

The Fragrant News

Winter 2007

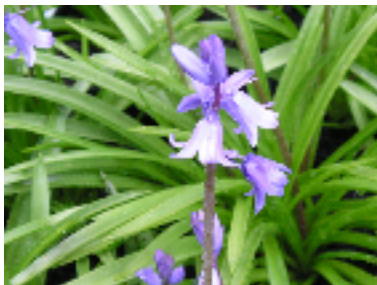
Welcome to the Fragrant News.

Thanks for belonging to this garden circle. We aim to give readers practical information that will help in planning and using the home garden. Much of the newsletter is herbally- based, as herbs are our passion. Growing vegetables and fruits in the garden is a healthy lifestyle choice.

BULBS

Bulbs all grow in a similar fashion. They use the swollen root as a storehouse of nutrient that keeps the plant alive when both leaf and flower have withered and collapsed for the season. While the roots also collapse and compost, safe within the confines of the bulb or rhizome a new shoot is already forming like a foetus in the womb. As soon as the weather conditions are favourable be it the temperature, moisture level of the soil or length of daylight this triggers the growth pattern and the whole cycle of flower, leaf, seed and dormancy begins again. Bulbs have numerous ways to reproduce. They can set seed, which is spread by wildlife, they can split and divide or they produce bulbils. These are small 'baby' or bulbils, which form at the root junction of the bulb. Over a number of years the area of the original planting will enlarge as the bulbs split and divide or increase in number. If growing in the wild the bulbs rely on animals and insects to move the bulbs to new areas. In the home garden, where things are more regulated and hopefully in control the garden owner must ensure that at least once every four years the whole patch is dug up and excess bulbs moved to a new area. Otherwise, the bulbs will be in too crowded an area and will weaken or stop growing. The following underground dwellers, nearly all herbs, feature in the garden of "The Fragrant Garden".

SPANISH BLUBELLS



(*Hyacinthoides hispanica*) This type of bluebell is extremely hardy and grows well in New Zealand. Left to multiply, the bulbs will busily increase and by mid- winter the new foliage will be starting to show through. When there is little else in the garden it is a most gladdening harbinger of spring to see all the active new growth. A pleasant reminder of the warm days ahead. Like all bluebells these are fragrant and a pleasure to have inside in a vase.

LILY OF THE VALEY

(*Convallaria majalis*) Lily of the Valley is well known for its delicately sweet perfume. This is harvested by the perfumery industry. The flower appears out of the newly emerged leaf in late spring and early summer. It does well in semi-shade sites as it needs a cool, moist root-run all year round. Left to establish a large clump it is one of the few bulb and rhizomous plants that grows best if left alone and undisturbed.

HOOP DAFFODILS

(*Narcissus bulbocodium*) The hoop petticoat daffodil is a miniature flowering bulb. The leaf gets about 20cm high and the delicate, scented flower emerges in mid to late winter. The flower is rounded and resembles the wired petticoat fashionable in past centuries. At The Fragrant Garden we have two flower shades of a soft cream and a brighter yellow. They are fine in the garden as long as they will not get over-swamped with more vigorous plants and can also be cultivated in containers. The



bulbs multiply underground to give a mature clump that can exceed 20cm round within a few years.

SOLOMON'S SEAL

(*Polygonatum multiflorum*) This gets its name from the rhizome that has a circular scar attributed to the previous season's leaf stems. This resembles the seal stamp that was used to imprint melted wax to show a letter or document was sealed. The dried rhizome was used to treat bruising and inflammations. Gerrard, one of the first published herbalists in the 17thC, wrote 'The roots of Solomon's Seal, stamped while it is fresh and greene taketh away any bruise, black or blue gotten by falls or women's wilfulness in stumbling upon their hasty husband's fists.' (Interesting to note the wry comment by a herbalist condemning domestic violence 300 hundred years ago.) This bulb is related to the lily-of-the valley and the flower is like a spectacular huge version of nodding white and green bells on gracefully arching 70cm leaf stalks. It flowers in late spring and does well in shady spots under trees. Even the spent stalks make a great autumn feature before being tidied away to the compost or bonfire.

