



The Spade & The Hoe

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March 2006

The March Meeting

will be held on the 9th at 7:15 P.M. at the Park Center, room 102. Bob Nicholson, president of the Northern Illinois Gesneriad Society will speak on Miracle Blooming House Plants. See you there!

The Flower Family Album - Gentians and Leadworts

The gentian family is named for a king who discovered their roots were medicinal. Fringed gentian, of which the poets sing, is a biennial with a very long taproot. Rose gentian is an annual. Others in the family are closed gentian, and prairie gentian (beloved by pioneer women for its blue flowers, it is the last flower of summer). The leadwort family contains primrose, sea-lavender (also called lavender baby's breath), thrift (great for rock gardens), and plumbago with its intense blueness. Treat plumbago as a 'semi-hardy' perennial, placing it in a very protected area.

-The Flower Family Album
By Helen Field Fischer and
Gretchen Marshbarger

The February meeting was a digital presentation by Bill Porter and Robin Flakne of the Village on the current status of the prairie plantings. There were many questions from the audience who expressed great interest in the subject.

Last Chance!

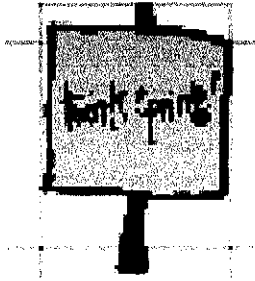
This will be your last newsletter if you haven't sent in your dues.

Garden Walk and Plant Sale

Holly Jansen reported that two gardens will be open this June: Pamela Frank's and Esther Behnke's. She needs one more garden, so don't be shy. She'll also need hosts/hostesses for each one. And keep in mind to pot up your excess plants for her. Our sale last year was a big source of revenue for us. Holly and her co-chairman Dolores Gilbertson will keep us informed each month as June will be here very soon.



Through the Garden Gate Well, since robins came to my garden last month, I have been looking for other signs of impending Spring. Daffodils are up about 6-8", scilla is up though not blooming yet, Stars of Bethlehem are coming up nicely, in fact, loads of perennials are popping up and showing their greenery! The weatherman may say Winter but we gardeners say Spring. I am so excited to report that my orchid has FINALLY begun to send up another flower stalk. I ignored my houseplants and now they're doing better. From now on, an austere regimen for all of them! The lemon tree is blooming again and setting new fruit. No flower stems yet on the sweet clivia. But every day I look out my window and see the delicate white snowdrops and I am at peace. It's funny how certain flowers can have such an impact on one's psyche. African violets have that power on others, also Madonna lilies, peonies, irises, tulips. It may be the promise that the spring blossoms carry that does the trick, sometimes it's the fragrance. The earth is renewing itself with Springtime.



The Flower Family— Dogbanes

Bane means poison and this entire family should be regarded with suspicion. Drugs and insecticides are made from some varieties, one of which is the Ordeal Tree of Madagascar, the most poisonous plant on earth. The family is closely related to the Milkweed family, having the same milky juice and unique pods. Its members are oleander (a tropical tree with pink and white blossoms, but its stems, leaves, and flowers are poisonous— even its wood which kills loads of people who use that as meat skewers), amsonia (a native plant), hemp dogbane (aka Indian hemp because of its use in making ropes), bigleaf periwinkle (a tender vine for hanging baskets and windowboxes), Madagascar periwinkle (a bedding annual), and common periwinkle (aka grave myrtle, it is a hardy native of Europe and is used under trees, in shady areas where grass will not grow, or as a ground cover where bulbs may poke through later.

Cedarwood *Juniperus virginiana*

Important ingredient in the medicine, cosmetics and perfumes of ancient Egypt, it was used in "cold cream soap" in the 19th century. It is an all-round tonic and stimulant, and an aphrodisiac.



Chicago Flower & Garden Show, March 11-19 at Navy Pier. Get a jump start on the growing season by viewing these luscious gardens and smelling the scents of flowers and soil.

Juniper *Juniperus communis*

In the Middle Ages, a bush would be planted by the door in the belief that this kept witches away. During times of plague, its branches were burned to ward off the disease. As recently as WW II, French nurses burned it in field army hospitals to disinfect the air. Nowadays, it is the source of gin.

Juniper has a marked effect on the digestive, female, and circulatory systems. A few drops of the oil in a warm bath or in a massage oil helps in treating sleeplessness and stress. It is a diuretic, analgesic, and muscle relaxant, and cleans and tones skins as it stimulates appetite.

In March, remember to:

- repot and fertilize houseplants;
- wait until the soil has dried out before walking on it;
- dig in 2-3" of compost or leaf mold to lighten the soil;
- prune spring-flowering trees and shrubs after they bloom;
- cut to the ground all perennials and grasses left standing for winter interest;
- plant caladium, canna, elephant ears, tuberous begonia, tuberose and others in moist soil-less mixture for transplanting later outdoors;
- start tomatoes and pepper plants in mid-March for transplanting in mid- to late May;
- sow lettuce, radishes, peas and spinach;
- trim Perovskia and Buddleia back to 6-8";
- divide most perennials.

- Garden Talk, spring 2006 & Chicagoland Gardening March-April 2006.



**Guest Columnist—
Bonnie Kimoto:
Collard Greens**

An old man lived alone in the country. He wanted to dig his yearly collard greens garden, but it was always very hard work for him because the ground was hard. His only son, James Jankins III, who used to help him was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and described his predicament.

"Dear James Jankins the III,

I am feeling pretty bad because it looks like I won't be able to plant my collard greens garden this year. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. If you were here my troubles would be over. I know you would dig the plot for me. Love, Dad."

A few days later he received a letter from his son: "Whatever you do, don't dig up that garden! That's where I buried the BODIES. Love, James." At 4 a.m. the next morning, FBI agents and local police arrived and dug up the entire area without finding any bodies. They apologized to the old man and left. That same day the old man received another letter from his son: Dear Daddy, You can go ahead and plant the collard greens now. That's the best I could do under the circumstances. Love, James III."

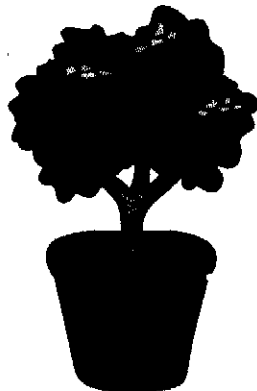
Helpful Hints

A member of the Royal Society, Robert Ball wrote at length to the gardener Richard Bradley in 1718 about how all noxious pests, notably caterpillars, were borne in great clouds on the east wind, originating in Tartary. Wind-breaks of trees, high hedges and wattle fences should therefore be placed to protect the whole garden or particular plants from that side, for no caterpillars would be found to the west of them.

For earwigs, Mr. Bradley advised hanging 'Hoggs-hoofs, the Bowls of Tobacco-Pipes and Lobster-claws on the tops of sticks' among plants 'and killing the vermin that lodge in them every morning'.

According to the BBC's Gardeners' Question Time programme, don't spray your roses for aphids. Plant a single clove of garlic beside each rose and the roots will take up a substance from the garlic that is inimical to greenfly and aphids. All members of the onion family, including chives, are partially effective, but garlic is the only completely efficient answer.

- Gardeners' Lore: Plantings, Portions and Practical Wisdom by Maureen and Bridget Boland



What's Blooming Table

Please bring in your treasured plants or blooms for all of us to admire at the March meeting. Many thanks to Jackie Kimel for sharing with us her extraordinary blooming oncidium orchid.

**Questions, comments,
payment of dues?**

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