

THE NATURAL GARDENER NEWSLETTER

This has been an amazing summer here on the West Coast especially when you compare it to the summers of 2007 & 2008 where it was so cool and wet. Gardens everywhere really seem to have appreciated the weather this year and the plants just seem larger and more exuberant than usual. I know my garden is looking particularly lush right now or as one of my neighbours said to me the other day "wow it sure is looking leafy in your garden". If you have a vegetable garden, this year has been really great. I've been hearing from lots of you that you have had tons of vegetables and the tomatoes, eggplants & peppers have done especially well. Not too surprising considering the heat we've had. I'm pretty confident that this weather is going to continue into September and give us a lovely Indian Summer. It will be great for the garden and especially great for all you Fall vegetable growers.

September is a great month for planting not only your spring bulbs but also perennials, trees, shrubs and vines. So if you have areas in the garden that need filling in or you are creating new garden beds you don't have to wait until spring. Plant them now, next spring you will be happy you did.

In this issue I will be talking about Spring bulbs, Fall planting, Plant of the Month, Fall Classes, Winter Flowering Kale and of course the To Do List.

Enjoy!

Bob



Cotinus 'Grace' a new purple smokebush with pink flowers and beautiful bright orange-red fall colour.

GROWING SPRING FLOWERING BULBS

Every September I hum and ha about planting tulips, daffodils, crocus and the rest of the spring flowering bulbs. Eventually I succumb to their tantalizing potential, plant several containers worth and am so happy in the spring when they magically appear. That's the thing about bulbs, they are so unattractive as bulbs it's hard to get excited about them. But then I remember how great they looked last spring when I was craving some colour in the garden and I know I have to plant more of them. And the great thing about bulbs is that they are so easy to plant. Here are a few pointers on planting your spring bulbs:

- Choose healthy bulbs. Avoid bulbs that are dry and withered, spongy or mouldy. In general, the larger the bulb for its type, the more flowers.
- Choose an appropriate location. Most flowering bulbs prefer full sun, but that can be almost anywhere in the spring, before the trees leaf out. So don't overlook a spot that seems perfect, just because it's a bit shady in the fall. Woodland bulbs (Anemone nemorosa (Woodland Anemone), Arisaema (Jack-in-the-Pulpit), Erythronium (Dog's Tooth Violets), Galanthus (Snowdrops) and Trillium) prefer a bit of cool shade. A well-drained soil will prevent the bulbs from rotting in cool weather.
- You can start planting your bulbs about mid-September although a few, like Colchicums and fritillarias, need to be planted as soon as possible.
- In general plant the bulb with the pointy side up. The exceptions are Fritillaria which need to be planted on their sides so they won't rot in our rainy winters and anemones. Anemones are really hard to tell which is the top and which is the bottom so ask us here at the store and we will show you.
- Every year I get customers coming in at the end of December quite distressed because they just discovered the bag of bulbs they bought in September and stored in the garage. They want to know if they can still plant them. The short answer is yes, as long as the ground isn't frozen you can still plant your bulbs. However for optimum root development try and get them planted before mid-November.
- Plant bulbs to a depth of about 3 times their diameter. For Daffodils, that's about 6 - 8 inches. Smaller bulbs can be planted to a depth of 3-4 inches and so on.
- Mix some organic bone meal into the soil at the bottom of the hole at planting time, to encourage strong root growth. You could mix in some water soluble fertilizer as well, but it's not necessary if you've already amended your soil.
- If rodents tend to eat your bulbs try planting your bulbs in a cage made of hardware cloth or chicken wire. The roots and stems grow through, but the rodents can't get to the bulbs. Make it easy on yourself and make a cage large enough to plant at least a dozen bulbs. Or you can make it really easy on yourself and stick to daffodils, which rodents and most other animals avoid.
- Replace the soil on top of the bulbs. Water the bulbs after planting, to help them settle in and close any air pockets. Through the fall and winter, you only need to worry about watering your bulbs if you're having a particularly dry season. Come spring, you should be well rewarded for all your efforts.

Here are few more yummy spring flowering bulbs we are now featuring at The Natural Gardener:

Tulip 'Blushing Beauty'



Iris 'Harmony'



Ornithogalum 'Silverbells'



Tulip 'Day Dream'



Narcissus 'Thalia'



Allium schubertii



PLANT OF THE MONTH

Drimys lanceolata – Mountain Pepper

Drimys is an attractive shrub found in Tasmania & New South Wales. Its red stems and dark green glossy leaves are a wonderful contrast in the garden. Scented white flowers are followed by seeds that can be used as a pepper substitute hence its common name Mountain Pepper. It can be a little tender but is hardy up to -15 C as long as it is out of drying winter winds. Drimys is not commonly found in gardens outside of Australia & Tasmania so it is a treat to have some available in the nursery. It is a really lovely shrub and is a great addition to your garden.



Zone: 8

Soil: Moist but well-drained, acidic. They don't like lime and don't let it dry out

Light: Does well in dappled light to full sun

Height: 12 feet

Spread: 8 feet

A garden is the best alternative therapy. – Germain Greer

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 reduces 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.

FLOWERING KALE

Flowering kale is one of those favourites of the fall garden that just keeps getting better as the fall progresses. In fact once frost hits the colours in the kale are actually more vivid. They are easy to grow and easy to look after. One of the benefits to growing them in the fall is that they are much less bothered by pests although you will have to keep a look out for slugs & snails.

Flowering kale is a great plant to use in containers or window boxes. When they are grown in six or seven inch pots, it is easy to move them from one area to another for seasonal color. For example, one week they can be used in the entry area; another week they can brighten the patio or deck. They are also colourful in low rockeries or rockery outcroppings. Actually, they will thrive in a sunny or semi-shaded spot anywhere in the garden.

The plants grow about a foot and a half to two feet high under normal growing conditions. For best display, plants should be set about twelve to eighteen inches apart. If planting in a container regular potting soil is fine and in the garden nothing special needs to be added to the soil for them to do well. However I would recommend adding some organic bone meal to the planting hole for that little added burst of nutrition. They thrive in full sun to part shade but I find they are less leggy in full sun. Speaking of leggy by mid winter they are looking pretty spindly but you can mound soil up around the stem if you find that they are starting to look a bit unsightly.

Take time out this fall to become acquainted with the showy flowering kale. It is a great plant to add colour to your garden during the fall and early winter months.



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 2009

September 21

Spring Bulb Planter

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

- Bob will 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 28

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 19

Winter Container Gardens

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

- Bob will be conducting 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 26

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**

If you would be happy your whole life long, become a gardener – Old Chinese Proverb

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

I hope you have enjoyed the September 2009 newsletter. If you have any gardening topics you would like to see in the newsletter please let me know, I would love to include them in the newsletter. This is always a nice part of the gardening season with warm days and cool nights. Do take a moment to stroll through your garden and enjoy what you have created this year.

Happy Gardening!

Bob



Rudbeckia 'Sonora'