

FLAK'S NEWS

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your environment"*

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The Rites of Springtime...

I'm back! This newsletter has become a spring tradition—something like the first robin on your lawn. When you see my newsletter in the mail, I hope your thoughts are of spring fever and those first days of spring when you can get outside and enjoy family and friends in your yard. I hope I have been helpful in providing a retreat for you to do that! As my busy season takes over my spring and summer, I certainly treasure time in my own backyard. Every year I vow to slow down—you know, take time to smell the roses! I have found that nature has a way of making us do that automatically as we get older, if you know what I mean! Seriously, next to my family, my business is the part of my life that brings me the biggest sense of accom-

plishment and pride. In some ways though, I feel as though I am caught in a tough spot. I am getting so busy that I could use two of me. I find it more difficult to make necessary phone calls in a timely manner. And if you know me well, you know it's not because I am too shy to talk! If I have been remiss in getting back to any of you, please know that this is one area I am working on changing. I hesitate to hire another designer because I feel that quality and my high standards would be difficult to monitor. So bear with me and accept my apologies as I work through these growing pains.

As usual, I have spent the off-season streamlining procedures behind the scenes and preparing for the upcoming season. I

was also busy serving on three MNLA (Minnesota Nursery and Landscape Association) Committees. I have served for many years on the Certification Committee, and recently joined the Landscape Design Committee and the Landscape Contractors Committee. I also became a member of the Chanhassen Chamber of Commerce and joined their Government Action Committee. I think that's something else that happens at my age—you join a lot of clubs and committees! But the winter wasn't all work. I took time off for trips to California, Florida, and Italy so I am refreshed and ready to go when you are! Landscaping season will be here before you know it! Give me a call and we can discuss your needs for 2005!

Greg Flakne, CP

Gardening Tips for a Green Earth

Earth Day is April 22 and as this date is approaching, I thought I would touch on the topic of earth-friendly gardening. There is so much we can do to promote healthy plants and lawns without destroying the very land we are trying to beautify! Many products and chemicals can be used with limited or no negative impact on the soil and ground water.

Whatever products you choose to use, always read directions on the packages as some ingredients may be dangerous when used with other ingredients or when applied incorrectly. Always enlist the help of your garden center staff when purchasing any chemicals.

Here are a few tips taken from a great book, "1001 Natural

Remedies" by Laurel Vukovic, available at Barnes and Noble.

Healthy soil: In a word — compost. A healthy compost pile requires equal amounts of *brown* materials (dried leaves, shredded newspaper, or dried flowers and plants) and *green* materials (grass

(continued on page 3)

What's HOT - Hydrangeas!

The hydrangea trend has caught the eye of many retailers and decorators, as well as gardeners! Silk and dried hydrangeas adorn wreaths and other floral arrangements and give a neat, contemporary look when massed in a vase. This look has become so popular it appears on magazine covers and as décor in retail stores. But why rely on the silk version when you can have the real thing? Hydrangeas are great for foundation plantings, shrub borders, or as an accent in your garden. We are lucky to have quite a few hydrangeas that are hardy for our Minnesota climate. The blooms are long lasting for outdoor color or you can cut the blooms and enjoy them indoors. The blooms even dry beautifully for an everlasting arrangement. Some varieties have even been grafted on a stick to create tree forms of these blooming beauties. There are so many colorful options and these flowering shrubs are easy to care for and are relatively disease and insect resistant. What more could you ask for?

Hydrangea blooms are actually made of up clusters of small flowers. Size, color, and shape of the flowers vary with the different varieties of plants. Blooming seasons and length of bloom time can vary, as well. Hydrangeas that bloom on new growth can be pruned in early spring as the new buds begin to emerge on the lower branches. You will find that hydrangeas that bloom on the old wood of the shrub require more careful pruning and more protection from the winter elements, but will be worth your efforts. But read on to find out Minnesota's new secret weapon against wicked winters and botched pruning jobs — Endless Summer!

Endless Summer *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Bailmer' This hydrangea has caused so much excitement in Minnesota! It is the first hydrangea to flower on both old and new wood, so it blooms continually throughout the growing season. Deadheading and cut-

ting back the shrub during the bloom cycle will actually encourage more flowering in the Endless Summer variety. Trimming any other variety of macrophylla hydrangea during the blooming cycle would put an end to the blooms for that season. Endless Summer's large flowers are about eight inches across and will bloom a beautiful blue in acidic soils (pH 5-5.8) and a lovely pink in alkaline soils (pH 6-7). The shrub will grow three to five feet tall and wide. This variety was just made available to my clients last year. I am looking forward to seeing the growth and hardiness of this variety after its first winter in the ground. Since it's almost fool-proof, this could be THE hydrangea for Minnesota!



Endless Summer blooms



Endless Summer shrub

Annabelle *Hydrangea arborescens* 'Annabelle' This beautiful hydrangea is also called a Snowball hydrangea for its very large, symmetrical flowers that bloom in June and July. It is probably the showiest hydrangea with creamy white flowers that can measure eight inches across. The shrub can grow up to four to five feet high and three to five feet wide. Annabelle grows well in the shade. (photo of Annabelle at the top of next column)



Annabelle

PeeGee *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora' PeeGee was named after its species (*paniculata* 'Grandiflora', hence, P.G.). PeeGee is very hardy in Minnesota. Large, cone-shaped flowers bloom in August and September. The blooms open as a creamy white color, then fade to a beautiful bronze-pink. This shrub can grow up to eight to ten feet tall and wide in our climate. They are adaptable when it comes to soil pH and sun exposure — an easier hydrangea to grow if you have the space. PeeGee also grows well in the tree form.



