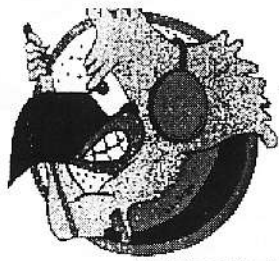


# St. Louis Park

Edition

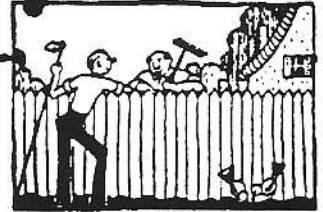
# The Garden Spray



Bulletin of the Men's Garden Club of Minneapolis, Inc.

Affiliated with Gardeners of America and the Minnesota State Horticultural Society

April 2000 Volume 58, Number 12 (The *St. Louis Park* Issue)



## April Meeting

**Date:** Tuesday, April 11

**Dinner:** 6:30 PM

**Business:** 7:00 PM

**Program:** 7:30 PM

**Place:** Lake Harriet United Methodist Church  
49th Street & Chowen Avenue South

**Cost:** \$9.00 if reserved in advance.

\$10.00 at the door (*if extra meals are available*)

**dinner reservations are necessary**

See page 6 for details

## April Program: Photography In The Garden

This program is a joint effort by Lloyd Wittstock and friends, all members of our club (Editors note: It should be added that Lloyd does have *some* friends who are *not* members of the club). This program will not guarantee prize winning photos for the photo contest but it should help. Rather, it will give the average garden photographer a few clues for taking better photos. If you would like a few tips on capturing your garden moments, taking that prize flower only you get to see, or creating a pictorial journal of your yearly garden changes come to the April meeting.

*Some of the topics to be covered will be:*

- History of Photography
- Equipment and Film
- Tips for better Pictures
- Photography on the Internet
- A Question & Answer Session

## About This Issue:

In addition to the typesetting and publication, Chuck Carlson faces a constant demand for new articles and photos for the *Garden Spray*. It is a lot for one individual to do. Consequently he has asked for some assistance. The small (but sometimes dynamic for short periods of time) St. Louis Park contingent of The Men's Garden Club of Minneapolis took up the challenge. Several of us had written articles, albeit under a bit of duress, and as a group we tend to be non-stop talkers anyway. Perhaps we could just write it down—the only problem was that we would need not only some editing but may have to cut out some incidental activity reports, like the President's Message or the Board Meeting decisions, in order to accommodate our ramblings. Little did we envision that we would also be talking about moving into Andy Marlow's "white space." Once it appeared we were crossing the line between creative journalism and wholesale "dissing" of the ancient and honorable traditions of the *Garden Spray* editors (some practices date back to the days of that legendary martinet Ed Culbert) Chuck wisely disavowed any responsibility for the outcome of the issue and gave us carte blanche.

Then we found that Chuck does far more than receive some articles and, as he said to us with a straight face, "just drop them into the template." How could such a fine man look us right in the eye and tell such big fibs. In our attempts to get it to fit, and do it within the limits of our computer-challenged band, we messed with the fonts and sizes of typeface and ran whole articles together rather than continue them on other pages--in addition to cutting deeply into the sacred white space. All of these are considered quite foul deeds in the eyes of bona fide editors.

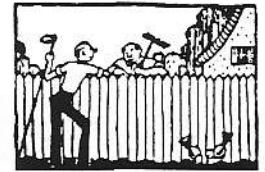
But that's the way the Mavericks from St. Louis Park are—we don't follow directions well, and that's probably the way our edition of the spray should look. So don't blame Chuck or Andy or Ritchie or any of those responsible guys. But you might consider asking for a chance for your community contingent of the MGCM to turn out an edition of the *Spray* with your distinctive personality imprinted in it. Ask Chuck for a chance.

# Growing Cacti and Succulents in My Apartment

An interview  
with Dr. Theodore A. Olson

In order to continue his gardening hobby when he moved from a house with a yard to an apartment Ted Olson had to be resourceful. The apartment had very limited window space and no balcony. Approaching the problem as a scientist (a true scientist never really retires, he just focuses his attention in new directions) he concluded that he could get the most economical and interesting use from his limited space by growing tightly clustered potted plants. He decided to grow cacti and succulents in the pots because of their extremely interesting growth patterns and the wide variety of unique individual cultivars. He currently has over 20 cacti on one small table together with a number of aloe, agave, and jade plants. His prize is a ten-year-old *agave* 'Victoria Reginae' which has won numerous blue ribbons for him at our annual flower shows.

