



Notes from

HORNBAKER GARDENS

"The Princeton Perennial People"
22937 1140 N. Ave., Princeton, Illinois 61356

NEWSLETTER No. 11

(815) 659-3282

MARCH 2000

Retail Hours

Starting April 10, we will be open seven days a week, Monday through Saturday 8:00 to 5:00, and Sunday 12:00 to 5:00, and we will stay open through October 15 in order to better promote ornamental grasses this year.

We will be closed July 4 and Labor Day, September 4, 2000.

OPEN HOUSE AND HOSTA WALK: We will hold our thirteenth annual Open House and Hosta Walk on June 9, 10, and 11, when the hostas are looking their best. Refreshments will be served, and drawings for prizes will be held each day.

PEAK BLOOM SEASONS: The peak of iris bloom is usually the last two weeks of May, although the weather can affect bloom season significantly. Daylilies have an extended bloom season, but the peak season for us generally starts just after the 4th of July, and runs for the next three weeks. Some ornamental grasses plume out as early as July or August, but most, including the spectacular *Miscanthus* varieties, plume out in September and early October, at which time mums will be blooming.

WORKSHOPS

Dividing Perennials: We will hold two free workshops on dividing perennials on consecutive Saturdays, April 22 and April 29, each at 10:00 a.m. We will discuss and demonstrate when and how to dig, divide and replant various perennials, including hostas and daylilies. The workshop is designed to show gardeners that most perennials are hardy and easily divided, and help them overcome their fear of hurting the plant in the process. No reservations are required.

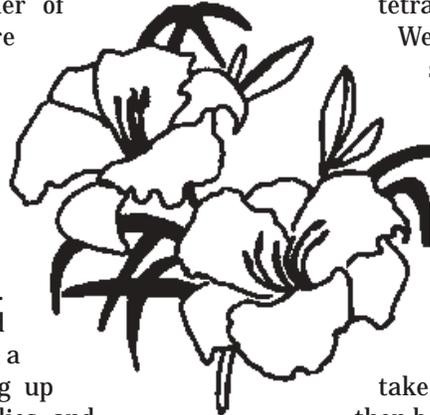
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Name Your Own Daylily

We were pleased to receive a visit early last summer from our good friend, Fred Smith, of Henderson, Illinois. Fred has been well known for decades as a collector, hybridizer, and seller of daylilies, and in more recent years, as a hybridizer of hostas, several of which we feature at our nursery. Due to health considerations, Fred was ready to discontinue the selling portion of his daylily passion. A deal was struck, and late last summer, we took a crew to Fred's place, dug up most of his stock of daylilies, and moved them to our nursery.

Fred had many varieties that we did not yet have, so we have added 50 or so new registered varieties to our collection, as well as several of Fred's named, but unregistered, varieties. But the most exciting thing that we brought from Fred's is his stock of seedlings that he was holding for evaluation. These seedlings are the most recent results of Fred's many years of hybridizing. These

are new, unique, hybrids. According to Fred, there are some really nice daylilies in this bunch, some of his finest hybrids to date, including both diploids and tetraploids.



We have lined these seedlings out in a special section of our daylily fields, and you can take your pick for \$15.00 each. We will dig them on the spot and drop them in a plastic bag, which you can take with you. You will then be the proud (and only)

owner of this new variety, which you can name, and could even register, if you so desired. Name it after your spouse, your child, your dog, or give it a fancy flowery name or an outrageous, provocative name. It will be your daylily to name as you please.

Most daylilies around here start blooming after the Fourth of July. Some start blooming later in the month so there will

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Stay On Our Mailing List

Last year we asked you to sign up again to remain on our mailing list, so that we could clean up and reduce its size. All would have been well and good had our hard drive not crashed, and had Rich not foolishly thrown away most of the paperwork before the hard drive crashed and before he had backed up the hard drive.

So the bad news is that we are asking you to sign up again by filling out the post card included with this newsletter and mailing it back to us. PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY. The good news is that, with our new software program, we can do a better job of profiling our customers who might want to be sure to receive any special mailings that we might do in the future pertaining to certain types of plants or products. For example, we anticipate a special newsletter devoted to ponds in the near future. Please indicate your areas of special interests on the card and mail it back right now while you are thinking about it.

