

The Garden Path

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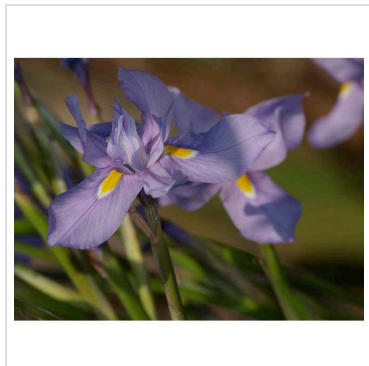
November 2016

PLANT OF THE MONTH By Marty Finkel

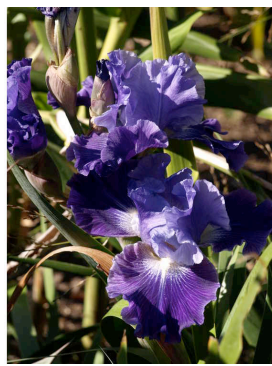
A fall-blooming “iris,” *Moraea polystachya*

The feature plant for this month comes from South Africa and is not in the genus *Iris* – some of its common names are peacock iris, butterfly iris, and African iris. It is *Moraea polystachya*, and it looks like an iris. It comes up and begins to bloom in September on stalks to 2 feet tall, with flowers succeeding one another through heavy frosts. These flower scapes are well-branched, and the structure resembles that of a blackberry lily. The flowers are light lavender-blue, and one source reports the size as one inch while another source says three inches. The plant goes dormant in summer and its grass-like leaves disappear, and it needs excellent drainage or it will rot. It should be grown in full sun.

Since the plant of the month is iris, here are photos of reblooming bearded irises alongside the butterfly iris for comparison. The reblooming irises bloom in the fall – October and November. Their culture is the same as the iris that bloom only in the spring. They need to be watered during dry times in the summer to bloom well in the fall.



Moraea polystachya



Iris 'Daughter of Stars'



Iris 'Aunt Mary'

Photo credits: The J.C. Raulston Arboretum

CHECKLIST By Mary Jane Bosworth

- Now is a great time to divide perennials in our area. Use a digging fork to lift an entire clump of hostas or other clump forming plants. Using a sharp device: knife, shovel or whatever works for you, divide the plant and replant at the same depth.
- Plan now for spring color. Set out spring flowering bulbs such as daffodils and tulips.
- Plant pansies and other hardy winter plants for color.
- This is the ideal time to plant evergreens, conifers and deciduous trees and shrubs. The cool weather allows for the formation of a good root system.

- It is also the time to transplant any trees and shrubs that need to be moved. Remember to consider the mature size of the plant before selecting a site.
- Have your soil tested now so you are ready for spring.
- Continue to remove debris from gardens: leaves, spent annuals, weeds.
- Mulch after the first killing frost for winter protection.

ORGANIC FARM SALES INCREASING By Edna Gaston

Recently I received a very interesting article from “greenTalks” by Ball Publishing Co. More good reasons for supporting local growers. At the end are listed 10 states with the highest sales of organic products, NC is not one of them. The article, entitled “Organic Sales Up 13% in 2015, But Not in All Segments” was written by Jennifer Duffield White. Here’s a short excerpt:

“Organic sales increased by 13% in 2015, according to the results of the 2015 Certified Organic Survey, which the USDA just released. Moreover, the organic farmers surveyed indicated that they plan to expand their production in coming years. Vegetables accounted for \$1.4 billion, while fruits, tree nuts and berries came in at \$1.2 billion. Dig a little deeper, though, and you’ll find that not all crops surveyed showed such growth. Organic floriculture and nursery crops reported lower sales (though propagative material more than doubled). Caveat being, of course, that this is a voluntary survey of organic producers, not a full inventory of every organic sale made in 2015.” The article goes on to note that total organic sales in 2015 were \$6.2 billion. For the complete article, here’s the link: <http://www.ballpublishing.com/GrowerTalks/ViewNewsletter.aspx?article=2056>

THE TYROS' CORNER By Eileen Novak

It has occurred to me over the past couple of years that I would be a better gardener if I weren’t so Frugal. (That sounds much better than “cheap”, doesn’t it?)

I have been weeding on numerous (VERY numerous) occasions and have seen a seedling of something and thought “isn’t that nice?” Wild cherry trees, for example, sprout up anywhere a cherry-eating bird has stopped on a branch and relieved itself. Since the trees, in the woods, are prone to some kind of disease that causes large knots on the trunk, and they die soon thereafter, I always thought that they needed all the help I could give them, so they are interspersed in my daylilies, my salvias, my blueberries and next to each fruit tree that I have planted. To put it bluntly, I’m enabling these weeds out of pity.

I like the little cedar trees that I have found, and now there is one growing behind my emergency generator that I am really going to have to kill, now that it’s too big to transplant (my original idea). The stately and elegant yellow poplar is another tree I would like to have more of in my landscape. It should not, however, stay in the planting 3 feet from the garage door. At this point it is yet another candidate for relocation as soon as it loses its leaves.

I have a little holly bush, nestled at the roots of a peach tree, which should have been moved last year. I do intend to move it this autumn, probably to the detriment of both the peach and the holly. Since I don’t know what KIND of holly it is, I will probably put it in the wrong place entirely, necessitating another move a few years down the road.

You see, I look upon these gifts of the birds as “freebies”, bargains, bonuses in the grand scheme of things. The birds would save me a lot of time by dropping their gifts where I want them, but somehow I have failed to communicate that to them.

