



MARCH/APRIL 2003

HEDGEHOG HILL FARM NEWS

SPRING CARE

We have heard many expressions of concern over the harsh winter and what effects it may have on our gardens this season. It has been one of the coldest winters we have seen in our thirty years of farming in Maine. But quite honestly, we are less concerned about the cold temps than we are about the way that spring actually unfolds and how much of a fluctuation there will be in April and May weather patterns. Here are some thoughts about spring garden care, based on the methods we have developed over the years. If you have mulches on your gardens, make certain that you don't take them off until the harsh cold is well over. Many plants are growing just under the soil surface and under the mulches and they are very tender at this stage. Keep plants protected from unexpected late freezes and strong winds. Don't clean beds too early.

In our perennial gardens, we don't do any fall cleanup, preferring instead to let old top growth and leaves remain on the gardens as a natural blanket. Therefore in the spring we need to clip, rake, weed and clean. In so doing, we remove our natural mulches but immediately add another mulch over the tender emerging plants.



This prepared mulch is a top-dressing, that will provide nourishment to the garden for the ensuing year. The top dressing is a combination of composted horse manure mixed with a small amount of peat to make a very friable and light mulch that can be spread easily over the garden without clumping. The dressing is applied to a depth of two to four inches. Once the spring rains begin, they release the nutrients from the mulch down into the gardens and this is all that we do for feeding in any given season, unless we are redoing a bed, or lifting and dividing old plants.

Once the perennials show growth through the applied dressing, then we sometimes claw the dressing into the earth around the plants, a task that accomplishes the final weeding and aerating of the bed. We apply this practice to all of our established display gardens yearly, and it keeps them vigorous and healthy.

If there are winter losses in any of the beds, we replace plants at this time and work some extra manure into the planting holes. From the time that we begin our spring care and all through the earliest weeks of the growing season, there is another task that is just as important as cleaning and feeding. It's watching for and correcting any heaving of the soils that happens with the constant spring thawing and freezing. We fully expect that the frost has penetrated the ground very deep this year and that there will be lots of heaving in the gardens. You recognize this if a plant seems to be sitting just a little too high in relation to the soil around it; if the heaving is significant, there may even be roots visible above the soil line.

Whenever you see this, take the time to reposition the plant back into the garden. Bring fresh soil up around the roots and tamp the earth firmly around the plant. You may have to do this in each garden several times but consider it time well spent as plants that have made it nicely through the winter can be killed simply by being pushed up out of the soil, exposing roots to temperature stresses and allowing them to dry.

Just a little extra care in the spring can compensate for the demands of a difficult winter. Don't assume that everything is okay just because you see early growth on your plants. Monitor the conditions carefully in April and May, especially during those first critical weeks when the snow has melted and plants are first exposed to unpredictable spring conditions.

CUTTING GARDENS

When beds are designed as display gardens, it is often difficult to allow ourselves to cut flowers from them for use inside. At the farm, we have display and production gardens; the latter are planted specifically for harvesting. It doesn't take very much space in a home garden to allocate a section for growing cut flowers and with a little planning you can have ample material for making gifts and decorating your own home.

If you choose some of the more productive annuals and herbs, you will be surprised how you can harvest liberally all season. Some annuals are so floriferous that they actually side-branch vigorously in response to being cut. Here are a few suggestions taken from this year's Plant Catalogue: agastache and lemon bee balm from the herb section; from the annual section, calendula, calliopsis, asters, cosmos, lisianthus, snapdragons, salvia viridis, tall verbena, zinnias, lavatera, nicotiana and sunflowers; from the everlasting section, Russian statice, limonium, gomphrenas, larkspur, both amaranthus and pennisetum. The list is lengthy, and from it you would need only three or four dozen plants for abundant harvests. It's a very modest investment in money, space and time and a cutting garden will embolden you to pick and arrange from early summer well into the fall.

DESIGN ASSISTANCE

If you are planning new gardens or amending existing areas, you undoubtedly have a number questions about what plants do best in what conditions. Please let us help you with your gardening questions. The staff at Hedgehog Hill consists of people who have been gardening for decades and we make a special effort to learn about all of the plants that we offer for sale at the farm. We have field tested nearly all of our materials and can offer information on how plants behave, what conditions they require, how rapidly they grow, how they can be divided, what you can expect in terms of possible disease and predation. Knowing answers to any of these questions can give you a real advantage in having success with your plantings. We are here because we love working with plants, and we are equally concerned that you have the information you need to make your gardens thrive.

