

Earthly Elements

"Helpful Information From The Trenches"

Issue 1

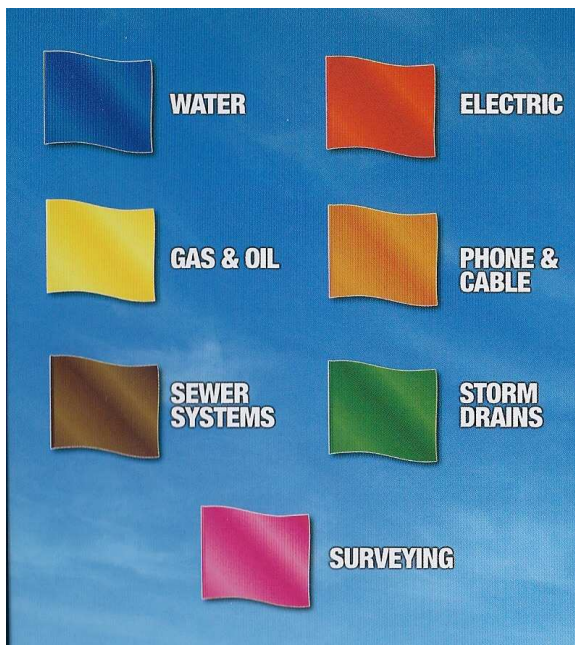
Spring Edition

March 2008

Utility Flags

(What those Colors Mean)

So what do the colored flags mean anyway? Before starting any BIG landscape project always **CALL 811** before you dig. **KNOW what lies BELOW.** Once identified **Always** respect the marks....it will save you time & money. Here's a break down:



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Fantastic



Fernleaf Peony

The Fernleaf peony, *Peonia tenuifolia*, is an awesome & worthy perennial to add to your garden. They are however, more expensive than most peony species or varieties (\$40.00 & up) because they're difficult to propagate. Your best bet to get one is to order online or through catalogs, as they're rarely sold in garden centers.

Fernleaf peonies look quite different from the familiar "old fashioned" peonies. As its common name implies, their foliage is delicate, feathery & well, "ferny". It's also much shorter, growing only 15 to 20 inches tall. They also bloom a week or so earlier, & are available in one color..... **dark red.** The flowers of 'Rubra Plena' (pictured above) are double while 'Plena' is the only cultivar that sports single flowers.

They're somewhat rare & seem exotic, but don't require any additional attention than "old fashioned" varieties. They're quite easy to grow, hardy in zones 3 to 8 & like all peonies, require well-drained soil in a space that receives at least six hours

DID YOU KNOW?

Ants DON'T help the peonies bloom, but they don't hurt the plant either. They feed on the sap of the unopened blooms, then leave when the flowers open. It's still a good idea to give em' a shake before bringing those beautiful blooms in just to be sure.

Fernleaf peonies can be planted in early summer or fall. When planting peonies, it's very important to have the top of the roots only 1 1/2 to 2 inches beneath the soil surface because they won't bloom if planted too deep. Plant the crown division with the pink buds or "eyes" pointing up.

Remove spent blooms on peony plants and keep the soil moderately moist throughout the summer. Do not cut back peony foliage until after the first fall frost.

Peonies are considered a symbol of remembrance. Fernleaf peonies bloom aptly around Mother's Day at the same time as many spring-flowering perennials, trees and shrubs. Use fernleaf peonies as specimen plants or in the front of a garden border. After the flowers fade, the light, airy foliage adds textural contrast to the garden.

Although peonies are propagated by division, they do not like to be divided. Unless crowded by other plants or encroached by shade, peonies are perfectly happy when

"Fun Fact"

Peonies are considered a symbol of remembrance.



Sources for Fernleaf Peony:

*waltersgardens.com (in Michigan)

*dutchgardens.com

*springhillnursery.com

All About Chives

Every garden should include chives, one of the easiest, and prettiest herbs you can grow. Young plants quickly develop into large clumps of grassy foliage topped by round pinkish/lavender flowers in late spring. Both the flowers & leaves have a delicate onion flavor. In addition to common chive (*Allium schoenoprasum*), there's also other varieties that feature special culinary or ornamental qualities. One in particular is 'Profusion'. It's popular because it produces long lasting edible flowers. The reason they stay that way longer is because its flower doesn't produce seeds.

GROWING CHIVES

Chives grow and flower best in full sun, but will also produce plenty of tasty leaves in part shade. Start with young plants available at garden centers or by mail. (Chives started from seeds usually won't be large enough to harvest, until the second year.) Plants grow to about 1' foot tall & wide.