Another of the “freebies” that I am always reluctant to remove are the volunteer tomato plants that pop up wherever they want. A nest of them is crawling over my crinum lily. Many more of them are trying to sunbathe on my dwarf crepe myrtles in the back. I read with amusement the directions online of “how to save tomato seeds”: Collect them carefully, rinse them, and then put them in water for a couple of days so the protective gel ferments away then dry them and store them at 40 degrees in low humidity. Yeah, right. My directions: find a tomato that was partially eaten, had blossom end rot or cracked and was ignored. Throw it at the compost pile in the garden & miss. Leave it in the elements and there will be a fantastic crop of seedlings in the spring, before your carefully nurtured seeds that you sent away for and sprouted are ready to hit the garden.

I keep justifying my “don’t pull it yet” attitude by remembering the one time that I saw something come up

and saying “those leaves look familiar, let’s see what it turns into” and being favored by a large-blossomed hibiscus bush. That’s one success compared to about a hundred of “whoops – should have pulled this out when it was smaller”.

So beginning gardeners, take it from someone who has learned by making this mistake. If you didn’t put it there, don’t leave it there. There will be birds dropping cherry, juniper and many other seeds all over the place, so that the species will continue. It’s not your job to ensure it.

INTERESTING TID-BITS By Marty Finkel

- Researchers at the Penn State University Department of Horticulture in a partnership with the Xerces Society (a conservation group dedicated to protecting threatened beneficial insects) has compiled a list of the ten top plants for total pollinator visits over three years. These are:

Mountain mint (<i>Pycnanthemum muticum</i>)	Erect goldenrod (<i>Solidago rigida</i>)
Rattlesnake master (<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>)	Gray goldenrod (<i>S. nemoralis</i>)
Thoroughwort (<i>Eupatorium hysopifolium</i>)	Dwarf blazing star (<i>Liatris microcephala</i>)
Coastal plain Joe Pye weed (<i>Eutrochium dubium</i>)	Swamp milkweed (<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>)
Wild bergamot (<i>Monarda fistula</i>)	Smooth aster (<i>Symphotrichum</i>)

This list was compiled for the northeast US, but they should all do well in NC. Rattlesnake master was chosen as 2016 Wildflower of the Year by the NC Botanical Garden.

A list specific for NC has been compiled by Debbie Roos, Chatham County Agriculture Agent, and it is divided into spring, summer, and fall blooming plants. A list of native plant and seed suppliers is also on the list.

- Daffodils that bloom in the fall? Yes, according to an article in the current issue of the *Daffodil Journal*, the official publication of the American Daffodil Society. Most are fragrant and shorter than their spring-blooming cousins. The species daffodils *Narcissus serotinus*, *N. obsoletus*, and *N. miniatus* are autumn-flowering and they grow best in gravelly, well-drained soils in full sun. Some have 15 or more flowers to a stem, some 5 or fewer, and some are solitary. They are native to Israel, islands of the Mediterranean, and the coastal areas of North Africa, including Morocco. Information for this tidbit came from the October 2016 issue of *The Avant Gardener* and Internet sources.
- The Monarch butterfly’s migration to Central Mexico and back takes it through a large part of North Carolina. Why not have a Butterfly Highway that features “pit stops” for them to rest, refuel on nectar and water along their journey – that’s just what Angel Hjarding did when she turned her doctoral research project into “one of the fastest-growing conservation programs in the state,” to quote Renee Elder in a March 2016 News & Observer article. Hjarding’s research in geographic information science in her field of geography at UNC Charlotte led her to realize that vanishing butterfly habits could be restored if enough people made a dedicated effort to plant food sources for them across the state. She says that anyone with a little land, patio-size garden, rooftop garden, even container garden, can become a part of the Butterfly Highway. She is working with utility companies, city parks, and the state DOT to encourage their using native plants in their rights-of-way and avoiding the removal of trees whenever possible (she notes that oak trees host more caterpillars than any other plant.) At about a month into the public phase of the project, 250 sites were registered. There are participants in every part of the state, with Mecklenburg County boasting the highest number. To become part of the Butterfly Highway, gardeners need “to pledge to support pollinators by providing a place for butterflies to rest, have a drink and refuel.” Hjarding’s website is butterflyhighway.org, and native plant seeds are available through it as well as signs designating participation in the butterfly highway. More than 100 signs were already in place at the time the article was written in March. The signs are sold at cost, which is about \$25. Just refer to the first tidbit and start planting – add a water source – and you’re on the Butterfly Highway!

GARDENING FOR THE BIRDS AND THE BEES, BUTTERFLIES AND ME by Edna Gaston

Recently the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service placed seven species of bees that are native to Hawaii on the Endangered Species List. Unfortunately, this is the first time bees have been on this list. As we all know bumblebees are suffering and we need to help now before they, too, are added to the list. Here are a few suggestions from an article by Meghan Shinn on the www.hortmag.com website entitled “Help Bumblebees with Your Garden”.

- Provide them with pollen and nectar from late winter through early fall. Plan your garden to start blooming early and finish late.
- Choose flowers that welcome the bumblebees. Plants native to your area are a good choice because the bees have evolved alongside them. Exotic (but not invasive) species can work, too. Just be sure to use the straight species, or pick cultivars that retain the general look of the species’ flower. That is, avoid cultivars bred for double petals or other fancy forms that make it hard for the bumblebee to access the pollen.
- Bumblebees best like purple, blue and yellow flowers. They cannot see the color red.
- Avoid using pesticides.
- Help bumblebees, which typically nest underground, overwinter by leaving some ground undisturbed—that is, not planted or mowed. Bumblebees may also take up in compost piles, woodpiles, stone walls or empty bird houses.

Much of this information has been said before. But it never hurts to keep these suggestions in mind. Now is a good time to think about bees, select plants and get them in the ground when appropriate so they can become established and ready to welcome our buzzing friends. For the complete article, visit <http://www.hortmag.com/weekly-tips/help-bumblebees-with-your-garden>

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