

## Horticultural News and Research Important to American Gardeners

### *Forcing Winter Flowers*

When you're tired of winter and spring seems impossibly far away, the next best thing to seeing trees in flower outdoors is seeing them bloom for you indoors.

Shrubs that bloom in early spring will have formed their flower buds the previous fall. Very often when their branches are brought into the warmth of a house, they will flower ahead of schedule. The easiest and most reliable indoor bloomers are forsythia, flowering quince (*Chaenomeles* spp.), and pussy willow (*Salix* spp.). Other woodies that may be coaxed into flowering ahead of schedule include peach, cherry, apple, and pear trees, dogwoods, cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis* spp.), bridal wreath spirea, mountain laurel, *Mahonia* spp., camellia, hibiscus, rhododendrons, lilacs, and magnolias.

The closer to a plant's natural flowering period the branches are cut, the faster they will bloom indoors. For example, forsythia, cut in late Febru-

ary, usually blooms within a week. Dogwood, witch hazel, and fruit tree branches take a little longer—over three weeks.

Cut branches for forcing on a sunny morning when the temperature is above freezing. Select young, pliable branches with fat flower buds. Use a very sharp knife or pruning shears to cut branches measuring one to three feet. Immediately place them into a pail of water.

Once inside, soak the branches in a tub of lukewarm water for several hours before transferring them to containers of water with a floral preservative. A warm room speeds up bloom; a cold one will slow it down. Keep the branches in bright light and, if possible, in a place with high humidity. This is especially important with harder-to-force plants such as magnolia, lilac, and rhododendron. Misting these branches several times each day or soaking the entire branches for several hours every two days will help them stay hydrated.



Cherries are among the shrubs that can be forced for early blooms.

**TIP:** The little packets of floral preservative florists include with bouquets of flowers supply nutrients for cut flowers and reduce bacterial growth in water. In a pinch, you can make your own preservative by adding one tablespoon of the mouth-wash Listerine™ to a gallon of water and using the water to fill the vases for your fresh-cut flower arrangements.

### JAPANESE PAINTED FERN IS 2004 PPA PLANT OF THE YEAR

“Graceful, attractive, and versatile,” is the way Steven Still, executive director of the Perennial Plant Association (PPA) describes Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium niponicum* ‘Pictum’), his organization’s choice for 2004 Plant of the Year. The low-maintenance perennial fern—native to China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan—grows to 18 inches tall with beautiful green and silver variegated fronds and wine-red stems. Japanese painted fern will form graceful colonies when planted in part to full shade and moist soil. Hardy in USDA Zones 4 to 8 and heat tolerant in AHS



Japanese painted fern is a stellar perennial for shade and woodland gardens.

Zones 8 to 1, it combines well with other shade plants that have green and white variegation such as hostas, sedges (*Carex* spp.), and ajugas.

### WIN-WIN ORGANIC RESEARCH

An organic gardening study by researchers at the Universities of Illinois and Wisconsin and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources has benefited farmers and other growers, fed the needy, and shows promise for home gardeners.

Using organic methods, the researchers raised more than 4,000 pounds of Roma tomatoes last summer on an experimental field site in Champaign, Illi-

nois. "Initially," says project director Cathy Eastman, associate professional scientist with the Center of Economic Entomology at the Illinois Natural History Survey in Champaign, "the research focused on the transition from conventional to organic agriculture. But the project is unique because both growers and consumers benefited."

Currently, growers cannot meet the demand for organic products in the Chicago and St. Louis metropolitan markets. Eastman's research, providing science-based data applicable to Midwest growing conditions, will help farmers successfully raise organic crops and capitalize on the evolving markets. "Organic agriculture...is one of the fastest growing segments in the industry, with a 20 percent annual growth rate," says Eastman.

Home gardeners interested in moving from conventional to organic gardening are likely to benefit from the study's findings over the long run. "The group is working with Extension specialists to ensure the dissemination of relevant, timely information," says Eastman. "Some of the basic principles and the results of related experiments (such as the benefits of soil amendments and evaluation of pest management options that do not involve pesticide applications) will provide information that could benefit gardeners."

## DIRTY DOZEN

On one hand, we are exhorted to eat more fruits and vegetables. On the other, we are learning that a lot of our produce is contaminated by pesticides. A dirty dozen list—the 12 fruits and vegetables containing the highest levels of the most toxic pesticides—was recently announced by the Environmental Working Group (EWG), a not-for-profit environmental research organization based in Washington, D.C., and Oakland, California. To compile its list of the 12 most contaminated, EWG used data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

From worst to bad, the conventionally-grown contaminated fruits and vegetables are: strawberries, bell peppers and spinach (tied for second), cherries (American grown), peaches, cantaloupes (Mexican grown), celery, apples, apricots, green beans, grapes (Chilean grown), and



Strawberries ranked first on the list of commercially grown fruits and vegetables most contaminated by pesticides.

cucumbers. To learn more about specific chemicals and disease risks—or to download a wallet-size guide to produce—visit [www.foodnews.org](http://www.foodnews.org).

## WATER GARDEN SOCIETY FORMED

Water gardening has been rated the fastest growing segment of the green industry and surveys indicate that creating a water garden is the landscape renovation project that homeowners most request. Now, water gardeners with ponds great and small have their own society, the North American Water Garden Society's (NAWGS), founded in May 2003.

