



The Spade & The Hoe

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From the Desk of Pamela Frank

I have had some surprises in my garden this spring. A couple of trilliums are popping up and a jack-in-the-pulpit and iris. These plants came in little plastic bags with a brown dusty soil, and they cost a dollar each. Each plant specimen was miniscule and basically teeny tiny bulb-lets or skinny little roots, nothing green and growing. I carefully potted up the little bits and pieces, marked the pots, and waited. A few weeks later there were some signs of life in maybe two pots. Eventually I just dug holes and planted the contents of the pots in a bed that was shady and protected. Every summer I would check for one plant, a trillium which I had marked with a white plastic marker. This spring, the fourth spring, I noticed two little plants with three spotted leaves exactly where I planted the little pot of soil in 2005. I covered the trillium with a plastic mesh because all I need is for a rabbit to chow down, and they continue to grow. Spring 2008 miracle #2: I already had a healthy jack-in-the-pulpit which I bought from Chalet. A week ago I was pulling out garlic mustard and I saw a young jack. The 'old' jack is already in flower. I put a tomato cage around the new arrival to protect it from being stepped on. As a gardener, and I am sure you will agree, it's these little happenings that make gardening exciting.

June Garden Walk

The Garden Walk will be held on Sunday, June 8th. The 1st garden to be visited will be the Spear's, 807 Surrey Land, from 1:00-2:00pm. The 2nd garden will be the Kimel's, 2141 Mickey Lane, from 2:00-3:00pm. And the 3rd garden will be the Frank's, 907 Glendale Road, from 3:00-4:00pm. The hostesses are Susan Fine (Spear's), Esther Behnke (Kimel's), and Brigitte Steinfeld (Frank's). We hope to see all our members at the Walk!



May Program

Last month's members' plant exchange was very well attended and everyone went home with new treasures to plant. It was also a good chance to meet with some of our newest members.

The latest thing in mulches is Cotton Burr Compost. It will improve heavy clay soil because it's packed with micro-organisms to bring life back to your soil and nutrients to your plants. It is an all natural product from the Texas cotton fields.

Through the Garden Gate June, the month of weddings, is also the month of our garden walk. For those of us who are new to our club, or to gardening, this is an excellent time for you to see what others have done in our home town, to see what plants really like to grow here, to learn from our members about what doesn't really like our hot and humid summers and our frigid and snowy winters. Our membership includes master gardeners and long-time gardeners who have a wealth of gardening information and who love to share that knowledge with others.

So, do not hesitate to ask questions of any of us. If we don't know the answer, we'll direct you to someone who does.

For our newest members, you are in for a treat at the garden walk. Not only do you get to study someone else's garden design and plantings, but you can spend the time visiting with all of us plus partaking of some delightful snacks! A wonderful start to summer!



Fresh Citrus

Citrus is easy to grow in Illinois. All it needs is lots of sunlight (or grow lights) and a summer spent outdoors in the sun. Plant your orange, lemon or lime tree in a large container with a lightweight potting soil. Use special citrus fertilizer during the growing season, then sit back and indulge in your very own hand-picked citrus.

Helpful Hints

Place a pot of herbs as close to the kitchen door as possible for easy access. Chives, parsley, oregano, mint and basil can be grown together in a big pot, and, because they are so close to the kitchen, you'll find yourself using them often!

Put a layer of crushed eggshells under hosta and they won't be bothered by slugs.

When tidying up the garden, deadheading, etc., dig a small hole right next to the plant and bury the spent flowers or yellow leaves in it. In a few weeks you will have great soil, a little bit at a time.

Use plenty of mulch to conserve water, slow down weeds, and build up the soil.

If your arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome is keeping you from enjoying your garden, check out the new ergonomic Radius hand tools. The curve of the tools promotes a safer and wrist-neutral approach to gardening.

A large, branching oak is perhaps the most venerable of all inanimate objects.

- William Shenstone
1714-1763



Going Greener

People have been using trees to shade their houses in summer, as windbreaks in winter, to let low winter sunlight in, and by selecting trees that adapt well to our area which limits the need for excessive watering and care. A well-placed tree can reduce air-conditioning costs significantly, as well as placing the AC unit in a shady area. Windbreaks can reduce heat loss from walls in winter. Shrubs provide an insulating effect around your home's foundation. Native plantings create habitats for birds and beneficial insects, for natural pest control. Finally, trees absorb carbon dioxide and give off oxygen.