Pond Talk: Green Water • String Algae • Winter Oxygen

We have really enjoyed our new display pond that we installed last March. It was a big hit with customers, too. Our crew, headed by our "pond guy", Mike Saylor, installed ten ponds last season all over the area, from Bloomington, Morris, and Dixon, to Muscatine, Iowa. Many customers who already have ponds came to check ours out, compare notes, and share their experiences.

Nearly everyone who has a pond seems to be very enthusiastic about the pond, the fish and water gardening. Several customers spoke of their pet fish that will eat from their hands. Lots of new water plants are becoming more readily available as water gardening becomes more popular.

Green Water The most common problem mentioned by pond owners was their battle with "green water". Green water is the result of suspended algae that feeds on the nutrients in the water. Draining the pond and replacing the green water with fresh water will not solve the problem because the fresh water generally contains lots of nutrients, so the algae has a population explosion as a result. The solution to green water is to have something else in the pond using up the nutrients, thus robbing the algae of their source of food. The two most important things that will compete for those nutrients are bacteria and plants.

The filters in our Biofalls and the gravel in our ponds support large colonies of beneficial bacteria and enzymes that use up nutrients and break down fish waste and organic debris. The skimmer also helps by removing leaves and other organic debris that fall into the pond.

Plants are very important in controlling algae growth. Place water hyacinths and water lettuce in your Biofalls. These floating plants reproduce rapidly, using enormous amounts of nutrients. Plant bog and marginal plants in the streambed and on the marginal shelf built into our ponds. Plants such as water lilies, water poppies and parrot's feather, whose foliage floats on the surface, can be planted in deeper water. Besides using up nutrients, the resulting shade will reduce the amount of sunlight reaching the deeper portions of the pond. Algae thrives on nutrients and sunlight. Also, use plenty of oxygenators, fully sub-

merged plants that soak up nutrients and sunlight directly through their leaves. Think of them as nutrient sponges.

We installed our display pond in late March last year, and were amazed at how crystal clear the water stayed for the first three months. That shows how well the bacteria was working all by itself, because we didn't have any plants to put in the pond until May, and those were very young plants. Around the 4th of July, the pond suddenly started to turn green. This new pond, with very little plant growth, sitting in full sun finally started to develop an algae problem. We continued to add bacteria and started putting more plants in the pond. Each morning, the water would be clear enough to see the bottom, but by afternoon, the sun would refuel the algae growth, and the pond would be murky. After a few weeks, the plants and bacteria gained the upper hand, and the water cleared up. This is apparently fairly typical for a new pond, which lacks enough mature plant growth to use up the nutrients that also feed the algae. It is probably especially true of new ponds in full sun, such as ours. Shade, especially afternoon shade, whether it be from trees, buildings, or floating plants, is a definite benefit in controlling algae.

String Algae The other type of algae that can be a nuisance is string algae. This is the long, stringy, slimy green stuff that can grow in the pond, attaching itself to rocks, other plants and any other surfaces. In our case, string algae was especially prevalent in our streambed. Some string algae growth is normal, but if it starts to be a problem, there are a couple of things to do. First, simply reach in and weed it out. Actually, it is probably best to cut it with scissors rather than ripping it out, in order to avoid sending many small pieces into the water to attach and start growing elsewhere. If weeding is not enough of a control, then use String Algae Buster, a new product which is not a chemical or algicide (which should be avoided), but a product that causes the string algae to take up more than normal levels of calcium, which in turn causes the string algae to break up. We treated our pond twice last summer, after the string algae growth in our streambed got to be too

much, and it worked great. The string algae just disappeared.

Winter Oxygen Naturally, here in the Midwest, small ponds freeze. The ice is only around 4"-5" thick, but it does freeze solid across the top, cutting off any access to the air. When this happens, the fish can use up all the available oxygen in the water and then suffocate. Thus, a portion of the pond needs to be kept open so that the water can absorb more oxygen. This can be done by floating a small heater in the pond, leaving a small pump running which shoots water up to the surface, or just leaving the main pump running.

We had a feeling that using a small pump submerged in the pond was the most economical and least troublesome option, but we wanted to find out what would happen if we left the main pump running. During the coldest spells of winter, the pond, stream and Biofalls all froze across the top. However, the water kept flowing underneath it all, and the skimmer box did not freeze, so the water was able to pick up oxygen as it circulated through the skimmer box. As I write this, the fish are just starting to emerge from their hiding places in the bottom of the pond. We did find one dead fantail goldfish. A couple of customers had told me that the fantails were not very hardy. The rest of the goldfish and koi all seem to be fine.

