

Garden Gatherings

A newsletter by the
Renville County Master Gardeners
containing USDA Zone 4 appropriate
information

Volume 62

May 2011



Bella Anna™

Pink Annabelle Hydrangea

The Newest Addition to the Endless Summer®
Collection

Say hello to Bella Anna™, a remarkable reblooming magenta-pink Hydrangea arborescens ('Annabelle'). This hydrangea is a color breakthrough for Hydrangea arborescens and the newest addition to the Endless Summer® Collection. This arborescens blooms from summer all the way through fall, just like the other hydrangeas in this extraordinary collection.

Bella Anna features a strong stem to support the weight of those beautiful magenta-pink blooms, ensuring each one stands tall and proud. And it certainly wasn't by accident. Over 50 'Annabelles' were painstakingly tested before arriving at one that was good enough to be called an Endless Summer. And, like the rest of the Endless Summer Collection, Bella Anna is easy to grow and performs effortlessly.

Shrub Type: Deciduous
Garden Height: 6' x 6' Tall
Zones: 4 - 9
Blooms on new wood
Exposure: Part shade

Source - www.endlesssummerblooms.com

Inside this issue:

- May Garden Tips
- Plant Purchasing Checklist
- Understanding Mulches and Mulching
- Gardening As We Age
- A Systemic Wildlife Repellent
- Book Review

What's Happening...

in our area

McLeod County Hort Society Plant Sale – May 14

McLeod County Fairgrounds – 9 a.m.

Meeker County Hort Society Plant Sale – May 14

Contact - hedtk018@umn.edu

Hutchinson Herb Walk, May 28

Contact – (320) 587-6094 or www.healthconnie.com

Garden Tour, “River Glen Gardens”, Sauk Centre – June 28,

Contact - Mary Hagen wmhhagen@frontiernet.net

Horticulture Night – West Central Research and Outreach
Center, Morris, July 28

at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum

Arboretum Exhibits

- “Seed Stories” - Now through May 15
- “Steel Roots” Exhibit – Beginning April 16
- Auxiliary Plant Sale – May 14 & 15 9 – 4

Sign up for the e-newsletter, get regular updates and view
full schedule of events at: www.arboretum.umn.edu

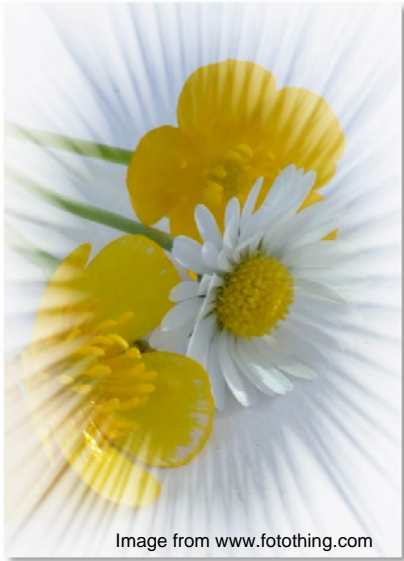


Image from www.fotothing.com

Plant purchasing CHECKLIST

When buying
ANNUALS, look for:

- Buds over blooms
- Healthy growth above and below the soil
- New growth at the base of leggy plants
- No or few roots growing out of the pot

When buying
PERENNIALS, look for:

- Healthy growth above and below the soil
- Multiple stems or crowns
- Fuller growth rather than taller growth

When buying
SHRUBS, look for:

- Pleasing branch structure
- No insect damage
- Healthy, well-distributed roots
- Fuller growth rather than taller growth

