

## THE WEEDPATCH GAZETTE

*The Upper Midwest's  
Fine Plant & Garden Quarterly*

*The Weedpatch Gazette* is written for people who believe that beautiful gardens should emphasize diversity and richness in plant material and be especially sensitive to landforms, ecology, economy, wildlife, and the wise use of land. By providing a forum through which amateur and professional gardeners may directly exchange information about fine plants and gardens, *The Weedpatch Gazette* seeks to locate the very best gardening resources available in Chicago and the upper Midwest. This magazine aims to present information succinctly, with candor, detail, and humor. On-time performance is not guaranteed. Manuscripts, ideas, benefactors, many more subscribers, and well-reasoned criticism are always welcome.

©1999 R. Lopat Communications. All rights reserved. Reprint with permission only. Published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$24/year. Advertising rates are available from the publisher. This is Volume 7, No. 2. ISSN 1083-673X.

### **Publisher & Editor:**

Rommy Lopat

### **Subscriptions & Advertising**

Carol Richardson

### **Creative Director**

Susi Wilson

### **Graphic Design / Cover Art**

Jill Sebenar-Kaman / Lynda Wallis;

John Drummond / Susi Wilson

Bob Williams

### **Webmaster**

Greg Cryns

**P.O. Box 339**

**Richmond, IL 60071**

**(815) 678-6005 phone & fax**

**e-mail: [weedpatch@rsg.org](mailto:weedpatch@rsg.org)**

**Internet Site:**

**[www.weedpatch.com](http://www.weedpatch.com)**

# From the Editor's Garden



**O**ops! Wasn't the *white* cover of last quarter's *TWG* a surprise? Especially to me. Well, printing mistakes happen, yet the show must go on. The cover is back to being beige (or is it brown, tan, or *Carex flagellifera* biscuit?). Today is February 11, and it's 65 degrees! Wearing only a sweater, I just walked the kids to school. A sweater! Do you believe? In February?

You know, when I was a kid I used to love "Venus Paradise". Do you remember Venus Paradise? It was a "color by number" set with colored pencils. It seemed like there were a million different pencils, and the sight of them lined up in strict rows, all sharp and ready to draw, set my aesthetic little heart a-fluttering. Thirty years later, my mother-in-law, who is an artist, burst my "Venus Paradise" bubble when she wryly observed, as she watched our daughters playing with "paint by number", that the effort was "totally uncreative". Yep, but it's one way of learning that a tree trunk is actually made of many different colors.

So, you ask, what does Venus Paradise have to do with gardening? Everything—at least in my hands. I've come to realize that I basically "garden by number". Unlike most people, I don't design by function: I don't own a butterfly garden or a secret garden or a conifer garden. Instead, I have a pink garden, an apricot garden, a yellow garden (under construction), a white garden, and soon I hope to add a red garden, a magenta garden, and an orange garden. My motivation? Well, it's slightly easier: since I can't say no to a plant, this way they always have a home (at least until the first time I move them). As famed plantsman Tony Avent (*Plant Delights Nursery*) would say, "I plant in drifts of one." Ditto. Have you ever tried to plant a mixed color border that works in every season? It's the hardest thing in the world to do. Much easier, I think, to start with one color and play off it into its harmonies.

My second reason for "color by number" is that I love strong color. I love orange, for example, and feel pity everytime a friend (or client!) says, "no orange!". How bizarre! Miss orange, and you're missing one of Mother Nature's finest efforts! Orange is great! What would I do without orange calendulas or orange crabapples or 'Princess Irene' tulips or butterfly weed or pumpkins?

Or red! There's another underutilized color! I absolutely cannot wait to put lots of fragrant red roses—all different values, tints, and saturations—around our white toolshed. Mix that red up with some green stuff, like curly parsley and 'Tom Thumb' lettuce and walks of green grass, plus other red flowers

like some ruby colored penstemons or some crimson-foliaged heucheras, and now you're talking "garden". In fact, looking around, the garden I like the least is the one with lots of summer-blooming pastels in it. It's going to get yanked. Way boring.

