

The Fragrant News

Spring 2008

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Greetings to all the herbies!

One week there is 80mls of rain over three days, two frosts in a row and the next week the temperatures are into the twenties and it is so sunny and dry! ADAPTABILITY and DILIGENCE seem to be the keywords! Keeping a close watch on the weather and being prepared for all that just might happen seem a good gardening idea. A sister-in-law from Whangarei area made comment that they have had good fruit set on the olives this year. Rushing out the same day to observe the olives in our garden reveals the flower buds are just forming. A reminder about how different gardening conditions can be in this fair land of ours.

Hope you are enjoying the garden and able to get out into it –when the weather permits.

Herbally yours,

Ian and Marilyn Wightman

GARDENERS ARE A SPECIAL BREED OF PEOPLE

Gardeners are optimists – They are always planting seeds, trees and shrubs. They belong to all the local horticultural groups – Rose Society, Succulent and Cactus Society, Orchid Society, Herb Society, Rhododendron Society, Dahlia Society, Camellia Society, Garden Groups. Whew! The list goes on and on! All have a love of gardening and are all experts or seekers of gardening lore. They are out there, whatever the weather, digging, and fertilising, planting, observing, just enjoying being in the garden.



Gardeners are stubborn. They will go out in the snow, frost, drought, deluge, whatever and do the chore that has been delegated for that day or that moment. They know that the next few hours may see a sudden weather change and those plants or seeds need to be in the ground so they can respond immediately to the great conditions!

Gardeners are determined. They are focused on phoning, writing, e-mailing all those special people who are experts and hold the only known collection of “Spotted, outer- Mongolian mint” so they too, can have a precious plant and add it to their collection.

Gardeners are artistic. They spend hours researching and consulting others for ideas and designs and creations that can be adapted to their own garden and enhance and enliven the area. They line up hapless “volunteers” to hold the

other end of a tape measure and stand round for hours while graphs are made and measurements recorded.

Gardeners are creative. They grow unusual plants and shrubs. They know what their friends have in their gardens. They walk the dogs and collect dried twigs and contortions along the seashore and the riverbank. These are dried or painted and then adapted into all the wonderful floral artwork and design that extends the garden to a higher dimension.

Gardeners are imaginative. They spend hours, weeks, and years developing new strains, cultivars, and flower colours. These are all named – Exquisite, Eddie’s Wonder, Desire, Sensation, Anniversary, Pink Splendour. All that enthusiasm spills over into the names that these new creations are given.

Gardeners are hard workers. They will get up at the crack of dawn to weed, trim, plant, fertilise, care, tender and nurture. Then they will be still going when the daylight has dimmed and the full moon cheerfully provides yet more light for the garden endeavours to continue.



Gardeners are appreciative. They love to see the rewards of all that hard work. Be it an accolade from their gardening club when they win a prize. Or a very impressed crowd of visitors when they sit down to partake of a feast harvested from the garden. To an overwhelmed recipient of a jar of pickles, preserves or jam that is the product of the garden. Or the new neighbour who receives a fresh feed of lettuce and carrots and wonders if that fantastic gardener next door might be prepared to help them put in that longed for vege patch.

Now the spring weather is here get out and breathe the fresh air. Turn over the vegetable garden. Work out where the new fruit tree could fit in. Plan that living hedge between you and the front verge. Go and get that luscious pink flowering shrub.

“Perhaps no word of six letters concentrates so much human satisfaction as the word “garden”. Not accidentally, indeed, did the inspired writer make Paradise a garden; and still today, when a man has found all the rest of the world vanity, he retires into his garden. “ - R. Le Gallienne (Corners of Grey old Gardens)

TREES IN THE GARDEN

Trees define a home. If two pyramid shaped trees, nicely trimmed, sit either side of the front porch in matching containers -they say “Welcome!” to anyone



walking up the drive. A big shade tree, with a garden seat underneath says “Here’s the place to relax.” This time of year, flowering cherry trees are in full flourish and many can be seen as a cluster at the front driveway or lining the path up to the house. They are beautiful with flowers on the tree and the pleasant pink carpet of blossom petals falling on the lawn. The Japanese honour these flowers often in their art and poetry. They

appreciate their beauty. Many trees are renowned for their petal fall. Koelreuterias are called Golden Rain Trees. Walking under a line of them in the height of summer, as the golden petals cascade down makes the walker appreciate the aptness of their name. How many people have been given first names that belong to trees? Lilac, Rosemary, Rose, Daphne, Myrtle and Erica all are honoured with sweet perfumes and hopefully, sweet people too.