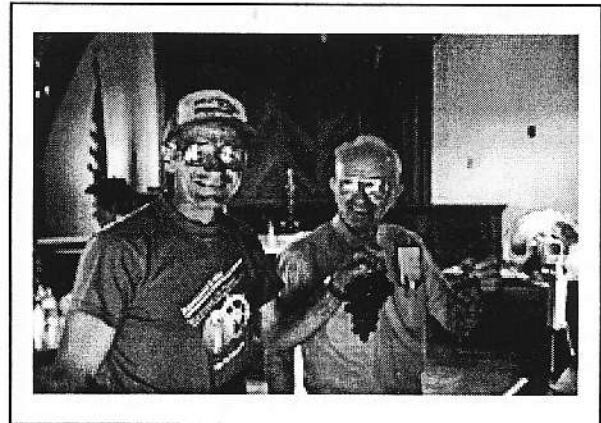
Although some cacti and succulents can be a bit fastidious, once the requirements for a particular individual have been determined they remain relatively constant. This is where apartment dwelling has an advantage; the microclimate in the high rise apartments is almost without variation from one season to another. When the temperature and humidity are constant light is the only important variable in determining water and fertilizer needs. Succulents and cacti should not be overwatered; more people have lost them from overwatering than from desiccation. "Water them when they are dry," is the advice given by many experts, but no one tells how you determine when they are "dry"—apparently it is one of the black arts of gardening. Initially Ted watered weekly, now he waters every three weeks. He can do this because he altered their water requirements by changing the light. Originally he grew his potted plants in fairly direct sunlight, but found that he could get more controlled and predictable growth by keeping them in diffuse light. He finds this preferable, although he acknowledges that you can get some very interesting changes in growth rate, plant shape and coloration with direct sunlight. Another important



hint for those wanting to grow succulents and cacti easily and predictably is, "get rid of that stuff they are planted in when you buy them!" They will do far better in the specially designed cactus and succulent potting mixture readily (and inexpensively) available at Bachman's or Lyndale Garden Center or any of the other large nurseries.

One of the old axioms of growing perennials is "move it if it isn't doing well where it is." Ted says that you can also keep it where it is and have it grow better if you change what you are doing to it. With a little study and patience (plus a scientific background and some of that "black art of gardening") it is clearly possible with cacti and succulents. In the past four years he has moved from a house to an apartment and then changed apartments, and all the while racked up the blue ribbons in the cacti and succulent division of the MGCM annual show.

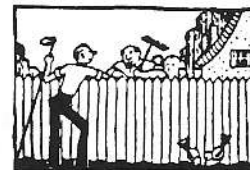
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*Superstar Bob Smith shows Phil Peterson his prize winning grapes at the 1986 Flower & Vegetable Show*

## The Lazy Gardener:

**Subject: Lawn Care**  
by Mary Maynard



Well, the grass will be greening up any time now, and it's time to think about Lawn Care the Lazy Way. Unfortunately, lawn care is really a situation where A Stitch in Time Saves Nine, and An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure. So, good lawn care really goes against the grain for a Lazy Gardener, although doing a few things up front will save plenty of time later. Needless to say, I do not have a perfect lawn. To have a perfect lawn, one cannot be a Lazy Gardener, as far as I can tell.

Here are a few lawn care observations:

1. Preemergent *crabgrass* control is worth the time and money. Most of us don't really need more than one fertilizer application in the spring, and getting one of those expensive ones with the yellow stuff in it will make a huge difference during the crabgrass season. You might not get 100% prevention, but even 90% is a LOT of crabgrass you don't have to pull out. Of course, you shouldn't put this down where you plan to plant seed or anything. There is a special version for newly seeded areas, but I've never tried it. As to when to put it on: I usually put it on after I have made Phil mow for the first time in the spring.

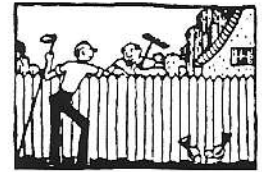
2. *Seeding* in bare or thin spots is not all that hard. I've had good luck with that grass patch stuff that has seed and green-tinted mulch mixed together. Seems like that mulch holds the moisture until the next time I get around to watering. Sometimes my watering practice is not ideal for new grass.

3. *Broadleaf weed control*. For the easy stuff — dandelions and plantains, an occasional squirt of one of the usual broadleaf weed killers works fine. I usually mix up a small batch in a hand spray bottle and spray the weed directly. I also have a neighbor who has one of those Weed Hound weeders, to which he has become quite attached. Since he has eradicated the dandelions from his own yard, he now has free rein in my yard as well. Despite my half-hearted efforts at chemical control, he still has material to work with in my lawn. I don't believe in those Weed-and-Fed fertilizers. For one thing, I don't like stuff sticking to the grass with kids and pets in the area, and for another thing, the time when I need weed control the most is the worst time to apply fertilizer.

