

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

Happy New Year and welcome to 2008! Wow, I still can't wrap my head around the idea that it has been 8 years since the Millennium. Doesn't it seem like it was only a year or two ago. The year 2007 wasn't the best year for gardening here on the West Coast. For me there is one word that sums up what 2007 was like, **WET**. It started raining in January and except for a few weeks in the summer it seems like it has been raining ever since. This has proven a challenge to many of us, especially those with plants that like the sun & good drainage. I heard from many gardeners that their echinaceas, rudbeckias, salvias and vegetable gardens just didn't do all that well this year. I think one of the few groups of perennials that did do well were the Hostas. They seemed to thrive on the moist, overcast days we had all year. This year can't possibly be as rainy as last year so, being the optimistic gardener that I try to be, I am really looking forward to the 2008 gardening season. There are some wonderful new plants arriving in the next few months that are really going to get you excited.

In this issue I will be talking about my favourite plants of 2007, a special promotion just for you for the month of January, the Plant of the Month, a seed company new to The Natural Gardener, mulch in your garden and of course the good ol' To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob

A SPECIAL PROMOTION JUST FOR YOU

To help combat the January Blahs and to thank you for all your support during this past year, The Natural Gardener is offering all our customers who receive our newsletter **15%** off everything in the store and nursery (excluding seeds) for the month of January.

Just mention that you read about the **15%** discount in the newsletter to receive your discount.

We look forward to seeing you in January!

JANUARY TO-DO-LIST

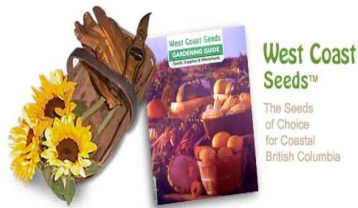
This is definitely the quietest time of the year for gardeners. However, there are still a few things you can do

- Spend some time going over the seed catalogues you ordered in December and order your seeds or come by The Natural Gardener and pick up your favourite seeds there.
- If your seeds arrive before the end of January you can sow them.
- Plant fruit trees
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines as long as the ground isn't frozen.
- Plant perennials.
- Apply dormant spray to fruit trees.
- Draw up a plan of your garden and mark on it any changes you would like to make, either plant wise or with your hardscaping.
- Make a list of plants you would like this year. You can pre-order with The Natural Gardener if you like.
- Make sure that any leaves or broken branches are off the lawn.
- With all the December storm damage your trees & shrubs have suffered now is the time to prune out any broken or damaged branches.

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SEEDS

It is almost time to start your seeds. The Natural Gardener features three different seed companies to give you as wide a selection as possible and is very pleased to be bringing you a new seed company this year. The three companies are:



West Coast Seeds – still the best company to get your vegetable and herb seeds from. Plants from all the seeds West Coast Seeds carries have been grown here on the coast to ensure that they will grow successfully for you in our wet/dry climate.

STELLAR



SEEDS

Stellar Organic Seeds - Located in lovely Salmon Arm their seeds are grown in their own certified organic fields and at several other organic seedgrowing farms in BC. All their seeds are certified organic, GMO free, open pollinated and quality tested.



Renee's Garden – The Natural Gardener is very pleased and excited to be carrying the Renee's Garden line of flower seeds. Owned since 1997 by Renee Shepard this is what she has to say about her seeds:

“At Renee's Garden, I offer only the varieties that are very special for home gardeners, based on easy culture and exceptional garden performance. This seed line is my personal selection of new, exciting and unusual seed choices of time-tested heirlooms, the best international hybrids and fine open-pollinated varieties. Our individually written packets offer beautiful watercolour portraits, with personally written descriptions, complete growing instructions, a quick-view planting chart and growing tips. Inside you'll find superior quality seed- the top germinating, reliable seed lots usually reserved for specialty growers.”

SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL SOIL

Mulch in your garden

One of best things you can do for your garden soil is to layer mulch over the bare spots between plants in your planting beds. Have you ever noticed that Mother Nature doesn't like bare soil? Perhaps you have seen how quickly bare patches of soil get covered with weeds. That's Nature's quick and dirty way of ensuring that soil doesn't blow away or get washed away. But if you're a gardener, you aren't exactly in love with weeds. You can do your part for the soil and your plants by adding mulch.

It's a job that makes other garden chores easier because, as well as making your beds look neat, mulching does a lot of other neat things. It's hard to think of another job that gives so much garden payback.

A layer of mulch keeps weeds down, mainly by blocking out light they need to germinate - and if a weed manages to poke through, it's easier to pull it out when rooted in a layer of mulch than in the soil.

Preserves soil moisture by reducing evaporation, and helps prevent erosion caused by rain and wind. Bare soil often gets a crust on it that prevents rain from penetrating easily.

Moderates soil temperatures.

Keeps soil cooler in summer and helps to reduce the risk of damage to plant roots in winter.

Keeps soil from splashing onto leaves, which keeps plants looking neater and helps prevent soil-borne fungal diseases.

As the organic material decomposes, it adds all-important organic matter to the soil and keeps the top layer of soil loose and airy.

Garden mulching how-to

All you do is just layer the stuff two inches to four inches deep over bare soil around your plants. Just don't put it right on top of perennials, and keep it from direct contact with the bark of trees and shrubs, as excess moisture right up against the bark can cause disease and rot.

When to add mulch: Do your mulching in spring before hot weather comes and while annual and perennial plants are still small enough to work around easily. If you happen to have a few spare one or two gallon nursery containers, put them over top of your plants and then you can shovel the material right onto the bed without worrying about covering your perennials. As for what to use, see your choices below.

Winter mulch: This doesn't actually keep plants warm, but maintains a more even soil temperature - a good thing in areas of the country where winter brings alternating periods of freezing and thawing and where there isn't enough snow cover to give plants a thick insulating blanket. Boughs cut from your Christmas tree make good winter covering, and have the added bonus of trapping insulating snow that might otherwise blow away.

Organic mulch - best bets

Perhaps the strangest mulch I ever saw was a wine corks spread all over a flowerbed. It works just fine - cork is a natural biodegradable material eventually - if you don't mind your neighbours speculating about your drinking habits.

Here are some more conventional choices:

Bark: Available shredded or in small or large chips, it's excellent under trees and shrubs.

Cocoa bean hulls: Good for flower gardening. Will make garden smell like chocolate at first, but the scent fades quickly. It can get mouldy if you lay it on too thick - don't add more than two inches. It's very light and can blow away. I find that watering after spreading helps keep it in place. Avoid using if you have a dog who might chew and eat it, as chocolate can make dogs quite sick.

Compost: Plants love compost, but unless you can purchase it or have a huge compost pile, it's hard to have enough on hand. When I use compost this way, I use about an inch or so, and top it with another material such as leaves or straw because compost can be a fertile launching pad for weed seeds.

Grass clippings: When fresh, they have high moisture and nitrogen content and can get smelly. The solution: apply a thin layer. Don't use when grass is going to seed, otherwise it can germinate in your beds to create a grassy weed problem.

Fall leaves: Nature's favourite - great masses of them are free in fall. They're best used chopped - otherwise they can mat and stop air and water movement into the soil. To chop, use a leaf shredder, drive your lawn mower over them or put them in a sturdy plastic garbage container and chop with your weed eater. Use them over winter or save in bags or in a pile to use in spring.

Straw: Keep any bales you buy for autumn decoration because straw makes great mulch for vegetable gardens and also excellent winter mulch. With straw I used to find my biggest weed problem was grain growing from the stray kernels in the bales. But now I store the bales uncovered outdoors over winter: the bales get wet, causing the grain to germinate in autumn's warmth, then winter cold kills them off. Presto: come spring, I've got problem-free mulch. The slight spoiling isn't a problem. (Hay is full of weed seeds, so don't mulch with it.)

