



Notes from

# HORNBAKER GARDENS

*"The Princeton Perennial People"*

22937 1140 N. Ave., Princeton, Illinois 61356

NEWSLETTER No. 14

(815) 659-3282

MAY 2001

## Iris Season Heating Up

Spring started out so late and cool that we assumed that iris season would be running late this year. However, a sus-

tained stretch of 80 degree weather has brought the irises along in a hurry. It now appears that the season is going to be right on time. We estimate that the peak of the season for the tall bearded irises will be from May 16 through the end of May.

The last two weekends in May will be the two big iris weekends. We will be open our regular hours on Memorial Day weekend. That is, we will be open Saturday 8:00 to 5:00, Sunday 12:00 to

5:00, and Monday 8:00 to 5:00.

Of course, the standard dwarf bearded varieties have been blooming since late April and early May. The intermediate bearded and border bearded are starting to bloom now, as well. To catch some of these early bloomers, you will want to come out right away.

For those of you who have never ordered irises from us, perhaps an explanation of the procedure would be appropriate. *Continued on page 3*

### Retail Hours

We are open seven days a week, Monday through Saturday 8:00 to 5:00, and Sunday 12:00 to 5:00. We will be open through October 14.

Please note that we will be open on Memorial Day, but we are closed on July 4 and Labor Day (September 3).

### OPEN HOUSE AND HOSTA WALK:

We will hold our fourteenth annual Open House and Hosta Walk on June 8, 9 and 10, when the hostas are looking their best. Refreshments will be served, and drawings for prizes will be held each day. We will also have a selection of specially priced plants.

### PEAK BLOOM SEASONS:

The peak of **iris** bloom is usually the last two weeks of May, although the weather can affect bloom season significantly. The shorter, early bloomers generally start blooming around the first of May. **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.

## Extend the Iris Season

Most of us think of "iris season" as the three-week period of time during which the tall bearded irises bloom, typically during the last half of May and the first few days of June. And it would be difficult to argue against the proposition that the peak of tall bearded iris bloom is the showiest, most magnificent explosion of color in the spring garden.

However, the iris show can easily be extended from late April well into mid to late June by planting iris varieties other than the tall bearded ones. (The season

can start even earlier if you plant some of the bulbs in fall that produce cute, tiny irises as early as late March. We'll discuss those more in a later newsletter.)

The first to bloom in our field are the Standard Dwarf Bearded varieties (or SDB's). These varieties grow from 8 to 15 inches tall, and generally start blooming around April 25. Because they start blooming in cooler weather, they tend to last a little longer, well into the middle of May, when the Tall Bearded varieties *Continued on page 3*

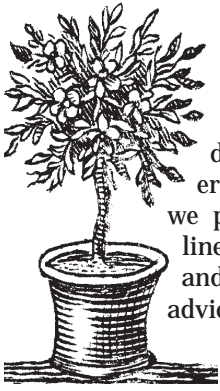
## Open House and Hosta Walk

Our fourteenth annual Open House and Hosta Walk will be held on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, June 8, 9, and 10.

We held our first Open House in 1988, when we had been in business for only a year. At that time, we were primarily a wholesale nursery. We held the Open House in order to let the local folks come out and see what the business was all about, and to see if there was any potential to operate a retail establishment from this remote location. Those that didn't

get completely lost trying to find us came out and enjoyed a day in the country. We were surprised and excited to see the amount of enthusiasm there seemed to be about our perennial business.

As we began to get our hosta display beds established, we began referring to the Open House as the Open House and Hosta Walk. In our early days, many people didn't know what a hosta was, so we wanted to emphasize this wonderful *Continued on page 2*



# Planting Trees and Shrubs

Since we cater to do-it-yourself gardeners, it is high time that we provided some guidelines for planting trees and shrubs. Here is our advice.

Keep your plant in a shaded location and water daily until you are ready to plant. Trees and shrubs can be kept in their containers for several days, or even weeks, if necessary, but the sooner they are planted, the better off they will be.