4. *Creeping Charlie* — in a class by itself. I have heard about people who have gotten rid of it, but I'm not convinced that it is in the realm of possibility for the

typical Lazy Gardener. Many experts tell us that the secret to the Creeping Charlie problem is to not get it in the first place—by having a lush green lawn that doesn't allow it to get established. This advice is less than helpful for those of us who have huge mats of the stuff crawling through the back yard, often endangering neighbor relations by hopping into adjacent properties. I have not succeeded in eradicating Creeping Charlie, but I have noticed a few things: (a) it takes many applications of a broadleaf weedkiller to completely eradicate it, if it is indeed possible. Something with Dicamba seems to be more effective. (b) the experts suggest spraying either when it is growing vigorously (pretty much any time, as far as I can tell) and blossoming; or at the end of the season, after it has been weakened by a hard freeze. Even then it takes multiple applications. (c) the 20 Mule Team Borax solution does seem to get rid of a lot of it, but isn't 100% effective. And, you can't reapply it, since boron accumulates in the soil, which is a bad thing. (d) If there isn't a lot of it, pulling it out of the lawn might be as effective as anything else. But you need to be ever watchful. Eternal Vigilance is the Price of a Charlie-free Lawn. (e) Bob Olson reports success with painting individual leaves of Creeping Charlie with Roundup using an artist's brush. I believe this proves that Bob does not qualify as a Lazy Gardener. [Bob — you may not change the previous sentences.]

5. You need to *mow* at least occasionally, if only to stay on good terms with the neighbors. The purists recommend mowing the lawn shorter in the spring and longer in the summer, when it's hot and the longer grass can shade the ground and keep it a little cooler. That would mean taking the time to change the mower height. Lazy Gardeners should just leave the mower height at one position — probably the "summer" configuration. Ideally, grass clippings should be left on the lawn to return nitrogen and organic material to the soil. The new mulching mowers seem to do a pretty good job unless the grass gets a little long between mowings. I personally collect my clippings because (a) I want the clippings for mulch in my flower beds, where weed reduction and moisture retention are more important to me than the greenest lawn on the block; and (b) I tend to pick up a lot of clippings on my feet or shoes and track them all over the house. Collecting clippings probably deprives the lawn of some nutrients, so it's possible that I should really fertilize twice in the spring. But I haven't done so thus far.



## Bob Smith "The Vegetable Man"

by Denis Grande

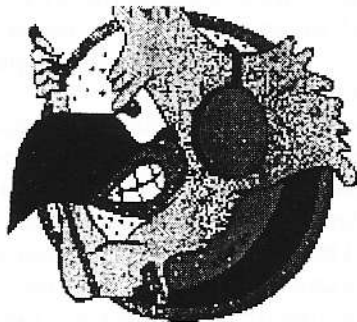
6. *Watering* is another important part of lawn care. Or so I've heard. There are two schools of thought on lawn watering: (a) Do it; and (b) Don't do it. Since most northern grasses will just naturally go dormant if it gets dry — and green up again when it rains again — some folks don't advocate watering the lawn. They may be right, but there are a few problems: it looks bad, it feels bad underfoot, and sometimes it doesn't recover all the way. So I try to water the lawn when it starts to look a little tired. Being a Lazy Gardener, I of course have never gotten around to getting a sprinkler system, so I move hoses around the yard. They say it's a good idea to water less often but more deeply. Since I often forget to move the sprinkler for many hours (and occasionally leave it running all night), I follow this practice without even trying.

7. *Fertilizing*. I try to fertilize once in the spring (with the crabgrass preventer) and twice in the fall: once in early September and once in mid-October. I have never taken the time to figure out the ideal fertilizer nutrient mix, so I just buy something cheap in the fall. The fall applications seem to make a big difference. Hard to tell about the spring one, since everything's growing quite well whether fertilizer has been applied or not.

8. *Trimming and edging*. I have heard of these, but cannot say anything about them from direct experience.

9. *Fall cleanup*. From everything I've heard, I guess it's a good idea to rake the leaves off the lawn before it snows. This is not a huge problem for me since all the big trees on our property have died since Phil and I got married and he moved to Dart Avenue. And, I want all the leaves I can find for winter protection of the flower beds, so I rake them off the lawn and onto the borders. If I didn't have flowers, I don't know how much raking I'd really do!

So, there you have it: everything I know about lawn care. It isn't much —and neither is my lawn!



### The War Oriole

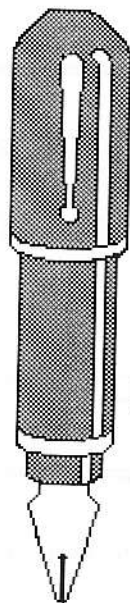
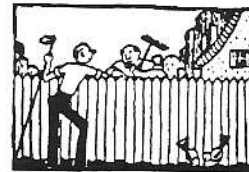
Symbol of the St. Louis Park Girls Tennis Team

A lot of great gardeners have lived in St. Louis Park, but none better than Bob Smith, The Vegetable Man. He was the Babe Ruth of the vegetable part of the annual Flower Food and Foto Show — only it was called the Flower and Vegetable Show in those days. He took home the trophy year after year with the most remarkable and perfect fruits and vegetables. He usually came late with his entries (to the dismay of the mere mortal vegetable gardeners who secretly hoped he would be out of town that weekend and give them a chance at some of the blue ribbons), but his entries didn't require much preparation and buffing—they looked like artist's wax models to start with. And he only did vegetables, no flowers. He had perfect tomatoes, perfect corn, several types of perfect potatoes and unbelievable apples and fruits. It was rumored that he had a special apple tree with three limbs: one limb Haralson, one Fireside and the other Cortland. When we asked him about the fertilizer he used and the pesticides he required he gave the most amazing answer. The only fertilizer he used was compost and he didn't believe in pesticides (although under close questioning by Leon Snyder he reluctantly admitted that for the apples he had to spray—no matter what he tried he couldn't keep the insects away without it). He was an organic gardener.