"Anyone interested in water gardening is welcome to join," says Ellen Beaulieu, the organization's first administrative di-

rector. In addition to offering information on creating and maintaining water gardens, NAWGS plans to address issues ranging from plant and fish regulations to permits, water restrictions, safety, insurance, liability issues and even concerns that people have regarding water gardens and the West Nile Virus.

For more information, visit the NAWGS Web site: [www.nawgs.com](http://www.nawgs.com) or call Aquascape Designs at (630) 326-2700.

## VIOLETS FOR BUTTERFLIES

Fifth graders at Markham Elementary School in Portland, Oregon, were among those who planted seeds of western blue or dog violet (*Viola adunca*), a main larval food source vital for the survival of Oregon's silverspot butterfly. Listed in 1980 as "threatened" under the U.S. Endangered Species Act, this butterfly is on the brink



The Oregon Zoo is working to save the endangered silverspot butterfly.

Catalogue + Shop  
[www.jelitto.com](http://www.jelitto.com)

**Jelitto**

Perennial Seeds

STAUDENSAMEN · PERENNIAL SEEDS · GRAINES DE PLANTES VIVACES


Production · Breeding · Seed Technology

USA Office: 125 Chenoweth Ln. · Suite 301 · Louisville, KY 40207  
Phone: (502) 895-08 07 · Fax (502) 895-39 34 · <http://www.jelitto.com> · [abush@jelitto.com](mailto:abush@jelitto.com)

German Headquarters: P.O. Box 1264 · D-29685 Schwarmstedt  
Phone: 01149-50 71-98 29-0 · Fax 01149-50 71-98 29-27 · [www.jelitto.com](http://www.jelitto.com) · [info@jelitto.com](mailto:info@jelitto.com)

of extinction. Habitat loss with its corresponding loss of host plants has contributed to a steep decline in many butterfly populations. According to Oregon Zoo director Tony Vecchio, the silverspot is among 22 either endangered or threatened butterfly species.

To stabilize the declining silverspot population, the Oregon Zoo recently released 293 pupae at the Nature Conservancy's 280-acre Cascade Head Preserve, one of the few remaining sites where the Oregon silverspot butterfly is found. Zoo officials collect eggs daily from female butterflies and put them into petri dishes, where they hatch into tiny larvae.

A \$16,100 grant from the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) enabled the Oregon Zoo, renowned for its butterfly conservation program, to create a new lab for raising threatened caterpillars and chrysalises. "This conservation effort is serving as a model for rebuilding an ecosystem," says Vecchio. "We want to involve children in the protection of endangered butterflies so they care about the future of all plants and animals." 

## In Memorium: Currier McEwen

Called a giant in the iris world and "dean of beardless iris hybridizers," Currier McEwen died on June 23, 2003—shortly after his 101st birthday. His long life was packed with accomplishments. After graduating from medical school at 24,



The late Currier McEwen with one of his hybrid irises.

he became a rheumatologist, and, at 35 became the youngest dean of medicine in the country at the New York University School of Medicine. In the late 1930s, he rescued Jewish doctors from Nazi Germany by providing them with positions at NYU.

He was nearing 60 when he first began hybridizing beardless irises, but he learned quickly. Four of McEwen's Siberian irises and five of his Japanese irises received the highest awards of the American Iris Society. In his breeding work, McEwen introduced the use of colchicine—a compound that prevents the normal division of cells—in order to double chromosome sets and produce tetraploids from diploids in *Iris sibirica*. His book *Japanese Iris* was published in 1990, followed by *The Siberian Iris* (Timber Press, 1996). Among McEwen's many honors

were the AIS Hybridizers medal in 1976, the comparable Foster Memorial Plaque of the British Iris Society in 1977, the Distinguished Service Medal of the Perennial Plant Association in 1991, the Luther Burbank Award from the American Horticultural Society in 1995, and the AIS Gold Medal in 1999.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL J. MCLANE



**The Art and Science of Container Gardening Is Coming To You...**

Our regional one-day events for spring 2004, supported by an online program for gardeners, are just a click away. Locations include:

Illinois	Minnesota
Indiana	Ohio
Maine	Oregon
Michigan	Alabama

The one-day events and the 12-week online container gardening program feature national experts and a certificate of completion. More locations and details will be on our Web site.

Join in the fun and learn to create innovative container gardens year-round!

[www.gardeninginstitute.com](http://www.gardeninginstitute.com)



**"That's one smart garden!"**  
- Carol F., Greenwood IN

Join the 1000's of gardeners who praise the EarthBox  
**"It's simply the Easiest Garden Ever Developed!"**  
- Gil Whitton, Host  
The National Lawn and Garden Show

**SO SIMPLE**  
There's no digging, weeding, or guessing. The EarthBox grows automatically - year after year.

**WORKS ANYWHERE**  
Your deck or patio - even *the back forty!* all you need is sunlight for fresh vegetables and herbs.

**MORE PRODUCTIVE**  
The EarthBox out produces any gardening method - with less water, less fertilizer and less care.

**100% NATURAL**  
No chemicals or expensive hydroponics. The EarthBox grows healthy produce, the way nature intended.

**ONLY \$29.95 + \$6.95 S&H**

**Call NOW To Order 1-888-502-7336**  
Or mail your check to: Dept P-AH153  
P.O. Box 1966, St. Petersburg, FL 33731