-Source – *Fine Gardening* magazine

May Gardening Tips

- Most flowering annuals are available as sturdy seedlings at garden centers and nurseries, but many will grow just as well or even better when you seed them directly into the garden. Zinnias, cosmos, bachelor's buttons, California poppies, and marigolds are good examples of annuals that grow rapidly from seed. But if you want annuals for containers, buy well-developed transplants that will look good the minute you pot them up.
- Early May is a good time to plant grass seed, but for good results you need to rough up the soil first. Unfortunately, this exposes crabgrass and other weed seeds that will sprout right along with your new grass. To stop most weed seeds, apply a specially formulated version of pre-emergence herbicide right after seeding. The label must state clearly that it's meant for newly seeded lawns, otherwise it will kill desired grass seeds, too.
- If you have an ornamental crabapple tree that's prone to apple scab - leaves that develop dark spots, then drop - begin a fungicide spray program before its flower buds open. If scab is bad every year, consider replacing it with a scab-resistant variety. Many hold their fruit in winter so there's no mess to deal with in fall. Visit the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum to see hundreds of crabapples in bloom around Mother's Day. Check them again in October to see their fruit. Find out "What's in Bloom" at <http://www.arboretum.umn.edu/>
- Attract butterflies to your yard by planting many good nectar-producing flowers. Include coneflowers, Russian sage, Joe-Pye weed, butterfly weed (Asclepias), beebalm, catmint, Mexican sunflower (Tithonia) and single or semi-double zinnias. Plan to have several species blooming at any given time. Though butterfly larvae (caterpillars) may feed on your plants, don't use any insecticides in the garden. And don't put up "butterfly houses" unless you enjoy them as garden art. Butterflies will never inhabit them.

Source: *Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station & University of Minnesota Extension*

Understanding Mulches and Mulching

It's hard to believe something as simple as mulching can solve so many gardening problems and offer so many advantages. Mulching is a gardening practice that has been around for years, but we are just now beginning to understand fully and appreciate all it does for our plants. In fact, there are almost as many reasons to mulch as there are mulches.

What exactly is mulch? Mulch is simply any material used to cover the soil or plants.

Why mulch? Many mulches are aesthetically pleasing and can help showcase your plants. A good layer of mulch will help to conserve moisture and suppresses weed germination. Organic mulches can add nutrients and humus to the soil. Mulch can help stabilize soil, preventing erosion. You can minimize the spread of soil-borne diseases by mulching, which prevents splashing of soil up onto plant foliage. An adequate layer of organic mulch will also keep the soil temperatures more even.

Aren't there lots of different types of mulch?

There are various types of organic and inorganic mulches. Some of the materials most commonly used for mulch are compost, grass clippings, shredded leaves, hay, straw, shredded wood, bark chips, pine needles, newspaper, various rocks and pebbles, plastic and weed fabrics. Each has its own pros and cons and best uses.



What is meant by "organic" mulch? When referring to mulch, organic means those that are made of plant material. Mulches made of rock or plastic are considered inorganic.

I've heard rock mulches aren't good for plants. Is that true? Yes and no. Rock mulches compact soil, can gather and hold excessive heat and accumulating organic matter (leaves, seeds, etc.) can make them dirty. But lots of people like the looks of rock and it lasts almost forever. If you choose to mulch with rock, avoid using plastic as your weed barrier unless it is needed to keep the

water away from the building foundation. Plastic will inhibit water and air circulation, making rock even more of a problem for plants.

How do I choose which mulch to use? What it is you want your mulch to accomplish? If looks are the primary consideration, choose the mulch you find most attractive. When mulching around annuals or perennials, use something made up of smaller pieces, such as shredded cypress or small pieces of bark. To show off the colors of blooms, use a dark mulch, such as shredded hardwood. To lighten up an area, you may want to use a light colored rock or shredded cypress. If you are mulching to help winterize your plants, use straw, hay or shredded leaves.

When should I apply the mulch? Most mulching can be done anytime during the growing season, generally the earlier the better. If you are mulching for winter protection, it is important to understand that you aren't trying to keep the soil warm ... you are trying to keep it cold so that it won't thaw and freeze alternately. (Occasionally, mulch is used to keep soil warm later in the fall when something was planted late.)

Do I need to weed before I mulch? It really is best to clean the area of all weeds before mulching. If necessary, use an herbicide to help with the job. Roundup or Finale will kill weeds from their root system and only take a few days to work, but be careful not to get it on anything you don't want to kill.