He remained a mysterious figure for years; he came to the garden club meetings in a three piece suit and was always quite interested in visiting with the old timers and new comers alike. But when Russell Smith (no relation) and the Garden Tour Committee came to tell him he was to be on the annual tour, he politely refused saying, "I'm not ready yet." Somehow he got away with it year after year (almost no one told that tour committee that they weren't going to be on tour—they were utterly relentless in their pressure). So there we were, a what-must-be-the-most-spectacular-vegetable-garden-ever and we couldn't see it—only the bounty from it each fall. Every now and then Bob would let something slip—like when he mentioned there was a raccoon-proof seven-foot chain link fence with barbed wire atop surrounding the corn. Another crack in the veil of

(continued on page 6)

## The Garden Spray



# Board Meeting Summary

Margaret Hibberd,  
Secretary

(in Margaret's absence St. Louis  
Park expatriate Tim McCauley  
recorded the minutes)



Secretary Margaret Hibberd  
St. Louis Park Wannabe

## MGCM Board Minutes

Meeting Date: March 7, 2000

**PRESENT:** Howard Berg, Carole Ann Brekke, Eldon Hugelon, Dave John (Fridley), Tim McCauley, Ritchie Miller, Kay Wolfe

**ABSENT:** Margaret Hibberd, Jackie Overom

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT BY RITCHIE MILLER:

President Ritchie reported that the 2001 convention will be dedicated to Bill Hull. He referred to a copy of the Minnesota Horticultural Society annual report, noting that our club had 29 volunteers listed. Also the MGCM was listed as a donor. We were reminded to return our Convention Name Survey and our reservations for the Dayton/Bachman show. Ritchie will be going to the region board meeting April 1, 2000, in Fort Dodge. A letter received from past National President Bill Laning pointed out that the *National dues will have to be increased* and urged us to support this action.

**VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT:** All programs for the year have been filled.

**SECRETARY'S REPORT:** The February minutes were approved.

**TREASURER'S:** The February report was approved.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS:

**Calendars:** Profits from this year's calendar sale have reached \$927.56. Dave was commended for topping the budget.

**Auction:** Sales amounts will be calculated via computer at this year's auction thanks to Marty Anderson. Eldon is preparing a list of the plants requested on the questionnaire passed out at the February dinner meeting.

### OLD BUSINESS:

- **Greeting New Members**--Ritchie will talk to the Hospitality & Program Committees for their ideas about welcoming and mentoring new members.

- **MGCM Garden Signs**-- action tabled

### NEW BUSINESS:

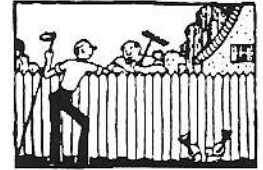
- **Pumpkins & Sunflowers**-- The National organization wants \$15.00 for pumpkin and sunflower seeds. We will rely on our members to donate seeds, as we did last year.

- **Valley Fair Request**-- Valley Fair asked if the Club would consider helping with monthly garden maintenance for a fee. No action pending further information.

- **New Members**--Ellyn Hosch and Joe Cassell were unanimously approved for membership.

**ADJOURN:** Meeting was adjourned at 9:10 P.M. for Ruth Berg's Irish-accented dessert.

**Note:** Next board meeting Tuesday, April 4th, 2000, 7:30 PM at Margaret Hibberd's, 1850 Roselawn Ave.



(continued from page 4)

mystery came when one of the program chairmen got him to promise to describe his garden as one part of an after dinner program. We packed the church basement that evening and heard some remarkable things: In the spring he planted his special stock corn in small lots and at daily intervals, so he could harvest half a dozen fresh ears each evening during the harvest season as they became ripe in the same sequence in which they were planted (he had a computerized dated record of his garden layout so he knew exactly where to harvest them). We also learned that he had permanent concrete walkways between the vegetable rows and flood lights for working into the night. It sounded like a Disney World setting. But still we couldn't visit.

