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Calendar

May
14 Mother's Day

June
25-28 Garden Centers of America
Summer tour; Buffalo area contact www.gardencentersofamerica.org

July
8-11 OFA Short Course & Trade Show; Columbus, OH; 614-487-1117 or www.ofa.org
16-22 Perennial Plant Association Symposium, Montreal, Quebec
18-20 PA Green Expo; Harrisburg Farm Show Complex, Harrisburg, PA; Contact Pat Hobbs 610-777-0293 and (800-789-5068) or www.pagreen-expo.com

September
18-23 Eastern Performance Trials; sponsored by Garden Centers of America
28-30 America in Bloom Educational Symposium & Awards Program, Eureka Springs, Arkansas; Contact www.americainbloom.org

November
5-7 27th Annual International Irrigation Show; Henry B. González Convention Center, San Antonio, TX Irrigation Association, Falls Church, VA 703-536-7680 or www.irrigation.org

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Cover photo credit: The growing season is here! Enjoy our new redesign for The Plantsman!

The Plantsman is published in early February, April, June, August, October, and December with copy deadlines on the first of each prior month. While camera-ready ads are preferred, set-up assistance is available at a nominal fee. Free classified advertising is offered as a member service. We will carry a short message (no artwork or logos) for one or two issues of The Plantsman.

For further information, please contact the editor, Melissa Moore, 845 Loudon Ridge Road, Loudon, N.H. 03307; phone 503-267-8492; e-mail, Moore@worldpath.net

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Yankee Features Lake Street Garden Center
Frank Wolfe and his success with forcing plants to bloom out of season was featured in the January/February issue of a Yankee Magazine. The article was complemented by colorful photos of spring time blooms. Wolfe explained that demand for out-of-season blooms is driven by flower shows and other special events. It is painstaking work that requires a great deal of planning and outsmarting Mother Nature.

NHPGA Receives Grant
Your association has received a $2,000 grant from the New England Greenhouse Conference. These funds will be used to attract top-flight speakers for future educational events. The NHPGA Education Committee plans at least three key events each year including a Twilight Meeting, Summer Meeting, and Winter Meeting. Brett Andrus, NHPGA president and chairman of this committee, looks forward to planning future programs.

Best Plants Books
Another print run of the book titled, "The Best Plants for NH Gardens and Landscapes" was completed this year. The popular reference book features NH authors Margaret Hagen, Cathy Neal, and Leslie van Berkum.

In addition to being featured at NH garden centers, this book can be found at Concord Border's in the local interest section. It garnered a positive review in Granite State Libraries, a newsletter to librarians and book buying agents throughout the state.

According to Cathy Neal, the total print run to date is 5000 copies.

Information is organized by plant habitats and includes a bibliography, index, charts, and tips on accessing the NHPGA website.

UNH Extension Agent Retires
John Porter, announced his plan to retire from the UNH Extension Service effective July 1. John has served the NH agriculture community by serving as a Dairy Specialist for 32 years. His office is in Merrimack County, yet his territory is most of the state.

John has worn a number of hats throughout his career. He has a particular interest in planning dairy facilities and has spearheaded the widely popular dairy conferences held each March. In recent years he has worked extensively with families to plan transfers of agricultural businesses from one generation to the next. After retiring formally, John plans to work on a contract basis in the area of farm business transfers.
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New England Companies Named to EPA's Green Power Top 25 List

Five companies based in New England or with significant business operations in New England were named to EPA's 2006 "Green Power Top 25 List". The list includes companies, organizations and government institutions that have voluntarily bought the most renewable energy and are part of EPA's Green Power Partnership.

Last year, EPA's Green Power Partners bought more than 4 million megawatt hours of renewable energy, which is nearly double the amount they purchased by the end of 2004. These purchasers are buying enough energy to power more than 300,000 homes a year, or the equivalent of removing the emissions of nearly 400,000 cars from the road annually. More than half of EPA's Top 25 green power purchasers are comprised of U.S. corporations, a number that continues to increase every year.

Businesses on the list that have major presences in New England include: Staples, Whole Foods Market, Starbucks, Johnson & Johnson, and FedEx Kinkos, Inc.