Plan on digging a hole significantly wider than the pot that the plant comes in, and plan on mulching around the

plant in a circle even wider than the hole. Therefore, if you are planting in a grassy area, skim off the sod in a sizeable circle and discard.

Dig the hole to the same depth as the depth of the root ball (or dirt in the pot). Measure so as to accomplish this. You certainly don't want the root ball sticking out above the hole after you set it in. But on the other hand, you don't want to dig the hole too deep, and then have to backfill before setting the plant in the hole. This is apt to cause the plant to settle too deeply into the softer backfilled soil.

Dig the hole wider, however, than the pot is, so that the roots have some softer soil to grow into. Do this by several inch-

es in the case of smaller shrubs, or by as much as a foot or two in the case of larger trees in large pots.

If your soil is poor, mix some Gardeners' Compost in with the soil to be used to fill the hole. But don't get too carried away. Use no more than one fourth to one third compost. You don't want to make the soil too light. Also mix in some Pro-Gro organic fertilizer, perhaps a handful or two.

Remove the plant from the pot. You may need to lay the plant on its side to remove the pot. If the plant is extremely root bound, it is important to break up the roots on the bottom and sides so that

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## A Barley Bale In Your Pond?

There is a dizzying array of products on the market geared toward reducing, eliminating, or otherwise killing algae in your pond. More and more evidence and field testing is indicating that barley straw is an effective natural means of controlling algae, especially string algae.

This is not a revolutionary breakthrough. Barley bales have been used for centuries in Europe for algae control in lakes and large ponds. In the U.S., companies specializing in lake management have begun using barley straw as an ecofriendly method of reducing algae.

Recently, the success of barley straw has carried over to water gardening.

Exactly how and why it works is still being studied. A short explanation is that, as the barley begins to decompose, it produces a chemical that breaks down the cell walls of the algae, while it also reduces the capabilities of algae to form new cell growth.

Barley straw is not exactly a "quick fix", however. It takes four to six weeks for the barley straw to begin decomposing and releasing the algae-inhibiting chemicals. But once the decomposition process has started, the barley will remain active for up to six to eight months. Barley straw has no negative effects upon other plant life, fish, or other animals in the pond.

Having a small bale of decomposing straw in your pond is not exactly aesthetically pleasing. However, we have placed a barley bale in our biofalls, inside the mesh bag that holds the lava rock. The bale wants to float to the surface, but that can be overcome by weighting it down by tying a rock to it, or by tying up the excess mesh so that it can't float up so far. Once the water hyacinths multiply to cover the surface of the biofalls, the barley bale can't be seen anyway. We sell barley bales for \$11.99 each. One bale is sufficient for a pond up to 11' x 16'. Two bales would be required for larger ponds.

Aquascape has now come up with a new product called a Barley Mat, which is a filter mat into which is woven organ-

ically grown barley straw, that contains no pesticides or herbicides. The Barley Mats can be added to the biofalls, between the other filter mats. While the mats can be added at any time, the easiest time to add them is during spring cleanup.

The advantage of Barley Mats, unlike the bale method, is that the barley is spread throughout the entire surface of the filter mat, increasing the barley's contact with the water. Plus, of course, the barley straw is nested inside the biofalls and is completely out of sight. The Barley Mat can be removed and replaced the following year during the annual pond cleanup.

String algae grows more quickly in ponds exposed to full sun. Barley Mats are ideal for such ponds. The Barley Mats, used in conjunction with AquaClearer bacteria and String Algae Buster, will provide an effective means of controlling algae and improving the water quality in your Aquascape pond.

The Barley Mat for the Mini Biofalls costs \$24.99, and treats up to 750 gallons. The Barley Mat for the Standard Biofalls costs \$42.99, and treats 750 to 1000 gallons (a typical 11' x 16' pond). Larger ponds should use two mats.

As of now, we do not carry the Barley Mats in stock, but we can have them shipped directly to you for a shipping charge of \$3.00. Just give us a call, use your credit card, and we can have Barley Mats shipped to you within 24 hours.

