

The Fragrant News

Winter 2005

Dear Friends,

We have adopted a new format and will now be producing the newsletter on a more regular basis. Please accept our apologies for the lack of information in recent times!

After two horrendous years the weather patterns have returned to normal in 2005. Last year in February we had the "one -in- a -100yr -flood" which left this area water-logged and the soil very heavy with little aeration and difficult to work. This had followed on from the 7 month long drought in 2003. Plants are so tough and resilient they cope. And the dedicated gardener also continues on despite the weather!

This year we have expanded the sales area in the garden shop and now have hundreds of trees on irrigation lines. This enables the watering of each plant from individual drippers that conserves water use. In May we participated in the 4th Garden Show held here in Feilding.



The Manfeild Park Garden Festival was again held in Feilding on the weekend of Mothers day. We participated with a site and won the Best Site award for the show. The theme was "Flower Bedzzz" and we decorated two beds decked out with herbs and succulents.

Our site in the early autumn morning prior to the Garden Festival opening. Yes – that's my shadow!

Jerusalem Artichoke

Helianthus tuberosus

Although the prestigious Globe Artichoke with its large grey leaves and giant thistle-like flower head is a fantastic, very presentable, architectural asset to any landscape, when it comes to eating them they prove a challenge. It is necessary to don the largest napkin around the neck, and making sure there is a bucket either side of the chair the eating can begin. The first bucket contains water and is for the continually dunked hands -to keep them clean and grease free. The second bucket is to throw the individual petals once they have been chewed and sucked to extract the miniscule amount of artichoke flavour. Not the most sociable of dishes to be taken in elegant company. The flavour is wonderful it is just the procedure to earn the privilege which is the problem!

However, with the arrival of the cooler months of the year the Jerusalem Artichoke comes to the astronomical rescue. All autumn the flowers of the Jerusalem Artichoke have been presenting a tall, graceful, yellow and green display in the garden. The plant is part of the sunflower family and the cheerful, yellow, daisy flower often reaches in excess of 2 metres in the garden plot. They are great positioned against a fence as the flower display can add depth to the autumn garden. It is advisable to select an area or plot that can be dedicated just to Jerusalem Artichoke cultivation. The smaller tubers tend to break-up when harvested and remain in the soil ready to be the next generation of plants. After the flower display is over the stems can be cut back to above ground level. The botanical name is *Helianthus tuberosus*. 'Helianthus' for the sunflower and 'tuberosus' for the tuber that grows underground. In the hot summer sun and the long days of autumn the tuber sits underground and increases in size. This is the part to use in the kitchen. The pinkie- brown tuber can be round or slightly elongated and is best left in the ground until needed. Unlike potatoes or kumera, the Jerusalem Artichoke is not dug up, dried and stored. Those gardeners, new to this plant, who do dig it up in early winter have to watch in horror as it shrivels up and goes mouldy rendering it inedible. Make sure when cutting back the stems in the garden that the cut stalk is left about 10cm long. The whereabouts of the

tubers is always readily identifiable. When the tuber is needed in the kitchen it can be dug up, washed and taken inside. What could be fresher?

Jerusalem artichoke can be utilised in the winter kitchen of soups and casseroles. They can be peeled but can also be scrubbed and the skin left on the tubers. Sliced they can be added to soups, casseroles or gently boiled and served in a white sauce.



They have the same flavour as the Globe Artichoke. As this is quite a distinctive taste it is a vegetable that could be introduced to the table in small amounts. A bit similar to using onions – a small amount enhances the dish whereas too much can overpower. They are good roasted, whole in their skins and can be served on their own or with a medley of roast vegetables that would include pumpkin, kumera, yams, potatoes, carrots, parsnip or onions.

Crab Apple Trees

A tree that has many uses is a bonus in the garden. Crab apples perform well in the garden year round. Soon they will be bursting into bud and then delighting us with their spring covering of frothy, white and pink blossoms. It is another welcomed facet of spring to see the daffodils, the lambs and the blossom. Crab apple blossom is sweet and showy. For a few weeks the birds and bees welcome a change in their diet as they eat the buds or harvest the nectar.

