

By Emerson Howell Nagel

Two partial samples from a monthly gardening newsletter that I produced for a garden shop I owned with my husband, Emerson's Garden. It ran for 4 years, with 1,800 subscribers.

Copyright ©1996 Emerson Howell Nagel

# Emerson's Garden Notes

---

Volume III, Number 2

April 1996

---

## Newsletter News

I'm happy to say we have almost fifty people signed up for the new Newsletter/Garden Club! Onward ho!

Lots of people gave feedback on their specific interests, so I tallied the results overleaf. I also included some other suggestions people made, as well as answers to specific plant questions.

## Proposed Expedition to the Natural Garden - May 4th!

Bob and I talked and talked about where to plan our first expedition. After going around in circles for a while, we decided it would be fun to combine a trip to an interesting garden with a plant buying/scouting trip, since a number of you have asked for suggestions of where to get good perennials.

We didn't have far to look for a place that fills both needs perfectly. One of our favorite expeditions, both before and since we had the store, was to drive out to St. Charles and visit the Natural Garden.

For those of you who haven't heard of the Natural Garden, it is just west of St. Charles on North Avenue, and takes (if you really dilly dally) about two hours to get to from Evanston. It combines a display garden with one of the best and broadest selections of field-grown (this is very important) perennials we've come across.

Field grown means that, um, the plants have grown up in the field. Well, obviously, but it ALSO means that they didn't grow up in 2000% protected, atmospherically controlled green houses, from which many plants make the transition to your garden VERY badly.

They also stress native plants, for those of you who are buffs. But what has most endeared them to me and Bob is that they have an abundance of- yes, you guessed it, SHADE PLANTS! We have arranged to have a guided tour of their facility, most importantly including their woodland display garden, which is really cool.

LOGISTICS: We'd meet at Mama Java's on Main Street at 9AM on Saturday. May 4th (the first reasonable weekend, and not too early to plant). Our tour of their facility would start at 11AM, after which we could wander around and those interested could buy stuff.

We'd then adjourn to one of St. Charles' restaurants (I'll come up with one that can fit us, in the nice-but-moderate \$\$ category), explore St. Charles' antique malls and the lovely Fox River, and head home.

They told us it might be pretty crowded, so car-pooling would be a good idea, but we could arrange that on the spot. Also, if you don't have a car, we can fit four people in our van (with room left over for plants!).

Please RSVP as soon as you can so I can give the Natural Garden an idea of how many people would be going on the tour. If you'd be willing to carpool, say so when you RSVP. Our phone is 847-869-3169.

It should be lots of fun, so I hope you can come.

### **Gardener's Almanac**

- You can start planting now! Hold off on anything started in a greenhouse, or seedlings, but hardy perennials can go in whenever you're ready.
- For those of you lucky enough to have fireplaces, wood ashes (from real wood, not that Duraflame) make a great fertilizer. Just don't overdo it.
- Get ready to start hardening off those seedlings. You should be moving your trays gradually out of their protected environment so the Great Outdoors isn't too much of a shock.
- Divide Fall-blooming perennials now, so they get a good hold for this coming Fall.
- Prune the Forsythia once the flowers have faded (they should be coming out any day now!).
- Move trees with spongy roots (Magnolias) or thin skin (Dogwood, Birch, Beach, Plum) now.
- All Winter covering should be removed by the end of the month.
- Plant Summer-blooming bulbs as soon as the ground can be worked. Don't limit yourself to the same-old same-old. Branch out - be Brave. Try an Aztec Lily (striking red, almost orchid-like, not hardy) or a Peruvian Daffodil (lovely smell, spectacular flower that looks like a large white spider).
- With all the leaves gone, this is an excellent time to inspect trees for caterpillars. Be ruthless - they are!

### **Plant Profile**

#### Wake Robin, Stinking Benjamin

##### *Trillium Erectum*

Since we had the store, in the past I've generally profiled indoor plants, but now my horizons have widened, so Bob suggested we feature trillium.

Trillium is really a wildflower, and is, if I'm not mistaken, protected in the wild (you can't pick it or dig it up).

BUT. Thanks to modern commercialism, we too can have trillium in our gardens - and since many of us only have shade, this is a perfect choice.

Trillium grows in wet, cool, fertile woodlands - code for even under a tree where almost nothing else will grow.

