for my personal mental health. The Hellebores should be in full bloom by now, the snow drops will be up and blooming as well as winter aconite and the cute little ranunculus ficaria with their shiny yellow flowers will be brightening up shady spots in the garden. You should start to notice that the Brunnera 'Jack Frost' is getting ready to bloom and some of the hostas should start to poke their heads out of the soil. We may still get a cold snap this month so keep an eye on things in your garden and if it does get cold again protect those plants that are just starting to emerge from the ground. Don't worry about the bulbs though; the little cuties have a natural anti-freeze that protects them from frost.

February is also the month when all the seeds have finally arrived which is another way of knowing that spring is almost here. If you haven't grown vegetables & herbs from seed in a while maybe this year would be a good one to give it another try. Just make sure you have a nice sunny window to start the seeds in and you may be surprised at what you can grow. And if you are worried about not having enough room in the garden to plant out all those cute little seedlings don't forget you can grow veggies in pots too. If you have any questions about seed growing don't forget that that is what we at The Natural Gardener are here for.

In this issue I will be talking about more New Temptations for 2012, Grafted Tomatoes, Snowdrops, Early Vegetable Seed Sowing, 'Blind Daffodils', the Plant of the Month and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob



Ranunculus ficaria 'Yaffle'

EARLY VEGETABLE SOWING

We gardeners are very lucky here on the West Coast. We can start planting out a few of our vegetable seeds in February and March. Sowing seeds this early has several advantages.

- These early plantings mean you will be enjoying them by late spring and then into the summer.
- Seedlings are less likely to be attacked by certain pests and diseases that usually only appear once the temperature warms up in March. For example, slugs, which can be major pests of young leafy crops like lettuce, cabbage and swiss chard are much less active in February when the temperatures are lower.
- Vegetable seeds sown now have more time to put down substantial roots which will enable them to withstand less watering.
- Early sowing means you can plan for successive sowing so you can have the crop longer.

There are a couple of pests to watch out for. Rodents and birds can be a problem but traps for the rodents and covering your newly planted seeds with row cloth should help.

In order for the seeds to germinate outside the soil must be friable and well drained. You don't want any thick clods of soil interfering with proper germination of your seeds. Make sure you work the soil well where you want to plant. It rains a lot on the coast here so try and pick a day after at least 2 rain free days to work the soil. You can also cover the soil with plastic sheets about 6 weeks before planting. This has the dual purpose of warming the soil and keeping excess moisture from the soil.

Here are a few vegetable seeds you can plant in February and March:

1. Broad Beans – sow in mid to late February 5cm (2") deep and 20cm (8") apart
2. Beets – sow in late February to early March depending on the weather 2cm (3/4") deep and 5cm (2") apart
3. Carrots – sow in early March 2cm (3/4") deep and 5cm (2") apart.
4. Peas – sow in late February to early March under cover 5cm (2") deep and 7.5cm (3") apart. Peas need the soil to be at least 6C to germinate properly.

Keep in mind that early vegetable sowing is weather dependent. If we get a cold snap in February hold off until it starts to warm up again. But with luck with the weather you can be sowing in February and enjoying your vegetables in May.



Carrots



Broad Beans

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Erodium chrysanthum

Erodium chrysanthum is a new plant for The Natural Gardener and we are excited to be carrying such a lovely perennial. This native of Greece and close relative of Geraniums is a small, evergreen perennial with lovely, lemon scented, creamy white flowers and ferny, silvery leaves that give it a very soft appearance. It is an excellent plant for the front of the border or edging a path and it is especially nice in the rock garden. I often get asked what plants will grow under the eaves of houses and if you have a south facing location this is the plant for you. It does best in full sun with very well drained soil and south facing eave locations are ideal for it. Erodium flowers best in leaner soils so no additional fertilizing is needed once it is established. The flowers start appearing in late spring and continue right into the fall. It is fully drought tolerant and will require no additional watering once it has become established which is usually after the first year of planting.