After the blossom fall the fat little apples, or crabs, start to appear. As summer progresses, the leaf cover of the crab apple provides shelter and shade in the garden. Most crab apple trees are quite modest and will grow slowly to reach a maximum height of three or four metres. They can be pruned in July and topped if the height needs to be regulated and maintained at a required height. They tend to keep a narrow form so are ideal adjacent to barbeque, pool or patio areas. Autumn time there are two features – the fruit have matured and are ready for harvest and soon the leaves will develop autumn tones as they turn colour and fall.

Now is the time to be planting fruit trees in the garden. While they are still dormant the roots have good opportunity to set roots and get established before the hot and dry summer weather. There is a wide variety of crab apple trees available for the garden. Fruit can range in colour from green, yellow or red. They can either be left on the trees as winter feed for birds or they can be harvested and made into a variety of tasty dishes. The pectin content of crab apples is high and provides one of the best fruits to make apple jelly. Crab Apple Jelly is gourmet food! Atop fresh scones or spread on a warm pikelet is one of nature's gifts.

Crab Apples have an ancient history. Wassailing the orchard on Christmas Eve was a European ceremony that blessed the trees to ensure a good crop for the next summer. (Here in the southern hemisphere June 21st would be our celebration.) Hot cakes were placed in the branches and cider was flung over the branches. Sounds like a good excuse to have a party! Roast apples or crabs were part of the feast. In Midsummer's Night Dream Puck says

“ And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's
In very likeness of a roasted crab.”

Camellias

Camellias have to be among the most versatile of garden shrubs and trees. They have thick, glossy leaves that create formal structure in any garden. Flowering from April through to November, they provide colour interest during the colder, grey days when there is little else putting on a glorious show. Camellias are named after a Jesuit priest, George Josef Karmel. While a missionary in the Philippines he collected many botanical specimens and sent them back to Europe in the 17th century.

Early in winter the sasanqua types come into bloom. These have small leaves and the flowers are 6cm or less across. These varieties are used in confined spaces and often as hedge lines where areas are narrow and limited. They do well against fences and along driveways where they can be trimmed to stay 40 to 50cm wide. Many new varieties of sasanqua camellias are now available that stay 50cm high

and can be grown year round in containers. These make ideal patio or porch plants, especially on the cooler and shady side of the house.

The *Camellia japonica* has over 30,000 different varieties. Japonica (Japanese) camellias and their hybrids start to flower in early winter and as the season progresses different camellias begin to flower. With careful planning, a garden can have a selection of camellias that will flower at different times, ensuring there will always be a colourful flower blooming. Selection can be made according to flower colour, size and shape. Camellia flowers are white, pink or red but with the wide selection available there are many shades of pink and red ranging from the delicate, softest pastel pink to hot pink or coral pink. Some are a combination of shades - one may have white centre and pink edges, another red petals with white marbling effects and some are flecked through every petal with white, pink and red. As usual, there are a few exceptions. In the last few years a range of soft lemon and cream shades has been bred.



The other distinguishing features of the Camellia flowers are their size and form. Some people prefer the single or semi-double shaped flower. These have a prominent display of bright yellow stamens in the centre. A speck of pollen falling on to a velvet red petal that glows in full sunlight is a simple and glorious sight. And yet another person will see beauty in a peony form that has lots of petals and is large, showy and rounded in shape. Formal, double camellia flowers are like water lilies in shape and form a geometric design.

In the garden Camellias need little care and maintenance to develop into handsome features. Easily planted or moved in winter when the soil moisture is high, Camellias are planted from April until Labour weekend. They have fine, surface roots so add compost and fertiliser into the hole when digging over the planting site. Camellias prefer acid soil and NZ soil is naturally acidic. Do not add lime, blood and bone or mushroom compost to camellias. All of these contain calcium that leaches alkaline chemicals to the soil. As the root system is close to the surface, Camellias may need watering over summer until they have settled into the new site. Bank up with leaf mould, some lawn clippings, bark or straw for the first two years after planting to retain moisture. Camellias are native to cold and hilly places so do well inland. They will survive in gullies and damp shaded places, as they prefer humid, cool air. However, they are just as suited to the town garden where diligent gardeners can tend to their needs. The south or west side of the house and section is sometimes hard to landscape. Here, camellias will provide shelter against the cold winter winds and give the area good form and flower colour. Those facing the rising eastern sun can have their blooms damaged on frosty mornings. Planted singularly or in a hedge line, Camellias are hardy and well suited to the Manawatu landscape.