It's called trillium because it is tri-form: it has three larger leaves (3" long), then above that, three short purple petals, and above that, three shorter white sepals. They bloom in May, and then produce large red berries, which little woodland animals love.

You may be asking why I'd profile something called Stinking Benjamin. Well, there is a slight smell, I can't deny it. But you won't notice it unless you stick your face right in it, and the rest of the plant is definitely worth it.

It is otherwise called Wake Robin, which really appeals to someone like me, with every sense straining toward Spring and warmer weather. I've been talking about Trillium Erectum, which is purple, but there are actually lots and lots of different kinds. The purple one is very hardy, but the white one is worth a try, too (Grandiflorum) and doesn't smell...

# Emerson's Garden Notes

Volume III, Number 5

August 1996

---

## Newsletter News

Sorry I missed last month, but believe me, it was worth it! Bob and I went on a fantastic trip around the world, and got some great garden ideas and pictures.

Again, I encourage you to share your questions and suggestions, and promise to print them as space permits. Our phone is 847-869-3169.

## Emerson's Garden Club Meeting - August 24th

We've only gotten a few responses on this, but we figured we'd go ahead anyway. It would still help us if you could RSVP, but if you don't get around to it, don't let that stop you from stopping by!

The date is Saturday, August 24, and we figured we'd allow two hours, from 4 to 6PM. If you can't come but have ideas, please call us or leave us a message (847-869-3169).

Weather permitting, we'll meet in our garden (more on this below...). We hope to see you then!

## Gardening Tips from Around the World

Well, as I said above, two weeks ago Bob and I got back from our expedition to London, Delhi, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Bangkok and Sydney, tired and a bit dazed, but with a store of incredible memories.

Two things are indelibly imprinted on my brain, and you may say to yourself, "She went all the way around the world, to all those spectacular places, and THAT'S what she noticed?", but truly, this is what most struck me.

First, in India, we stayed at an old, colonial hotel built in the 30's, with a lawn for lawn tennis and marble floors everywhere. Well, we were having breakfast and gazing out at the lovely lawn when we saw four men pushing and dragging something back and forth. Mystified, we watched for a while and concluded that two men were pulling and two were pushing what we finally figured out was a very heavy lawn roller. Later, saw the same kind of being drawn by an ox as well several people, but this time with blades to cut the grass. More anything else - more than poverty and the splendor, the dirt and the marble, the Taj Mahal and the laundry being washed en masse in the river where they dump the ashes of their dead, this collaborative manual laboring for me captured the essential difference between America and India!

I'll you the second thing that struck me in the next newsletter, or I won't have space for the Gardener's Almanac.

## Gardener's Almanac.

- While we still have this cool weather, put a pond! (See over).
- Sow seeds for Forget-me-nots perennials and other perennials now for Spring blooming. Seeds may be hard to find, so try catalogues or friends with plants you like (generally, all you have to do is snip off the heads and shake out the seeds).
- Watch your creepers carefully, and thin out vigorously to prolong and thicken growth during the rest of the Summer. My father uses a Garden Weasel on his Vinca with great success.

- Better get your bulb orders in soon, if you want the pick of the crop! Try some new ones this year, like the pretty little Spring bulbs that come up even before the snow has melted (like Glory-of-the-Snow and Snow Drops).
- Dead-head (not a Rock group) annuals and perennials every time you go outside. The more you do, the longer you'll have blooms.

## **Plant Profile**

### Rosary Vine, String of Hearts

#### *Ceropegia Woodii*

Normally, these profiles refer to a type of plant. This time, I want to talk about one particular plant, a Rosary Vine that we rescued in the store, and that has held onto life tenaciously through thick and thin, even when it was reduced to a few spindly shoots.

You may remember it - we had it in our plant hospital next to the potting bench, and frankly, it looked pretty pathetic. It was in a clay pot (of course), but had lost most of its vines through dehydration. Patiently, painstakingly, we took cuttings from the few remaining strands, dusted the cut ends with RootTone (a hormone that stimulates root growth), and frankly with very little hope, stuck them into the soil next to the straggling survivors. Then we loosely wrapped the whole thing in a clear plastic bag, to help it conserve moisture while it made roots, and sat back to wait.

I'm happy to report that our friend is now (almost) thriving! He's perched happily on a Victorian candle bracket, in the window over the sink in the kitchen, and while we were gone his new vines grew so long they got tangled up in the paper towel holder. He hasn't flowered yet, and he's still pretty scrawny, but we have high hopes!