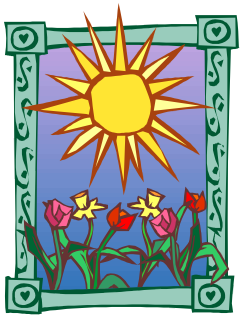


Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 1 | *Spring Edition* | March 2004

Time To Begin Again!

Yes, new beginnings can be challenging but they're also necessary and a blessing. As the world gets smaller, the earth and our stewardship of it is becoming a global issue of great importance. It's a fact that we need to "Make Each Day Earth Day" by doing small things. The article on page 2 discusses organic ways (which I highly believe in & practice) to do this. Next up is some interesting info about soil as it relates to what we grow in the garden. Speaking of plants, bulbs in particular, the bit on page 3 might offer some new combinations for you to think about. On page 4 we have yet another perennial for you to try, the variegated Iris. It just might be the "Winning Streak" you need to liven up those beds. Here's looking forward to another great gardening season!

Instant Spring!

Here's a creative and inexpensive way to chase away the winter blahs. Simply go to your favorite one stop shopping center (Meijer, Wal-Mart, etc.), find the CD section and choose one or two of those nature sounds CD's like: "The Echoes Of Nature" series (single CD which cost about $4.00), or any of the "Elements" series (a CD and DVD set costing about $6.00). Next, move to the floral department and pick up a few bouquets of fresh flowers. When you arrive home, get out several vases, arrange some of the flowers in each one, pop the CD in and ***VOILA! Instant spring!!***

"Every gardener knows that under the cloak of winter lies a miracle."

In This Issue

*Instant Spring
*Make Each Day Earth Day
*It's Not Just Dirt
*Bulb Companions
*Gardener Gatherings
*Winning Streak

Make Each Day Earth Day

Protecting the environment shouldn't be limited to Earth Day. A new national survey conducted by the Biodiversity Project reveals that 89% of Americans believe it's important to prevent the extinction of plants and animals. Moreover, 64% of respondents say everyone has a personal responsibility to help protect biodiversity—the incredible variety of life on Earth. Another study reports that 47% of consumers use organic products at least occasionally. According to the Organic Lifestyle Shopper study from The Hartman Group, three common factors motivate consumers to buy organic products: having children, having specific health conditions such as food allergies or cancer, and seeking a healthful lifestyle. This year, the Earth Day celebration is being held on **April 22nd.** You can check out the list of events at **www.earthday.org.**

Helpful Hints for a Happy Earth Day

1. Find natural alternatives to standard insecticides. If you need to take on aphids or other leaf munchers, use insecticidal soap sprays that suffocate the bugs but don't leave a lethal legacy behind.
2. Reduce fungi and mildew by providing air circulation in the garden. Leave space between plants. If a plant is prone to fungal disease, replace it with a different species.
3. Find alternatives to herbicides. Keep undesirable plants out of your yard by using mulches and hand weeding. Let go of the notion of a perfect lawn; clover and creeping Charlie can look nice when they're mowed, too.
4. Mow your lawn high! A height of around 3" inches will discourage weeds.

For more tips please visit: **www.biodiversityproject.org**

It's Not Just Dirt

Justin Hancock

Soil is important to plants because it supplies them with water and nutrients, and anchors their roots. Here's a primer to help you understand one of your garden's most basic ingredients.

Sand—Sandy soils are made of relatively large rock particles that fit loosely together. These soils tend to warm faster in the spring and drain quickly during wet periods. Unfortunately, they don't hold water well during drought and lose nutrients more quickly than other soil types. Sandy soils feel gritty to the touch.

Silt—Silty soils are made from medium-sized particles. They shed excess water more quickly than clay, but not as quickly as sand. Silty soils tend to feel slick to the touch when they're wet.

Clay—Soils with a high clay content are made of small particles that fit tightly together. Clay soils hold water and nutrients during times of drought, but stay wet longer during wet periods. They're more susceptible to winter heaving (moving around) during periods of freezing and thawing, which exposes and harms roots of perennial plants.

Organic Matter—This is not a soil type, but organic matter helps eliminate the disadvantages of both sandy and clay soils. Organic materials such as compost, decomposed manure, and shredded leaves hold moisture when the soil is dry, but still let soils shed excess water. They re-

duce soil compaction, allowing plant roots to spread more easily.

