

NURSERIES, GARDENERS, PLANTS & OTHER COOL STUFF

The Garden in Summer

Next year I vow that I won't buy a seed or a plant.

Yeah, right. But I really do need to edit. There's one entire garden that needs a complete re-do, for it isn't deep enough, suffers from having an ancient row of peonies down its back, and has a schizo color mix-up of mauve, lavender, white, orange, red, and periwinkle. The worst.

A huge new semi-circle garden is in process of being figured out. It's about 100' long, and will take the place of the original "weedpatch": the long border that separates field from lawn and that's been an Achilles heel since we bought the place ten years ago. Mostly annuals and old phlox right now, this new garden is supposed to be a fragrant shrub border, with flowers mostly of purple, blue and yellow. I also have hopes that it will be low maintenance (hardee har har). Right now it's stuck in process: it's waiting for me to take out the few good plants and rototill in a truckload of compost. It's also waiting for me to kill the marginal plants, but I can't bear to put "Round Up" on them yet: it's just so hard to kill anything in bloom, even if it is just dopey old lavender Phlox. Oh, to be a more hard-hearted gardener!

My existing "circle" garden looks well, but there are gaps in some places and crowds in others, necessitating a good deal of transplanting. Did I mention that I also need to edit out the salmon-colored **Daylilies**, reddish **Potentilla 'Miss Wilmott'**, and crimson **Sweet William** and an enormous yellow

Cassia that somehow snuck in where clear pink is supposed to be? Oh, yes, and I have decided that the garden would be much nicer if instead of just one **Vitex agnus-castus** it had 3 pairs repeating down its spine, so there's yet another project for next year.

Do you know about Vitex? I alternate between calling her "Vitex" and calling her "Agnus", both of which remind me of the personalities of Zelda, Mame, Clara, and other artistic, flamboyant gals of the early 20th century that I would have greatly enjoyed knowing. Actually, my association is far off, for both the words *hagnos* (Greek) and *castus* (Latin) mean "chaste". According to Pliny (who knew everything), the reference is to the "dames of Athens, who made their pallets and beds with the leaves thereof, to cool the heat of lust, and to keep themselves chaste for the [festival] time".

I do not recommend Vitex in the hope of cooling any lusty intentions you might have—you certainly won't find me rolling around in its leaves! But I do admire this native shrub of Italy, this member of the Verbena family. It's lavender flower spikes are prolific, and while it's said to be marginally hardy (it dies to the ground each year like a Buddleia), it seems to do fine for me. It grows right back up to about 4' by 4'. And I've punished this poor thing: in its first year it moved from Riverside to Richmond, then from one garden to the other in full bloom, and has roared back after each of two winters. It's a very welcome sight in the heat of the summer. Please do make room for Vitex' flamboyance somewhere!

Cerithe major purpurescens: An Unusual Addition for its Foliage

You may recall that a reader asked about **Cerithe major purpurescens** in the Summer 98 issue, but all I could report was a description from a *Thompson & Morgan* catalog and the fact that I grew some from seed. It was thus described: "A highly versatile, aristocratic border plant. The fleshy blue-green leaves with white mottling, spiral up the stem, transforming themselves into tighter packed, sea blue bracts and then the finale—small clusters of rich purple/blue tubular, nodding flowers, which are cream inside and loved by bees. It is an 12-18" evergreen, Mediterranean native....". I would say that while its red grape-colored flowers are the least of its virtues, the blue-green of its foliage is outstanding—almost surreal in certain lights. Do leave more growing room than I did: it grows 15" tall and just as wide, and give them plentiful water: I lost two to drought. My verdict? A wonderful foliage plant—so long as you keep it well watered.

Happily, my ignorance of correctly spacing a **Datura 'Evening Fragrance'**, the **Cerithe**, and a group of sky-blue **Anchusa** worked out fine: they've all grown together and look marvelous with each other. Nearby are the diminutive blue **White Pine** [*Pinus strobus* 'Densa'], the bruising silver leaves of **Cardoon**, and the silver-blue **Russian Sage** [*Perovskia*]. Great structures, great foliage!

Lincoln Park Conservatory

When I was 23 or so, I lived in a brownstone on Orleans Street in Chicago. Since I had no windowbox, much less a garden, I volunteered to be a gardener at the nearby *Lincoln Park Conservatory*. Actually, the Conservatory was so unorganized that it seemed like I was the only gardener or at least the only *working* gardener there. I was definitely the only person who actually liked talking to the public: most of the time, the only Chicago Park District representative in view was the guard who sat on a stool at the front door and pressed a clicker each time a visitor walked through the door. Heaven help the visitor who asked a question!