"These EPA partners help diversify this country's energy supply by promoting alternative and renewable energy sources," said Robert W. Varney, regional administrator of EPA's New England office. "These companies voluntarily use green power – helping reduce dependence on foreign sources of power."

The Green Power Partnership is a voluntary EPA Program that seeks to increase the use of green power among leading U.S. organizations. Partners in the program switch to green power for a portion of their electricity needs in return for EPA technical assistance and recognition. EPA's Green Power Partnership currently has more than 600 Partners, including Fortune 500 companies, states, federal agencies, trade associations, and universities.

Staples, a Framingham, Mass company exceeded its original commitment to buy 2 percent of its total energy load or 9,494 MWh green power. The company uses 48,283 MWh of green power which includes the largest renewable energy certificate deal in the U.S. The company is committed to buying 10 percent of its energy from green power sources. With stores nationwide, Staples buys landfill gas, biomass, solar, and wind power from five providers that supply the company with green power through delivered energy products as well as renewable energy certificates.

FedEx Kinko's Inc., of Dallas Texas was a 2002 Green Power Partner of the Year, and has been a 2001 and 2003 Green Power Leadership Award winner. FedEx Kinko's is reducing it environmental footprint through efforts that include buying renewable energy, reducing energy use, offering recycled and alternative papers, and minimizing waste. FedEx Kinko's Inc. buys renewable energy at more than 400 branches in 18 states, for an approximate 40 million kWh per year. FedEx Kinko's receives it power from a wide variety of sources, including wind, geothermal, landfill gas, solar, and small hydro.

Credit: Sheryl Rosner US EPA – New England 2/13/06
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Perennial Plant of the Year

The Perennial Plant Association has named Dianthus gratianopolitanus 'Feuerhexe' (Firewitch) the 2006 Perennial Plant of the Year.

Cheddar pink is the common name of this excellent sun exposure perennial. It is an evergreen selection with bluish-gray, silvery foliage and purplish-pink fragrant flowers in mid-spring. Rebloom can occur in the summer and into the fall. Firewitch is hardy from zones 3 to 9. Mature mats of this cheddar pink have foliage 3 to 4 inches tall and 6 to 12 inches wide. Flowers will reach 6 to 8 inches high. This evergreen perennial performs best in full sun in well-drained soils.

This plant is a good choice as a border edger, as a rock garden plant, or as a ground cover on a sunny slope. After flowering in late spring, the spent flowers should be cut back to promote rebloom later. The clove-like scent of the low-growing ornamental makes it the perfect choice for use in a border near a walkway.

The genus Dianthus is a member of the Caryophyllaceae family with species found native to the Mediterranean, Balkan Peninsula, and Asia Minor regions. The genus contains, annuals, biennial, and perennial species and includes plants with the common names of carnations, sweet Williams, and pinks. The name Dianthus originates from the Greek dios and anthos, the divine flower, which refers to the flower of a god, an indication of the esteem in which the flower has always been held. Cheddar pinks are named for Cheddar Gorge in southwest England, one of the locations where it grows wild.

Credit: Perennial Plant Association Feb. 2006

July is “Smart Irrigation Month”

The Irrigation Association has named July “Smart Irrigation Month” to raise awareness of the importance of using irrigation efficiently.

“The mission of the Irrigation Association is to promote efficient and effective irrigation worldwide,” said IA Executive Director Tom Kimmell. “Smart Irrigation Month is a way for the industry to highlight irrigation equipment and practices that make the most of our most precious resource.”

“While the irrigation industry is bringing increasingly efficient technology to the marketplace, irrigation consumers have an important role in choosing efficient technology and using it effectively,” Kimmell said.

IA members in every segment of the industry will be asked to display to the Smart Irrigation Month logo and share tips for efficient irrigation with their customers in July while highlighting products and services that promote efficient irrigation.

The Irrigation Association’s Turf and Landscape Irrigation Best Management Practices recognize that an efficient automatic irrigation system requires quality parts and design, accurate installation, proper maintenance, and effective management.

American agriculture becomes more efficient every year, with statistics showing irrigated farms are moving to more efficient modern irrigation practices allowing growers to produce more on less land with less water.

