

# THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

November is definitely not one of my favourite months. It's usually cold, wet (or snowy) and gloomy. Not only that but the garden definitely is winding down and I find that I have lots to do with cleaning up my planters and containers. I don't clean everything up now, I leave most of my clematis alone until February, the Hakonechloa and other grasses I also leave until early spring and any plants with seed heads or berries I don't touch so the birds can get at them. But I definitely clean up my Hostas, Gingers, Hardy Begonias and Ferns. The beginning of November is also when I finally move my Aeoniums and Echevarias inside. I also console myself with the fact that this is the time when I send in my spring plant bookings to my growers for next year, so I can dream a little about what plants will be arriving in the spring. On top of that Christmas arrives at The Natural Gardener the first week of November and that adds a lot of fun and sparkle to my days.

Don't forget to get those bulbs you bought into the ground now. This is prime bulb planting time, the soil isn't too cold yet and there is lots of rain to water them in well. In addition keep an eye on the weather this month. It's still a great time to plant and transplant but because it's another La Nina year the weather could turn cold and snowy suddenly interrupting your plantings.

In this issue I will be talking about Plant of the Month, a few more spring bulbs, Christmas gift suggestions, Christmas Tree bookings, a Plant Sale, Non-floppy Paperwhites, Pruning Clematis Guide and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob



Fall has arrived in my garden.

## PLANT OF THE MONTH

### *Arum italicum* ssp. *italicum* 'Marmoratum'

Once winter arrives and nearly all your plants are asleep there isn't much of interest out in the garden. There are of course the lovely hellebores who begin blooming in January and who doesn't love them and there are also the epimediums, heuchera and a few ferns. But other than that there isn't much to see. However, there is another wonderful winter foliage plant that needs to be planted more often and that is ***Arum italicum*** and in particular ***Arum italicum* ssp. *italicum* 'Marmoratum'**.

The arums are a striking, almost tropical looking plant for the shady winter garden and especially the silvery veined ones like '**Marmoratum**'. The leaves are arrow shaped and heavily marbled with silver. On the West Coast they start emerging from the soil in late September or early October and by mid to late October are out in full leaf. Then, there they are through rain and sleet and snow. It is quite something to see them buried in snow and then emerging unscathed as the snow melts. The two cultivars I grow have been completely flattened by the snow but as soon as it melts they spring back up like nothing has happened. About mid-spring a cream coloured, spathe-like flower emerges for a couple of weeks. Once pollinated, usually by flies, the flower falls off and you are left with a seed stalk that gradually turns bright red by the end of the summer. Shortly after the flower fades the leaves disappear only to emerge again a few months later to start the cycle all over again. I highly recommend ***Arum italicum* 'Marmoratum'**. I hope you will give it a try.

Zone: 4

Light: Shade to part shade

Soil: Moist, well-drained

Height: 18 inches, 45cm

Spread: 15 inches, 38cm



*Arum italicum* ssp. *italicum* 'Marmoratum'

## NOVEMBER TO DO LIST

- There is still time to plant those trees, shrubs and perennials you picked up in October but haven't had time to get in the ground. Just remember to mulch them well once they are planted. This is also an excellent time to move or divide your peonies.
- Get those bulbs in. While you can wait until December if you must, your bulbs will do much better if you can get them in before then. Don't forget to add a little organic Bone Meal with each bulb. Just a note that regular bone meal hasn't got much in the way of nutrients anymore due to over processing because of the threat of Mad Cow disease. Organic Bone Meal hasn't been over processed and is an excellent fertilizer for your bulbs.
- If you haven't already done so, apply a good organic lawn fertilizer such as Gaia Green Turf & Lawn Blend. Your lawn will love you for it and be healthier next year.
- You can also fertilize your trees and shrubs once the leaves have turned colour and/or fallen off.
- Water all your evergreen trees and shrubs really well before the first hard frost. This may seem like a moot point with all the rain we get but even a few days without rain will dry out your evergreens and can lead to 'winter burn' or even death.
- Start potting up indoor bulbs for December and January colour. Remember that paperwhites take 4-6 weeks to bloom once they are planted while hyacinths will still need another 6 weeks of chilling before bringing them out into your room. Just place them in the fridge but remember to top up the water regularly
- If you saved your amaryllis bulb from last year now is the time to bring it in, re-pot it, water it well and place in a bright room. You should have wonderful blooms by Christmas.
- Stop fertilizing your indoor plants since they use less water and fertilizer due to the lower light levels.
- Delay all unnecessary pruning until late winter or early spring, just before bud break. Your plants will heal faster when your plant is growing the most vigorously.
- Rake up those leaves. I know it seems pointless when there are still so many leaves left on the tree, I feel the same way about the sidewalk in front of the store, but leaving them on the lawn can prove detrimental to it. For a great mulch for your garden run over them with the mower first then spread them over your garden beds. Voila, the perfect mulch.
- Now is a good time to clean, repair and sharpen all your gardening tools. If looked after properly you will get years of use out of them.
- Hanging baskets should be emptied and washed thoroughly with soap and mild bleach solution before being put away for the winter.

