

# FLAK'S NEWS

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## Flakne comes out of hibernation

The snow is gone! I've returned from my annual pilgrimage to Florida and my phone is starting to ring more often. It must be spring! My adrenaline kicks in a bit more and my excitement about getting back to work is growing. I do work during the winter months, though not at my summertime pace. As always, I attended the Minnesota Landscape

Nursery Convention. I still continue to serve on the Certification Committee for the MNLA (CNLP). This winter, I also began serving on the Landscape Design Committee for the MNLA. And I am also excited to begin working on a new sub-committee to design a new "Dry Stone Garden" at the U of M Landscape Arboretum. This will be a place where visi-

tors can go to view different types of stone hardscapes. I also had the pleasure of moving into my new office space and decorating it with new computer equipment! I enjoy the laid back days of winter but I am always eager to get going again in the spring. I wonder if this is how the hibernating animals feel this time of year...

## Perennials still hot after all these years!

Several years ago, I featured an article entitled, "What's Hot—Perennials". People are continuing to request perennials in their landscape plans, including full blown perennial gardens. And perennials offer such a variety of colors and shapes and textures; it's easy to incorporate them into almost any outdoor area. The Perennial Plant Association has believed for a long time how "hot" perennials are. To promote the use of perennials, they began naming a select perennial to become "Perennial of the Year". Perennials must meet the following criteria to be named "Perennial of the Year":

2. Low maintenance
3. Easily propagated
4. Exhibits multiple seasonal interests.

I have begun to feature the current year's winner on the back of my newsletter. Are you curious to find out which other perennials have made the list?



One of my personal favorites: *Salvia* 'Mainacht' *May Night* (dark purple in background)

## Perennial Plant of the Year Index

- 2003** *Leucanthemum* 'Becky'  
**2002** *Phlox* 'David'  
**2001** *Calamagrostis xacutiflora* 'Karl Foerster'  
**2000** *Scabiosa columbaria* 'Butterfly Blue'  
**1999** *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* 'Goldsturm'  
**1998** *Echinacea purpurea* 'Magnus'  
**1997** *Salvia* 'Mainacht' *May Night*  
**1996** *Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red'  
**1995** *Perovskia atriplicifolia*  
**1994** *Astilbe* 'Sprite'  
**1993** *Veronica* 'Sunny Border Blue'  
**1992** *Coreopsis verticillata* 'Moonbeam'  
**1991** *Heuchera micrantha* 'Palace Purple'  
**1990** *Phlox stolonifera*

# Rhododendrons—Hardy for Minnesota !

Beautiful and showy, several species of rhododendrons can be used in Minnesota landscapes. I use rhododendrons for their full shape and beautiful dark foliage that lasts all year 'round. The key to growing rhododendrons successfully lies in proper site selection and soil preparation. With very little maintenance, these gorgeous shrubs will give you years of colorful pleasure!

## Choosing the proper location:

Evergreen rhododendrons will thrive in full or partial sun, although they are sensitive to extreme heat. I try to avoid planting them on a sunny south side of a house. Heat can be reflected and build up and scorching can be a problem. Also, it is best to avoid windy areas if possible.

## Planting:

The roots of most rhododendrons run only four to six inches deep so it is important not to plant rhododendrons too deep. They are to be planted in a shallow hole, then backfilled with a mixture of acid peat and existing soil.

## Fertilization:

Rhododendrons can be fertilized once or twice a year during spring or summer. Use an acid fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate or you can purchase special acid enriched fertilizers at your local garden center.

Top dressing with an organic mulch is very beneficial to rhododendrons. Mulch can help retain water within the soil during hot spells, as well as keep the soil temperature cool. And a healthy dose of mulch can also keep the weeds at bay! Be careful not to hoe or cultivate too deep or the root system can be destroyed.