Credit: Beth Casteel, Irrigation Association, 2/22/2006

SAF PR Fund Turns 5

This year marks the five-year anniversary of an industry-wide voluntary promotion effort that has generated valuable publicity about the unique benefits of flowers and plants and the expertise of professional florists.

Nearly 2,000 retail florists, wholesalers, suppliers, growers and importers are contributing to the Society of American Florists (SAF) Fund for Nationwide Public Relations. Thanks to their contributions, the SAF PR Fund has conducted five consumer research projects and six ongoing public-relations campaigns, generating more than 579 million consumer impressions (the number of times consumers are exposed to the floral message) with 47 placements in national magazines as well as TV, radio, newspapers and online coverage in 136 markets nationwide. The ad value of this coverage is $10.9 million.
"It is amazing to look back at how much this effort has accomplished for industry promotion in such a short amount of time and with limited funds," says Dwight Larimer, AAF, president of DESIGN MASTER color tool inc. in Boulder, Colo., and chairman of SAF's Consumer Marketing Committee. "The programs continue to build on each other, reaching more consumers every day."

The SAF PR Fund is public relations not advertising. Recent examples of SAF PR Fund successes include news articles in these popular national publications: USA Weekend: The USA Today magazine heralded the results from SAF's Emotional Impact of Flowers Study, conducted at Rutgers University, in the Jan. 22 "GardenSmart" column: "Flowers bring smiles ... a single bloom creates talk ... bouquets beat depression." The publication reaches nearly 52 million readers.

Woman's World: In its Feb. 7 issue, this popular national magazine included a two-page spread titled "Be happier, smarter and healthier with Flower Power!" Colorful photos of African violets, blue irises, gardenias, hydrangeas, lavender, roses and tulips, complemented SAF's Flower Therapy spokeswomen Leatrice Eiseman's insight on the effects of color on moods. The article also touted results from SAF's Emotional Impact of Flowers Study: "Simply being around flowers makes people feel closer and more connected to others, especially loved ones - even if they're not in the same room!"

Prevention: In the article "Homegrown Healing," the March issue of this popular women's magazine cites two SAF studies. It touted SAF's Impact of Flowers & Plants on Workplace Productivity Study: "Texas A&M researchers found that volunteers who kept a vase of vibrant flowers on their desks, along with green plants elsewhere in the office, generated more creative ideas than those in an environment lacking vegetation." The article continued to tell readers to "add a bright bouquet to the den or living room" by highlighting SAF's Emotional Impact of Flowers Study.
The Plantsman

Elsewhere in the News, cont’d.

Through the PR Fund, SAF is creating more media buzz in March with the continuation of its Flower Fundamentals public relations program. SAF is hosting press briefings with editors of national publications, in which Flower Fundamentals spokesman, Rebecca Cole, a floral designer and the host of Discovery Channel’s “Surprise by Design,” leads workshops designed to generate more publicity for the benefits of flowers and plants and the expertise of florists.

“We have come so far,” Larimer says of the SAF PR Fund’s five-year anniversary. “Imagine what could be done with more funding. There are many great PR opportunities. All we need is more industry participation.”

SAF thanks the 2,000 retailers, wholesalers, suppliers, growers and importers who are supporting the PR Fund.

Credit SAF 2/27/06 News Release

PA Hosts New Green Expo

The newest wholesale trade show in the “green industry” the Pennsylvania Green Expo (PAGE) will be held at the Harrisburg Farm Show Complex in July. This show located in centrally located Pennsylvania is being marketed to businesses and individuals engaged in all aspects of the green trade – nurseries, florists, landscapers, arborists, lawn and garden centers, grounds maintenance etc.

The Harrisburg Farm Show Complex has over 1 million square feet of show space to accommodate the show. The PA Department of Agriculture is a supporter of the show. The event is set for July 18-20, 2006. For more information contact 800-7789-5068.

Grant Funds for Water Management

The Horticultural Research Institute’s (HRI) executive committee granted $335,000 to 22 high-priority projects and four scholarships for 2006. These projects best meet the needs of the industry and have quality scientific merit that will result in new knowledge and techniques to deal with major industry issues.