## SALE! SALE! SALE!

For all of **November**, to make room for the Christmas Trees that will be arriving at the end of the month, we are offering **50% off** all of our perennials, vines, trees and shrubs.

Please note **Pansies, Violas and Bulbs are excluded.**

**Everyone must take time to sit and watch the leaves turn. ~Elizabeth Lawrence**

## MORE SPRING BULBS

It is definitely not too late to plant your bulbs so if you haven't had a chance to pick out your bulbs now is the time to do it. You can plant anytime as long as the ground isn't frozen which for the West Coast can mean planting right into December. Here are few more bulbs to tempt you:

### Tulip 'Candy Club'

This is a lovely, multiflowering tulip. This means you get more than 1 flower per bulb.



### Tulip 'Princess Irene'

One of the fragrant tulips, its sweet fragrance will entice you.



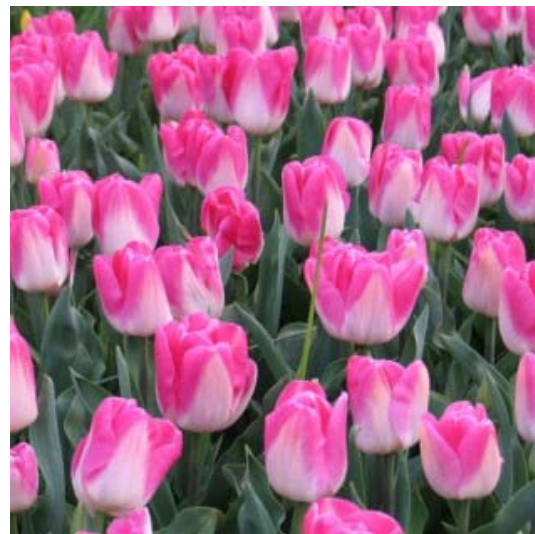
### Tulip 'Havran'

Wouldn't this look magnificent planted with white or pale yellow tulips or daffodils.



### Tulip 'Innuendo'

Beautiful is all I can say!



## CHRISTMAS TREES

I've had a good response on pre-orders for the Christmas Trees this year. We are starting to get a bit low on them so don't delay in getting your pre-order in. These Christmas Trees are cut a few days before I have them delivered so you know they are FRESH and won't be dropping needles all over the house. Just call, e-mail or drop in to the store and let us know which tree you would like. There is a small delivery charge of \$10.00 this year.

Below is the list of trees we will be carrying, the amounts we are bringing in and the cost of the different types and sizes of trees. We have sold out of the 5' Canaan Fir already and sold out of all our trees last year so don't wait too long to order yours.

TYPE	SIZE	AMOUNT	COST
Grand Fir	5'	5	39.00
Canaan Fir	6'	Sold out	45.00
Canaan Fir	7'	5	60.00
Noble Fir	5'	6	53.00
Noble Fir	6'	5	65.00
Noble Fir	7'	11	76.00
Noble Fir	8'	2	95.00



The **Noble Fir** is the Queen of the Christmas Trees. It is an elegant tree, with a classic layered look to it. The branches are sturdy and the needles are soft which makes hanging ornaments fun and easy.

The **Canaan Fir** is very unique in that it shares the best characteristics of the Fraser Fir and the Balsam Fir. The appearance closely resembles a Fraser Fir. The needles are short, soft, and rounded with a dark green topside and a silver accent underneath. The Canaan is a slightly tapered, but full tree. The branches are thick and sturdy, but still leave enough room to hang ornaments and lights closer to the center of the tree. One of the best things about Canaan Firs is that when properly looked after they will maintain freshness and needle retention right through the Christmas season. Most importantly Canaan Firs are wonderfully fragrant with the same fragrance as the Balsam Fir whose scent is considered the 'smell of Christmas'.

## CHRISTMAS AT THE NATURAL GARDENER

The Christmas season is always a wonderful time here at The Natural Gardener and this year I am particularly excited because we have some fun and exciting Christmas décor items for your pleasure. We are also featuring a fine selection of garden themed gifts for the discriminating gardener. Below are just a few of the Christmas items The Natural Gardener will be carrying starting November 2<sup>nd</sup> to make this a very special holiday season for you and yours. By the way, Bob will be serving hot organic apple cider and his home baked chocolate chip cookies every Saturday and Sunday until Christmas.



Rocket & UFO Ornaments



Robot Ornaments



Rocket Santa & Snowman Ornaments



Robot Santa with Christmas Tree Ornament



Reading Fairies Ornaments



Melting Snowman Salt & Pepper Shakers



Skiing Fairies Ornaments



Rabbit on Sleigh Ornament



Santa on Reindeer Rocker



Dancing Santa Rocker

## NON-FLOPPY PAPERWHITES

I've talked about this before but it's so cool it bears repeating.

