

Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 1

Spring Edition

March 2006

A Long Journey

Roses, Hibiscus, Agave oh my....I didn't spend the whole winter in Michigan! My off season travels included Las Vegas, Arizona and California. I did NOT swim in the ocean, or come back with a tan....it was COLD there too! Don't let anybody fool you friends....yes, it SNOWS in the desert!!! The day we visited the Grand Canyon (a highly recommend **MUST SEE** for EVERYONE) it was a very crisp 32. Good thing there wasn't any wind or it would have been worse. The scenery however, made up for the cold. AWESOME & BREATHTAKING are the only words to describe it.



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Plant Profile:

Viburnums

This is one of the best shrubs to grow in Michigan. Viburnums, are members of the honeysuckle family with lacy, often fragrant, white or pink flowers and lustrous fall foliage. The shrubs range from ground-hugging dwarfs to medium-size trees reaching 20-foot tall with a similar spread. The spring flowers come in two types: dome like clusters of florets or "flattop" flower heads similar to lacecap hydrangeas. Birds love the colorful fruits (berries) that appear in summer and fall. These fruits are found in a surprising array of colors: red, pink, blue, black, orange and yellow.

"Viburnum" in Latin means "wayfaring tree," referring to the shrubs that were once common along travel routes. Native Americans once used long, sturdy shoots of *V. dentatum* (Arrowwood) as arrow shafts, and old-time schoolmasters cut switches of *V. nudum* to discipline students. The Viburnum family consists of 150 to 200 species in North America. The most fragrant types are Burkwoods and the Snowballs which are renowned for their sweet, spicy, clove-like scent. On the next page I have provided you with a list of MY top favorites.

My Favorite Cultivars

'Korean Spice' (*V. carlesii*) Sweet-scented pink/white star-shaped flowers appear mid-spring. Fruits are black and fall leaf color is purplish red. Grows to 8 feet high/wide.

'Mohawk' (*V. x burkwoodii*) One of the most fragrant of all viburnums, its clusters of white flowers have a sweet perfume that permeates an entire garden. Grows to 7 feet high/wide.

'Mariesii' (*V. plicatum tomentosum*) Showy is the word for this Doublefile, with its layers of white flowers on shrubs that are twice as wide as high. Bright red fruits appear in mid-summer.

'Pink Beauty' (*V. plicatum tomentosum*) The flowers of this one open white and turn a reddish pink with age and or cooler temperatures.

'Arrowwood' (*V. dentatum*) This variety grows 6 to 12 feet high and thrives in both dry or wet soils. Flowers are creamy against glossy, dark-green foliage, and the blue-black fruits are enhanced by red autumn foliage.

'Blue Muffin' (*V. dentatum 'christom'*) A compact Arrowwood Viburnum at 3 to 5 feet high by 3 to 4 feet wide. Beautiful indigo-blue berry clusters in late summer and fall, after a late spring display of white flowers. Somewhat glossy oval serrated foliage is attractive all season, becoming a rich burgundy in autumn.

'Black Haw' (*V. prunifolium*) A classic for all seasons: Creamy-white flowers are followed by blue-black fruits and purple to deep red autumn foliage. Boldly textured bark creates winter interest. Gets 12 to 15 feet high/wide.

Pink Beauty



Blue Muffin



Bulb Companions

After the beauty of spring bulbs has faded, what are you left with? Foliage that ever so SLOWLY turns brown. As a rule we know that cutting it off too soon will cause problems for next year's show. The bulbs need nutrients from those dying leaves to rejuvenate. To deal with the dying foliage creatively, simply plant annuals and or perennials near them as a cover-up. Here are some suggestions:

Astilbe Columbine Hardy Gerani-
ums
Creeping Phlox Lady's Mantle Ferns
Lavender Daylilies Hostas Pan-
sies

Vinca minor (Creeping Myrtle)



House Hunting... For the Birds

Put up a birdhouse and the magic begins. A birdhouse will become a focal point in your landscape, attracting brightly colored songbirds to your yard. Birdhouses provide a fascinating view into avian family life. From the courting of the parents to the first hesitant fluttering of a baby bird. We'll cover just about everything you need to consider for inviting feathered friends into your gardens.

Creating a Bird Friendly-Backyard

Even small yards can be bird magnets if they feel safe, have food, water, and nesting places. Well placed plant material is also an impor-

Trees and Shrubs: Needed for shelter, nesting sites, seed, nuts, nectar and fruits/berries.

Flowering Plants and Vines: Provides shelter and food.

Water: For drinking and bathing. Shallow birdbaths with clean water are best.

Bird Feeders: Fill with seed, suet and nectar.

Houses: Good as nesting sites and shelter.

You can also give birds a helping hand by providing a stash of nesting materials. Place the items in suet cages so the birds can get to them easily. Here's what birds will use: twigs, hair (dog/cat or human) thin 6" strips of cloth, leaves or long dried grass, yarn, string, or raffia cut to 6" long, pieces of cotton or quilt batting, and pine needles.

Who's in the House?