A priority research issue identified by the committee and industry members has been water management and use. In response, the committee agreed to support a research consortium on water issues. It is the goal of the committee that during the consortium, priority water issues will be determined as well as the evaluation of current water research and its applicability to the industry. A total of $50,000 will be awarded to significant and quality water research projects. Collaboration among researchers will be encouraged to ensure that duplication of research does not occur.

In addition to HRI’s competitive grants program, HRI is actively partnering with other associations to increase industry research. Most notably, HRI has partnered with the USDA Agricultural Research Service to obtain and guide federal research dollars to critical industry research through the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative (FNRI). FNRI research funding now totals $6.25 million. By leveraging federal and other sources of research funding, HRI is able to fulfill its mission to become the national clearinghouse for research and development for the nursery and landscape industry.

The following information highlights some of the projects funded by research grants distributed by HRI. The institution, principal investigator, project and amount of the grant are listed. The Ohio State University, (Dr. Parwinder Grewal), Development of a New Biological Product for Slug Control, $20,000. Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University and North Carolina State University (Drs. Jeffrey F. Derr and Joseph C. Neal) Controlling New Weeds in Nurseries and Landscapes $5,000. Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Dr. Robert D. Wright) Development of a New Container Substrate Derived from Ground Pine Wood Chips $15,000. Water Management Research Consortium: Identifying Nursery Industry Priority Water Issues (Investigators to be determined) $15,000.

Credit: ANLA News 2/17/2006
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New Varieties and POP Ideas

All-American Rose Selections Gives Independent Garden Centers
A New Way To Stop And Sell The Roses

All-America Rose Selections (AARS) is now offering high impact point-of-purchase display materials in an effort to help independent garden centers (IGCs) and nurseries successfully market and sell the annual AARS winning roses, beginning with the 2006 winners - Julia Child, Rainbow Sorbet, Tahitian Sunset and Wild Blue Yonder.

Attention grabbing, easy-to-install and affordable, these signs come in three unique formats, each featuring photography of the current winners. Made from weather-resistant materials and designed to make set-up a breeze, there are a variety of layout options to meet every IGC’s marketing needs. As an added incentive to participate in the program, AARS is offering IGCs a 50 percent co-op discount on the first order at the time of purchase, and each sign is co-branded with the center’s logo.

“Our winners are always a popular choice for people’s gardens,” says AARS president Steve Hutton. “Now, this new customized signage will help garden centers showcase the 2006 winners while making it easier for people to learn more about these award-winning roses.”

In anticipation of the 2007 season, AARS plans to introduce a similar program to help with visibility for next year’s winners later this spring.

Pixie Meadowbrite Cornflower Echinacea

The 2006 AARS winners made history by being featured in the Pasadena Rose Parade for the first time ever this January. They are also among fewer than 200 unique roses recognized by AARS since 1938, and only 34 in the last ten years. To place an order, call New Growth Marketing at 1-877-752-3030.

Credit: AARS, Feb. 27, 2006

Dwarf Coneflower
“Chicagoland Grows” introduces Pixie Meadowbrite™ Coneflower, Echinacea ‘CBG Cone 2’ PPAF, the first true dwarf hybrid and the third in the Meadowbrite™ series of brightly colored coneflowers. Previously released were Orange Meadowbrite™ Coneflower, Echinacea ‘Art’s Pride’ PP# 10050 and Mango Meadowbrite™ Hybrid Coneflower, Echinacea ‘CBG Cone 3’ PPAF.

This charming, mini-coneflower reaches only 18 inches high and is 20 to 24 inches wide. It has strong stems and bright pink flowers well into late summer. A controlled cross of Echinacea [tennesseensis x purpurea] x [angustifolia x tennesseensis], the plant was selected for hardiness, drought tolerance, longevity, compact form and garden durability. The vigorous plant, hardy in USDA zones 4 through 9, has a medium growth rate and in two years reaches a mature height of 18 to 20 inches and width of 24 inches.

Jim Ault, Ph.D., director, Ornamental Plant Research, Chicago Botanic Garden, releases the latest plant in the Meadowbrite™ series following seven years in development.
All-American Rose Selections Gives Independent Garden Centers
A New Way To Stop And Sell The Roses

An example of Northern Charm Boxwood Buxus Wilson

years in development.

