

Nursery News

- Those friendly **Master Gardeners are holding clinics at the nursery again** this spring in May, from 1:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon, on the following dates: Sat. May 6th, Sunday the 7th, Sat. the 13th and Sat. the 27th. These helpful people are here to answer any gardening questions or concerns you may have.
- **Classes will be starting up again in June** and the schedule will be sent out by email. If we don't have you on the list for our online maintenance and pruning bulletins, please drop us a quick note to russellnursery@telus.net
- **Hours:** We're open 7 days a week from 9 to 5.
- **A warm welcome** to Laurel Kennedy and Catherine Macleod who have joined us this spring.
- **It's time to fertilize, if you haven't done so already.** Lawns should have been done by now, but it's still not too late for the first feeding. For trees, shrubs and perennials, Acer 20-10-10 slow release fertilizer is the best general purpose fertilizer we have, and is what we use here at the nursery. It is available in 3 sizes: 4, 8 and 20 kg. If you would like to use an organic fertilizer on your vegetable garden, we also carry a new product from the Gaia line especially for that.
- **Questions? Comments? Suggestions?** We'd love to hear from you. Our mailing address is Russell Nursery 1370 Wain Rd. North Saanich, BC V8L 5K8. Our phone number is 656-0384 and our email address is russellnursery@telus.net
- **Gardening Smartifact:** Try to keep the lawn away from your trees. It is too competitive for nutrients and moisture. Instead use woodland perennials, especially those that don't mind growing around tree roots.



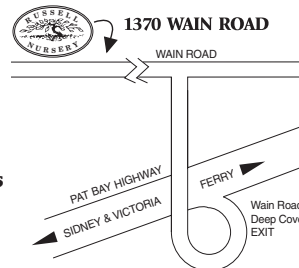
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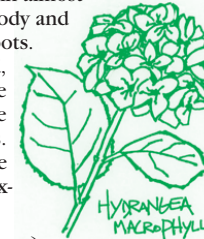


Spring 2006 GARDENING NEWS

Heads up on Hydrangeas - by Susan Tice

Summer flowering shrubs are few and far between and there are none showier than hydrangeas with their brilliant colours and long lasting blooms. Look beyond the common garden types and you'll find a large assortment of unsung heroes; truly gorgeous and versatile plants that are not so often seen. Following are a few notes on some of the interesting varieties and species that could provide you with a spectacular display of colour this summer.

Climbing Hydrangea (*H. anomala petiolaris*). Climbing or crawling, this is one big vine. Slow to get started, it has the potential to cover a large area. It will grow happily in sun or shade in almost any soil. The branch structure is woody and attaches to its support with aerial roots. Use it to scramble along the ground, cover a fence, a rock wall or the side of an unsightly shed. It flowers in the late spring with big white lacecaps. The leaves are a lustrous green and the bark develops a beautiful peeling texture.



Smooth Hydrangea (*H. arborescens*): Happy in full sun but able to flower and grow in quite heavy shade. Does best in moist, humous, well-drained soil. Blooms on new growth. Can be lightly pruned or cut back hard for the largest blooms. **H. 'Annabelle'** produces large rounded flower heads (up to 12" across) that start out lime green and mature to bright white. It does tend to be floppy if it gets overhead watering. **H. 'White**

Dome' has very sturdy stems that hold the clouds of white lace-cap blooms nice and straight. Great in a woodland setting or for mass planting. Both types are good for cutting and drying.

Teddy Bear Hydrangea (*H. aspera*): Large in stature, leaf and bloom. A sheltered, shady, moist, woodland garden is just the spot for this one. Its flowers are large pink-purple lace-caps with prominent fuzzy centres. The leaves and stems are fuzzy too. Flowers mostly on previous season's growth - prune after flowering. A stunning plant for a big space.

Hydrangea paniculata: Easy to grow and extremely adaptable to acid or alkaline soils, moist or dryish conditions (once established) and doesn't mind clay. Flowers best in sun or partial shade. Can become quite large- 10 feet or more, or kept down with hard pruning. Flowers generally are large, white and cone-shaped and occur on new wood. Several cultivars are available, among the best are the following:

'Limelight' : Produces lime green flowers in mid-summer that age to deep pink in the fall. Great as cut flowers, either fresh or dried. Try this one in the perennial border where the cool green will complement many colour schemes. Grows to 6-8 ft.

