



Bear Creek Press

"Smothering Dandelions"

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Mom quietly passed away last August at the age of 95. Even though her gardening days were long behind her, she still enjoyed fresh flowers from Loretta's mixed borders. But during her long life, she had gardened. She had always gardened. Gardening was a way of life in her household. When folks ask how I first started in the nursery business, I place the blame firmly on her shoulders.

Mom's yard and garden was always carefully maintained. She had a family's worth of laborers and wrote lists for each of us. She had so many lists she had to make lists of her lists. Each of us had our own chores. I am pretty sure by the time I could crawl she threw me onto the lawn to keep the dandelions down. She must have decided the sheer bulk of a pudgy baby would smother them. By the time each of us was axle high to a lawn mower wheel, we were learning to operate that lawn mower. I'm certain I was as interested in gardening as having a tooth extracted.

She was a gardener's gardener. Fresh cut flowers were brought into the house. Dad built her stone-edged landscape beds and then built some more. There was ornamental red lettuce in the front yard in a row next to perennials, years before anyone heard from the edible landscape fanatics. She made sure we only picked one leaf from each head so the all the plants in the row would be a uniform size. There was a compost pile behind the garage that, when properly mined, yielded the finest crumbly soil, slow cooked by insects and time.

She made all of us help. I recall wanting to watch Batman on TV on a perfectly lovely spring day. She found something for me to do outdoors. Fifty years later, if the weather is not scalding or frozen, I will find an outside chore before doing one indoors. I also recall an innocent forsythia chopped to the ground in an attempt to learn proper pruning. Shrubs generally fear me to this day.

So, thank you, Mom. Our love of gardens and flowers and weeds (well, maybe not so much) comes from you and Dad. The ability to grow food, sow seeds, trim branches and a hundred other tasks was taught by you. Dad sowed a love of stone that seems to have laid dormant for decades. I will always happily blame you for the love of gardening.

More, More, More

It is that time of year again. No, not gardening time. We are referring to the time we renew our membership in the self help group, "we-bought-too-much-pottery-again group." As a classic enabler, I faithfully attend these meetings with my spouse, hoping that together we can make some progress. The results of our progress (or lack of it) are visible at the bear where trained staff will help you navigate the narrow aisles of the display area.

In the meetings, we discuss the advent of the problem: the pottery catalogs that show up with the frequency of cold nights in an Arctic winter. The problem is compounded by the long, lonely days following Christmas during which hands shake as page after page of colorful pots are studied. The inevitable "ordering period" is openly discussed, each member recalling that harrowing stage of our addiction.

Receiving the pottery seems to be a release from the grasp of this mania. However, by the time the ninth pallet of colorful pots has been unpacked, we realize this is not the case. We still have a long way to go with the program. I think I heard her on the phone today looking for more.... Our weakness is your benefit, however. The variety, the colors, the sizes! Certainly there are a few that will fit on your patio or porch. And don't worry, there is room in our self help group for a few more people.

New Perennials

This year there are more new plants than ever. New annuals, new vines, new trees, new perennials. There are so many choices and so little room in this newsletter, we will barely get started. So here is an attempt to entice you with a few new perennials.

Volcano Clematis and Rosamunde Clematis

Red is the featured color on these two Clematis vines. Volcano's red suggests a lava flow with rich velvet red flowers borne throughout the midsummer. This vigorous grower will tolerate light shade. Two tone flowers grace Rosamunde's prolific vines. A salmon background is accented with a bold stripe on each petal. A prominent central cluster of yellow anthers enhance the colors of these two handsome vines.

Summer Sun Heliopsis

Heliopsis, or false sunflower, is a mid summer perennial that is outstanding in the field. Summer Sun is an unusual double flowering variety that grows to three feet. Three inch golden domed flowers will thrill any gardener and make their mothers happy also.

Maid of Honor, True Love, Wedding Bells and First Dance Hellebore

Oh, goody, it's a wedding! Everyone will love the marriage of bold flowers and deer resistant foliage on these new Hellebore introductions. Party in a pure white dress, deep maroon tux or lovely yellow formal of these celebratory double flowers. These four new Lenten roses with the wedding theme names (way to go, marketing department!) will dress up a shady spot in your garden.

Abiqua Drinking Gourd Hosta

This stately Hosta is named after the Abiqua River in Oregon. The large cupped leaves on a two foot tall specimen are a heavy textured dark blue-green. "But what about the 'drinking gourd' part of the name, you may ask? The heavy substance leaf edges turn upwards to create a water holding palm. The result is a leaf that looks like it could be a utensil as well as a very original name for a Hosta.

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Empress Wu Hosta

For a hosta with some presence, start with Empress Wu. At a stately four feet tall, this is the largest hosta available. Dark green, deep veined leaves form a massive mound. The foliage frames mid-summer spikes of reddish violet flowers. Quite an impressive show, don't you think? As for the real Empress Wu, she was an important political and military leader, responsible for expanding China's reach in Asia and enacting many positive internal changes. We do not know if she grew hostas.

Rhino Hide Hosta

There seem to be so many hostas in trade they are running out of names for them. Yet each name helps describe an attribute in a simple, concise way. Rhino Hide is a good example. No, the rhino is not standing behind a tree (how *Do* you hide a rhino?). This Hosta has the heaviest leaves of all hostas with strong

cupping and prominent puckering. Green-yellow markings stand out on a blue leaf on this 20 inch tall plant. For extra credit, say this name out loud five times very fast.

Julia Rose, Scarlet Heaven, Cora Louise, First Arrival Itoh Peony

Those fun loving botanists have done it again. By the mid twentieth century, Japanese Horticulturalist Itoh had successfully crossed tree peonies with perennial peonies. He was a very patient man, having thousands of failures before his successes. The resulting plants, known as intersectionals, were further developed in the US. Itoh peonies display all of the best traits of both peonies. Sturdy, long lasting foliage gives way to repeat flowers of stunning colors. These are just a few selections of a growing group of plants that should grace every garden.

Moon Dust Yarrow

At only 14 inches tall, this is an ideal yarrow for a mixed perennial garden. Soft yellow flowers combine well with any other color. The short, erect stems will not sway or fall like the taller yarrows. Distinct silver fern-like foliage sits low to the ground making a soft groundcover carpet. Maybe moon dust really is magical.

Berry Timeless Coral Bells

This year's selection of Coral Bells will thrill any Heuchera lover. One of our favorites, Berry Timeless, boasts an exception blooming season with flowers that don't know when to stop. Light pink flowers deepen to rose as they age and finally dry on the stem.

Oops, we are out of time. Please stop by the Bear to see these and many other exciting perennials.



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