

Nursery News

- Those friendly Master Gardeners are holding clinics at the nursery again this spring on Saturdays or Sundays in May and June. They will be here to answer any gardening questions or concerns you may have on the following dates: May 11th and 25th, June 7th, 8th and 15th, from 1 to 3 in the afternoon.
- 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
- Do you know what the numbers on the bags of fertilizer refer to? The three numbers refer to the percentage of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium in that particular formulation. For example, 6-8-6 would have 6% nitrogen, 8% phosphorus and 6% potassium and quite a high percentage of filler.
- Hours: We're open 7 days a week from 9 to 5.
- A warm welcome to Jane Hunter and Angela Boss, who have joined us this spring.
- It's time to fertilize, if you haven't done so already. 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 we have several options. Lawns should be fed now as well. We have three different lawn fertilizers, two of them are organic (Milorganite and Gaia Green).
- Questions? Comments? Suggestions? We'd love to hear from you. Our mailing address is Russell Nursery 1370 Wain Rd. North Saanich, BC V8L 5V1. Our phone number is 656-0384 and our email address is russellnursery@telus.net

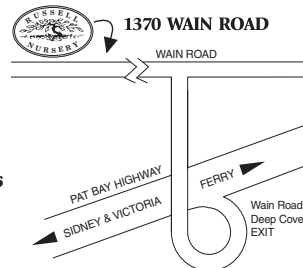
Russell Nursery in North Saanich

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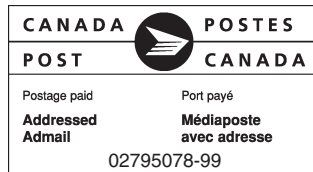
Unusual and hard-to-find plants along with all the old favourites for your garden. Specializing in trees, shrubs and perennials. Wide Selection of Japanese Maples.

1370 Wain Road, North Saanich – Phone 656-0384

Regular hours open daily 9-5:00 except some holidays



Russell Nursery
1370 Wain Road
North Saanich, BC V8L 5V1



Spring 2008 GARDENING NEWS

Staff Plant Favourites



Laurel's Pick: *Cotinus* 'Grace' & 'Young Lady' Most people are familiar with the burgundy foliage of the purple smoke bush, but newer introductions like 'Young Lady' and 'Grace' are well worth trying. Both are disease free, deer resistant,

drought tolerant and brilliantly coloured in the fall. 'Grace' has large rounded leaves that are a translucent silvery purple that shimmers when backlit by the sun. It can get very large – reaching almost treelike proportions, but will tolerate hard pruning in winter and is thus kept to a manageable size. At the other end of the spectrum is 'Young Lady', a compact grower that is perfect for small gardens and containers. It has greyish apple-green leaves. It is the most prolific bloomer of all the smoke bushes and is covered with frothy pink flowers for most of the summer.

Sue's Pick: *Sambucus* 'Black Lace' & 'Black Beauty' The stunning, almost black

foliage, the masses of pink flowers and the easy going nature of these plants put them on many 'Top 10' lists. 'Black Lace' has fine cut foliage and could be mistaken for a Japanese maple, but it's much less particular. It holds its colour well, even in shade. 'Black Beauty' has huge flowers that develop into edible berries. Sambucus prefer moist soils, but can be somewhat drought tolerant once established. They benefit from hard pruning in the spring and aside from that are maintenance free.



Brian's Pick: *Styrax japonica* 'Emerald Pagoda'. This cultivar has a larger leaf and flower than the regular Japanese Snowbell Tree,

and it is a good, strong grower to about 25 feet high. It is a heavy bloomer, with fragrant, white, star-shaped flowers about one inch across. The leaf is dark green and leathery in texture, and the fall colour is a clear, luminous yellow. Snowbell trees are largely pest and disease free. One of our customers told us recently that this was the "most beautiful tree she had every planted".



Lynne, Leah, Michele, Kim, Katja, Brian, Laurel, Laurie, Faye, Sue, Angela and Jane.

GARDENING NEWS comes to you courtesy of
Russell Nursery in North Saanich

1370 Wain Road, N. Saanich 656-0384
Regular hours – open daily, 9-5

Katja's pick: *Ilex crenata* 'Convexa' This form of Japanese holly, *Ilex crenata* 'Convexa', is a free-fruited (black glossy fruit) evergreen shrub with small, curled, glossy green foliage. It is fast growing and makes a superb low hedge either sheared or un-sheared. It is a handsome plant that is an alternative to the slower growing boxwood. It makes an elegant

backdrop to the flower garden or will provide strong architectural form as a specimen. It looks amazing if used with grasses, such as *Pennisetum* and/or *Carex*. *Ilex* 'Convexa' is durable and easy to manage. Grow it in sun to part-shade. This drought tolerant plant is adaptable to clay and sandy soils.

Grasses For The Shade Garden - by Leah Croft

Those of us lucky enough to have shady gardens are, for the most part, well-versed in the types of perennials that will thrive there - hostas, ferns, brunnera, dicentra to name but a few. There is one group of plants that we shade gardeners tend to overlook, and that would be grasses, many of which are very useful in lower-light conditions.