SAFFRON



(*Crocus sativa*) Saffron forms thin, strap-like leaves and when they first emerge in late autumn the flowers quickly appear. The flower stamens need to be picked early in the morning for best flavour. Spread out on paper towels they will dry in ten days. Once flowering has finished the leaves elongate to over 20cm in length. They grow well in free draining soil and are cold hardy lasting all winter before dying back in the spring. They divide and multiply well increasing the potential stock of saffron threads for the kitchen.

BELLADONA

(*Amaryllis* sp.) These lilies are called "Naked Ladies" as they first flower before the leaves grow. The flowers are striking being 50cm high and the pink and white flowers are spectacular. They flower in late summer and after flowering set thick, flax-like leaves. They prefer well-drained soil and will flower better in full sun. Here in the Manawatu, they are a favourite bulb for farms as stock know to leave the plant alone.



PREGNANT ONION

(*Scilla maritima* *Urguninea*) This unusual oddity was once highly regarded medicinally by the ancient herbalists. Nowadays it can be grown for its quirkiness. The main, central bulb starts sprouting a multitude of baby bulbs all around the bulb's edge on the soil's surface. It needs a sunny position with well-drained soil. The white flowers appear in late summer.

GARLIC

(*Allium sativum*) Where would the world be without garlic? In the First World War it was used in the field hospitals to cleanse wounds and help fight infection. Naturally occurring antibiotic properties make garlic as good a medicine as it is a flavour. Wintertime is the right time to plant out separated garlic cloves. Push them deep into the soil and harvest six months later. Each clove will have increased to be a large cluster or corm. With the temperate climate of New Zealand, garlic can be grown year round. Elephant Garlic and Rocambole Garlic are the two varieties that will grow flowers. If left to flower this can distract from the root forming a larger corm. As both these type have tall, elegant flowering spikes then a few extra can be planted simply for the pleasure of enjoying their show.

JOCKEY CAP

(*Tigridia pavonia*) Summer flowering jockey caps are showy and zany. The plant grows leaf first then sends up a 70cm high flower stalk. One by one over a three-week time frame each flower

emerges. They are lily-like in structure and have a triangular geometry. The white flowering variety has a dozen hues of white to cream but the pink, yellow and orange forms are a kaleidoscope of dashes, wiggles and spot formations on the three petals. They are stunning! The flower head will produce copious seeds in the pod and these readily sprout to colonize an area. They require good drainage and mature bulbs will produce each summer for years to come. They are hardy and long lasting.

ORANGES AND LEMONS

The new crops of citrus are ripening well with the cool winter weather and their delicious flavours will soon be enjoyed. Nature is so clever to provide us with a welcome burst of Vit C. Just when our bodies are most receptive to respond to boosting natural defence systems for repelling winter colds and germs.

Different climates require different citrus varieties. Kaffir Limes will grow and flourish in the north Auckland area but die of cold in Taupo. We get away with growing kaffir lime this far south by keeping it in a large tub. It is carted out to the garden for summer but tucked away in a glasshouse for winter. In the royal houses of Europe and England the citrus were treated in a similar fashion. They were kept in the “orangery” for winter. This was a special glasshouse that had steam heat from water filled pipes or even muck heaps of manure that fermented and kept the trees ‘hot’. (Next time in France when the Palace of Versailles is visited in summer, admire the tall orange trees and note their huge containers and that they too are portable so they can be wheeled away for winter.)

It does pay to read up about citrus and appreciate just which types will flourish and grow well in the local climate. Why waste money on trees that will struggle to grow well and bear healthy fruit?

All citrus responds well to a monthly boost of fertilizer over the warmer six months of the year. It flowers in late summer and the fragrance of citrus is one of the very best scents. Its heavy redolent perfume just fills the air. A good excuse to stand and inhale deeply! A light prune to shape and cut out any dieback or limbs that are making the tree too dense can be done in spring. This helps air circulation and will lessen any fungal occurrence. One hazard of New Zealand is the native borer, which regards citrus wood as its caviar. Watch for the tell tale signs of sawdust under the tree. Remove any dieback caused by the insect as soon as it is noticed.