Then one day it happened. Russ Smith heard that Bob Smith had retired from his position as an executive of one of the utilities companies and was moving to Florida. Russ wasn't going to be denied this time—and the legendary Smith Vegetable Garden was added to our evening garden tour. Russ had to lay on an extra bus because of the intense interest. No one remembers who else was on tour that day (can you imagine going to all that work of getting your garden ready and no one remembered they were at your place?). In some situations it is anticlimactic actually seeing something you had romanticized for years, but the fabled Smith Vegetable Garden didn't disappoint anyone. It had the impenetrable fence and the concrete walkways and the grafted trees, and it had more. There were corn stalks eight feet tall in early July. The already huge cabbages and cauliflower had nary a blemish. And the tomatoes were all carefully trained on trellises (made from half-inch steel bars welded together) and pruned to have all the leaves facing the sun. And there was more—much more. It was an "ooh and ah" garden—those who saw it on that famous day will never forget it. And those who missed it will fib and say they were there. That was the only time we ever saw the remarkable Bob Smith Vegetable Garden, and for most of us the last time we saw Bob Smith. Others have come along since and won a lot of vegetable blue ribbons, but none had the charisma of Bob Smith the Vegetable Man. However, there are still charismatic gardeners in St. Louis Park—and they will be on the garden tour this summer when we will be featuring the Gardens of The (St. Louis) Park.

(Editor's note: technically Bob Smith lived in Minnetonka, a bedroom suburb of St. Louis Park)

## Coming attractions

### The August MGCM Members Tour:

*"Tea in the Garden" Don't miss this  
once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the  
zany and eclectic St. Louis Park gardeners  
in their natural habitat.*

### ***Dinner reservations are necessary*** (Please call in your reservation early)

#### *Dinner Meeting Reservation Policy:*

The permanent reservation list is in effect for this meeting. Check your mailing label. If it has a "p" by your name ("pp" for two names) you are on the permanent list. If there is no "p", you are not on the permanent list. To make a dinner reservation, contact **Mary Maynard** by Friday, April 7. Mary can be reached at **612-926-7506** or by e-mail: [mary.j.maynard@healthpartners.com](mailto:mary.j.maynard@healthpartners.com). If you are on the permanent list and will not attend, you must notify Mary by the same date or you will be responsible for the cost of dinner. If you want to cancel a dinner reservation on Monday or Tuesday, call Howard Berg. If the reservation can be sold, you will not be billed.

## Non-Gardener's Lament

By Gary Opperman

Please, I need just a minute to grouse.  
You see I am blessed with a gardening spouse.  
Many out there may know  
The tough row there is to hoe  
For this unfortunate St. Louis Park house.

So now let me share a typical day  
In the garden season with my dear wife, Kay.  
It may not be pretty,  
But I'll try to be witty.  
So, please read on with no delay.

I awaken real early before she rises  
To revel in all the new blooming surprises.  
I fix coffee and cream.  
And sit in a warm sunbeam.  
On this day there could be absolutely no crises.

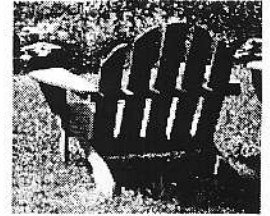
I sit in my Adirondack chair.  
Reading my paper with nary a care.  
I hear, "Grab a shovel!"  
And I know this means trouble.  
My great day has just turned less fair.

"Morden Centennial needs a new home!"  
"Go get the bucket." and "Go get the loam!"  
I know just the other day  
I moved it the opposite way!  
Can we never curb these perennials that roam?

It's close to dinner time I fear  
And Kay from the garden I must steer.  
She says just a sec.  
It's longer than heck.  
Why I wait for her is not at all clear.

So there's Birginia, Henry Cabot Lodge and an asternaut  
And one should invest in 'Blue Chips', I thought.  
She says with great might,  
"You never get their names right!"  
It would be easier if they all stayed in one spot.

So for those of you who with my view agree,  
On August the Sixth come and join me.  
Relax in an Addie chair.  
Have a beer with no care.  
And let those gardeners go on endlessly!

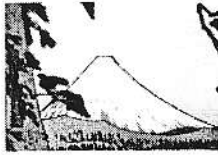


*(Editor's Note :— Gary Opperman is Kay Wolfe's Husband and Poet Laureate of St. Louis Park. Gary is obviously looking forward to Kay's garden being on the club's summer tour!)*

## Drip Irrigation Systems for a Home Garden

by Dave McKeen

I have been invited to write an article as part of the "Gardeners of St. Louis Park" issue. I have been a member of MGCM since 1994. Living in St. Louis Park on a small city lot with a back yard overshadowed by a large elm tree. I decided to do the majority of my gardening in the front yard. This includes roses and annuals along the driveway, and the use of pots on the steps and window boxes. I think having pots around the front entry and the use of window boxes can make a house feel so warm and inviting. I really enjoy working in the yard when people walk by and have a question that I can answer about gardening. One of the ways I save time and energy is to incorporate the use of drip irrigation into my gardens and windowboxes. I have to credit Henry Orfield for introducing me to it several years ago. There are several drip irrigation products available around town but I have no experience with them. I deal with a company called Dripworks in California. I feel they have a good product at great prices. It requires no special tools or above average talent to get your system up and running and they will assist you with your irrigation plan if you send them a basis drawing of your yard. I also use drip irrigation in some of the gardens at the Minneapolis Golf Club where I have worked as their landscape gardener for 18 years. To contact Dripworks call (707) 459-9645 and they will get a catalog to you.