## Open House

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plant. We hold this event on the second weekend in June because the hostas look great at that time. Of course, they look great from early May into fall, but early June is a great time for viewing hostas.

Cookies and lemonade have always been a part of the ambiance of Open House. During the last few years, we have started having a list of "specials", plants, including some hostas, perennials, trees, and shrubs, as well as some giftware, available during the Open House at discounted prices.

And don't forget the prize drawings. Attendees register for the drawings, and near the end of each day, we draw the names of three prize winners. The big prize on Sunday is usually a large hosta clump.

# Planting

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they will begin growing out into your soil rather than continuing to circle within themselves. Do this by making a "butterfly" cut (or X cut) with a knife across the bottom of the root mass. Pry the roots apart somewhat. You may also make three or four vertical cuts down the sides of the root mass.

Set the plant in the hole, making sure that the depth still looks correct. Backfill with the mix of soil, compost and organic

fertilizer, and pack in well. Water well, really well. You want the soil to settle into any air pockets that you may not have completely filled. If you have some soil left over, you can make a slight doughnut around the plant to help hold water while the plant gets established.

Sprinkle a few handfuls of Pro-Gro organic fertilizer around the plant, and mulch the entire circle to a depth of four inches. Mulching will help hold the mois-

ture in and keep weeds down, while decomposing and adding organic matter to the soil. However, in the center of the circle, pull the mulch away from the base of the plant. You don't want to effectively plant the tree or shrub too deep by mulching deeply right at the base of the plant.

In the case of a larger tree, now is the time to stake it. Right after you plant it and water it in well, you can easily straighten it while it is sitting in the mud. Likewise, a good wind during this first growing season can easily send it into a permanent lean. Stake the tree, using three cords and stakes, set in a triangular pattern. People often use short lengths of rubber hose to protect the tree where the rope goes around the trunk. Apparently, nylon cord can be used without any special protection. Just snug the cord up, rather than pulling it tight.

Water the plant again in three or four days if it hasn't rained. Then water weekly through the first growing season when you're not getting rain. Water deeply when you do water. Watering frequently and shallowly only encourages shallow root growth. Better to water less often, but deeply, in order to encourage the roots to follow the moisture down into the ground.

## Extend Iris Season

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(TB's) are just starting to bloom. Since the SDB's bloom so early, many of you who come to see the big iris show later in May never get to see them.

A couple of years ago, we eliminated a few varieties of SDB's that just weren't especially colorful. Those that we kept, plus a couple of new varieties that we have added, eleven varieties in all, are truly excellent irises. If time permits, we will try to take some pictures to show you, but you can hardly go wrong by trying out some SDB's. These smaller varieties do not seem to be bothered much by iris borers. They also multiply quickly, allowing you to spread them about the gardens or share them with friends.

Bridging the gap between the SDB's and the TB's are the Border Bearded (BB's) and the Intermediate Bearded (IB's). (Spout all these initials to your friends, and you will sound like a real iris expert, à la Barney Fife: "Yep, Aunt Bea, my SDB's are just about done blooming, but my BB's and IB's are nothing short of gorgeous, and the TB's are coming on fast. (Sniff.)"). The BB's and IB's stand 16" to 27" tall. The distinction between the two classifications is that the BB's have somewhat smaller flowers. We carry nine varieties of BB's and nineteen varieties of IB's.

A walk through the field on May 9 revealed that all of the IB's were blooming, while the BB's were well budded up, and some were just starting to bloom. All of the SDB's were still blooming, but some of them were just about done. A dozen or more varieties of TB's were even starting to bloom. There is variation, of course, from variety to variety, as far as bloom time is concerned. While some of the TB's are starting to bloom now, others

won't start until later in May, and will bloom into June.