PeeGee in tree form

Tardiva *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Tardiva' Tardiva is similar to PeeGee, although it flowers later in the season and has slightly smaller blooms. It grows up to six to eight feet tall and eight to ten feet wide. The glossy leaves of this tall, lush shrub, create an elegant contrast with the cream colored blooms. Tardiva, like PeeGee, grows well in tree form. (photo of Tardiva at the top of next column)



Tardiva

Unique *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Unique' Unique is another close relative of Tardiva and PeeGee. This upright, mounded shrub produces large, white flowers. It can grow to a height of eight feet and a width of ten feet. Unique blooms on new wood, which makes it a more reliable bloomer in our climate. Unique also grows well in tree form.



Unique

Pink Diamond *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Pink Diamond' This colorful, upright hydrangea, with cone-shaped blooms, is very hardy for our Minnesota winters. This shrub will grow up to three to four feet wide and tall. The large medium-pink flowers bloom in July and August.



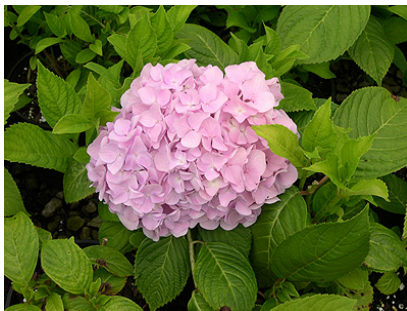
Pink Diamond

Nikko Blue *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Nikko Blue' Although it is rated for zone 5 (the Twin Cities are in zone 4), Nikko is worth the effort if extra care is taken in the winter. When grown in acidic soil, the blooms will be a spectacular blue! If the soil is alkaline or neutral, the blooms will be pink. The flowers bloom in July and August and can be six inches across. Nikko can grow to four to five feet high and wide. The buds of Nikko Blue form on the old wood, so if our winter temps damage the plant, you may miss one season of blooms. Protecting the old wood is a priority with this hydrangea so pruning can be a bit tricky. Read how "Endless Summer" can be a wonderful substitute to this higher maintenance variety.



Nikko Blue

All Summer Beauty *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'All Summer Beauty' This hydrangea is very similar to Nikko Blue, although it is a bit smaller. It can produce blue or pink flowers in July and August. It is also rated for zone 5, but it is hardy for our Minnesota winters. Since the buds can form on new wood, winter damage won't prevent flowers from blooming.



All Summer Beauty

If hydrangeas suit you for indoor and outdoor color and beauty, I am happy to provide all the necessary information to make your hydrangeas show!

Green Earth...

clippings, fruit and veggie peelings, coffee grounds, egg shells, fresh plant and flower clippings). Use compost to improve the nutrient content of your soil or as a mulch. Make sure you don't include diseased plants or weeds that have gone to seed in your compost pile. Check out www.mastercomposter.com for more composting information than you will probably ever need.

Pest Control: Encourage beneficial insects to visit your yard by providing their favorite habitats and food sources. Comfrey, Echinacea, fennel, garlic chives, lavender, zinnias, lupine and many other plants will invite ladybugs, green lacewings, spiders, even birds to your yard. These helpful critters will prey on the destructive pests such as aphids to keep your garden and yard and plants healthy.

Invite birds to your yard: Provide additional food and water to encourage birds to visit your yard. A mixture of millet and black sunflower seeds will bring wrens, robins, and jays to your yard to eat pesky insects.

Insecticide Soap and Horticultural Oil are also very effective against soft-bodied insects.

Weed Control: Weeds can't compete with a healthy lawn:

1. Keep your grass long (3 to 4") to retain moisture and keep weeds at bay.
2. Water longer at each session and with less frequency for healthy roots.
3. When you mow, let the clippings fall on the grass for proper soil pH.
4. Aerate, de-thatch and reseed yearly.
5. Scatter grass seed on thin spots in your lawn as soon as they appear. Keep bare soil in landscape beds and gardens mulched to prevent weeds from popping up.
6. Fertilize with phosphorus free fertilizer. *Ringer's Restore* and *Ringer's Supreme* are natural fertilizers for lawns and gardens.

There are many ways to maintain a healthy yard and garden with natural remedies. Many other ideas are contained in Laurel Vukovic's book.

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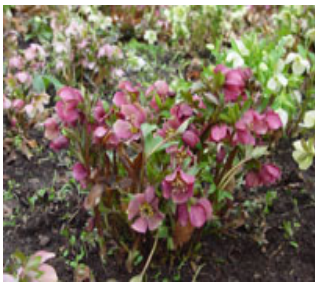
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Your satisfaction is my success

Helleborus xhybridus “Lenten Rose”

2005 Perennial Plant of the Year



The Perennial Plant Association has announced that the Perennial Plant of the year 2005 is *Helleborus xhybridus*, commonly known as ‘Lenten Rose’. A hybrid of nine different species, the Lenten Rose can provide a rainbow of colors to any garden. From pure white to a plum color, with shades of red, pink and yellow in between, these beautiful roses can last up to two months. And some enthusiasts believe that the foliage is actually more beautiful than the flower! The leaves are divided into seven to nine segments and look like coarse, leathery umbrellas. The interesting texture of the foliage adds interest to a garden long after the flowers have faded. Lenten Roses prefer shady to slightly sunny locations, and require well-drained soil for optimum growth. They are hardy plants, that once established, require only occasional watering.