"This is a completely different direction for coneflowers," said Ault. "Pixie is more compact than any other coneflower on the market and has an incredibly long bloom time and small perky flowers."

Like most coneflowers, Pixie prefers well-drained moist soils and full sun. It is a wonderfully drought-tolerant, dwarf perennial perfect for containers, perennial borders and small urban gardens. With the habit of a pot mum, it fits snuggly into small gardens and commercial landscapes. It has a heavy flush of blooms from July to August with sporadic flower production until October and is very attractive to birds and butterflies.

Pixie Meadowbrite™ can be ordered through retail catalogs Songsparrow and Jackson and Perkins. All three Meadowbrites™ will be available in select independent U.S. garden centers in late spring to early summer 2006. In following years, "Chicagoland Grows" will introduce shades of red, apricot and white coneflowers.


For more information on Pixie Meadowbrite™ or the "Chicagoland Grows" Plant Introduction Program, visit www.chicagolandgrows.org.
Credit: Chicago Botanic Garden Jan. 17, 2006

Charming its way into gardens this spring will be a new "Chicagoland Grows" introduction -- Northern Charm™ Boxwood, Buxus 'Wilson'.

The small leaved, emerald boxwood has excellent cold-hardiness and a uniform, oval growth habit. Foliage turns a rich black-green in winter. It is perfect for hedges, borders, accents, groupings, foundation plantings and formal gardens.

Northern Charm™ was selected out of a seedling block from which Green Mountain and Green Velvet boxwoods arose at Wilson Nurseries, Inc., Hampshire, Ill. It has a compact, oval-round habit and a good growth rate. Its delicate semi-glossy emerald foliage develops an appealing bluish cast during the growing season, changing to rich, deep black-green during winter. The plant is hardy in USDA zones 4b through 9. It has a slow to medium growth rate (typically less than 6 inches annually) but in 15 years, it can grow to 3 to 4 feet high and 5 feet wide.

Northern Charm™ is easily transplanted and is best sited in filtered sun, although it does perform well in full sun, as well as in shaded locations. Extremely wet sites should be avoided. There are no pests or diseases known to affect the shrub.

Credit: Chicago Botanic Garden Jan. 17, 2006
When I asked Rick, "What was the most important and best things you took from Garden Center University?" Rick's answer surprised me: "The formulas and being able to measure what we do." His answer is the essence of what we learned. But the networking, the friendships, Ian Baldwin's expertise and the field trips to the different businesses and garden centers were what came to mind for me.

Garden Center University, through ANLA is a 5-session, three year commitment. It is scheduled to meet in January and July, making it easy to attend. The first session starts in Louisville, KY. This event begins just prior to the ANLA 3 day Management Clinic. If you haven't heard about the Management Clinic, it is a fantastic learning and networking experience. It is definitely on our list of must-do learning events. Access to the clinic is easy via the Manchester Airport.

The first session (January) of the GCU focused on: Business strategies and identifying goals- what makes a garden center a Super League store, Numbers and formulas that help a company track performance, Trends, Human skills, Your retail team and training that pays, and Silent service - traffic flow, signage and effective POP.

Session Two (July), held in San Diego, was an in-depth analysis of spring. We reviewed the formulas for profitability and budgeting. The hardgood analysis of what products outside the plant category are doing well was fascinating. With classmates from California, Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania & Ohio we got a good picture of what similar retailers were doing. The companies represented ran the gamut of grossing $300,000 to $75 Million (7 stores). Our field trip to an Armstrong’s Garden Center in Encinitas (one of 36 employee owned stores) and to Roger's Gardens in Orange County were an interesting contrast. Armstrong’s puts out a glossy magazine highlighting their plants and brands of products in their stores. It captures the California Lifestyle pretty effectively. That particular Armstrong's backs up to the Flower Fields ranunculus fields and has an impressive AARS trial and display rose garden. Roger's Gardens has one location, and does 5% of their gross, or 1 million dollars in ready-to-go mixed containers, starting at $14.95 to $400.00. They also have seating to accommodate their 52 weekend educational seminars. When we visited, their 4th quarter was their most profitable with Christopher Radko ornaments being a very hot product.
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Session Three, (January) was held in Atlanta, to correspond with the Atlanta Giftmart. I didn’t schedule enough time to see the whole Giftmart show and not being a big shopper, was thankful we only had time to visit the 2-3 floors of the Gardens. I was coached by my friend Ed from Stauffer’s of Kissel Hill, one of their hardgoods buyers, who is responsible for 6 million dollars in inventory. I made contact with a couple of new vendors which made the trip worthwhile.