There are other Camellias species that are important in the daily diet of many people around the world. *Camellia sinensis* provides us with the daily cuppa. Millions of tonnes are harvested and processed each year from this one species for export as tea. Leaves from this plant can be harvested and air - dried. Kept in an airtight container, fresh green tea can be made by infusing the leaves. And in Japan and China the seeds of several Camellia species are processed into oil. This camellia oil is the main cooking oil in many Asian countries.

Garlic

May, June and July are the best months to plant garlic. Garlic takes six months to develop and mature. Traditionally it is planted on the shortest day of the year and harvested on the longest day in December. There are several varieties available that can be grown. Elephant Garlic is an unusual type that has very large cloves and a mild flavour.

Garlic grows as a compound bulb. The ten or so cloves are held together at the base and surrounded by the papery outside skin. Split the bulb into separate cloves and leave the outer skin covering intact on each clove. Choose only the well- developed, larger cloves for planting. (The remaining smaller or misshapen cloves can be used in the kitchen.) Each clove needs to be pushed into the prepared ground. Bury it about twice the length of the clove ensuring the blunt end goes in first and the pointed tip is uppermost. Within two weeks it will have germinated and be sprouting. If the cloves are planted too close to the surface then they literally push themselves up and expose the roots. Wow! The power of nature!

Any area of the garden can be suitable for planting garlic. One June we planted the garlic crop around the standard roses along the front fence line having learned that garlic was a great companion plant for roses. The neighbour came over in November and explained her curiosity could be contained no longer. She just had to ask about the “bulbs” as she had waited all spring to see what flower was going to eventuate! She seemed disappointed when told it was the year’s garlic crop. If there is a patch of garden, about a metre in size, the area is sunny and well drained then consider growing the garlic there. It can be planted in formal squares or circles rather than rows. The garlic will need watering in the summer months to ensure nice fat bulbs. (Gardeners are then partaking in edible landscaping.)

Garlic will continue to grow all winter long and in the last month the leaves will wither and start turning yellow. After they have been in the ground 6 months lift them and let them dry in the sun for a few days. They can be plaited and hung in a cool, dry place or cut the stalk and lay them in flat containers for a month to dry out. This is essential to prevent the bulbs getting mildewed.



Winter -time is also the best time to cook with all last year’s garlic. Take a whole bulb and put it in the roasting pan for the last half hour when roasting meat or vegetables. The cloves when served can have the soft pulp squeezed out and enjoyed. The garlic is very sweet when cooked whole. The more garlic is peeled, chopped and crushed the more bitter the flavour becomes as all the sulphur content is stirred up and dominates. So, if using garlic in soups and casseroles leave the cloves whole or cut just once. Placing several cloves under the meat in a roasting dish will keep the garlic moist and the flavour will permeate through the meal. And place whole cloves inside poultry when roasting for the same lovely flavour. It is easier to peel the raw garlic clove when it is held on the chopping board and pressed. This cracks the outer skins and makes it quicker to pop out of the skin. Both parsley and chervil are known to remove the after taste of raw garlic so serve them in your dish too.

Garlic is a strong antiseptic and has been used for thousands of years in medicine. In WW1 the juice was expressed, diluted and applied to wound dressings. There are records from the field hospitals that this method saved many lives as it controlled suppuration. Before vaccinations and antibiotics garlic was successfully used to treat both leprosy and tuberculosis. The Egyptians, Chinese and Greeks all record its many healing applications. Perhaps garlic is the secret ingredient of the healthy Mediterranean diet. What would a pizza or salami sausage be without garlic?

This winter there is a new variety of garlic available from the nursery. It is rocombole which is readily sets fertile seed. This guarantees a fresh crop every year as the seeds will drop from the seed head and starting growing. As garlic leaves can be used as a chives substitute this variety should prove versatile.

The mail-order catalogue is on the website. It has been updated and now contains over 400 herbs. We hope you have enjoyed this newsletter. You will automatically continue to get it unless we hear otherwise.

Regards,

Marilyn & Ian Wightman

{ HYPERLINK "<http://www.fragrantgarden.co.nz>" }

60 Port Street East

Feilding

New Zealand

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