First of all, take the *Carex* family. Mostly evergreen and technically classified as Sedges, *Carex* fall into the category of ornamental grasses. *Carex* 'Evergold' forms a low cascading clump of finely cut creamy-yellow and green variegated leaves. *C.* 'Kaga Nishiki' ('Gold Fountains') with its soft, bright green and gold foliage is perfect for a waterside planting, alongside various primulae. Semi-evergreen in our area, a quick clean-up after the winter puts it back into tip-top shape! *C.* 'Frosty Curls' has finely textured, soft green leaves that look silver at a distance, slowly growing to 12-24". *C. flagellifera* (reddish-tan foliage, 14" - 20" tall) is tough enough to handle some dry shade once established. *C.* 'Ice Dance' is the multi-tasker in the family: with dark green foliage edged with white, it slowly spreads by rhizomes and is lovely beneath taller growing perennials and shrubs. Though it prefers moist, well-drained soil, it has done well in the drier areas of my garden, and come through the winter in pristine condition. The knock-out in the family is Bowles Golden Sedge, a herbaceous beauty which needs moist soil and serves as a perfect accent to broader leaved perennials.

Acorus 'Ogon' is a low-grower with fan-like, golden foliage that provides a splash of sunshine in any waterlogged parts of the garden. *Acorus gr.* 'Variegatus' is cream and green, lending itself equally well to containers, bor-



ders, mass plantings and waterside conditions.

The most revered grass for shade here at the nursery is *Hakonechloa* 'Aureola'. Slow to establish, maturing to somewhere between 18" and 24" in height, its gold and green striped leaves arch gracefully, making it perfect as a focal point, or as countless visitors to the nursery can attest, the ultimate container plant (who hasn't noticed all the gold emanating from that pot underneath the willow tree). The straight species, *Hakonechloa macra* is dark green. My personal favourite is *H.* 'Albo-Striata'. Quite literally meaning 'white striped', it actually has more of a pale yellow to the centre of its leaf, making it more subtle and less brassy than its better known cousin 'Aureola'. I find this one to be understated and far easier to use, be it with ferns in the shade or even some blue *Agapanthus* in the sun, (this guy can take it). It's absolutely stunning.

Then, there are those grasses that 'live in denial' - those that seem well-suited for sun, but actually need protection during the hottest part of the day to look their best. Most of the following will also tolerate drier conditions. Most varieties of *Deschampsia* are evergreen here and carry airy panicles of flowers well above the foliage. *Deschampsia* 'Northern Lights', cream and green variegated with pink tints, is small and easily slipped into a mixed container planting. *Molinia caerulea* (Variegated Moor Grass) looks similar but will grow slightly larger, finishing up somewhere between 12" and 20". *Calamagrostis* 'Avalanche' is tall, but narrow, quickly growing to 4' high. Its gold flower plumes are offset by the dramatic white stripe down the centre of its leaves.

Brightly coloured *Stipa arundinacea* (Pheasant's Tail Grass) will happily exist in sun

or dryish dappled shade as will Northern Sea Oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*), which is worthy of a special spot in a Japanese-influenced garden. Its beautiful green leaves are bamboo-like in appearance, and its seedpods are extremely decorative (see photo).

If you are into grasses but have shade - so be it, embrace your darker side! As a groundcover or specimen in a container, mass planting or focal point, consider some grasses for your shadier site.

Soil and Fertilizing Basics for Gardeners

- by Faye Ford and Susan Tice



Know Your Soil

Gardeners living in this paradise called the West Coast seem to have two chronic complaints - bad weather and poor soil.

Unlike the weather, soil can always be improved. Correct soil pH (pH is the measure of the acidity or alkalinity of the soil) and balanced nutrients can make the difference between a lush green garden and one that barely supports life.

Feed the soil, and the soil will feed the plants. Sounds easy, right? But how do you know what might be lacking in your soil or what the pH is? In our rainy climate, it's reasonable to assume that our soils are on the acid side, i.e. have a low pH, but to really get the scoop on your soil, we recommend soil testing.

Soil testing is used to determine the levels of essential nutrients in, and the pH of, the soil. Test results will include recommendations for fertilizer and amendments needed for optimum plant growth. Follow the recommendations to ensure that your soil is feeding your plants a healthy, balanced diet. Ideally, a repeat test should be done in three years to monitor the effectiveness of amendments.

Soil Testing can be done locally at MB Laboratories, 2062 Henry Ave. West in Sidney, 656-1334

NPK - Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium, the Major Nutrients

Nitrogen, for lush vegetative growth, is the nutrient most likely to be lacking. It should come from a source such as well aged compost, manure, or slow release fertilizer. In order for nitrogen to be absorbed by plants it must be in the right chemical form. Nitrogen in properly aged compost and manures is already in the right form and high quality granu-

lar fertilizers contain both readily available and slow release nitrogen. Nitrogen is most effective when plants are actively growing, so add organic matter and fertilizers in the spring, when soils have warmed up a little, and the micro-organisms in the soil are awake and feeding - doing their job of converting nutrients into plant food.

Phosphorus is important for "roots and shoots". It stimulates root growth, formation of flowers and seeds and provides for fast, vigorous growth. Testing will show that there are high amounts of phosphorus in local soils, but generally it is in a chemical form that is unusable by plants. Bone meal or rock phosphate should be added at planting time and must be in direct contact with the roots to be of use. Top dressing with bone meal is ineffective and wasteful.

Potassium is important for cell development. It stimulates early growth, and promotes hardiness and disease resistance. It is readily soluble in fertilizer form, but is not well absorbed in very wet soil. Oxygen is needed for it to be taken up by the roots, therefore keeping soil texture loose with organic amendments is key. The optimum temperature for uptake of potassium is 15 - 25 degrees C. Heat activated, slow release fertilizers are an effective source of potassium.

Minor Players

The minor minerals required for excellent garden soil include calcium for sturdy young plant growth, magnesium for the formation of amino acids and vitamins, iron and sulphur for chlorophyll synthesis and copper for the metabolism of nitrogen.

In the end it comes down to good stewardship. Overuse of fertilizers is bad for the environment and underuse of fertilizers and amendments is bad for the plants. As in many things, striking a balance is the key to success!