- from a brochure by Van Zelst Inc.

Gentlemen know that fresh air should be kept in its proper place - out of doors - and that God having given us indoors and out-of-doors, we should not attempt to do away with the distinction.

- Rose Macaulay
1881-1958

Helpful Hints

Dress up the front of your house by the simple addition of one or two large pots filled with bright colors, contrasting textures, and different heights. Have the colors of the flowers complement the color of your house for maximum effect.

Another hint is to keep the plants in the front of your house well-watered, pruned, weeded, and deadheaded, and the grass neatly trimmed. Nothing says neglect as clearly as overgrown grass, seed pods on flowers, dead branches, etc. Once tidied up in spring, it is a snap to maintain it.

When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather.

-Samuel Johnson
1709-1784

Summer afternoon - summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.

- Henry James
1843-1916

More Helpful Hints

After living in a house for several years, you can look at the garden with a critical eye to see what can be done to improve the beds. Remove some more grass? Transplant something from hot sun to a more shady bed? Rejuvenate some old and overgrown shrubs with selective pruning? Put in a brick border? Spring is a good time for these garden make-overs when the weather is not too hot and the soil is not too dry.

The choice of trees should be governed by your need for shade in summer, protection from winter winds, stunning autumn color, uplifting spring blossoms, and/or the shape or color of the trunk for winter interest.

Underneath the trees, different cultivars of hostas can make quite a show. Or try gooseneck loosestrife coupled with hostas for a different look. Other plants that do well in shade include astilbes, purple coneflowers, tall spikes of ligularias, forget-me-nots, lily-of-the-valleys, coral bells, and many ground covers like ajuga reptans, sweet woodruffs, or periwinkles.



EPCOT International Flower & Garden Festival by Nancy Spears

This show runs from March through May each year at Disney World's EPCOT resort. Richard and I had a wonderful time visiting all the venues during the last two weeks in May. Gardeners have created many character topiaries which are displayed throughout the grounds using amazingly creative techniques. These are not your everyday topiaries but huge creations decorated entirely with plants and plant material. Smooth surfaces are created with mosses, flowers provide color and depth and grasses bring flow and movement to the sculpture. You had to see Lady and the Tramp to believe it, with Lady's 'grass fur' naturally blowing in the wind.

Each country around the lagoon has their special take on the show. England featured displays with teacups as a theme. China had topiaries of the zodiac creatures created from seeds, leaves and wood fibers. A butterfly garden tent provided the experience of seeing the emergence of new life from the chrysalis. Bonsai creations, some over 80 years old graced the Japan exhibit. France features aromatics and had a sniff of perfumes and the plants used to blend the scent. Spices were the theme at Morocco. A xeriscape garden demonstrated techniques. Norway's roof was abloom with alpine flowers.

There were gardens for children and vegetable gardening with many new techniques demonstrated. Clever scarecrows were created from rakes and shovels, mulch from old rubber tires, and stepping stones were decorated.

One of the attractions was Garden Town. Inside was a complete garden show with daily speakers, plant displays, merchandising areas and food. There was a

fantastic video presentation showing how Disney prepares each year for the Garden Festival, how they create the huge topiaries with build-in watering systems, and how it all get put together at the last minute. That was the best part of all, seeing the behind-the-scenes work that created such a grand production.

More than half a century has passed, and yet each spring, when I wander into the primrose wood, I see the pale yellow blooms and smell their sweetest scent — for a moment I am seven years old again wandering in the fragrant wood.

- Gertrude Jekyll

In June, remember to:

- start feeding the roses;
- feed spring bulbs, but avoid the center or crown of the plants;
- fertilize peonies with bone meal and composted manure around their drip line;
- remember to keep a garden diary;
- plant gladioli, dahlias and cannas now;
- tomatoes and peppers can be planted now;
- remember to water new plantings and mulch them to retain moisture;
- now is the time to give houseplants a summer vacation outdoors;
- fertilize houseplants when new growth appears;
- if planting bare-root shrubs, soak the roots overnight before planting.

More and more I am coming to the conclusion that rain is a far more important consideration to a gardener than sun, and that one of the lesser advantages that a gardener gains in life is his thorough enjoyment of a rainy day.

- Margaret Waterfield, 1907

What's Blooming Table

Keep this feature in mind for our July meeting.

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