Citrus is a good accompaniment to many seafood dishes in the kitchen. Freshly squeezed lemon or lime juice on poached or pan-fried fish is excellent and all the flavour needed to enhance the dish. Hummus that has lemon juice added is the best variety. And all the sweet desserts and iced cakes that incorporate lemon are numerous. When making a no-sugar stevia cake for diabetic friends an icing of cream cheese thinned with lemon juice and zest is perfect. It eliminates the icing sugar and surprisingly does not detract from the sugarless flavour. Adding lemon juice to chopped fresh fruit will stop browning of the salad. Lemon juice in hot water makes an excellent hot drink. Add honey, garlic or whiskey to help combat a sore throat and ease a head cold - Great to go to sleep on when feeling low with a stuffy cold.

Oranges can be used in the same ways. Grapefruit cut in half are an ideal way to start the day in winter and mandarins are perfect as healthy snacks during the day. Tangelos are juicy and another daily fruit choice as well.

Another fruit that thrives here is the kumquat. It is an ornamental citrus as the bright orange fruit is lip-smackingly bitter and it is usually used for topiary specimens in containers. It does make delicious marmalade though. Sliced thinly, the orange fruit adds a new dimension to marmalade.

If only the juice of citrus fruit is being utilized take time to pare away the skin with a vegetable peeler as well. Attempt to just take the top layer and leave the thicker pith. Lay this out on a paper towel and dry. It can be used to flavour dishes as well as perfume bowls of pot pourri. If the climate is too cold for citrus fruit to thrive then have a north- living friend send a box of



citrus south as a present! Eat and cook with it then squeeze out the surplus juice and freeze in ice block cubes. It keeps very well frozen and can be utilized all year round. Lemons can be used in cosmetic making and the spent lemon case does a great job to whiten and clean hands – especially gardener’s dirty digits! Ian’s Mother used to make the best marmalade ever and her annual gift of several jars of “Myrtle’s Marmalade” is fondly remembered.

The following is as close as I can get to replicate her dish. The secret is to prepare the fruit and leave it to soak overnight. This softens the peel and releases all the flavour into the jam. Use whatever citrus fruit is on hand. Make a note of each batch and the type of citrus used so the most preferred combination could be remembered and remade.

CITRUS MARMALADE

Use whatever citrus is to hand. As long as the total weight makes up to 1.5kg of fruit. I use any combination – sometimes lemons, mandarins, grapefruit and kumquat. If there is only one lime then that is all that can be used. This makes each batch completely different depending what citrus is available. Make sure there is plenty of time and just sit at the kitchen table and slice the fruit very finely. Remove pips as they appear and if some escape into the mix do not be unduly worried. This proves that it is home made! Keep tipping the chopping board as it fills, into the pottery or plastic container. Do not use a metal bowl or pot. There is a lot of acid being released and this needs a non-reactive surface so avoid aluminium or stainless steel containers.

When the fruit is all chopped add 2 litres of water. Cover the container with cling film and leave at least 24 hours. Tip all the mix into a large pan and slowly heat. When it has come to the boil start adding cup by cup 1.5kg of sugar. Allow the jam to come back to boiling point and boil for about five minutes before adding the next measure of sugar. When all the sugar is in and dissolved allow the pot to boil for 15 minutes more. Test in a saucer of water by adding a few drops of marmalade. If set this will roll into a firm ball. If this does not occur, add a packet of jam set to ensure a firm marmalade. Boil for a further 5 minutes then pour the marmalade into sterilized jars. (I cheat and put six clean jars into the microwave and process on high for two minutes.) Another tip, place hot jars onto a wooden chopping board to pour in the boiling jam. Placing a hot jar onto a bench top that is cooler in temperature will often crack the jar. Next, just enjoy the strong, fresh flavour -especially good on hot toast, crumpets or muffins for breakfast mmmmmm!



Hope you are braving the cold, wet and wind and getting out to the garden just as usual. Nothing like some good energetic work of fruit tree pruning, raking up leaves, weeding or turning over the garden to keep warm and enjoy the fresh air. Winter is a great time to assess the garden and make planning decisions for all the work of spring and summer. We enjoy the stroll round the garden dreaming and scheming. This winter there are seven tuis enjoying the camellia and gum nectar. What a pleasure to have them as guests! November in Wellington is conference time in the herb world. Both Ian and Marilyn are guest speakers. If you

want to know more then use the Herb Federation of New Zealand’s website. { HYPERLINK "http://www.herbs.org.nz" }

**Herbally Yours,
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