This is a wonderful plant to include with your plantings of salvias, dwarf hebes and small euphorbias. I also think it would be the perfect perennial to plant on the Gulf Islands especially because it is deer resistant.

Zone: 7

Light: Full Sun

Soil: Very well-drained

Height: 6 inches

Spread: 1 1/2 feet



Succeeding With Snowdrops

What would spring be like without the Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*. The first harbinger of spring, snowdrops are proof that warmer days are coming and with them a multitude of plants to gladden our hearts. Even in the depths of February, when I see my snowdrops rising out of the ground it brings a smile to my face and the knowledge that the dreary, dull days of winter are almost over. Even though snowdrops seem to be in everybody's garden they are not quite as easy to grow as you might think. Their bulbs dry out quickly and moving or planting snowdrops as plants or "in the green" as the saying goes means a year or two with little or no bloom. So when is the best time to plant these little beauties. June is both the best time to plant and move bulbs as they are effectively dormant then and you won't damage their delicate roots. If you are wanting some of the new, special named varieties try and get them as bulbs. If that is not possible and you have to purchase them potted up then make sure they stay watered, fertilize them with an organic liquid fertilizer and wait until the leaves turn brown before planting them.

It is tempting to grow snowdrops in pots especially the rarer, more expensive ones but that would be a mistake. The main reason not to grow them in pots is that the bulbs cannot take being frozen. If the pot freezes this will kill the plant. In addition snowdrops are big feeders and don't seem to get enough nutrients in pots. So, even if the pots are in an area where they won't freeze the plants will still often just gradually fade away.

The ideal location to plant snowdrops in your garden is under deciduous trees and shrubs. That way in early spring they will get lots of the light they need to grow and prosper. By the time the trees leaf out in late spring the snowdrops will be entering into their dormant phase and won't be bothered by the reduction in light levels. If you are planting them in your garden bed make sure that you don't plant them under any evergreen shrubs like rhododendrons (unless they can get lots of light) and away from plants like hellebores, hostas or pulmonaria that can grow over the plants. Make sure the soil is moist but well-drained and don't forget to feed them with a good organic fertilizer.



Galanthus nivalis

FEBRUARY TO DO LIST

- Lift and divide perennials as long as ground isn't frozen
- In case of a late cold spell watch that your pots don't freeze and then collect water on top
- Remove any irrigation posts in your pots if a big freeze is coming
- Start seeds of Statice, Dusty Miller, Pinks, Ornamental Peppers, Lobelia, Geranium, Gerbera, Heliotrope, & Petunia etc.
- Increase light and water to geraniums and fuchsias that were brought indoors and went dormant.
- Start seeds of lettuce, spinach, radishes and corn in cold frames
- Start tomato seeds indoors
- Bring in potted bulbs of hyacinths, tulips and daffodils for a splash of early spring colour
- Prune back miscanthus and pennisetum grasses to about 1 foot from the base
- Prune fruit trees
- Prune winter flowering shrubs and vines right after flowering
- Prune roses when forsythia is blooming
- **Apply dormant spray to fruit trees, roses and deciduous shrubs and trees**
- Plant new trees and shrubs as long as the ground isn't frozen
- Watch out for aphids. If you find any either squish them or spray with Safers soap
- Keep an eye out for any weeds that are starting to grow. If you pull them now while it is still easy to do so you will have much less of a problem this summer.

The February sunshine steeps your boughs and tints the buds and swells the leaves within."

- William C. Bryant

VALENTINES DAY

That special someone in your life deserves the very best so for Valentines Day The Natural Gardener will have a beautiful selection of orchids for you to choose from. Roses and cut flowers are nice but they will only last about one week while orchids, which are easier to care for than you think, will bloom for 2 – 3 months. **New for this Valentines we will be carrying TILLANDSIA GLOBES.** They are beautiful, easy to care for and make a wonderful gift. We will also have fresh cut tulips, potted plants and lots of garden themed giftware for you to choose from. We look forward to seeing you.