FARM HOURS

The farm is open every day except Monday, from nine to five during the months of March until the end of December. During the month of May, when people are picking up their spring plants, we are open on Mondays. You may reach us during any of these open hours by phone; you may correspond with us anytime through our e-mail address; you will always find information about workshops, lectures and special events on our web site.

DEADLINE: APRIL 1

A brief reminder that April 1 is fast approaching. If you haven't yet sent us your early plant order, it's time to dig out the Plant Catalogue. Early order prices are significantly lower than the full May plant prices. An early order will assure that we reserve your plants at the best price. It will also allow us to anticipate what we should seed, transplant, and dig before the Spring Fair beginning on Friday, May 9.

WORKSHOPS IN MAY AND JUNE



MAKING GARDEN CONTAINERS

SATURDAY, MAY 31
SATURDAY, JUNE 7
SATURDAY, JUNE 14

For the past several years we have offered this unique workshop on making your own garden containers from simple materials that include peat moss, cement, fibermesh and water. These beautiful stone-like pots are durable, easy to fashion and can be designed into a number of unique shapes. They are often referred to as hypertufa pots, and they originated in England. These pots have been featured in a number of publications, including *Horticulture* magazine, *The Herb Companion*, and Jim Wilson's book on container gardening.

The day-long workshop is great fun. Of all the classes we have taught at the farm, this one is guaranteed to bring the most laughter, get you the dirtiest, and let you end the day with the satisfaction of having made a collection of unusual and usable garden containers. We will provide all the materials necessary, the forms for designing, and the space to cure the pots when finished. Each person will have ample time to finish at least a couple of pots during the workshop.

During the class we will direct the production work and intersperse the crafting time with some ideas on container garden design, plant choices, and soil and maintenance ideas. We will also give each of you enough plant material to fill one of your containers.

The workshop is taught by members of the staff at Hedgehog Hill. We have all made and continue to use hypertufa pots in our gardens, and we're certain that you will be pleased with your own results. This class is very popular, so we advise that you sign up early.

WORKSHOP DETAILS

COSTS: \$45.00 per person. The cost includes the class and a light lunch.

CLASS TIMES: 9:30 until 2:30.

WHAT TO BRING: Wear old work clothes and bring a couple of pairs of sturdy kitchen-style rubber gloves.

CLASS SIZE: 15 people per class.

REGISTRATION: Use the form below to register in person, by phone, by mail, or by e-mail.

| |
|---|
| NAME _____ |
| ADDRESS _____ |
| CITY _____ |
| STATE _____ ZIP _____ |
| TELEPHONE OR E-MAIL _____ |
| DATE OF WORKSHOP _____ |
| Remember to include the fee by check or charge (Visa, AMEX, Discover, or MasterCard). |
| Card # _____ |
| Expiration Date _____ |

BARTER DAYS FOR MAY AND JUNE

Now in its fifth year, the barter program remains as popular as ever. Here are more dates available in May and June.

Wednesday through Sunday
MAY 14 to MAY 18

Wednesday through Sunday
MAY 21 to MAY 25

Wednesday through Sunday
MAY 28 to JUNE 1

Wednesday through Friday
JUNE 4 to JUNE 6

Tuesday through Friday
JUNE 10 to JUNE 13

Tuesday through Friday
JUNE 17 to JUNE 20

Wednesday through Saturday
JUNE 25 to JUNE 28

The work during these seven weeks will vary broadly, depending in large part on the weather. It may include greenhouse work, potting, garden maintenance, weeding, planting and mulching. Whatever the tasks, you will be working with a range of plant material and there will be time for discussions and questions. The exchange continues to be a day of your help on the farm in return for \$50 worth of plants. Days begin at 9:30, end at 4:30, with a break midday when everyone gathers for lunch and relaxation.

To register for the work crew, call, write, or send an e-mail with day(s) requested, your name, address and telephone. If you want a space, act quickly as dates fill almost as soon as these newsletters are received.

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DIRECTIONS:
From the Maine Turnpike: Exit 12 Auburn to Rt. 4 North, to Rt. 117 South to Buckfield
From Augusta: Rt. 202 to Winthrop, Rt. 133 to Wayne, Rt. 219 to Sumner
From Norway/S. Paris: Rt. 117 to Buckfield
Signs in Sumner and Buckfield to the Farm.