That was twenty years ago, and things were really neglected: signs were dangling, hidden, or gone; dead leaves had accumulated and lifeless branches hung forlornly; scraggly bushes dotted the foundation outside; weeds had overtaken “Grandmother’s Garden” (the perennial beds across the street from the Conservatory); and “The Rookery” (a splendid natural outdoor water garden designed by historic landscape architect Jens Jensen) was truly decrepit. In short, I loved it. To me, it was like a secret garden, a hidden jewel. Like Gloria Swanson in *Sunset Boulevard*: a faded beauty, cranky but fascinating.

Despite their lack of diligence to housekeeping, the greenhouse staff would always get it together to stage a Chrysanthemum Show, an Easter Show, and an Orchid Display, as well as growing zillions of blue, white, pink, and maroon annuals for the long outdoor beds that lie just south of the Conservatory. The shows were gaudy,

dazzling, and relentlessly monotonous: after all, how many ways can you vary a group of blue hydrangeas?

So it was with more than passing curiosity that I met the Chicago Park District’s new Deputy Director of Conservatories, Adam Lifton-Schwerner, who was recruited from the *New York Botanical Garden* two years ago to improve the horticulture displays at the Conservatories. To date, I’ve been impressed by his knowledge, ener-

“THE EASILY BORED CLUB”

For those of you who are easily bored, I received the following press release that may be of interest:

“Laurel, MD (July, 1998): ‘Magazine of the Month Club’, a new concept offering subscribers a sampling of magazines within an area of interest, made available today its first category: gardening. ‘Magazine of the Month Club’ consists of 12 different gardening magazines sent out one each month for an entire year. Subscriptions are available for \$19.95 plus shipping and handling by calling (888) 775-MAGS.”

If you sign up for 3 years, does that mean you’ll receive 36 different gardening magazines? Holy cow! Eventually they might even include *The Weedpatch Gazette!*

gy, and diligence. And he’s put together a great team of community volunteers to help raise the funds and donate the materials to improve these lovely conservatories. I’m one of those volunteers.

We’re having a fundraiser on December 1st, and I hope you’ll come. Take a look in the *Calendar of Events* for more information. We need you!

But most of all, go visit the Conservatories. They’re open 365 days a year, and you’ll be amazed at their splendor!

Woe, The Pollinators

You may recall a recent article on the attraction of Monarch Butterflies to Milkweed [*Asclepias*]. You may also remember that millions of Monarchs died (12” deep “carpets” of dead butterflies!) during a freak snowstorm in Mexico City during the winter of 98. El Nino, of course! Forest fires and logging are depleting so many more that experts predict that the Monarch migration will disappear in 20 years. In fact, a “Group of 100”, including Mexico’s “greatest living writer” Octavio Paz, is campaigning to have the San Andres reserve in western Mexico declared a federally protected area for the butterfly.

I think I’ve noticed the effect in my own garden. I have Milkweed all over the place, and I’ve only seen two or three Monarch butterflies this summer, and no caterpillars! Is my Milkweed un-tasty or am I viewing the result of an ecological disaster?

By the way, I read in *Butterfly Gardeners’ Quarterly* (\$8; PO Box 30931, Seattle, WA 98103) that violets are the host plant of fritillaries. Come spring, the fritillaries expect to be near the new growth of violets, so please don’t weed them out so much!

Do you have the following woodies in your yard: sassafras, hackberry, birch, willow, black cherry, ash, spicebush, hickory, hazelnut, oak, persimmon, sweet gum, or tulip tree? If you have all of the above, you are a caretaker of

many species of butterflies. This calls for a reward. If you have all of the above, I will send you a bottle of (good) champagne!

Woe, The Landscape

In the Winter 98 issue of *TWG*, I wrote a tribute to landscape architect Alfred Caldwell. Mr. Caldwell died in July at age 95. He contributed a great deal to the Chicago region, and I hope that our younger generations of architects will give as much as he.

Prairie Plants Needed

Here's a request I'm passing on from George Johnson of the *IL Native Plant Society*: Brookfield Zoo has constructed a new entrance road, and horticulturalist John Jocius wants to plant a high visibility, mesic prairie on a half-acre near the roadway tunnel entrance. Unfortunately, he only has a "1/4 acre" budget. If you have plants you could donate, please call (708) 485-0263 Ext. 537 or 538.