In this session we reviewed the fiscal thread, marketing and promotions budgets, human resource and merchandising. After knowing our classmates now for three classes, the dialogue and sharing was eye-opening and excellent. We all came away with action plans for the coming season.

Session Four (July), was held in Freeport Maine. Outstanding field trips to Scott Longfellow’s Garden Center in Manchester Maine and to L.L. Beans made this a very targeted merchandising event. L.L. Bean’s merchandising team takes two weeks to do their seasonal changeouts store wide. And the entry level pricing of some of their products was a great tip to share back on the homefront.

Classroom time was again an in-depth spring review, updating our marketing plan to reflect a changing marketplace, how ‘open to buy’ works in the budgeting process, human resource and personality differences, and an intro to the business plan and action plans to take home.

Between Freeport and Session Five, Rick and I identified that we needed help prioritizing our next projects. Garden Center University Professor Ian Baldwin came to the rescue. Spending 1½ days with us we now have a manageable action plan for Rolling Green for the next 3-5 years.

Ft Lauderdale and Session Five: (January) This session is scheduled so attendees can visit the TPIE, or tropical plant tradeshow. Now really comfortable with our classmates we did some outstanding exercises in interviewing and job reviews. The review of business management, merchandising and marketing was all part of the classroom work. In the Business Plan unit: several of our classmates are facing big investment projects in the next couple years. The feasibility and payback requirements were explained and reviewed. It certainly made some of those decisions more realistic.

Our graduation on Ft Lauderdale Beach was fun and serious- we all know the hurdles we have ahead: staying ahead of the trends, weather, labor management, fuel and weather. I really hope we will cross paths with this great group of people in the years to come.

For those of you that work with your spouse, Garden Center University makes the work process more fun in a roll-up-your-sleeves-and-get-those-numbers-challenging way. It has made us really look at inventory, where we make money and how we manage our company. Rick and I started GCU after the very difficult 2003 season. We knew that we needed help to be able to adjust and be profitable despite the rain. We encourage you to seek the formulas to help you succeed. ANLA has printed an excellent brochure for Garden Center University. Contact Amanda Flynn at 202-789-5980 x3010 or aflynn @anla.org. Let us all say a prayer for sunny weekends in 2006. ✯
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The Plantsman
I promised you another article from last year's Green Summit conference experience. One exercise that proved extremely helpful had the participants looking towards the future and where the greens industry is headed by scanning the current environment through popular...and some obscure...magazines. The Summit commented that "by anticipating what might be among a range of possibilities, leaders can develop background, context, and understanding that will help them address whatever futures may come. A key leadership skill in preparing for the future is constantly scanning for new sources of data and new key messages, and that means turning to multiple and varied information sources."

One source of varied information is your local, large bookstore. There you'll find the wonderful world of magazines - hundreds of them specifically written to attract a targeted audience and full of potentially useful articles and photos. Your job is to periodically select a handful of them from areas outside your normal sphere of interest (punk rock, atomic science, holistic medicine, teen scene, Latina living, etc.) and spend a few hours identifying industry specific messages from within their pages. In fact, it's a great exercise for your entire staff! The price is right and the synergy you'll receive from the group sharing their findings and translating those thoughts into business ideas may be invaluable.

Here are a few nuggets gleaned from the magazine pages at the Green Summit:

- Consider offering more services to meet the expectations of younger consumers.
- Sell "green experience" gifts.
- Find innovative ways to speed to market new plant "fashions."
- Explore "branding" opportunities for plants and services.
- Connect to the "buy local" story that already resonates in the produce arena. Label New England-grown nursery products as "locally grown."
- Sell plantscapes as "lifescapes."
- Promote green products as healthy for kids.
- Offer night blooming and scented plants for "midnight" gardeners to enjoy. Provide lighting solutions for them.
- Personal shopping is a good solution for the problem of personal busyness.
- Consider a European trend toward green roofs.
- Tie gardening to holistic medicine trend.
- Emphasize ease-of-use, service plans, and low-maintenance products to appeal to the older population.
- Bring new plant material to market from China.
- Use more solar power and bio-diesel to run equipment and vehicles.