After the TB's come the Siberian and Japanese varieties. These varieties are beardless. The Siberians generally bloom during the first part of June. The flowers are smaller, but they stand on strong stems, usually around three feet tall. Most are in the blue and purple color ranges, but there are some excellent whites, and a couple with reddish hues. Siberians like moisture, especially while they are getting established. They grow well in the garden, as well as along a pond or stream. They are much less trouble than the bearded irises, since they do not suffer from borers, soft rot, or brown spot. They are quite trouble free. When dividing Siberians, do not do so in the middle of the summer, as you would with the bearded varieties. Instead, do your dividing in early spring as growth is just starting, or in the fall, in which case most of the foliage should be cut back during the process. Dividing only needs to be done when the clump gets old enough that all of the new growth is coming from the outside edge of the clump, and the middle has died out.

Japanese irises (*Iris ensata*), bloom even later than the Siberians. They have somewhat flattened flowers in white, blue and purple colors. The flowers are larger than the Siberians, and are quite exotic. Japanese irises grow best in lime-free, acidic, boggy soil. They are often seen growing near the water in Japanese gardens.

By planting some of these early and late blooming irises, you can easily have irises blooming from late April through late June.

## Iris Season

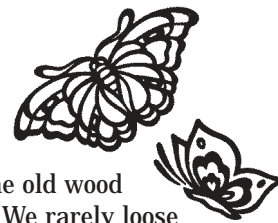
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priate. The best way to pick out the irises that you want is to walk through the field while they are blooming and make your selections. You then place an order and pay for it. We should be able to tell you when you turn in your order whether any of the varieties that you have selected are already sold out. When you place your order, you indicate whether you will pick up your order or you want it shipped to you. Most people prefer to pick up their orders. It gives them another excuse to come out, and pick-up time is during daylily bloom season, which means that there is another whole field of gorgeous flowers to walk through.

We dig the orders shortly after the Fourth of July, at which time you will receive a postcard telling you that your order is ready to be picked up, or your order will be shipped to you, as the case may be.

# Success With Butterfly Bushes



We are on the northern edge of where butterfly bushes, or Buddleia, are hardy. However, they are well worth growing. They grow three to six feet tall, depending on the variety, and are covered with long, arching flower racemes. And yes, the butterflies are all over them. If dead-headed, these plants will bloom most of the last half of the summer.

Farther south, Buddleia grows as a shrub, with new shoots coming out from last year's wood. This far north, however, the old wood dies off, and new shoots come from the ground each year, or in some cases, from low down on the old wood.

To successfully overwinter Buddleia, one must apply a mulch in late fall or early winter. Something light and fluffy, with good insulating value, such as straw, works best. For some reason, the books tell you not to prune off the old wood until the following spring. We have had a very high success rate by following these guidelines.

Before Thanksgiving, we break up a bale of straw and spread it around the Buddleia a good foot deep. We wait until early April to prune off the old wood, about a foot tall. Then we watch to see where the new shoots come from. If no shoots come from the old wood, but only

from the ground, then we prune off the old wood to the ground. We rarely loose a butterfly bush.

Customers frequently report loosing these plants over the winter. Presumably, this is usually due to a failure to mulch deeply enough, although it may be possible that an especially severe winter will cause the loss of Buddleia. Probably those planted earlier in the season have a better chance of surviving than those planted in the late summer or fall, since their roots can get better established in the ground before winter.

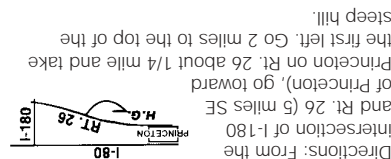
## Our Guarantee

We guarantee our plants to be true to name and in good health at the time of purchase. We guarantee hostas and daylilies through the first winter. See the iris catalog for our limited warranty on irises. All other plants are guaranteed for a period of 30 days. Since we have no

control over when, where, and how they are planted and how they are maintained, nor over weather conditions, dogs, children and stray basketballs, we cannot guarantee plants beyond that time.

We attempt to sell plants that are listed as being hardy in this area (Zone 5),

and to warn the customer as to any plant that is not. However, we encourage our customers to educate themselves as much as possible as to the hardiness and cultural requirements of the plants they purchase.



**GIFT CERTIFICATES AVAILABLE**



We accept

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