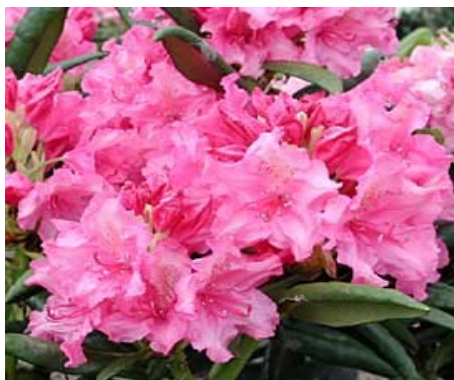
**Aglo:** Deep rose-pink flowers with a red eye bloom in early May. The foliage is a beautiful dark green and turns copper-bronze in the fall. ▼



**Anna H. Hall:** Pale pink flowers fade to white. Anna is a rounded shaped shrub and keeps her green leaves throughout the year. ▼



**Haaga:** Rose-pink flowers bloom in mid-May. Haaga has an upright shape and maintains its dark green foliage year 'round. Haaga is a larger rhododendron—about 7' tall. ▼



**Hellikki:** Dark violet-red flowers bloom in mid May and look beautiful next to deep green foliage. Hellikki is a spreading rhododendron with a dense, upright growth habit. ▼



**Helsinki University:** Bright pink flowers with orange-red flecks bloom against dark green foliage. ▼



**Henry's Red:** Beautiful dark red flowers bloom in mid-May. Leaves are large and dark green. ▼



**Ken Janeck:** Deep pink flowers bloom in mid-May on this rounded shrub. The dark green foliage is actually wooly underneath! A photo of Ken Janeck is on next column. ►



**Mikkeli:** Large white flowers with a tinge of light pink. Flowers have little green flecks and bloom in mid-May. Foliage is dark green. ▼



**Northern Starburst:** Red buds turn to bright pink flowers. Glossy green foliage turns reddish-brown, then purple-black in the fall. ▼



**PJM and PJM Compact:** These are very popular rhododendrons with bright lavender-pink flowers which bloom in early May. Dark green foliage turns a beautiful mahogany in the fall. Photo of PJM on the next column. ►



**Pohjola's Daughter:** A slow spreading shrub with pink blooms that fade to pure white. Foliage is dark green. ▼



**Purple Gem:** This slow-growing rhododendron shows off masses of tiny blue-purple flowers in mid-May. Small green leaves turn a beautiful bronze in the winter. ▼



**Scintillation:** Deep pink flowers bloom in mid-May. Dark green, large leaf foliage. ▼



**Pests:**

One benefit of our Minnesota climate is that rhododendrons don't have many serious problems with pests so pesticides are usually not necessary. A hot and humid summer may promote powdery mildew. If chlorotic foliage indicates that the soil is too alkaline, then peat, sulfur, or ferrous sulfate can be added to the soil.

Should rabbits, deer or mice find your shrubs too tempting, just cover with hardware cloth during the winter months.

**Which ones for Minnesota?**

The blooms are the least hardy part of the plant, and of course, have the most value to us. The good news is that even if a harsh winter or late frost kills the buds, the plant itself will most likely remain unharmed and can produce a lovely growth of blooms the next year!

Stick with the species mentioned in this article for low maintenance and hardy growth!

<b>Rhododendron Quick Reference Guide</b>		
<b>Flower Color</b>	<b>Leaf Type</b>	<b>Height</b>
<i>Lavender-pink</i>		
PJM	Small	4-6'
PJM Compact	Small	3-5'
<i>Pink</i>		
Aglo	Small	3-4'
Anna H. Hall	Large	5'
Haaga	Large	7'
Helsinki University	Large	6'
Ken Janeck	Large	3'
Northern Starburst	Small	4-5'
Pohjola's Daughter	Large	3'
Scintillation	Large	4-6'
<i>Purple</i>		
Purple Gem	Small	18-24"
<i>Red</i>		
Hellikki	Large	6'
Henry's Red	Large	3-5'
<i>White</i>		
Mikkeli	Large	5-6'

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**FLAKNE'S EXTERIOR DESIGN/SCAPE CO.**

# FLAK'S NEWS

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2003 Perennial Plant of the Year

**LEUCANTHEMUM**  
*Becky*

The Perennial Plant Association has announced that the Perennial Plant of the year 2003 is *Leucanthemum 'Becky'*, otherwise commonly known as the Shasta daisy. This perennial is an excellent choice to be grown en masse in a perennial border, in natural landscapes to attract butterflies, in a large pot, or even by itself. "Becky" grows best in full sun, although it can withstand partial shade. The soil should be moist, but well-drained. This hardy perennial can provide beautiful color from July through September, and will continue to bloom, as long as dead blooms are trimmed. And what do you do with all of those blooms? Bring them indoors! 'Becky' makes a lovely cut flower!