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THE PLANTSMAN
How About Herbs

Repelling Insects the Natural Way

By Maddy Perron

Here in New England, after a long winter, the warmth and humidity of early spring makes us feel rejuvenated and tends to put some pep in our step. Sadly enough, it is also a wake up call for those pesky mosquitoes. We may be anxious to get out there in our gardens and woodlands, but each year the preparation for trudging outdoors seems to get more extensive. As we tuck our pants in our socks to keep those ticks from crawling up our legs, we're thinking which insect repellent to rub or spray on. That last week in May with black flies and mosquitoes working together might even make us include the netting of a bug baffler for more protection. Oh, and don't forget the sun block and hat to protect against those harmful rays! Whew! I sure hope you have enough energy left to go plant those seedlings and spread that compost.

Lyme disease is scary enough, but now that West Nile Virus is creeping into our neck of the woods, we need to be diligent in preventing those annoying mosquito bites. You may be one of those people that seem to attract biting insects. It is a known fact that some people are more prone to mosquito bites than others. The human body can exude more than 340 chemical scents. Mosquitoes find some of these scents more enticing than others and are also attracted to the CO2 and lactic acid from our breath and skin. Even the scents from some perfumes and shampoos can attract them. The females are the biters, and use visual, thermal and olfactory stimuli to search out their next blood meal.

Probably the most effective and most popular insect repellants are those that contain Deet (N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide). According to a clinicians guide in the Annals of Internal Medicine, the combination of Deet and permethrin-treated clothing can be nearly 100% effective against insect bite. Permethrin is a synthetic chemical similar to the natural pyrethrum that is derived from the chrysanthemum plant.

Most parents feel skeptical about using chemical products on their children and for good reason. The EPA has approved Deet's use, but with caution and sparingly. Studies show that 15% of Deet applied to the skin is absorbed through the blood stream.

It might be wise to look into a natural way to repel insects. Some botanicals can be very effective in warding off insects, but need to be applied more often than the chemical insect repellants. Oil of lemon eucalyptus, a plant based repellent, is registered with the EPA and in recent studies it provided protection similar to low concentrations of Deet.

A study from the New England Journal of Medicine states that eucalyptus oil is proven to be the most effective of the natural repellants and has a 120.1 min. protection time. Soybean oil comes in at 94.6 minutes, citronella 20 min. and Skin-So-Soft bath oil 9.6 min. A product with 23.8% Deet can last up to 301.5 min.

Some repellants can be burned in patio areas to ward off insects. Citronella candles are popular here in the U.S. Burning Myrrh or frankincense can be germicidal as well as mosquito repelling. In Asia and Africa, pyrethrum, is made into coils and burned to provide up to 80% protection. Goldenseal was used by the Cherokees who pounded the rootstock mixed with bear fat and smeared the concoction on their bodies.

Here are a few recipes that you might like to try and experiment with. Essential oils are very potent and should not be used full strength on the skin, as they will cause skin irritation.

Catnip (nepeta cataria) contains nepetalactone which was proven to be 10 times more effective than Deet at repelling mosquitoes. I'm not sure what the staying power of this natural replacement is, so frequent re-application may be necessary. Mix 1 tsp olive oil with 2-5 drops of catnip oil.

Yarrow (achillea millefolium) can be made into repellant by harvesting the flower tops and packing into a jar, then pouring vodka to cover. After 6 weeks, strain and put into a spray bottle.

Basil leaves have repelling properties also. Just pick one cup and infuse with water, then strain and mix the liquid with 4 oz. of vodka. Apply with a spray bottle.
One part garlic juice to 5 parts water is said to work well on children with chemical allergies.

Other essential oils have repelling properties, such as geranium, rosemary and lavender oils. You really don't need to be stinky to repel insects. You just need to be wearing a scent that they're not crazy about and that masks your own scent.