Despite the success of leaving the pump running, in terms of living fish, there were some drawbacks. During very cold spells, more water would turn to ice in the streambed, thus removing water from the pond. This caused a drop in the water level of the pond, so that the water level was in danger of dropping below the opening in the skimmer box, in which case the skimmer box, where the pump is located, could run dry. As a result, on the coldest days of the winter, Rich was out there dragging hose through a foot of snow in order to add water to the pond. Our conclusion is that it is probably best to invest in a small pump to submerge in the pond for the winter, drain the Biofalls, and remove the main pump from the skimmer box. Our main concern with doing that is for the plants in the streambed. Will they dry out and die? We'll probably test that out next winter.

What's New At Hornbaker's?

Due to space limitations, we will keep this short, but we have lots of new plants this year, as usual. We have 37 new hostas including 'Dick Ward', an excellent green-margined sport of 'Zounds'; 'Embroidery', a rare hosta with creamy white centers that turn green in summer, and unusual, stitched margins; Tony Avent's 'Tattoo', a small yellow hosta with the outline of a maple leaf tattooed in the center of each leaf; and 'Pineapple Upsidedown Cake', a plant with slender, yellow-centered, rippled foliage.

Our love affair with ornamental grasses continues. We especially like a couple of new *Miscanthus* varieties: 'Sirene', which exhibits a beautiful red color in the fall; and 'Rigoletto', a showy green and white striped clump.

New perennials include *Persicaria* 'Red Dragon', a gorgeous red, variegated plant; *Echinacea* 'Kim's Knee High', a shorter

version of purple coneflower; and *Perovskia* 'Little Spire', a 25-inch version of Russian Sage.

New trees and shrubs include a couple of gorgeous, variegated specimens. One is a spruce, *Picea orientalis* 'Aureospicata', which pushes a lovely, creamy yellow new growth on top of dark green foliage.

The other is a pine,

Pinus contorta

'Taylor's Sunburst', a beautiful yellow and green variegated plant.



H. 'Pineapple Upsidedown Cake'

Hosta of the Year

For the last few years, the American Hosta Growers Association, of which we are a member, has named a Hosta of the Year. The year 2000 Hosta of the Year is 'Sagae', a popular hosta which forms a very large clump of blunt tipped, frosty green leaves with creamy yellow margins. For many years, this hosta was known as *fluctuans* 'Variegated', and then the name was changed to its Japanese name.

We first saw 'Sagae' at the wonderful garden of the late Russ O'Harra in Des Moines, Iowa in 1987. His clump was absolutely gorgeous. We have carried this hosta for many years, and many of you already grow it, I'm sure. If you are not familiar with 'Sagae', check it out. It's one of the best large hostas on the market.

Previous Hostas of the Year include 'So Sweet', 'Fragrant Bouquet' and 'Paul's Glory'.

Our favorite organic fertilizer

We have always tried to garden using organic methods as much as possible, and were thrilled a couple of years ago to discover a fertilizer produced by North Country Organics. It is called Pro Gro 5-3-4, and contains a blend of eleven organic ingredients and minerals, including rock phosphate, oyster meal, kelp meal and greensand. If they did a TV commercial about this stuff, it would be like the spaghetti sauce commercial—"It's in there." We've been using it for two years, and feel as though we are getting tremendous results on everything, including perennials, trees and shrubs,

and even the lawn.

Pro Gro is a dry blend that you simply broadcast on lawn or garden, or mix into the dirt in a new garden or planting. Since it is organic and slower acting than chemical fertilizers, you don't need to worry about overdosing or about getting

it on the foliage of existing plants. Now it comes in a more convenient 25 pound bag instead of the heavier 50 pound bags that we had been lugging around. We will have a good supply of Pro Gro on hand this spring for \$14.99 per bag. Try it; you'll like it.

Daylily

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be new varieties just starting to bloom throughout the month of July. Come check it out.

Fred has retained daylily stock with which he will continue to hybridize, and we hope to be able to replenish this special seedling field every year or two in order to continue to offer unique and exciting plants for years to come.