For continuous cutting, keep plants well watered and give them a light application of compost or other fertilizer in spring and again midsummer. Divide large clumps every 3 or 4 years, in early spring.

Cold temperatures can cause chives to go dormant. To extend your harvest, grow a clump in a pot that you can bring inside during the winter. Indoors, keep plants in a cool but bright south-facing window.

HARVESTING CHIVES

Use sharp scissors to cut chives about 2” inches above the soil, harvesting from the outside edges of the clumps. This can be done *before* the plants flower in spring. After plants flower, cut back the entire plant to remove the spent flower stalks.

IN THE KITCHEN

The mild flavor of chives can be used just as you would onions—in salads, omelets, soups or on baked potatoes. The French combine chives with parsley, tarragon & chervil to make a seasoning they call '*fines herbes*'. The herbs are diced so finely, they're almost smelled rather than tasted. They're then added at the very end of the cooking process, because they'll lose potency if heated.

Mulch Works!

Mulch **really** is a good investment. No, it's not a one time deal...but the long term benefits are well worth it. Better soil texture, happier plants and less weeds! April (weather permitting) is the best time to freshen up landscape beds with a new layer of mulch. For most, a light 1” layer or what's referred to as “top dressing” is all that's needed. That amount may vary however, depending on how much the mulch has broken down. Some areas may need more to bring the level back to the 3” depth range. Here's a few more ways your investment “**works**” for you:

- **Weed Away.** Putting down a thick mulch layer along with a bit of Preen®, helps control those pesky invaders. Even when weeds poke their way through the mulch, they're much easier to find and eliminate.
- **Moisture Maintenance.** Mulch decreases evaporation from garden soil, thereby reducing the need to over water during hot spells.
- **Splash Control.** Mulch helps protect plants from soil-borne diseases, such as bacterial spot, which are generally transmitted through soil splashed on leaves during rain or watering. An effective barrier between the soil and plant leaves does help prevent infection from those types of diseases.
- **Beauty Factor.** Layers of double grind hardwood & organic mulch give gardens a neater, more attractive appearance than just bare soil.
- **Keeping Cool.** The sun can heat garden soil significantly during the summer, which can be hazardous to the roots of some plants, such as Clematis. Properly spread mulch helps the soil, and plant roots stay nice and cool.
- **Breaking Down.** During the season, organic mulches decompose, which improves soil texture, by increasing organic matter. The finer the mulch (double or triple grind hardwood), the quicker it decomposes. Before spreading the “top dressing”, it may be best to add compost & Milorganite® (an organic, slow release nitrogen) near the plant bases. BOTH compost & Milorganite helps to replenish nutrients that will get used by the plants themselves & by the mulch during decomposition.

HERBED EGG SALAD

SANDWICHES

When Easter is over, whatcha gonna do with all those leftover eggs? Here's a simple recipe using **BOTH CHIVES & EGGS!** ENJOY!! Recipe serves 4.

- 4 hard-boiled large eggs, (*peeled & chopped*)
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- 2 tablespoons minced **fresh** herbs such as parsley, **chives**, or tarragon
- 1 scallion, minced
- 2 teaspoons (*or to taste*) lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- a pinch freshly grated lemon zest
- 8 slices whole-grain bread

In a bowl stir together all ingredients except bread until combined well. Salt and pepper to taste. Make 4 sandwiches, pressing bread slices together gently.

Hope,
Patience,
& Work

—These are the
Three GRACES of Spring
—Ruth Shaw Ernst

Gardener Gatherings

What & Where

Matthaei Botanical Gardens
Spring Plant Sale
May 2, 3 & 4

call 734-998-7061 for location & details

Canton Beautification Council
Perennial Exchange & Seminars
May 3rd 9:00 AM 12:00 PM

call Ray at 734-502-2017 for location

Livonia Garden Club Plant Sharing
May 17th 10:00 AM 12:00 PM

at Historical Greenmead
call Liz at 734-425-6880 for details

Novi Spring Perennial Exchange
May 24th 9:00 AM 12:00 PM

Old Township Hall
10 mile Rd. E. of Taft
call 248-347-0400 for more info

Northville Historical Society
Perennial Exchange
at Historical Mill Race Village
May 24th 8:00 AM 12:00 PM
call 248-348-1845 for location & details

MSU Tollgate Gardens
Spring Plant Sale
June 7th 9:00 AM 2:00 PM
call 248-347-3860 for location & details