When it comes to staying power, the botanicals aren't a great choice. If you're wise though, and plant the repelling herbs here and there in your garden, you needn't go far. It's pretty easy to grab a leaf and rub some on your neck and ankles, maybe chew a little basil to mask the CO2 and voila, a pretty handy repellant, and it can be re-applied as soon as you hear that nasty buzz... again. Hopefully those pesky mosquitoes will be foiled and we can all get our gardens in without being the next blood meal.

Perron is a Master Gardener with a special interest in herbs.

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If there’s one book you want to stock for kids or donate to a youth program this is it.

Zinnia’s Flower Garden by Monica Wellington. It’s colorful, accurate, and kid-friendly. The book is noteworthy for its layout and appealing story. Real photos of plants are interspersed with the illustrations to create a superb book. Even the margins of each page deliver a message about plant growth and garden insects. (One page shows the life cycle of a butterfly. Monthly entries in Zinnia’s garden journal add to the story.) The balance between text and illustrations is just right, and will delight young readers.


A good choice for adults looking to garden with the younger generation is Kids’ Container Gardening: Year Round Projects for Inside and Out from Ball Publishing. The author Cindy Krezel delivers a how-to guide for kids with 17 interactive container gardening projects.

Each project is highlighted in the color photographs by Bruce Curtis. The projects are divided by season and kid-tested. Everyday items are featured in creating these projects. This book is a smart choice for young inspiring gardeners and their adult caregivers.


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From Storey Publishing: Bestselling author and vegetable gardener Ed Smith, shares all his secrets for coaxing the very best vegetables, herbs and even some fresh fruits from this surprising new source in Incredible Vegetables from Self-watering Containers. It is the first book that provides a proven system for maximizing the benefits these new containers offer. This low-maintenance approach to vegetable gardening revolutionizes the way we grow edibles at home.

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The NHPGA Horticultural Endowment Grant for 2005 was awarded to Lisa Tewksbury, University of Rhode Island, for her project entitled: Biological Control of the Lily Leaf Beetle in New England.

Without natural enemies, this exotic insect is eliminating native and cultivated lilies since it was first reported in the U.S. in 1992.

The lily leaf beetle is controlled by six parasitoids in Europe. After evaluating biology and host specificity of three European parasitoids, Tetrastichus setifer, Lemophagus errabundus, and Diaparsis jucunda, Lisa and her colleagues obtained USDA approval for field releases of all three in New England. Tetrastichus setifer is now established in four New England states and is substantially impacting the lily leaf beetle population. The $5,000 NHHE grant will enable Ms. Tewksbury to monitor the spread of T. setifer, throughout New England, and make additional releases L. errabundus, and D. jucunda in field lily plots in New Hampshire and Rhode Island to achieve establishment of these parasitoids in New England.

It often takes several years for a newly introduced biological control agent to become firmly established, to start to impact a host population, and to spread beyond the initial release site. To some degree the implementation phase of biological control occurs naturally. The parasitoids that Lisa releases are expected to spread throughout North America in the same way that the lily leaf beetle has. However, the intent is to eventually make parasitoids available to growers and home gardeners who will directly receive the benefits of this research by introducing biological control agents into their own farm or garden, and assist in the spread of the parasitoids.

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As part of our ongoing commitment to community service, SNHRC&D has teamed up with Alvirne High School in Hudson to construct 25 universally accessible planter boxes to be placed in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, centers for the developmentally disabled, and similar locations for patient therapy and enjoyment. The planters are portable and can be moved indoors during the winter months as desired. We are reaching out to friends, neighbors, and professional organizations for recipient contact information as well as assistance with the donations of potting soil, compost, plants, and or seeds. We would like to deliver a complete package to recipients so planting can begin as soon as the weather allows. Signage recognizing project partners will be attached to the side of each planter after construction. If you know of a facility that may be interested in receiving a planter box (there is no cost for the planters or their delivery) or are interested in making a donation of soil, compost, plant materials, or seeds, please contact Bob Sheirer, Program Manager, at robert.scheirer@nh.usda.gov or Sue Hoey, RC&D Coordinator, at susan.hoey@nh.usda.gov. If you would like to speak with us about this project, please don't hesitate to call the office at 223-0083. All RC&D activities will be provided to anyone regardless of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, marital status, or handicap.

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