How deeply should I apply mulch? Again, this varies according to what type of mulch you are using and why you are mulching. Most organic mulches are applied 2-4 inches thick. Rock mulches average 2-3 inches deep. Mulches applied for winterization are usually 4-6 inches deep.

Are weed barriers a good idea? Whenever possible, fabric weed barriers are an excellent idea. They aren't foolproof, but they greatly reduce weeds coming from below the barrier. Plastic is a less expensive alternative, but it greatly inhibits air and water flow. A weed barrier will not keep seeds from germinating on top of it.

Can I use Preen with a mulch? Preen, a pre-emergent herbicide, is a good alternative to weed

barriers. It is important to weed thoroughly before using Preen, since its job is just to keep new weeds from germinating. It does not affect anything that already has leaves or a root system. Preen can be incorporated into the soil surface or sprinkled on top of mulches and gently watered in.

Is there any time I shouldn't mulch? There are times when mulch keeps the soil too wet. This can be a problem with plants that are sensitive to winter

moisture. Young seedling plants can be smothered by too much mulch. Some woody mulches, such as raw wood chips or sawdust, can draw nitrogen from the soil. You can compensate for this by using a water soluble fertilizer while the mulch is still fresh. And sometimes rodents are attracted to mulches, burrowing around looking for insects and tender plants to nibble on.

Source – Bachmans.com



Gardening As We Age

By Jan Howell, Renville County Master Gardener

I recently attended "Garden Fever" at the Landscape Arboretum and a session was held on the topic of "Gardening As We Age." Many people experience limited endurance due to chronic health conditions. Those with limitations can continue to benefit from and take pleasure in gardening through modification of activities that aid in energy conservation.

Begin garden activities with warm-up exercises to limber the muscles and bring the heart rate up gradually. Warm-up exercise will help prevent and reduce strains, muscle pulls, and soreness. Before beginning gardening activities, perform five to ten minutes of slow, rhythmic stretching and low-intensity exercises.

Some design tips that you might find helpful are:

- Place garden beds near the house for quick accessibility.
- Place garden beds near a driveway to decrease the distance needed to bring supplies such as plants and soil to the garden area.
- Keep garden tools and containers within easy reach.
- Place garden beds close to an available water source.
- Use a large plastic trash container as a water source from which watering cans can be filled.
- Provide plenty of seating in the garden area.
- Build raised bed gardens. They reduce the need to bend or kneel and allow wheelchair-bound gardeners easy access.
- Fences, walls, arbors, and trellises can be used to support plants or to hang containers at an accessible working height.
- Don't forget containers, possibly on caddies, with wheels, for easier movement. Also containers in bright colors add interest and are easier to see.

Adaptations for Physical Changes:

- Avoid overhead reaching and below-the-waist bending activities which expend extra energy.
- Prioritize tasks to complete lighter gardening tasks before those that are more strenuous.
- Start early in the day when temperatures are lower.



- Plan to complete only one heavy gardening task per day.
- Alternate a task with a rest period.
- Carry a portable phone to summon help if needed.
- Avoid lifting or holding anything for long periods.
- Ensure adequate fluid intake to combat signs of dehydration in warm weather.
- Take a kitchen timer to the garden area and set it for 10-15 minute intervals as a reminder for rest periods.

For more tips, visit www.gardenfitness.com. The site includes a 6-week fitness-gardening plan, a message board, gardening tips and more.

Tools

- Use long-handled tools (weeders, spades, bulb planters, grass shears, etc.) in a standing position to reduce reaching and bending. Limit to short periods of time.
- Trowels, weeders, and forms come with soft ergonomically sound handles, which are less painful for the gardener with arthritis or carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Hand tools which locate the grip upright are good choices for gardeners with weak wrists.
- For gardeners who need to sit, hoes, rakes, and trowels are available with lightweight telescopic or extendable handles that expand to 18 inches.
- Another good alternative for seated or small gardeners are children's size garden tools.



