

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

Here we are in September wondering where the summer went and how come we didn't get all those things done in the garden we had planned on in May and June. Well, it's not too late. Fall is a great time to plant and re-organize as I will be talking about in this issue. So, don't despair, you've still got lots of time. Not only that, but the bulbs are here now. I love planting those unremarkable looking capsules of promise, waiting all winter for them to appear and then seeing the beauty that comes from something so bland and unappealing.

At first I thought that this summer was unusually late and unusually cool (except for about a week in July) until I checked back on last year and read about how unusually cool and wet the summer was then. I think that because of global warming the weather is going to be more unpredictable and more changeable from now on. This can be a real challenge for gardeners, I'm thinking about all you tomato growers out there, but also a time of opportunity. It's an opportunity to experiment a little more with different plants and also to see how your favourites hold up under these new conditions. It will also allow you to practice zonal denial by growing more plants that up until recently weren't very hardy here. Just think of the increase in the number of hebes that are now available here on the coast as one example. We gardeners are a durable, optimistic lot and I know you won't let weird and crazy weather discourage you.

In this issue I will be talking about Fall Planting, Fall & Winter Heather, Bulb Planting, the Plant of the Month, Fall Classes and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob

**"The love of gardening is a seed once sown that never dies."
-- Gertrude Jekyll**



Buddleja "Nanho Blue"

FALL PLANTING

I know I've talked about this before but I thought I would bring it up again because Fall really is a great time to plant.

Fall is a great time to plant perennials because...

- ~ The soil temperature is warmer in fall than it is in spring. Warm soil promotes fast, strong root growth.
- ~ The shorter days and cooler temperatures of fall reduce the severity and length of transplant shock.
- ~ Since many insects are going dormant for the season, fall planting reduces the risk of insect attack and plant damage.
- ~ Fall planting reduces the load of springtime gardening chores. Many people have more time to plant perennials in September than in May.

PLANTING PERENNIALS in the FALL

It's certainly possible to keep planting perennials well into the fall. Here are a few ideas for ensuring better success when planting during this cool time of the year.

- Add plenty of organic matter to the bed, which improves soil drainage and at the same time improves moisture retention so plants don't dry out so quickly. Two inches of compost or moistened peat moss dug in to a depth of 6 to 8 inches will help immensely.
- Newly planted perennials will need regular watering, even in the fall. Watch for signs of wilting and water as soon as possible. Aim for a deep watering once a week rather than sprinkling lightly every few days. Watering by hand is fine, or use a well-aimed sprinkler or soaker hose. One inch of water per week should keep most newly planted perennials happy. This is easy to measure by placing an empty tuna can or margarine container in the sprinkler path and timing how long it takes to fill to one inch deep with water.
- Try to get perennials planted at least four weeks before the ground freezes hard in your region. For Vancouver that means you should be able to plant right up to the beginning of December. This should give most types plenty of time to get themselves rooted in before winter.
- Mulching around newly planted perennials helps to conserve moisture and will protect their roots. It also reduces the task of weeding. Some examples are shredded bark, bagged compost or composted manure.
- Mulch should be no deeper than two inches. A really simple way to apply mulch over a new perennial planting is to turn pots upside-down over your plants, spread the mulch then just remove the pots. Mulch should taper down to nothing the closer you get to the stems or crowns of your perennials. When deep mulch is in direct contact with perennial stems, various rots and fungus problems can develop and these may actually kill or damage your plants.
- When buying bargain perennials that are tall and spindly or floppy, it's often best to prune the plants back by at least half at planting time. They will grow new foliage and establish quickly. Aside from Peonies and true Lilies, most other perennials respond very well to pruning.
- A root-stimulating fertilizer may be helpful. A liquid organic fertilizer such as Raingrow Bloom-A-Long works well.