Pine needles: Long lasting, light and easy to come by if you have pines - each fall they drop a pile of needles. Leave in place in top of soil under your trees or rake up to use elsewhere in the garden. Cones from pines and other evergreens can also be used. This material is ideal for woodland gardens. Some gardeners find that prickly needles help to discourage slugs. Apparently, the soft-bellied pests hate crawling over pine needles.



PLANT OF THE MONTH

Jasminum stephanense – I am a great believer in vertical gardening and this fragrant, vigorous vine is one of my favourites for climbing up a fence or trellis. In no time at all it will clamber over your fence or trellis filling the air with its fragrance. Hummingbirds love this vine and once they discover it you will be entertained for weeks by them. It is semi-evergreen to evergreen here on the coast depending on how severe the weather is but if it does take a bit of a beating during the winter it doesn't take long for the new growth to appear in the spring and fill in with its glossy green and cream leaves. The flowers are a beautiful shade of pink rather than the usual white or yellow of other jasmines and appear in masses in late spring and then sporadically throughout the summer. It is easy to grow and can reach a height of 20 feet eventually. If you like fragrance in your garden then *Jasminum stephanense* is a must for you.

Zone: 7

Light: full sun to part shade

Soil: Moist, well-drained

Height: 15 - 20 feet

Spread: 10 feet



Jasminum stephanense flowers

"Gardening is a way of showing that you believe in tomorrow."

Bob's Favourites of 2007

I always have a hard time with selecting my favourites of each year because there are so many wonderful plants out there that I love. Making it even more difficult is the fact that 2007 was such a great year for plants, especially for new cultivars. So, in no particular order here are some but not all of my favourites for 2007:

Heuchera Midnight Rose



Next to Heuchera Lime Rickey this is my favourite Heuchera. It appeared late in the season and was an immediate hit with my customers. It's dark purple, almost black foliage speckled with pink is a real stunner. For the shade garden what could be better.

Acanthus mollis Tasmanian Angel



I've always admired Acanthus for their exotic looking flowers but now we have available to us a stunning plant with its variegated leaves in cream and green. With the addition of its pink and cream flower stalks it makes a bold statement in the shade garden.

Daphne Summer Ice



This lovely white and green variegated Daphne is accentuated by very fragrant, pale pink flowers in early summer that re-blooms from summer through fall. Most daphnes are a challenge to grow but Summer Ice is one of the easiest. It prefers full sun and good drainage and is evergreen unless we have a severe winter. It is a wonderful, unique addition to your garden.

Sanicula caeruleascens



Sanicula is a low woodland plant with small divided green leaves and fuzzy bright lavender blue flowers. It's long blooming and adorable with repeat bloom in fall. There was lots of interest with this hard to find shade-loving perennial. It is wonderful in pots or tucked in amongst the corydalis and Brunnera.

Euphorbia Blackbird



Blackbird is a truly striking euphorbia. It has exceptional purple-black evergreen foliage with contrasting chartreuse flowers. The more sun it gets the darker the foliage becomes. As an added bonus it does great in containers. I couldn't keep it in stock in the nursery it was so popular.

Lewisia Constant Comment



As its name suggests Constant Comment blooms continuously from May right into the summer. If you provide it with excellent drainage and a gravel mulch it is easy to grow and bloom. It gives a real punch of colour in your sunny garden beds or rock gardens.

Viola Silver Samurai



I'm not a big fan of violas so I was very pleasantly surprised when I was introduced to Silver Samurai. With its large, silvered leaves and pretty, fragrant pink flowers it was love at first sight. Easy to grow in the part shade garden it forms a lovely mound with flowers appearing in late spring and lasting for several weeks. After the flowers you still have the beautiful foliage to look at. Perfect!

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

I hope this edition of The Natural Gardener newsletter brought a little sunshine into your January day. Enjoy this quiet time in the garden and remember **“One who plants a garden plants happiness”**.

Happy New Year!

Bob



Helleborus orientalis