Every garden can have a tree as a living focus. Trees abound in all shapes and sizes and there will always be one to suit any size garden and any situation. Assess the garden and work out what is the climate, sun or shade aspect, wet, windy, sheltered or dry detail of that individual spot. Choosing a tree for the garden needs some thought and consideration for plants best suited to the area. For instance, Daphnes tend to be put in the sunny front of the house where they can be admired and their perfume

appreciated. However after a few hot summers they fizzle out. Knowing that Daphnes need a cool root run and prefer a shady area with good drainage will see them planted at the back and under shade. In this better site that suits them they will thrive.

Trees flower throughout the year. In winter Witchhazels, Viburnum burkwoodii and Wintersweet have colour and strong perfume. In autumn the taller Salvias



provide colour and accent while all around, the deciduous trees perform their autumn leaf drop in shades of brown, red and yellow. Summer time has many flowering trees such as Evergreen Magnolias, Tulip trees (Liriodendron) and Dogwoods (Cornus). This time of year the modest NZ trees provide colour with Kowhais, Hoheria's and some of the night scented Pittosporum.

Trees provide fruit as well as blossom and shade. Edible trees can range from gooseberry and currant bushes to pine nuts or almonds as well as apples, plums and apricots. There is a wide choice of fruits and nuts available.

**“He who plants a tree
Plants a hope”**

Lucy Larcom – “Plant a Tree”

Right now in spring it is optimum time to plant trees. They need the cool, moist soil left over from winter to soothe their roots and let them adapt to the new environment. Remember to stake newly planted trees too. Equinoxal winds can snap those tender young roots very easily. Having the tree or shrub staked allows it to remain secure against the wind and lets the roots keep on growing!

Spring time there are lots of fragrant trees in bud and flower. Mulberry, Carolina All Spice, Lilac, Osage Orange, Lime, Oak, Elder, Willow are but a few of the herbal trees that grow well in New Zealand.

The Herb Federation of New Zealand holds an annual herb week in March to celebrate the useful plants. 2009 sees the four featured herbs of Herb Awareness Week that are all trees. Herbs can be trees too!

SPRING SALAD HERBS

The vegetable garden is a bit skint on providing the traditionally accepted fresh green leaf for the salad bowl right now. The last few cabbages are a bit strong and tough and the lettuces are fast running out. Perennial spinach is a good substitute as the leaves are softer and smaller than silver beet. This winter we have experienced mangle beet for the first time. The leaves are good for salads too. And the one or two carrots that are pulled and grated into the salad bowl

also have the carrot leaves cut up and added to the greens. There are all the spring greens to enjoy. In snow bound countries the spring is longed for when



the first fresh green herbs start to appear. One of the first is Spring Beauty. The leaves of this small annual herb are crisp, juicy and a joy to munch on this time of year. Montia or Claytonia are the botanical family names. While it used to be always known as 'Spring Beauty' in ancient Europe, come the Californian Gold Rush and the miners needing the green for scurvy prevention and it gets

reinvented as 'Miner's Lettuce'. As some of these miners also made it to Australia and then NZ their new name for the herb tends to dominate. Raraki or Puha is also in fine form as is chickweed, groundsel, dandelion and cleavers. Yes, it is a tasty bite if just the tender young tips are harvested and added to the salad. Honesty leaf was considered gourmet tucker in Tudor times but I find it a bit tough and chewy. Sweet young comfrey leaves, just one or two are a tastier option right now. Then there is chicory, cress, rocket, Good King Henry to add as well. Once the salad is all compiled the last of the marigold petals can be plucked and sprinkled over the tasty fare. As the lemon crop has been phenomenal this year a light dressing of oil and lemon juice completes the bowl. Add a diced apple, some crumbled feta, a side dish of chick peas or bacon and the meal is ready!

Herbally yours,
Marilyn and Ian Wightman
New Zealand
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Title: FRAGRANT NEWS AUTUMN 2008
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Author: Ian Wightman
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 15/10/2008 8:22 PM
Change Number: 5
Last Saved On: 22/10/2008 8:56 AM
Last Saved By: Ian Wightman
Total Editing Time: 37 Minutes
Last Printed On: 29/07/2009 1:57 PM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 4
Number of Words: 1,418 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 8,085 (approx.)