Perennials (and shrubs) are often rootbound in their containers by late summer or fall. Your plants will establish more quickly and be healthier if you damage the rootball slightly before planting. Use an old kitchen knife and slice an X across the bottom of the rootball to a depth of about one inch. Spread this cut open a little and shove in a stone or handful of soil to keep it open. Larger plants might need some scoring along the sides of the rootball. This does damage

the roots slightly, but during the repair process the new little roots quickly discover the garden soil and they grow out into it within a couple of weeks. If you don't do this important planting step your perennials might stay rootbound for a year or more!

BEAUTIFUL BUTTERFLY BUSHES

I have always liked *Buddleja davidii* or Butterfly Bush ever since I was a young kid growing up in Richmond. There were several large, ok huge, plants in my neighbourhood and I never grew tired of watching all the Painted Lady and Swallowtail butterflies feasting on the nectar of the drooping purple flowers. They are often maligned these days due to their propensity to get rather large and self-seed freely. However, with just a little care they can be stellar performers in the late season garden. And you'll make the butterflies happy.

Dan Hinkley, the consummate plantsman, has written a short article on *Buddleja* that I am including here and that I know you will find informative and inspiring.

The genus of the so-called butterfly bushes, *Buddleja*, has done remarkably well for itself. Its 150-plus species occur throughout Asia (where it's geographically centred), in the higher elevations of South Africa and from western North America south to Tierra del Fuego. The spelling of the genus has long been muddled; the American rendition, *Buddleia*, has lost favour among the pundits.

From Weed to Garden Splendour

Recent studies have shown many *Buddleja* species exhibit a highly efficient use of soil nitrogen coupled with a highly efficient system of photosynthesis. These attributes paired with simple fecundity (a typical flower head of *B. davidii* 'Potter's Purple' will release 40,000 fertile seeds each year) have resulted in a blitzkrieg of naturalization in temperate climates outside its natural range. In a mere 50 years since its introduction in England, *B. davidii* has become one of that country's most wide-ranging weeds. Yet with caution and proper selection of species and cultivars, *buddlejas* can still be brought into the garden setting with a clean conscience.

Though this genus is chiefly associated with its fragrant, butterfly-attracting flowers, I've long maintained that it should be considered as much for its foliage. All the species possess paired leaves that are retentive during the winter and terminal panicles that bloom on the current year's growth. All except *B. alternifolia*, that is. It blossoms on the previous year's wood. I've not yet had the opportunity to visit the native haunts of this species, as Reginald Farrar did in the early 20th century. Today the clever and cynical Farrar remains an enigma, but his observations of plants are often spot on. Of *B. alternifolia*, he wrote, "in blossom embodying an elegant waterfall of purple, in foliage a doppelganger of an old olive."

GROWING BUDDLEJA

As a general rule, species that blossom on the current year's wood will do well in Zones 6 through 10, although *B. davidii* is safely hardy to 10°F. More tender species and those blossoming on the previous year's growth may be pushed into colder zones; plant them in protected locations or adjacent to rock or masonry walls.

Softwood and hardwood cuttings root easily. Butterfly bushes, like hydrangeas, are fast growers and cuttings should be potted directly into gallon containers for establishment.

As for pruning, virtually all species can be cut back hard to rejuvenate them from the base, and this is the recommended practice for *B. davidii*, in late winter before growth resumes. Species blossoming on the current year's wood should be pruned hard directly after they flower. I also recommend removing the flower heads of all paniculate species directly after they flower. This tidies the appearance of the plant, alleviates the chances of it self-seeding and encourages lateral growth. The resultant growth of foliage remains through the winter, providing visual appeal in the off season.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

X *Phylliopsis hillieri* “Sugar Plum”

I first came across this rarely available, evergreen member of the Ericaceae family early this spring and was immediately drawn to its glossy green leaves and mounding habit. So of course I brought some into the nursery and was really blown away when it started to bloom. There were masses of pink, bell shaped flowers all over the plant. Stunning! Adding to its charm is the fact that it is a repeat bloomer and is currently in another flush of bloom as I write this.