For some time, I felt intimidated by my choice. It seemed as if no one else gardened by monochrome. I read a ton of magazines: and it's always contrast, contrast, contrast. Especially, it seems, with chartreuse: chartreuse and magenta, chartreuse and screaming blue (for that Greek island effect), even chartreuse and black!

Garden guru Ann Lovejoy added to my inadequacy by writing in a 1996 *Horticulture* article that "color themes are popular with beginning border builders, who appreciate the way such guidelines prevent the natural chaos common to gardens." But hey, I'm not saying that I'm relentless about using one and only one hue: I'll put blue in my yellow border, really I will, because it strengthens the yellow. Actually, ol' Gertie Jekyll said it best: in *Colour Schemes in the Flower Garden* (1908), she wrote, "For instance, a blue garden, for beauty's sake, may be hungering for a group of white lilies, or for something of palest lemon-yellow, but it is not allowed to have it because it is called the blue garden, and there must be no flowers in it but blue flowers. I can see no sense in this...My own idea is that it should be beautiful first, and then just as blue as may be consistent with its best possible beauty".

Actually, I only learned in recent weeks—having bought a copy of a new book called *Color by Design: Planting the Contemporary Garden*—that gardeners like me have a name. We are "colorists"! The book was written by Nori and Sandra Pope, owners of

Hadspen House in Somerset, England. And they are kindred colorists, albeit "off the charts" in experience compared to me. After reading their book, I am now secure that I can pursue a 100' long yellow border without fearing that Ann Lovejoy will call me a sissy.

Regrettably, I am not an artist. Working with color is a big challenge for me, as my artistic friend Susi reminds every time she sees the orange poppy that I still haven't removed from my "warm pink" garden. In my own defense, I do have my excuses for not transplanting: 1) when it's blooming I just don't have the heart; 2) it's in there with 'Marshall's Delight' monarda and so transplanting becomes a big project; 3) I don't yet have an orange garden to put it in; 4) Lord knows I can't simply dig it up and throw it away!

Nonetheless, all gardeners need training, especially in the use of color. Few of us know the difference among the words, hue, tint, tone, value and saturation. Understanding the terms of color is vital, because gardeners should know the rules before breaking them. Another essential ingredient is knowing how color changes under the bleaching of our strong Midwestern sun. I am delighted to have Jan Little and Rosalind Reed contribute excellent essays to this edition, along with wonderful design ideas by a number of local professional gardeners. It's spring! Let's play—with color!

As always, enjoy!



PS Thanks to all of you who contributed native plants to the Brookfield Zoo, after seeing the Zoo's request in *TWG*.

## **SO THAT EXPLAINS IT!**

**(Or, we always knew they  
were in the dark...)**

"The human eye contains two kinds of receptors: rods respond to light or darkness; cones are sensitive to color and detail. Men's eyes have more rods, a thousand times more sensitive to light than cones, so men wait for low light, often seeing better in the dark. With a plethora of cones, women may stumble in the dark but are better able to respond to the subtle blush of a rose. It doesn't stop there. Men and women process the information that comes through their eyes differently. Women store visual information on both sides of their brain, men on one side only: this gives men better depth perception, but at the price of color recall, which is easier for women. Ten percent of men are functionally color blind, and almost none have the selective capacity of a woman's eye, well trained. In November, when I am planting bulbs, I can count on Sandra to recall just the violet shade of *Tulipa* 'Greuze' and whether it will sing with *Dicentra spectabilis* 'Goldheart'. Few great gardens have been made by only one person—I can think of none." —Nori Pope

—As reprinted from the excellent book, *Color by Design: Planting the Contemporary Garden* by Nori and Sandra Pope [1998, SOMA Books, San Francisco, ISBN 1-57959-016-0, \$30]