Not all birds use birdhouses. Even if you buy or build a fantastic one, only the birds that normally use tree holes or nooks of buildings will move in and raise their young there. Some Michigan birds that will use birdhouses are:

American Kestrels-----Northern Flickers
Tufted & Plain Titmice-----Purple Martins
Black-Capped Chickadees-----Wood Ducks
White-Breasted Nuthatches-----Starlings
Common, Barn, & Barred Owls-----Bluebirds
Eastern & Western Screech Owls
House Wrens----- Sparrows & Finches
Red-Headed, Pileated, & Downy Woodpeckers

House Specs

There's an abundance of birdhouses you can buy or build, but dimensions are more important than shape. Consider the type and size of birds you wish to attract before you choose.

Single-family birdhouses: These are designed for parents and their young. Most birds prefer to nest away from others, even those of the same species.

Multi-family birdhouses: Purple Martins, Tree Swallows and House Sparrows are a few of the kinds of birds that don't mind living and raising their young together.

Floor: There should be just enough space for a nest and a parent bird.

Entrance Hole: It should be large enough for a parent bird to enter while keeping predators out (about 1" for most small birds). It should also be high enough from the floor of the house to keep baby birds from falling out, but low enough to allow parent birds to comfortably reach inside and feed them.

Height: The height of the birdhouse from the ground is important since some species prefer nesting high up while others want to raise their young closer to the ground. Listed are some preferences of common birds: Bluebirds: 5 to 10 feet • Chickadees: 6 to 15 feet • Titmice: 6 to 15 feet • Nuthatches: 12 to 20 feet • Purple Martins: 10 to 15 feet • Flickers: 6 to 20 feet • Downy Woodpeckers: 6 to 20 feet.

Placement: Attach your birdhouse to a tree or a sturdy pole near a bush or tree. This enables new parents a place to sit and watch for danger as their young experience their first flight. Also, position it away from prevailing winds, and if a birdhouse has not been used after a year, consider moving it to a new location.

Stunning Seedlings



Rather than start seeds in paper cups or plastic pots, try something new. It's an easy project to get your kids involved with and a good way to spark early-spring excitement. Sow your seeds in pretty, (yet inexpensive) glass jars and dishes. If you've never grown vegetable or flower seedlings, this is a fun and small-scale way to start. They're real attention getters, and fun conversation pieces. If you entertain, they shine as centerpieces or decorative focal points. Your guests are sure to make com-

What You'll Need:

Glass Containers (preferably with lids)

Choose stylish, inexpensive clear-glass containers. Dollar stores, garage/rummage sales or thrift stores are great place to shop for these. Look for candy dishes, large wine glasses, brandy snifters, apothecary jars or bowls. Avoid using crystal because water salts can etch the glass.

Plants

Pretty much any seed will work. If you're doing this with your kids, pick large seeds like sunflower, beans or corn, as they're easier for them to handle. They also sprout quickly, which is an encouragement for youngsters. Herbs are great too and can be used in your kitchen shortly after maturity. Here's a few more suggestions:

Flowers: Zinnias, sunflower, sweet pea, bachelor button, cosmos & marigold

Vegetables: Tomato, beans, bell peppers & corn

Herbs: Basil (green or purple leaf), wheat grass, thyme, chives, cilantro, parsley (flat or curly leaf)

How To:

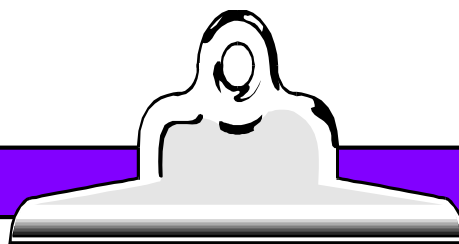
Because there's no drainage holes, fill the bottom third of jar with decorative pebbles, stones, colorful marbles or glass beads. Even aquarium gravel can be used to help with drainage.

Next, add a lightweight, potting soil mixture (preferably one without peat as those mixes encourage fungus gnats). Leave 3" of empty space at the top of the container so seedlings have "head room" to grow and so that a lid (if your container has one) will fit properly.

Plant the seeds in the jar according to the directions on the package. Mist heavily to moisten the potting medium, but don't water to the point of sogginess. Cover the dish with a lid or plastic wrap to increase humidity level, and move it to a warm place while waiting for seeds to sprout. After seedlings appear, remove the lid and move the container to a sunny window.

Water carefully when the soil surface feels dry to the touch. You may occasionally fertilize with liquid fertilizer that has been diluted to quarter-strength. Transplant to the garden after about eight weeks, or as weather allows. Avoid leaving lids on for long periods of time, as it encourages fungal diseases. Lids should also be removed while planted containers are in direct sun.

Gardener Gatherings



What & Where

Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Spring Plant Sale

May 5, 6 & 7

call 734-998-7061 for location & details

Livonia Garden Club Plant Sharing

May 13th 10:00 AM 12:00 PM

at Historical Greenmead

call Liz at 734-425-6880 for details

Detroit News

Spring Perennial Exchange

May 20th 9:00 AM 11:00 PM

call 313-222-2492 for location & details

Novi Spring Perennial Exchange

May 27th 10:00 AM 2:00 PM

Old Township Hall

10 mile Rd. E. of Taft

call 248-347-0400 for more info

MSU Tollgate Gardens

Spring Plant Sale

June 3rd 9:00 AM 2:00 PM

call 248-347-3860 for location & details

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