Phylliopsis “Sugar Plum” is an intergeneric hybrid between the North American natives *Phyllococe caerulea* and *Kalmiopsis leachiana*. It prefers well-drained, acidic soil similar to what heathers prefer. On the coast it can take full sun to part shade. I think it would make a wonderful container plant and definitely would be a wonderful addition to your garden.

Zone: 5

Soil: well-drained, acidic

Light: Full sun to part shade

Flowering: Mid spring then repeat flowering in late summer to early fall

Height: 2 feet

Width: 2 feet



HEATHER (*Calluna vulgaris*)

One of the best plants to use in the fall/winter garden is *Calluna vulgaris*. It is especially attractive in fall/winter containers as many of the heathers hold their flowers over the winter. *Calluna vulgaris* is also known as Ling or "Scotch" heather. These are the true heathers, among the hardiest and most varied of all hardy heathers. Sizes range from small tufts, mounds and carpeters to shrubs about three feet tall. Flowers can be single or double. There are even a few bud bloomers who hang onto their flowers through winter and look as if they are still in bloom. There are also many interesting foliage colours. Some turn spectacular shades of orange and red during the cold weather of winter. The varieties that show coloured spring new growth are valuable for their several months of extremely showy foliage from January to June, and then they go on to bloom for an additional several months.

Callunas grow and flower best in full sun but can tolerate partial shade. The coloured foliage plants need bright winter sun to turn those intense shades of orange or red. Some experts recommend pruning the Callunas with spring coloured tips in the fall so you get to enjoy the new growth without pruning it off.

Good drainage is very important. They are liable to get root diseases if grown in wet spots. Callunas thrive on acidic soils which makes them a perfect plant for the Lower Mainland. All Callunas but the most compact miniatures need annual pruning or plants will become straggly and unsightly. Prune the stems below the flowers after flowering in fall or in early spring in colder climates.

The Natural Gardener is bringing in a selection of heathers for you to plant in your containers or gardens this month. Here is who will be available:



Calluna Dark Beauty



Calluna Roter Oktober

Plus **Calluna Salena** which has white buds with magenta tips from August to November & **Calluna Veronique** which also has white buds from August to November.



Calluna Silver Knight

SPRING BULBS

The spring bulbs have arrived and here is a sample of what we have for you this season:



Tulip Fire of Love



Tulip Greenland



Narcissus Sound



Tulip Colour Spectacle



Narcissus Full House



Allium Schubertii



Muscari Mount Hood



Fritillaria persica



Galanthus Flore Pleno (Double Snowdrop)

There you have it, a small sample of the bulbs we have in the nursery now. Please come by and have a look at our full selection.

FALL CLASSES

Once again The Natural Gardener is offering our popular Fall Garden Classes to help you explore new plant possibilities and to increase your gardening knowledge.

We will be offering classes on everything from Orchid growing to winter container gardening. There are several classes that will be taught by people in the industry who have an incredible wealth of knowledge to share with you. Just take a look at the class list below and decide which one(s) you'd like to take.

All classes are held at The Natural Gardener Garden Store, 4376 West 10th Avenue, begin at 7PM and are limited to 15 people.

You must pre-register for a class either in person, by phone or by e-mail. When phoning or e-mailing, a credit card number is required.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to call the store at 604-224-2207 or e-mail us at info@thenaturalgardener.com.

THE NATURAL GARDENER GARDEN CLASSES SCHEDULE

FALL 2008

September 18

Spring Bulb Planter

Instructor: **Bob Tuckey**, owner of The Natural Gardener

- I'll be talking about the wonderful varieties of bulbs available to you this year, where to plant them and how to plant them. Then we will plant a "lasagne" pot that will bring you several months of continuous colour next spring. Lasagne pots are planters that you plant with a succession of bulbs so that you will have a colourful display from February to May. I'll supply the bulbs and you bring a 12"-14" oval, round or square planter.
Cost: \$50.00 **Class starts at 7pm**

September 25

Getting your vegetable garden ready for Fall & Winter!