Phalaenopsis orchid



Tillandsia Globe

NEW TEMPTATIONS PART TWO

Here are a few more of the new or new to the nursery plants we will be bringing in for you this year. All of them are interesting and will definitely add a bit of the WOW factor to your garden.

Vaccinium 'Pink Lemonade'



This is the first true pink blueberry. It produces fruit in mid to late season. It requires full sun and acidic soils. The fruit is firm and nice and sweet. Imagine a Pink Blueberry Pie. Yummy!

Chiastophyllum oppositifolium



Chiastophyllum is a relative of the sedums. This little charmer is perfect in a part shade area of the garden or as the photo shows, growing out of a rock wall. It gets 6 inches high and sends out sprays of yellow flowers in late spring to early summer.

Belamcanda chinensis



Photo courtesy of Brighterorange

Belamcanda is a member of the iris family. It grows best in full sun or light shade. It forms a low clump of sword shaped leaves. It flowers in mid-summer. The seed pods split open in the fall to reveal dark black seeds.

Epimedium warleyense 'Orange Konigin'



I love epimediums and I love the colour of Orange Konigin. Easy to grow and perfect for dry shade Epimediums should be a staple in everyone's shade garden.

Polystichum setiferum proliferum



I love ferns for the texture they bring to the garden and this fern has texture in spades. It is an evergreen fern that does well in part shade and will tolerate some sun. It also produces baby plantlets along the stem.

Helleborus niger HGC 'Jacob'



There are so many great hellebores out now but what I like about 'Jacob' is how many flowers it produces and the fact that they are upright therefore easy to see. It grows about 8 inches high and can be covered with up to 15 or 20 flowers at a time. Stunning!

Convallaria majalis 'Albostriata'



Photo courtesy of Plant Delights Nursery

Everyone knows what Lily of the Valley is but this beauty has more elegance and charm than the regular one. With its golden striped leaves and slower spreading habit this is a must for every part shade garden. It will even do well in containers.

Thalictrum delavayii



The Natural Gardener has carried several cultivars of Thalictrum before but never the species delavayii. It is an elegant perennial for the part shade garden. It reaches a height of 4 feet and it flowers from mid-summer to early fall.

GRAFTED TOMATOES

I talked a bit about the grafted tomatoes that will be coming in April/May of this year in the January newsletter. Here is some more detailed information about the grafting of tomatoes and other vegetables like cucumbers and eggplant.

Grafting of tomatoes has actually been going on since the mid-fifties. It was initially developed for commercial growers who were having problems with fungal root diseases. As the growers moved from growing in soil to hydroponic growing this practice fell out of favour with commercial growers. With the advent of new tomato cultivars that tend to be less disease resistant the idea of grafting has seen a resurgence. For the home gardener the benefits of grafted tomatoes are not just disease resistance but also extra vigour which produces larger plants and heavier yields. Grafted plants also come into flower and fruit earlier and last longer, a definite plus on the West Coast. How much earlier do they fruit? From trials it appears that grafted tomatoes fruit 3 to 4 weeks earlier than own root tomatoes. In addition grafted tomatoes appear to tolerate colder soils and perform better in poorer soils than regular tomatoes.

Here are some important pointers for growing grafted tomatoes:

1. Plant with the graft union above the soil to prevent the scion from putting out roots
2. The tomatoes will need support right from the start
3. Don't let the tomatoes dry out
4. Feed the tomatoes twice weekly as the fruit starts to set
5. Because of their vigour tomato plants can support more branches so you can get more fruit.

MIGHTY 'MATO™ **GRAFTED VEGETABLES**
Stronger! Faster!
Fights Off Disease and Pests! Super Yields!

See the amazing difference!