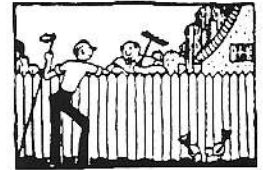


## Hosta Hunting in Japan: A Visit to Gotemba

By Bob Olson

What is your favorite hosta? 'Patriot' (super sport of 'Francee'), the relatively new variegated ultrafast grower that looks elegant in nearly everyone's yard? Perhaps it is 'Great Expectations', the spectacular reversed-colored (gold in the center with green margins) 'Frances Williams'? Or maybe it is just the reliable easy-to-grow-and-always-looks-good old favorite 'Gold Standard.' Whatever it is, it is likely to be an American hybrid. Almost all the great hybrid hostas come from America. So why then would a hosta aficionado go all the way to Japan to get some hostas?

The reason is that hostas originated in Japan and all the wonderful hybrids we have in our gardens come from a handful of wild Japanese plants. There are only about 40 species of hosta, and all but three or four come from remote wilderness areas in the Japanese Islands. It is from hybrid crosses of these species and their spontaneous mutations that all the wonderful garden cultivars arise. Defining a species is not easy with hostas. But simply put: plants of the same species will look alike, will breed "true" and can be found growing wild in nature. The last points are important in defining a species. Most of the hostas we grow are not species, they are hybrids and they definitely do not "breed true." If you plant seeds from one of them, such as 'Frances Williams', the seedlings will not be the same as the parent(s) even if you cross the plant to itself. In overwhelming proportion they will be funny looking little green plants. None will be variegated. Those eye catching multicolored plants we grow are divisions, called *clones*, taken directly from the variegated mother plants.\* A very few are spontaneous mutations of solid colored plants, or are seedlings from highly prized "breeders" (hostas whose leaves are irregularly streaked with pigmentation sometimes have unstable expression of the chromosomes that determine leaf coloration, and their seedlings are often multicolored). If you are growing one of these mutations or seedlings, you

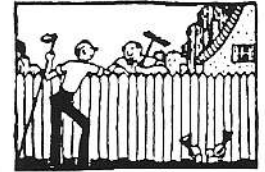


either were very close friends with a breeder or you paid a *lot* of money for it.

Spontaneous changes in hostas occur rarely. In Japan professional hosta hunters scour the wilderness for such specimens and offer them to well heeled Japanese collectors for princely sums. The Japanese have a national craze for variegated plants and deep pockets when it comes to their collections. But on the other hand Americans have a national craze for variegated plants and hosta collectors in particular seem to have no compunctions about paying hefty prices for what they want (exceeded only by orchid fanciers and dwarf conifer collectors who border on being deranged). Not only does the craving exist to have a beautiful plant, it is even stronger to have one no one else has—and which they can't get. This is what drives otherwise normal people to Japan. The genetic material in the U.S has been pretty well worked over and if a variegated sport from a different species could be found new "blood" could be infused into the breeding programs. The other reason for otherwise normal people going to Japan is just to see these lovely species hostas in their native habitat—that is a worthy end in itself.

It was for both these reasons that Mrs. Hideko Gowen, the sprightly proprietor of Gowen's Nursery in Excelsior, and I assembled a small group of hosta zealots for a trip to Japan. We spent almost two years making the arrangements with Japanese members of the American Hosta Society. Our Asian counterparts composed an itinerary with classic Japanese efficiency. We were up and on our chartered bus at 7 AM each morning and in a different city almost every day. There were two or even three extremely interesting but taxing activities on our daily agenda. One day we visited Ryoanju (the 400 year old Zen garden in Kyoto), toured a tea plantation in Southern Honshu and took a tour boat across the Japanese Inland Sea—in addition to traveling 200 miles by bus. This pace went on for over two weeks. Almost all were wonderful adventures, but three dates stand out as being very special. Two were days we saw *hypoleuca* and *pychnophylla* growing in remote and almost inaccessible wilderness areas and the third was our trip to the fabled Gotemba Nursery where professional hosta hunters from the slopes of Mt. Fuji bring their treasures to be sold. The great Kenji Watanabe, too old now to hunt plants himself, continues to hold court at Gotemba and run the by-appoint-





ment-only nursery. His four sons, who have inherited his remarkable gift for finding sports and spontaneous mutations in the most rugged and inhospitable areas in Japan, bring in the most wonderful things. This was the opportunity of a lifetime for a plant-crazed band of hosta fanatics. But there were problems. Watanabe-san did not speak English, nor did his sons. Therefore, arrangements were made for the secretary of the Japanese Hosta Society to come to Gotemba to serve as interpreter. Mrs. Gowen could also perform this task, but we were a relatively large party and the Watanabes were not anxious to have an uncontrolled situation. They sent a firm message that only groups of four people at a time would be allowed in the nursery. The others would have to wait outside—there were 16 of us.

