

April 2017

Here we are, another year, another spring? Newsletters always start with my obligatory observances on the weather. What a weird spring! That's it. What else is there to say?

My hopefully over-wintering **PLANTS IN THE BASEMENT** seem to have done better than usual. All four lemon verbenas came back and the hip-hop euphorbia is growing fast and blooming. Perhaps it was the lack of extended cold this winter or perhaps it was the bubble-wrap on the windows. You do know about bubble-wrap, don't you? In case you don't, here is the deal. If you have windows you don't use for gazing, dampen glass slightly, apply bubble-wrap. It will cling indefinitely and cut down cold air significantly.

ROAD TRIP! My friend Shirley and I made the trip to my hometown in March to see the 'Art in Bloom' exhibit at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts. Members of various garden clubs are assigned art works to be interpreted in flowers. It is a wonderful event and we thoroughly enjoyed both admiring and criticizing the arrangements! If you go to the Mount Laurel Garden Club web site, you can see Shirley's pictures. She posted them all, the ones we loved and the ones we didn't. Frankly I thought the Museum people were a little mean in some of the works they chose. By the way, this exhibit is not judged.

You all probably know by now my weakness for **CORAL BELLS** (heuchera). We have a new one! It is named Ginger Ale and is just the color you would expect it to be, with somewhat frillier leaves. This is another food related coral bell variety to go with Peach Flambe, Blackberry Ice, Plum Pudding, Caramel, Cherry Cola and so on.

Does anyone else remember singing this round?

White coral bells upon a slender stalk;
Lilies of the valley deck my garden walk;
Oh, how I wish that I could hear them ring!
That would only happen when the fairies sing.

Ask me, I will sing it for you. But wait! I checked youtube and apparently lots of people remember 'White Coral Bells' and are ready, willing and able to sing it for you. Some more ably and tunefully than others. Funny, my computer thinks it should be "choral bells". I get that squiggly green line.

Can it be that I only did TWO newsletters last year? Oh yeah, that's right, I was wounded and kinda wimped out. We did the two state fairs, NJ and WV, same as always, except they are never the same as always. Two days at the NJ State Fair just isn't enough. We like to see everything and eat everything and buy cool stuff from our Nepalese friends.

I am up to my eyeballs in CATMINT! Three varieties, actually four if you count the one 'Cat's Meow' from last year. In case you have forgotten, catmint is an outstanding perennial, considered a fragrance herb, with attractive gray-green foliage and long-lasting, reblooming clusters of flowers in various shades of lavender. We have 'Six Hills Giant' (up to 3 Feet); a new shorter variety with brighter blue blooms called 'Purrsian Blue' and the standard variety 'Walker's Low'. You will love them all! I finally found out why 'Walker's Low' is so named. It has nothing to do with the height of the plant. A couple in Ireland (the Walkers) were plant breeders. They had three levels of garden in the English manner: high, middle and low. The catmint came from, you guessed it, the low garden. Thus the name, 'Walker's Low'. Most cats do not care for catmint, unlike its cousin, catnip.

Perhaps you wish to grow a larger quantity of CHAMOMILE for tea. The following is an excerpt from one of the many hand-outs I seem to generate. Yes, it is an annual. It may, however, self-sow if you let some seeds drop. The little plants may appear in the fall and are, oddly, winter hardy.

GERMAN CHAMOMILE: Annual; full sun. One happy plant will produce many blooms from which tea is made. Foliage has no fragrance. Grow from seed or purchase plant. THIS SEED MUST HAVE LIGHT TO GERMINATE. Not all seed companies have correct info on packets. Scatter seed on surface and gently press in. DO NOT COVER. Harvest flowers when petals begin to turn down slightly. May be used fresh, actually has more flavor that way. If you wish to dry blooms, spread them on a screen. Use six to eight blooms for a cup of tea. Relaxing, good aid to sleep. Safe even for children but may not agree with allergy sufferers.

I am attempting to work with the DEER that pass by the market every night. They tend to taste plants on the far side of the display so I try to arrange accordingly. I do make the occasional big "Oops" though. Such as two days ago. "Oops," I guess they like wood asters. Not to worry, they will regrow quickly.

I was again reminded that cats like VALERIAN ROOT. I spoke this week at the Greater Woodbury Garden Club. In showing them a valerian plant, I ripped off some root and passed it around for them to smell. When I got home, I put it on the floor and while all the cats showed interest, Licorice went really silly over it. Yes, we have marvelous second year valerians, which will bloom beautifully this year. Valerian is the only plant I know that has completely different foliage first and second years. Nervous? Chew on the roots. (Or buy capsules)

Our ANIMALS are diminishing. We lost the last of our beautiful white geese this spring. They seem to be more fragile than other breeds. We are in the market for more geese since our remaining two are 29 years old. Anyone? We also lost our Molly cow, who was close to the oldest cow in the world. That leaves us with Della, who is also no spring chicken. I told Andy we must check the fence in case someone offers us some kind of wonderful animal! Della knows where the fence line is and doesn't cross it.

Speaking of CHICKENS, the new girls are getting in gear and I am getting up to 7 or 8 eggs a day. I may be able to handle one more egg customer. First come...

We do, however, have two lovely new girl GUINEA PIGS, Machu and Picchu, (I love the names, they came already named) from Animal Welfare in Voorhees..

Seems like a lot of my friends are down-sizing and purging their stuff. Bah! If I can follow in my mother's footsteps I have 25 or so years yet. We are still planting trees and shrubs and collecting stuff.

Our Chinese WISTERIAS are going to be fabulous this year. Last year they got frozen first time ever and we had no blooms. Of course the one in front has no blooms as usual. The books will tell you, sometimes they never bloom.

RANTS:

#1. How about the ridiculous sales tax reduction? 6.85 percent indeed! Haha. How many people want their penny? If you spend \$1000.00 you save a buck and a half, right?

#2. I read in the Wall Street Journal that bar soap is going out of style in favor of liquid soap. Here's the situation as I see it. Bar soap comes in a paper or cardboard wrapper. Liquid soap comes in a plastic bottle. Aren't we making

enough plastic trash with all the bottled water? Don't get me started.

REMEMBER! LAST SAFE FROST DATE IS MAY 15! CAREFUL WITH ANNUALS.

Andy has divided his OX-TONGUE houseplants and a few will be available for you. They are quite unusual. Although they look somewhat like aloes, they are in the gasteria family. They need bright light but no direct summer sun. They get really neat blooms.

BIRD REPORT: We have several chipping sparrows this year. They are tiny, not much bigger than chickadees. If we didn't feed the birds we might have some extra money!

Come see us. Ring the newly painted bell in the newly painted bell stand. What a job! Scraping, sanding, priming, painting, crawling around on the ground. Worth it, I think.

Gloria & Andy

The Butterfly Garden

**Here, by this crumbling wall
We'll spread the feast, then watch what guests it brings.
Earth-rooted flowers to flowers of heaven shall call,
And all the gorgeous air shall wink with wings.**

Alfred Noyes