Coming soon!
Grafted Eggplant,
Peppers, Melons,
Cucumbers,
Squash

typical 'Big Beef' Mighty 'Mato' 'Big Beef'

SUPER NATURALS
Dandelion Regenerative, LLC.

www.graftedvegetables.com

The advertisement features a comparison of two tomato plants. On the left is a 'typical 'Big Beef' plant, which is shorter and has fewer tomatoes. On the right is a 'Mighty 'Mato' 'Big Beef' plant, which is significantly taller and has a much heavier yield of tomatoes. The background is a light green color with a white border. The text is in various fonts, including a large, bold, red and yellow font for 'MIGHTY 'MATO' and a white, bold, sans-serif font for 'GRAFTED VEGETABLES'. The tagline 'Stronger! Faster!' and 'Fights Off Disease and Pests! Super Yields!' is in a black, italicized font. The 'Coming soon!' section is in a red, jagged-edged box with a white border. The website address is in a black, sans-serif font.

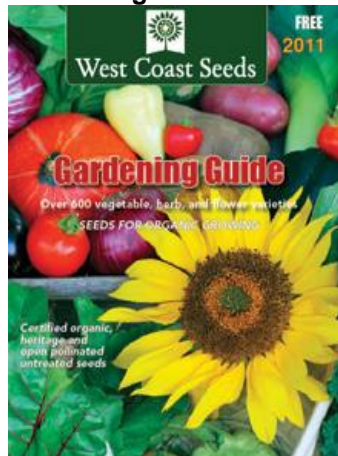
We are taking pre-orders for the grafted tomatoes now, so if you are interested give us a call.

SEEDS

All The Natural Gardener seeds have arrived. We will continue with our expanded selection of **West Coast Seeds** in addition to once again carrying **Stellar Organic Seeds** and **Rene's Garden Seeds**. Now's the time to start planning and planting your seeds

West Coast Seeds

With their new, colourful packaging and excellent quality these are the seeds to get for all your vegetable and herb needs. The seeds offered have all been trialed here on the coast to make sure they grow and thrive in our West Coast climate. West Coast Seeds has also expanded its offering of Organic Seeds. The free catalogues are now in so come by and pick one up. **The seeds arrived January 12th and we have a great selection including Quinoa, new this year.**

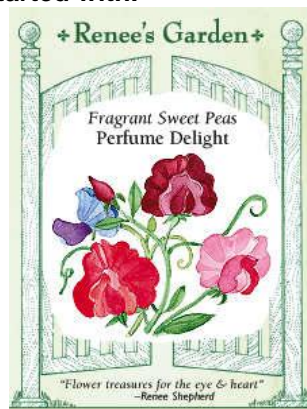


Stellar Organic Seeds

Now based in Johnson's Landing on beautiful Kootenay Lake, BC, Stellar Seeds are the best supplier of organic seeds for the vegetable gardener. The selection is a bit limited but the seeds available are of the highest quality and are grown in the interior of BC. All their seeds are GMO Free and Open Pollinated. **The seeds arrived January 20th.**

Rene's Garden Seeds

Rene's Garden Seeds is located in Felton, California and they offer a high quality, high germinating selection of flower and herb seeds. **The seeds arrived on January 4th so we have a great selection for you to get started with.**



BOTANICAL LATIN

In our continuing quest to understand what the heck the Latin names of our favourite plants mean here is the next word of the month:

ALATUS – Meaning Winged. Example: Euonymus alatus (u-ON-i-mus a-LA-ta) – Winged Euonymus – it has winged branches.

I have been writing a garden blog and wanted to remind you to check it out at blog.thenaturalgardener.com



We are also on [Facebook](#). You can find us at The Natural Gardener Garden Store.

The Natural Gardener now has a website for those of you with smartphones like the I Phone or Blackberry. The website is structured for ease of use on your smartphone. Check it out when you have a chance:

www.thenaturalgardener.mobi

"The flowers of late winter and early spring occupy places in our hearts well out of proportion to their size."

