

## April 2020

Yes, we are open. Yes, we have a normal amount and variety of plants. Yes, you can walk around and there is plenty of space to be apart if that is what you want. End of topic.

My Grandmother always said, “You eat a peck of DIRT before you die.” Now science is saying that eating that dirt is good for us. Apparently raising your own herbs and vegetables and not getting them quite so sterile clean before eating helps our bodies to tolerate exposure to bacteria and the like and stay healthy. Toughens us up, so to speak. This applies to stuff we grow, not the lettuce that fell on the floor at the supermarket.

Now for my obligatory comments on the WEATHER. I agree winter really didn't show up this year. Our mixed display pot has a Mrs. Howard's creeping rosemary that isn't very hardy. Yet there it is, blooming beautifully on two long branches. I don't think my Peace rose ever went fully dormant. Of course, you can't tell. OUR LAST SAFE FROST DATE FOR TENDER ANNUALS IS STILL MOTHER'S DAY. Last night temperature was in 30's. Maybe colder tonight.

We have four newly hatched GOSLINGS! It is so exciting! Mom and Dad are very protective to the point that a good picture is almost impossible. Whenever you get close enough, they walk away so all pictures are from the rear. These are new geese from those we had last year. They were meant to be all girls, but you see how that worked out.

Our old gander (32) is now living with the chickens for his safety's sake. He doesn't mind.

As usual, I couldn't resist having food and drink related CORAL BELLS (*heuchera*). We have Champagne, Cherry Cola, Electric Plum, Peach Flambe-more to come.

We have become enamored with HELLEBORES. The two that we bought as babies two years ago have been wonderful, blooming forever where nothing else succeeded except rampant trumpet vine and honeysuckle. So we bought two more. \$\$\$\$\$. The good news is, we have some for you at an only slightly outrageous price. They look great. I just must remember they are not for me.

Our DRIFT ROSES outside the fence look incredible. Seems like the buried moth crystals actually did keep mice from eating the roots. If you want to use this

method of protection, be sure to bury the crystals adequately so birds don't think they are something edible.

Okay, now here comes the complaint! Mt. Laurel has cancelled all LEAVE PICK-UP indefinitely. As far as I know, the leaves are picked up by one person driving a truck with a big vacuum tube, then dumped wherever they go. Where is the contact? Shall everyone rake their leaves to the curb for cars to park in and set on fire? Am I being unreasonable here? All the leaves from the woods pile up against our fence and will ultimately cause mold and leaf loss in the previously mentioned roses. My only choice it seems, is to rake them and throw them over the fence. Rather kill the grass than the roses. Once again I ask, am I being unreasonable? Am I the only one unhappy with this decision? Feel free to answer this.

Please continue to watch for PRAYING MANTIS EGG CASES. We are almost having a plague of Biblical proportions. Some people still think the adults are beneficial, but they have become waaay too much of a good thing. We collected upwards of fifty egg cases this winter, mostly in the butterfly bushes and next to the area of milkweed. **THEY ARE KILLING OUR CATERPILLARS AND BUTTERFLIES**, particularly monarchs. It's not lack of habitat, (although habitat is always a good thing) it's these voracious killers.

Most of you know by now that we are State Fair people. We have found a new destination! And it's in January! (By the way, there are those who think I use too many exclamation points. Tough!) The PA FARM SHOW is held in Harrisburg every year. It is the largest indoor farm show in the country. We spent most of two days and didn't anywhere near see all of it. And it's free! Pay \$15 to park, get on a shuttle bus and get taken right to the door. With over 6000 animals, you can bet we enjoyed ourselves, although I must say NJ State Fair has more and better poultry, especially chickens. And better food.

Speaking of chickens, I am hear-by announcing a NAME THE CHICKEN CONTEST. I don't always name my girls, but this one is so gorgeous. She is a black Orpington, which is a big fluffy breed. (Look it up) Her sister, a chocolate Orpington, is Lady Godiva. The prize is one dozen of our lovely free-range eggs. Call, text, email. You have two weeks.

Do you need a big robust FERN to cover some territory where nothing grows? I have it for you. No, I don't know its name or even where I got it. It's the variety that gets those fronds that stay through the winter and look like big brown feathers. Name, anyone?

Repeat article from last year when I didn't have much catnip available:

Do you have CATNIP? Why not? No cats? Let me tell you about catnip, other than making your cat crazy (or extremely mellow). Butterflies and bees love blooming catnip. Activity is constant. With all the flap about helping pollinators by planting natives, don't forget other popular cultivars. Bees are particularly fond of the tiny flowers of LEMON BALM. By the way, both lemon balm and catnip make a pleasant soothing tea for people.