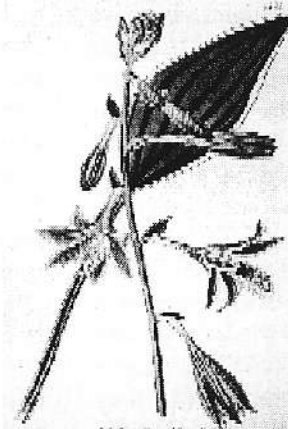
Normally it is a pleasure to travel with gardeners. They are among the most agreeable of people, and this group was one of the best. They endured long hours, extreme weather, and bureaucratic delays with cheer and good nature. But there was one place where civility ended sharply. It was when we were to buy one-of-a-kind plants. There wasn't exactly pushing and shoving, but there had already been some hard feelings over who got to the bargains (there were precious few of those) and the unique prizes at the lesser nurseries. Gotemba threatened to be a war zone. It be-

came such a concern that we elected to draw lots to determine in what order we would go to Gotemba. It became even more complex as cartels formed. Most cartels had two elements: one member with a low entry number and others with large bankrolls.

I joined into one of these by default. The Japanese are highly attuned to protocol and ceremony. Because I was the President of the American Hosta Society and would be presenting presents from the group to Watanabe-san, I had to be the first into Gotemba. It would not have been good for me to "buy the place out" when I hadn't entered the lottery with the other tour members. Therefore, I decided I would not purchase anything. Instead I arranged to (financially) back Mark Zilis, the owner of a tissue culture lab in Chicago, who had run out of cash (the Watanabes would not take credit cards nor checks) and Mark was beside himself with frustration. Two other

amateur gardeners in our party contributed to the Zilis fund with the idea that each of us would get numerous plants from each one purchased once they came out of tissue culture—and Mark promised us a year's head start on the world, that is we could have them a year before anyone else. This would be invaluable for trades, spectacular gifts for close friends, or you could just recoup (easily) your original investment by selling one or two before they hit the market. A group from the East coast had made a similar arrangement. Intrigue and innovation ran rampant in the hours before our buying spree.

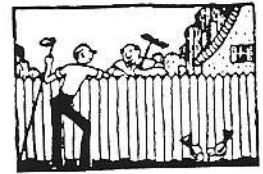
It was a magnificent morning. As usual there was bright sunshine, but today the air was so clear you would see the snow capped peak of Mt. Fuji against an azure sky in the distance as we awaited our turns to be taxied to Gotemba. Another nursery, Nono Hana (which means "wild flower"), had volunteered to have us hang out on their premises before and after our pilgrimage to the hosta Mecca. The proprietor, Mr. Nakamura, was a peerless host. He provided refreshments and classical music in his orchid house and invited us to clean and prepare our plants in his work areas. Although he is a fine man there was more than unrequited good will in his offer. He hoped for some spin off business from those waiting for



their numbers to come up.

And with good reason. He had a wonderful nursery and his prices were far better than Gotemba, the Tiffany's of hosta dealers. Some of those who went later actually turned the tables on those who had low lottery numbers by snarfing up the unique (and fairly priced) hostas at Nono Hana. They found things such as variegated *H. tortifrons* (a most-difficult-to-propagate species plant) which had never been seen before, and *H. 'uzo no mai'* (Japanese for "I'll bet you can't grow me") for \$5 a division. For the more normal exotic plant crazed gardener Nono Hana is a far better deal than Gotemba.

Finally, we were taken to see the Watanabes. The revered Kenji Watanabe himself greeted me at the gate. He was dressed casually in a short sleeved white shirt (open at the neck) and loose fitting khaki pants. He looked younger



than his eighty plus years and more vigorous than one would expect. He explained that there were three green houses here. One for the general buying public, one with premium hostas and other exotic cultivars, and one "forbidden" greenhouse with his most recent acquisitions and personal treasures. But first we had an exchange of gifts. I gave him an AHS T-shirt especially designed for this trip—despite the fact that he didn't seem like a T-shirt type of guy—and a pin with the AHS logo; while he gave me a copy of his classic book on species and rare mutations of Japanese hostas, which I forgot to have him sign. Then he asked what I would like to see. "The forbidden greenhouse (of course)," I replied. And he took me there. For the rest of the visit we admired hostas with bizarre shaped leaves, red petioles, and streaked leaves—and one *montana* with doubled flowers that he said looked like a chrysanthemum (it wasn't in flower when we were there). There were no bargains to be had in either of the greenhouses we toured (we skipped the one for the general public). Plants in the forbidden greenhouse weren't for sale while the ones in the other greenhouse averaged \$250-\$300 each. But price didn't seem to be a problem for those who came after me.

It was a grand day for all concerned. The Americans had the buying spree of a lifetime, and our group's visit made for one of the largest sales days in Gotemba's memory—about \$12,000. There was also a lot of money spent at Nono Hana (they wisely took credit cards). Late that evening we returned to our hotel in Tokyo and begin the laborious process of cleaning all the dirt and debris from our now bare-rooted plants. We had to prepare them for bringing through the Department of Agriculture inspection when we returned to the United States. The fastidious hotel manager insisted we do it in the parking lot rather than in our rooms. That is a story in itself. Most of the plants we brought back lived and thrived, those Mark Zilis got for our cartel are still struggling through the tissue culture process. But eventually they will come and when they do they will remind us once again of the wild day at Gotemba.