Paperwhites are one of the most popular bulbs for forcing during the gloomy winter months but the one problem there has been with them is that they flop over once they start blooming. Well, now there is a solution to the problem. A study done by the Flowerbulb Research Council at Cornell University has discovered that a dilute solution of alcohol instead of regular water shortens the paperwhites by about 1/3 but the flowers stay their usual size.

### What to do

We suggest planting your paperwhite bulbs in stones, gravel, marbles, glass beads, etc. as usual. Add water as you normally would, then wait about 1 week until roots are growing, and the shoot is green and growing about 1-2" above the top of the bulb. At this point, pour off the water and replace it with a solution of 4 to 6% alcohol, made from just about any "hard" liquor. That means, to get a 5% solution from a 40% distilled spirit (e.g., gin, vodka, whiskey, rum, tequila), you add 1 part alcohol to 7 parts of water. This is an 8-fold dilution yielding 5% alcohol.

Then, simply use this solution, instead of water, for further watering of your bulbs. It's as simple as that. The result will be a plant that is 1/3 shorter, but with flowers just as large, fragrant, and long-lasting as usual. The plant will be nicely proportioned and won't need support stakes, wires, or other gizmos to keep it upright. You will see results within just a few days.

### A few other thoughts

- Do not use beer or wine, as the sugars in them will cause major problems with the plants
- As with humans, paperwhites can also suffer alcohol overdoses! We suggest 4-6% alcohol as a normal and safe range. If plants are given much more than 10% alcohol, growth problems will start, and 25% alcohol is dramatically toxic. So, moderation is the key!
- It is not strictly necessary to pour off the water after the plants are rooted (as we suggest above). You can just as well add your 5% alcohol without pouring the water off. The result, though, will be a lower than optimal alcohol concentration around the roots, and, ultimately, growth will not be reduced as much as you expect. The reason to pour off the water is to simply maximize the alcohol level around the roots.
- Basically, the higher the alcohol concentration (within reason), the shorter the plants. So it is not critical whether you use 4, 5, or 6% alcohol. Just stay well below 10%, where growth problems become noticeable.
- If you do not have alcohol for consumption in your household, rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol) works just as well. Since this is usually 70% alcohol when purchased, a dilution of 1 part rubbing alcohol to 10 or 11 parts water is appropriate.
- Why does this happen? It is believed that it is simply "water stress", where the alcohol makes it more difficult for the plant to absorb water. The plant suffers a slight lack of water, enough to reduce leaf and stem growth, but not enough to affect flower size or flower longevity.



## 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:

**MACROPHYLLA** – meaning large leaf. Example: Brunnera macrophylla (brunn-ERR-ah mak-roe-FY-la)

I have been writing a garden blog and wanted to remind you to check it out at [blog.thenaturalgardener.com](http://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 iPhone or Blackberry. The website is structured for ease of use on your smartphone. Check it out when you have a chance:

[www.thenaturalgardener.mobi](http://www.thenaturalgardener.mobi)

**A woodland in full color is awesome as a forest fire, in magnitude at least, but a single tree is like a dancing tongue of flame to warm the heart. ~Hal Borland**

## PRUNING CLEMATIS

I've talked about pruning clematis before but it is still a bit confusing so I thought it would be a good idea to talk about it again. Most clematis can be pruned anytime from now until early spring so please refer to this guide when you are heading out to do just that.

**Clematis Group A.** (Flowers late spring to early summer on growth produced the previous year.)  
When: Immediately after flowering, if necessary. How: Minimal pruning; cut overlong shoots down to a bud pair; remove growth that is winter-damaged; thin if growth is too dense by removing individual stems to a pair of buds or to their base; hard prune to the base every three years. Clematis Montana, Macropetala and Alpina varieties are in this group.

**Clematis Group B.** (Flowers in early summer on previous year's wood and again in late summer on new shoots.)  
When: Late winter or early spring, before there is new growth. How: Prune to stimulate new growth while retaining old wood framework; stagger pruning over the season, doing only some shoots at a time; can hard prune every three years.

**Clematis Group C.** (Flower late summer to fall.)  
When: Late winter or early spring, when buds begin to grow. How: Prune young plants as for Group A; hard prune established plants every year back to two strong sets of buds on each stem as close to the ground as possible.

November 2010

There we have the November issue of the newsletter, I hope you enjoyed it. If you have a chance do come by and check out our Christmas décor items and ornaments. There is a definite cupcake theme to this years Christmas ornaments. Don't forget to get out and enjoy your garden while you still can, there's a cold winter coming.

Happy Gardening!

Bob



A *Heptacodium micinoides* tree with it's pinky red seed pods in my garden.