'Little Lamb' : Smaller in stature than most in this group. The small blooms look like little lambs



Leah, Joe, Jacquie, Michele, Angie, Lynne & "Cassie", Brian & "Sandy", Catherine, Marlene, Laurel & "Sally", Val, Susan

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dancing across the plant. Perfect for the smaller garden or in a container.

'Pink Diamond' : Large conical flowerheads open white and age to a deep rich pink. Stunning as a specimen planting. Hard pruning produces larger blooms. Somewhat drought tolerant, but dry soils produce smaller blooms.

'Grandiflora' (PG or PeeGee): The original panicle type, first introduced in 1860- if it's been around that long it has to be good! Capable of reaching 15 to 20 feet, pruning and thinning will keep it to a much smaller size. Can produce cone-shaped blooms 18" long and 12" across the base.

Oakleaf Hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) : Known best for its great fall colour. On the coast it does best in open, sunny, moist, conditions. **'Alice'** grows

Tips for Growing Beautiful Hydrangeas:

Site: Plant in sun or light shade. Hydrangeas in a lot of sun need to be well-watered and mulched. They are at their best in bright light with some shade in the hottest part of the day. Moist, humous soil is preferred by most types.

Soil: Soil and colour are closely linked. The flower colour of *H. macrophylla* is directly related to the pH of the soil. Blue flowers develop in acid soil and pinks in neutral or alkaline soil. Around here, soils tend to be slightly acid and flower colour hovers between shades of pink and blue. For better blues, incorporate peat moss at planting time and avoid the use of bonemeal. White flowers aren't affected by pH.

The other factor that affects colour is aluminum. To improve blues, aluminum sulphate can be watered into the soil several times, at weekly inter-

Euphorbias - by Lynne, Marleen and Leah

This vast genus of plants can provide something for most occasions, from the back of the border to the front row, adding subtleties of colour and form which can stand alone or compliment neighbouring plants.

Why it's better on Vancouver Island - Reason 1,001 and counting.

Do you have deer visiting your garden? Gracefully nibbling a leaf here and there before moving along? Well, it could be a lot worse - you could be in Anchorage and have moose visiting instead. An alert "Gardening News" reader showed us an article from the gardening section of the *Alaska Daily News*.



8-10 feet, is sun tolerant, and produces a multitude of white cone shaped blooms that mature to rose pink. The fall foliage is burgundy red. Flowers best on old wood. Deadhead in fall.

Big Leaf Hydrangeas: (*H. macrophylla*). No article on hydrangeas is complete without mentioning this group. Large, showy and beautiful this is the group that has it all. Some unusual cultivars to watch for: **'All Summer Beauty'**- blooms on old and new wood. **'Amethyst'**- Soft mauve, double flowering, semi-dwarf. **'Ayesha'**- unusual cupped flowers- look like lilacs. **'Hornlii'**- Small and cute. **'Jogasaki'**- large growing, unusual double lace-cap form. **'Nigra'**- black stems and day-glo pink blooms. **'Shamrock'**- new, double lace-cap, pink flowers age to dark red, blue to deep violet.

vals, in the spring and fall. Mix at a rate of 5ml aluminum to 1 litre of water.

Pruning: *H. macrophylla* blooms on old wood so avoid hard pruning. The best time to prune around here is about mid-March. You'll see that there are several pairs of buds down the length of the stem. Cut off all the old flower heads just above the first pair of good strong buds. Our experience has been that many varieties will still flower if they have been pruned to a lower bud, so you could experiment a little to see what kind of results you get. A young plant will need very little pruning beyond deadheading. On older plants cut out about a third of the oldest stems close to the ground to encourage the growth of new ones. Also cut out any dead or damaged stems. Most other types flower on new wood and can be pruned to control size and shape.

Euphorbias have adapted to different environments worldwide and most varieties are from tropical or sub-tropical zones, with probably the best known example being the poinsettia (Euphor-

continues...

In the harsh Alaskan winters, virtually no ornamental plant is safe from these mighty masticators. The scary thing about these animals is their size and their appetite: a moose needs **20 to 40 pounds of twigs** to stay alive for a single winter's day.

bia pulcherrima). Many varieties are succulents, some are trees, but it is the hardy perennials which are of interest to us here.