Source: Carver/Scott County Master Gardeners and WSU "Gardening For Life – A Guide to Garden Adaptations for Gardeners of All Ages and Abilities"



From Garden to Table

The Renville County Master Gardeners are excited to announce a new gardening series that we will be introducing at the Renville County Fair in August. Watch this newsletter for more details in months to come. You're gonna want this!

A Systemic Wildlife Repellent

Tom Levar, a scientist at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, has developed a product to deter wildlife from eating **ornamentals**.



The product is marketed by Repellex, and is a systemic that delivers capsaicin (essentially, red pepper) to the plant, making it inedible. The product was just approved by the EPA, and is now available at the Repellex site. (Make sure you look for systemic products, as this company sells many other repellents that are topical, and will wear away from rain, etc.) Here's the Repellex site:

http://www.repellex.com/Systemic_Repellents-Systemic_Tablets_50_Ct.html

To read the news release on the EPA approval:
<http://www.repellex.com/Systemic%20Repellent%20Technology.html>

Book Review



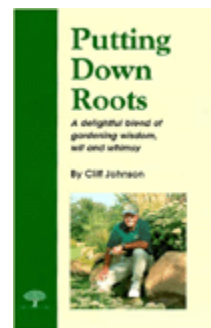
Putting Down Roots

Reviewed by Jane Alderks,
Renville County Master Gardener

Last night I finished reading a book entitled *Putting Down Roots* written by Cliff Johnson, Carver/Scott County Master Gardener. I highly recommend this book to everyone with an interest in gardening.

The book is a compilation of short gardening columns that were originally published in the *Chaska Herald*. *Putting Down Roots* (available at www.puttingdownroots.net/marketing.htm) is divided into four sections – winter, spring, summer and autumn. In each section Mr. Johnson shares his knowledge and lessons learned from being a Minnesota gardener and Carver/Scott County Master Gardener. He has a delightful sense of humor combined with common sense.

Below is part of an article from the spring section entitled “Maples Can Wow You With Dazzling Fall Color.”



This is an ideal time to plant trees. If you don't have room to plant a tree in your own yard, ask a neighbor if you can plant one in his or her yard.

A tree is a living monument. Plant a tree in someone's honor or memory, and that tree will remind you – and others – of that person for decades to come. Now, don't just plant any old tree. There are too many great trees to choose from to waste the effort on a tree that has bad habits (i.e. brittle branches, heaving roots or disease susceptibility). Select a tree that will satisfy your objectives and fit your space. Search out the tree specialist at your favorite reputable garden center. Tell him or her where you want to plant the tree (in sun or shade, north or south side of house, wet or dry soil, etc.) and what qualities you're expecting from a tree (fall color, shade, appeal to wildlife, etc.).

One tree that offers a great deal of variety – and can be quite confusing – is the maple. To avoid mistakes, you almost have to use botanical (genus + species) names. No two nurseries label their stock alike, so it's best to go armed with some prior knowledge. For the maples listed below, I've included both the common and scientific names.

*Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*) – the maple most people think of first, and the source of maple syrup. Sugar maples can grow to 65 feet and show off dazzling red, orange and yellow fall color. If you have room for a sugar maple, consider the cultivars “Majesty”, “Green Mountain” or “Legacy”.*

*Red Maple (*Acer rubrum*) – grows to 60 feet and boasts outstanding red fall color. Red maples like full sun and slightly acid, moist soil. Select a variety from a northern seed source; best bets are “Northwood”, “Olson” and “Autumn Spire”.*

At the end of his list of maples, Mr. Johnson adds:

Remember that maples are susceptible to sun scald injury on the south and southwest sides of the trunk in winter. The bark heats up during mid-day, then cools quickly when the sun sets, resulting in vertical splits in the trunk bark. To help prevent sun scald injury, wrap trunks with tree wrap in late fall and remove it in April.