- Gertrude S. Wister

'BLIND' DAFFODILS

Everyone likes growing daffodils in their garden and the first year or two they usually grow and flower well but sometimes after a couple of years they flower less and less until you are left with just leaves. These are called 'Blind' daffodils. Here are the main reasons why daffodils go 'blind' and how to prevent it:

- Soil too dry – if planted in a dry area water your daffodils well after flowering until the foliage starts to fade
- Cutting foliage too soon – Do not remove foliage until it has turned brown, usually 6 weeks after flowering. Never tie leaves into a knot to make it look neater as was once popular, it reduces photosynthesis in the leaves.
- Seed heads – do not allow the seed heads to develop. It takes energy away from the bulb. Remove spent flowers immediately.
- Not enough fertilizer – Fertilize with a liquid organic fertilizer in mid-spring and for container grown daffodils fertilize with a liquid organic fertilizer every two weeks from when the flowers start to fade until the leaves start turning brown.
- Planted too shallow – plant bulbs at twice the depth of their height.
- Planted too late – they should be planted by mid-September for good flowering.
- Overcrowded – Split congested clumps and replant when their leaves have died down.
- Narcissus Bulb Fly – this bulb pest looks like a bumblebee and its larvae feed on bulbs including daffodils. The difference between it and a real bumblebee is that bumblebees have two pairs of wings while the Narcissus fly has 1 pair of wings. Cover your bulbs with remay after flowering if this problem occurs.

BRILLIANT BRUNNERA

I have always liked Brunnera, especially 'Jack Frost'. For me they are a mainstay in the shade garden. Tough, easy to grow and pretty much pest and disease free they also look great in the shade garden. So why wouldn't you grow them. There are 4 species of Brunnera but only one, Brunnera microphylla, is decorative enough to be grown in your garden. Brunnera are related to Pulmonaria. You can see that in the fuzziness of the leaves and stems of both plants. It originated in Turkey but has been available since the 1800's. However it was only in the 1980's that named selections began appearing. One of the first of these was Brunnera 'Langtrees' which is still available. From 'Langtrees' most other named cultivars have been developed including the immensely popular 'Jack Frost' as well as 'Looking Glass', 'Hadspen Cream' and 'Dawson White'.

Brunnera is a deciduous perennial but I find that it hangs onto its leaves until early winter and then the new leaves start appearing in February. I like to remove the old leaves around December just so it looks tidier. In the spring, usually around March, stems of blue, forget-me-not like flowers appear and last well into spring. I find that as the flowers start to fade it is a good idea to cut off the flower stems. The plant will look a little bedraggled but very quickly new, large leaves appear to great effect.

Certain cultivars of Brunnera are excellent for dry shade conditions that are notoriously hard to grow plants in. 'Langtrees' is probably the best for dry shade. Just remember to water it well its first year. After that it will require no extra watering. It would look great planted with Iris foetidissima, Epimediums and/or Helleborus foetidus.

In regular garden situations the cultivars 'Jack Frost', 'Looking Glass' and 'Mister Morse' (which has white flowers) do very well. They need little in the way of special care but will appreciate regular watering and feeding. Occasionally mildew can be a problem but that is usually the result of conditions being too hot or too dry. Just keep an eye out for it.

As you can see, Brunnera are valuable additions to any shade garden and with new cultivars appearing each year their usefulness is only going to increase.



Brunnera 'Looking Glass'



Brunnera 'Langtrees'

I hope this month's newsletter has you itching to get out into your gardens. This is the start of another exciting gardening season and I'm looking forward to showing you all the new plants that will start arriving soon. In the meantime take a moment to wander through your garden and dream of all the possibilities.

Happy Gardening!

Bob

Gardening is about enjoying the smell of things growing in the soil, getting dirty without feeling guilty, and generally taking the time to soak up a little peace and serenity. ~Lindley Karstens



Brunnera 'Mr. Morse'