What at first glance appears to be an unusual flower is in fact a modified leaf (sometimes called a bract) which surrounds the true flower, usually an inconspicuous yellow. In most cases it is the chartreuse hues of the bracts forming large heads which provide a wonderful foil to other colours in the garden. Some of the heads can make interesting cut flowers. The benefit of having the show created by bracts instead of flowers is that the effect lasts for several months, generally starting in early spring and going well into summer.

Most Euphorbias are poisonous and all have a sticky, milky sap (often referred to as latex) which can be an irritant. Some people are more sensitive than others to this sap so care should be taken when handling or pruning euphorbias. Wear gloves if necessary and be particularly careful not to get the sap anywhere near your eyes. On the good news front, deer and rabbits also find the sap irritating and the genus as a whole has proven to be deer resistant.

Many of the tried and true varieties have links to Euphorbia characias. *E. characias wulfenii* first springs to mind, probably due to its sheer size. At a height of 1.5 m (4-5') it really makes a statement and the clump in the garden at the nursery draws many a comment. With an almost shrubby appearance, the grey-green leaves surround the stout stems which become topped with cylindrical heads of chartreuse bracts in early spring. The flowering stems age to yellow and by the time they need cutting back in summer the new shoots are present to give foliage and form throughout the winter. Low plantings of perennials around the base allow the true majesty of this specimen to be appreciated. For those with less space there are varieties such as 'Humpty Dumpty' or 'Jade Dragon' which reach 75 cm (2'6") and give a similar look. 'Portuguese Velvet' is unusual in that the leaves are covered with tiny hairs, giving it an almost felty appearance. A newcomer to the scene is 'Tasmanian Tiger' which has green and white striped foliage and creamy-white flower heads with the potential to reach 1 m (3'). We are looking forward to seeing this as a mature plant. Similar in form to *E. characias* is the hybrid *E. martinii*. The leaves and stems have maroon highlights and the "flowers" have brown centres. A diminutive form by the name of 'Baby Charm' which only reaches 30 cm (1') is also sometimes available.

Upright forms with interesting highlights on the leaves and stems are *E. schillingii* and the variety

'Excalibur'. Leaves are bigger than on most Euphorbias and have lighter strips down the middle. Spring growth on 'Excalibur' has lovely bright maroon edges and looks wonderful when teamed with flowering perennials which echo the cream and maroon accents, such as lilies. Yellow and chartreuse "flowers" predominate but an exception is *E. griffithii* with its burnt orange bracts atop slender green leaved stems up to 1 m (3') tall. It can form sizeable clumps in the garden but is not invasive. The most common variety is aptly named 'Fireglow' but a slightly shorter form is 'Dixter', a selection with darker leaves having a reddish tone.

All these varieties can be cut down to the ground in fall.

Some Euphorbias are not so well behaved but their colonizing habits make them excellent ground cover. *E. cyparissias* types such as 'Fens Ruby' have soft feathery foliage which gives wonderful texture, only grows to about 20 cm (8") and can be teamed with grasses or shrubs but needs to be kept away from anything too delicate which may be overwhelmed. *E. robbiae* is the ultimate ground cover for that impossible dry shady area where nothing else will grow. Essentially evergreen, the bright green leaves grow to 30 cm (1') and are then topped with airy spikes of yellow-green bracts in spring.

Euphorbia epithymoides (sometimes known as *E. polychroma*) is one of the smaller forms which gives the effect of a green mound 45 cm (18") high with flat topped golden-yellow bracts which look much more like flowers than other euphorbias. There is also a variety with purple foliage (*E. epithymoides purpurea*) for an interesting colour combination. At the smaller end of the scale is *E. myrsinites*, a dwarf variety from the Mediterranean. It grows about 15 cm (6") and has unusual spikey grey leaves hugging thick stems which appear to spiral out from the centre. It is suitable for a rock garden as good drainage is essential - gravel underneath the lax stems will help prevent rotting in winter. It is very drought tolerant.

In general Euphorbias are not fussy plants, are mostly pest and disease free, and all of the described varieties will thrive in any reasonable soil provided it is well drained - Euphorbias do not like wet feet, particularly in winter. Bright light is ideal and, although most will grow in full sun, some protection during the hottest part of the day is preferable. All but the giant varieties (even the spreading ones) make excellent container plants, either alone or in mixed plantings.