DEER are getting in trouble already. They don't normally bother yarrow so I have it on the end of my display (so far, 'Coronation Gold' and 'Paprika') and they practically mowed it off. But I am trying something new as a deterrent, namely BUBBLE WRAP, the big stuff. I spread it on the ground in front of the at-risk plants hoping that their sharp little hooves will pop the bubbles and put them off. It is my own brilliant idea. I will report back on success or failure. Yes. I have to anchor it somehow and pick it up in the morning, but it is easier than rolling up chicken wire.

I have a NEW COMPUTER, a Christmas gift from Mark with all programs installed and/or transferred.. You remember Mark, my computer expert son in WV. You may also remember that I HATE getting a new computer, but Windows 7 was about to die. I haven't totally driven him crazy with my questions yet, but the season is just starting. I confess I did get so angry at something it didn't want to do that I pounded my fist on the desk and frightened the cats. Andy wants to get a much bigger monitor and I don't. We'll see, although the fact that I can't grow parsley means I am not the boss of the house.

**BIRD REPORT:** If you hate birds, skip this article. STARLINGS are plentiful to say the least, but I like them because they are so smart. I also didn't realize they do something I didn't think possible. Their beaks change color with the seasons. I always thought a beak is a beak and that is it. Not so with the starlings. In winter when they are all covered with stars, beaks are black. In summer when they are mostly black with a few stars, beaks are yellow. How do they do that? Birders, do any other species change beak color?

Our MONKSHOOD looks like I will be able to make a few divisions this year. It seems to be hard to come by so I will put a really high price on it. Just kidding. Monkshood is a very neat purple (blue?) perennial with hood-shaped flowers but is extremely poisonous so don't plant where your dog will run through it. I keep hoping the deer will eat it but no such luck.

We love to grow COMFREY and deer love to eat it. Deer, however, do not like variegated vinca vine. We have a large area of vinca back of the house, so we put our comfrey in large pots and sit them in the vinca. It works! Deer also do not like perilla or sweet Annie so I let it grow amongst other deer tasty plants.

I was able to get 'AMAZING GRACE' creeping phlox for you and for me. It has a white bloom with a pink eye. It has grown 'amazingly' in WV for Mark (You remember Mark). He keeps dividing and spreading. Besides that, it was one of my mother's favorite hymns and my grandmother's name. How could I resist?

If all goes according to plan, I will once again be at the Burlington County FARMERS MARKET on Saturday mornings. We had a good time with it last year and sold some plants besides. The vendors are quite a mixed bag; not always the same ones. Some come every week, some only once a month. Some are very reasonable, some pricy. Come check it out. Centerton Road in Mt. Laurel, 8:30 AM to 1 PM starting probably mid-May.

Sadly, my Mount Laurel Garden Club has had to cancel the PERENNIAL PLANT SALE we always have the end of April. With access to the Library being in doubt, I did not want our members to put in time digging plants only to be cancelled at the last minute.

The Iranian lady in WV who made PERSIAN SYRUP doesn't seem to be doing it any more. Health issues? At any rate, I liked it so much I am going to have a go at making it myself. It is basically mint, honey and vinegar. There are recipes online. I must wait for enough mint to grow. I will report back. Ruth, here's hoping

How could I almost forget to tell you to stream my hometown radio station? Joanna the webmaster often likes my pix, too. WJEJradio.com. click on the listen live button.

I'm sorry if this is controversial, but I MUST HAVE MY SAY or I will have stomach cramps. I fail to see the point in not going out in your own car with your very own bacteria, etc. It is spring, the trees are blooming, the tulips are blooming, the landscapers are still keeping everything lovely. Where is the harm in going for a Sunday or Monday or Tuesday drive? We did that waaay back when I was a kid just to look at what was out there. In my original neck of the woods one of our favorite drives was into PA looking for barns with hex signs. Did we stop and get out of the car? Rarely. It was being together as a family. Alright, I admit, sometimes we stopped at Dairy Queen, but strictly to eat our cones in the car. Funny, that Dairy Queen is still there and still no place to sit.

**If you MUST get out to walk around, try a cemetery. I guarantee the residents won't mind.**

**Or you can come here. Lots of room. Enjoy all our violets. Much prettier than grass.**

**Ring the bell, I will sanitize it. Seriously.**