•••

(\* editor's note: Recently hybrid plants have been propagated by tissue culture; a process where microscopic divisions taken from "mother" plants are grown in a laboratory until they are big enough to survive on their own).

## "Talking from under My Hat" English Country Gardening in "The Park"



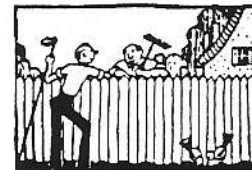
By Kay Wolfe

I am a great admirer of English gardens. Now this is a bit unusual since I've never been to England. I have had to acquaint myself with English gardens through books. Two of my favorite garden designers are Gertrude Jekyll and Penelope Hobhouse. I study the plant materials they use, the layout of their garden beds, the combinations of their perennials. I would always come to club meetings asking if a certain plant that "Penelope Hobhouse used" could grow here. Many times Mary Maynard had to patiently remind me, "Kay, remember, we are living in St. Louis Park!"

Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932) was a great naturalist and a great color gardener. Her flower beds were planted in a naturalistic style. Instead of planting in blocks of color, which was popular in the Victorian times, she wove plants in and out of the beds, planting them in drifts. She planted flower gardens in a naturalistic style. Penelope Hobhouse, author as well as garden designer, greatly admires Gertrude Jekyll's work. Penelope says that gardening is editing nature, not dictating to it. She feels she is painting a picture to create visions of nature.

### *Structure in the Garden*

A well designed garden needs a good architectural backbone. The architectural elements in the garden are paths, fences and arbors, woody plants, even benches. Once these "woody" architectural elements are in place, the herbaceous materials can be added. In my own garden I have added arbors and lattice fences, all to be used as supports for plants. My husband Gary built them out of



### *Bed Shapes*

cedar. I have let them weather to a beautiful mottled gray color. I wouldn't think of painting them, the natural aged cedar is a wonderful backdrop for all kinds of vines, from roses to Morning Glories.

English gardens have many paths and walls made of natural materials. Gravel paths are frequently used. Since I thought gravel would be impossible to shovel in winter, I installed stone paths. Wanting to use something that had a more natural feel than concrete pavers, I found flagstone steppers at Hedberg Aggregates. The flagstone comes in two colors, a buff tone, and "Chilton", which is grey and pink and even purple-red. It's great fun to dig through the piles of rock at Hedberg's to find the color stones I want. I buy them in batches the size of the car trunk. I liked the paths around the house so much that I convinced Gary to remove the concrete sidewalk to the front of the house. In order to have a smooth surface for walking, we did intersperse the flagstone with concrete pavers. The pavers are located primarily in the center of the walk, which makes shoveling easier in winter. Planting mosses and thyme amongst the stones softens them and adds yet more color. The walk must be quite striking, I have one neighbor who wants to steal it!

### *Plant Combinations*

My English idols have an exceptional talent for creating artful plant combinations in the garden. Gertrude Jekyll said that if you get the foliage right the flowers look after themselves. Penelope Hobhouse says that flower color is very ephemeral, the "whole grace" of the plant is the most important. Choose plants by their shape, texture, and leaf color. Then think of the flower color. The flowers are like scattered cushions amongst the furniture. These views made me start to look at plants in a whole new way.

Now my gardens contain combinations of shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, and some annuals. I plan the plant groupings first by plant shape, then by leaf color. Next to round mounding shrubs I use tall slim grasses. I vary plant height and shape, leaf texture and color as I go along the borders, much like blending fabrics in a patchwork quilt. My gardens have soft color, and an Impressionist feel. I find the bright wild colored annuals I used to buy stand out too much and don't blend in, and I no longer use them. A whole new naturalistic look has evolved.

The shape of the garden beds also adds artful drama to the garden. I have created border gardens which circle the perimeter of my property. The edges of all the beds are undulating lines, creating bed widths that vary greatly. I learned that a garden border should be at least as wide as the tallest plants. And trees look best when anchored in a bed large enough to give a good base. Below one large elm I've created a raised bed and lined the perimeter with field stones. Terraces in a small hill have also been created with field stones to continue the natural feel.

### *Garden Furniture*

A garden is a place to refresh the soul. So be sure and add benches and chairs, a place to sit and contemplate the beauty. Furniture is not meant for the patio only. I have cedar benches and Adirondack chairs and tables on the lawn, again all left to age to a natural gray. And don't forget to create a place to have tea! What could be more refreshing to the soul-china teacup and comforting tea in the midst of the garden!? Is this England in St. Louis Park? Those of you who've been there will have to tell me! And last but not least-don't forget to Wear Your Hat!!

### *Bob Smith's Friends*



*Charlie Proctor and Andy Marlow are driven into the flower competition by the nonpareil Smith*

# MEN'S GARDEN CLUB OF MINNEAPOLIS, INC.

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