Loam—Loamy soils are those rich with organic matter. In addition to regulating water better than both sandy and clay soils, loamy soils encourage beneficial microorganisms such as mycorrhizal fungi, which reportedly help plants absorb nutrients and resist disease

Hardpan—This is a layer of soil so compacted that plant roots can't grow through it. In extreme cases, water won't permeate through the layer. Hardpan can occur when sand is mixed with clay--unless there's a very high percentage of sand, the small clay particles will cling to the larger sand particles and eliminate the spaces between the particles where water moves through. It can also occur by compaction, especially with heavy equipment.

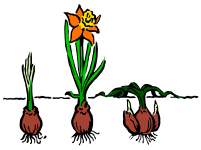
Acidic Soil—An acidic soil has a low pH (lower than 7.0 on a scale of 0 to 14). The pH of a soil determines, in part, what nutrients plants can take from the soil. For instance, plants absorb iron readily in acidic soils, but have trouble absorbing molybdenum. Some plants, such as blueberries and rhododendrons, have adapted to acidic conditions and require acidic soil to grow well. Sulfur and aluminum sulfate tend to increase a soil's acidity.

Alkaline Soil—An alkaline soil has a high pH (higher than 7.0 on a scale of 0 to 14). The alkalinity of a soil also determines what nutrients plants can absorb. For example, plants absorb potassium more readily in alkaline soils, but have trouble absorbing manganese. Some plants, such as some Dianthus, thrive in alkaline soils, but most garden plants prefer a neutral or slightly acidic soil. Lime and wood ashes are two materials that increase a soil's alkalinity.

Mulch—While not actually a soil component, mulch (such as compost, my favorite double grind shredded hardwood, or shredded leaves) relates closely with the soil. Mulch helps prevent soil erosion, holds moisture, and reduces drastic temperature changes in summer and winter. An organic mulch will break down, and need to be replaced every season but the bonus is that it will (yearly) add organic matter to the soil.

"Anyone can have dirt. *Gardener's* have soil."

Bulb Companions



As spring wears on, bulb foliage browns and ripens. This shouldn't be cut off because the bulbs need it to rejuvenate, but it looks awful. Planting annuals and perennials around the dying foliage is the best way to cover it up during its final throes. Some suggestions:

- Marigolds
- Columbine
- Veronica (Subulata)
- Hardy Geraniums
- Campanula (Subulata)
- Hardy Vinca Minor
- Creeping or Woodland Phlox
- Lady's Mantle
- Lavender
- Daylilies
- Astilbe
- Hostas
- Ferns

"A garden is a delight to the eye and a solace for the soul."

Sadi

Gardener Gatherings

Places to Go & Things to Learn

What & Where

Novi Spring Perennial Exchange
March 29 9:00 AM 12:00 PM
Old Township Hall
10 mile Rd. E. of Taft
call **248-347-0400** for more info

Matthaei Botanical Gardens
Spring Plant Sale
April 30, May 1 & 2
call **734-998-7061** for directions & details

Detroit News
Spring Perennial Exchange
May 15th 9:00 AM 11:00 PM
In the Detroit News parking lot
next to MGM Grand Casino
call **313-222-2492** for directions & details

Ann Arbor Garden Walk
June 5 10:00 AM 4:00 PM
call **734-663-1788** for more info

Contact us at 734-416-0866 or earthenjoy@att.net

A Winning Streak

Bearded irises have long been a classic, especially mixed with peonies for a grand spring show of color. Now let's talk about an iris with variegated foliage! One that proves its landscape worth by dressing up your garden not just for three weeks of bloom—but all year long.

There are only a handful of variegated irises, and my favorite is definitely *Iris pallida* Albo Variegata. Its cool, creamy streaks complement the soft blue-purple flowers, which are sweetly fragrant. The variegation in this and other striped-leaf irises is at its best when the fans are arrayed so that the sun shines *through* them. This luminescence borders on the inspirational. While most irises are at home in full sun, this one will still perform solidly in a lightly shaded area, where its white stripes can help brighten up the shadows.

How To Grow Them:

Light: Full sun
Hardiness: To 25° below zero
Growth Habit: 2 1/2' feet tall

"A garden is a lovesome thing!"

Thomas Edward Brown