

April 2018

The old saying is, "No news is good news." This is not so good when there is a newsletter to write! I am trying to reach waaay back to the fall and winter for something to excite and inform. Wait a minute! Did I say reach back into the winter? I don't have to reach very far! Temperatures went down into the 20's several nights last week. My poor baby plants and sensitive perennials were huddled in the little greenhouse and the minivan. Hopefully all have adjusted now. I put them out and told them, "You are just going to have to deal with it!"

Just finished spring cleaning our DRIFT ROSES outside the fence. Weather was warm for once so I had short sleeves. Now I look like I have some terrible disease. It is worth every scratch and puncture, however, as they are going to be fabulous. After a couple years of struggle, they are doing just what they are supposed to do. Drifts stay fairly low, about 30 inches with a nice spread. Blooms are smallish, double and profuse and, unlike knock-out roses, very fragrant. If you get them, buy the largest you can for the money and water them religiously the first two years. They have several bloom cycles and deadheading is not necessary.

BIRD REPORT (Not interested in birds? skip this article) Believe it or not, we have just had our first English sparrow in forty years. Yes, I know, they are at the grocery store, flying around in Lowe's and so on but not here. I keep a list.

We are awash in cowbirds and red-wing blackbirds this year. The chipping sparrows, new to us last year, are seen almost every day. They are very cute, about the same size as the chickadees with a little red-brown crown.

Then there are the crows. They come when I call them, or, if I am slow with the food, I come when they call me. One bold fellow even occasionally comes on the deck for suet.

I find that I have gotten lax with my stock of BASEBALL BAT PLANTS. You know, the ones that you can't kill with that bat. I intend to do better. I have several already and will soon have more. Plumbago, ajuga, lysimachia, etc.

We will have proper GREEK OREGANO this year, but no basil mint. My source lost their stock and I lost the pots that I planted for stock. I bought a strawberry mint at a show in MD, put it in the basement and killed it. The BAYS in the basement look great. They will be out this weekend for you.

OUR WINTER LOSSES Apparently our two big butterfly bushes by the market have died back to the ground. I hope they recover. The enormous santolina in pot by the market turned up its toes. We lost almost half of our American elm to that heavy snowstorm. The tree people said "You want us to take down the elm now?" Nooooo!

VEHICLE SAFETYALERT! We never plan to have an accident (That's why they're called accidents.) but here is something we gardeners need to do. In a collision, any unsecured tool- trowel , pruning shears, hand fork- can become a dangerous projectile causing damage or injury. Please secure your tools in some way or put them in the trunk. I have a heavy blanket in the back of the minivan and my tools go well under that blanket. Do it!

THISTLE LESSON Perhaps you already know your thistles but we didn't. We thought we had a stand of the dreaded invasive Canada thistles in our pasture, but on better observance I realized they are biennial. Looked in my book and found that we have bull thistles. They are still big, tall weeds, though actually very pretty in bloom, and very painful! Much easier to control and I always leave a few for the blooms.

UNDERSTANDING BIENNIALS It seems that many people don't understand the life cycle of a biennial so here it is. We will start with the plant in bloom, almost always in summer. The mature plant will produce many seeds and then die. The seeds will germinate in late summer or fall making

baby plants that are winter hardy. In spring the plants will grow to maturity, bloom, and the cycle starts over. So biennials take two years for their cycle but if a good self-sower, you will have them every year. That means if you buy a large foxglove in bloom you will lose it after blooming unless it produces an offshoot which occasionally happens. Now read this again to be sure it sank in!

It's time to clean up your LAVENDERS if you haven't done it yet. Get all the leaves and plant debris out of the middle and away from the base. This will breed fungi which are death to lavender. Don't mulch under the plant. You may gently fluff off dead foliage and prune out dead branches. Done. Ready for bloom. We have 'Phenomenal' variety again. I didn't have one left to plant so can't give comprehensive report. Anyone?

We have been informed by many sources that PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE is a bad guy; an alien that is taking over our wetlands and fields, so I was amazed to see one growing in our sandy, dry cow pasture. I watched it bloom for a while then went with shovel to take it out. Imagine my surprise to see this non-native, which supposedly nothing eats, well inhabited by a number of good-looking caterpillars. Also to my surprise, I could not find them in my Peterson's caterpillar book. For once, the internet did not disappoint. They are caterpillars of the HAPLOA CLYMENE moth, which besides being very attractive, does resemble the Star Trek badge. I wanted to include a picture, but didn't find one to do justice in black and white. Look it up. Loosestrife stayed, at least for the season.

We have our usual selection of yummy sounding CORAL BELLS: Plum Pudding, Cherry Cola, Peach Flambe, Ginger Ale and so on, plus Fire Alarm with amazing bright red foliage.

The little BALMY BEE BALMS that were left survived in their pots which is always a good thing and makes them a desirable variety. Of course, nobody has them available this year so we will be dividing and conquering, we hope. I

am not sure if they are patent protected which would mean they will just be called 'short bee balm' but you will know what they are.

We went to the POULTRY SHOW last October and came home with a few new chickens , two very expensive (\$25 each) golden lace Wyandottes and a frizzle rooster. Frizzles show up every now and again. They can be any breed but do not breed true. You will love him. Very wild looking.

Since I listen to my hometown radio station so much (Have I mentioned it before? WJEJRadio.com) I get pulled into activities there. For the third year, two years with my friend Shirley, I went to the Washington County Art Museum's Art in Bloom. As you may know from other places, this is where the museum picks works of art to be interpreted in flower arrangements. It is in March. Anybody else interested? We stay over one or two nights and try to get in as much trouble as possible.

GOOSE STUFF This could get really long. I will try to abbreviate. Last winter in the snow and very cold, an enormous red-tail hawk went right under our deck after the geese. Camille was ok but Knob was injured in defense. If you remember, they are 30 years old. It was so cold, Knob was going to go into shock, so in the house they came, where they stayed for, well, it seemed like a year but I guess it was about two weeks. By the way, the hawk moved on and got one of our \$25 hens.

At a later date, we lost Camille and Knob was very upset, so we found him another woman. Even at his advanced age, they got it on, so to speak, and she decided to set. So she is setting on six eggs under the deck, which left him at loose ends again. So we got another goose, a tufted Roman, but he doesn't like her much. I'm not sure where we go from here, but if the eggs hatch, I will have to take geese with me to the old ladies' home!

At the end of the season, I usually plant some leftovers that I have been lusting after in my SHADE GARDEN back of the house. Then through the winter the

tags either disintegrate or get carried away by the chickens. Then the game is on when spring arrives, trying to figure out what is coming up. I do buy plants sometimes you know. Sorry to say, the expensive Alaska fern apparently didn't like the cold.

REMEMBER, MAY 15 LAST SAFE FROST DATE FOR YOUR SENSITIVE PLANTS!