Instructor: **Sharon Slack**, Head Gardener at the Vancouver Compost Demonstration Garden

- Now is the time to be getting your vegetable garden in order for fall planting and for prepping the beds for spring planting. Sharon will share her wealth of knowledge on growing vegetables and will be discussing fall harvesting, fall planting, prepping the soil, composting and irrigation of the beds. If you are just getting into vegetable gardening or you've got an existing garden, either way you will find this class very informative and helpful.
Cost: \$20.00 **Class starts at 7pm**

October 16

Winter Container Gardens

Guest Instructor: **John Cowie**, Horticulturalist

- John is back for another fun-filled and informative evening of container gardening. He will look at which plants to use, different plant combinations and what the special needs are of a winter container garden. Then you will make a container garden to take home. I'll supply the plants and you bring along a 12"-14" oval, round or square planter.
Cost: \$50.00 **Class starts at 7pm**

October 9

Orchid Care Clinic

Guest Instructor: **Norm Dorosh**, Owner of Somerville Orchids

- Norm is one of the best private orchid growers in the Lower Mainland and he will be sharing his knowledge about the more common species of orchids grown indoors, their light requirements, type of soil, watering, fertilizing, re-potting and how to get them to re-flower. This is a fun, informative class I know you will enjoy. **If you have an orchid that you'd like us to look at bring it along.** There will be a free draw for one of Norms spectacular orchid flower arrangements at the end of the class.
Cost: \$20.00 **Class starts at 7pm**

October 25

Using Beneficial Insects, Companion Plants and Integrated Pest Management for Pest Control In Your Garden

Instructor: **Bob Tuckey**, owner of The Natural Gardener

- With a greater understanding of how harmful pesticides are for your garden and the environment people want to use other ways of controlling pests in their gardens. I will be speaking about the different types of beneficial insects for the garden, companion planting to control pests and Integrated Pest Management for your garden.
Cost: \$15.00 **Class starts at 7pm**

"Always remember the beauty of the garden, for there is peace."

SEPTEMBER TO DO LIST

- Set out transplants of cool-weather vegetables
- Prune cane fruits such as raspberries and blackberries
- Plant winter pansies and fall annuals (calendula, dianthus, ornamental cabbage and kale)
- Plant peonies
- Plant fall-blooming bulbs amongst the fall perennials in your window boxes & planters and in drifts in your garden beds
- Continue to harvest herbs and flowers for drying
- Divide peonies. Be sure to have 3-5 eyes per division. Plant with eyes no deeper than 2 inches below the soil
- Divide bearded iris and other spring- and summer-blooming perennials
- Plant bare-root trees and shrubs
- Plant herbs and groundcovers as the weather cools
- Over-seed lawns that are patchy from the summer
- Lay down turf for new lawns
- Fertilize your lawn in early September. This is the most important application of the year
- Apply beneficial nematodes to combat Root Vine Weevil and cutworms

BENEFICIAL NEMATODES

I know I bring nematodes up a lot but they are one of the most effective ways of controlling root vine weevil and cutworms. So, once again here is everything you wanted to know about nematodes.

Nematodes are microscopic round worms that feed and reproduce on a multitude of insect pests. Susceptible pests or hosts must be in the larva or grub stage for the nematodes to effectively parasitize. As a parasite, the nematode enters the grub through any available opening such as the mouth or anus. Once inside, eggs are laid and a bacterium is released by the nematode to initiate decomposition of the grub which provides a food source to the developing young.

Now is the time to apply these very useful biological predators to combat black vine weevil. The larvae are still quite small at this time of the year and are easily attacked by the nematodes. To ensure even better control it is recommended that another application of nematodes be done between April and June depending on the weather.

September 2008

Have an enjoyable time in the garden this September. This month is usually a very pleasant month for gardening with warm days and cool nights. So, enjoy your time in your garden and remember to take a moment to smell the roses.

Happy Gardening!

Bob



A lovely fall planter