Workshops

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Pond Workshops:

To accommodate the high interest in ponds, we will hold two pond workshops, one on Saturday, May 6, and the other on Saturday, May 20, each at 10:00 a.m. Emphasizing the Aquascapes Design system, we will show you the different components that go into the water feature, and go through the 20 step method of installing it. Topics will include construction of the pond, streambed, and waterfall, plants and fish, and general maintenance. The workshop is designed to be helpful both for the do-it-yourselfer and for those who might want us to install the pond. The workshop will last around an hour and a half. Advance registration is required, and the cost is

\$25.00. Please mail in your check and designate which date you wish to attend, or call and use your credit card. Should you purchase a complete pond kit or have us install a pond this season, the workshop fee will be deducted from the purchase price.

Designing with Grasses:

We will hold two free workshops on grasses, one in the spring and one in the fall. The spring workshop will be held on Saturday, May 13, at 10:00 a.m., and the fall workshop will be on Saturday, September 23, also at 10:00 a.m. We will discuss how and where to use grasses, as well how and when to plant, fertilize, divide, and maintain grasses. No advance registration is necessary.

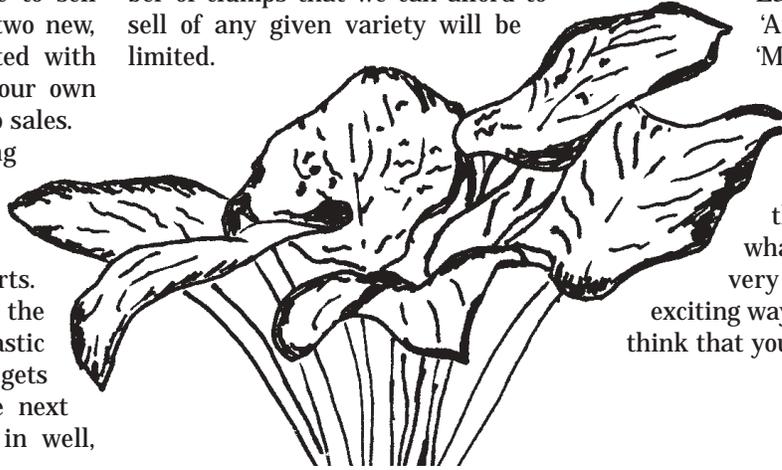
Hostas: Buy The Clump

For several years, we have been trying to increase our supply of hostas so that we can start offering larger, field-grown clumps in addition to the starts and smaller clumps that we offer in pots. Due to the incredible popularity of hostas, we have had difficulty increasing our supplies enough to be able to sell clumps. Until now. We have two new, flat-topped shade houses planted with hostas, which we will dig for our own propagation as well as for clump sales.

We have been selling daylilies in clumps for several years. In fact, we sell more daylilies by the clump than we do potted or in bareroot starts. Clumps are dug on the spot for the customer and dropped into plastic bags. As long as the customer gets the clumps planted within the next day or two and waters them in well,

there is very little transplant shock, since the plants have not been divided. This is true for both daylilies and hostas.

Prices, of course, will vary, depending on the variety, age, and size of the clump. Obviously, not all hosta varieties will be available in clumps, and the number of clumps that we can afford to sell of any given variety will be limited.



We plan to have more varieties available in clumps as the years go by. This year, we should be able to offer at least a few clumps each of the following hostas: 'Blue Umbrellas', 'Sun Power', 'Regal Splendor', 'Love Pat', 'Sagae', 'Guacamole', 'Whirlwind', 'Pearl Lake', 'Summer Fragrance', 'Antioch', 'Sugar and Cream', 'Moonlight', 'Mildred Seaver', 'Blue Cadet', and probably a few others. Clump sales will start in May, after the hostas start growing, so that you will be able to see what you are getting. We are very excited about this new, exciting way to shop for hostas, and we think that you will be, too.

HORNBAKER GARDENS

22937 1140 N. Ave.,
Princeton, Illinois 61356

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We accept



EASIEST DIRECTIONS TO HORNBAKER GARDENS:

From the intersection of I-180 and Rt. 26 (5 miles SE of Princeton), go toward Princeton on Rt. 26 about 1/4 mile and take the first left. Go 2 miles to the top of the steep hill.