Of Bugs and Beetles

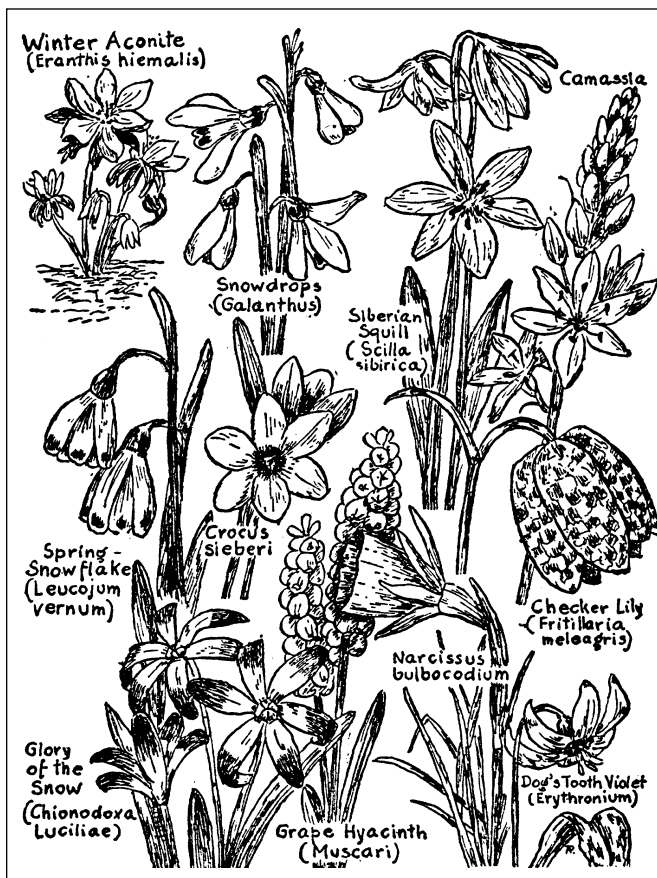
With the advent of the Asian Longhorn Beetle in the Chicago region (by the way, I've heard that Michigan City, IN also has an infestation), here's an update on the Japanese Beetle, which arrived in 1916 in New Jersey and has been winging its way westward ever since. The Beetle's numbers exploded (we're talkin' *billions of new* beetles swarming around) in 1998, due to El Nino's warm wet

weather. Indiana and southern Michigan have "heavy" infestations, while "spreading infestation is becoming a major problem in northern Illinois", according to the *U.S. Japanese Beetle Survey* (Gainesville, VA.). As you know, the beetles lay eggs in the tastiest lawns; the eggs hatch into grubs, which eat up the roots of the grass in spring and fall. In June and July of the next year the grubs become beetles, whose shells are tough as nails and not even

calling the Survey at (800) 801-0061.

Jens Jensen

As you know, "The Rookery" in Chicago's *Lincoln Park* was designed by landscape architect, Jens Jensen, in the early 1900's. It is a marvel of land art. For those of you who study Jensen, you might want to contact *TWG* subscriber John Notz, Jr., who has written a detailed account of how Jensen came to landscape Edward Uihlein's (Notz's great-grandfather) house ("Forest Glen") in Lake Geneva, WI, including "a grotto pond with a rookery and a spring...which about 35 men were busy over 5 months to complete everything." The research effort traces how Jensen may have obtained his earliest private commissions through Uihlein, a German immigrant and vice president of the Schlitz Brewing Company who lived at 2041 Ewing Place in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood, was a member of the *West Parks Commission*, President of the *Chicago Horticultural Society*, and owner of one of the most extensive orchid and tropical palm conservatories in the United States. Perhaps you can add to his research on the interaction among the German social elite in circa-1905 Chicago? Contact Mr. Notz at (773) 348-5196.



Some Favorite Bulbs for Fall, circa 1932

desired by birds.

Control of Japanese Beetles is best achieved through the USDA-developed Milky Spore Powder. This natural material lasts 10-20 years with one application (!), and is safe to use around pets, ponds, plants and people. A source for Milky Spore can be found by

By the way, Notz' paper points out that for many years Jens Jensen anglicized his name, using "James" instead of "Jens". James Jensen?! Sure doesn't have the same cachet as Jens—perhaps this is a part of history that should remain hidden. ☹