

# OVER THE GARDEN GATE

The Newsletter of the Valley Gardeners Club

February 2018 Page 1

## COMING SOON IN A GARDEN NEAR YOU

I am looking over my snowy garden, trying to imagine what the bulbs I planted last fall will look like. I am imagining large swathes of colour giving me the cheeriness I so missed when the world was all white. Bulbs in their dazzling array of dresses are a wonderful boost to the garden.

However, peeking shyly in the shade, just waiting for the snow to melt, are other non-bulb delights. They are subtler, patiently working their way into your heart and mind. My two favourites are hellebores and primula. They love the coolness and dampness of spring. They revel in the lower level of sunlight that graces us as the snow melts. Primula come in a myriad of colours and cultivars (500 at last count), quite enough to satisfy any serious collector or to tempt you away from planting just one. Here's a sampling of some I have grown:

### Primulas:

***P. vulgaris*** (common primrose) - these tough little flowers are typically pale yellow. It grows best in moist but well-drained soil in light shade. It is increased by seed or division.

***P. veris*** (cowslip)- The nodding deep yellow flowers are produced in spring, in clusters of 10-30 blooms together on a single stem. Red- and orange-flowered plants occur rarely. Where native, it is frequently found on more open ground than the common primrose so will tolerate some cool sun.

***P. elatior*** (oxlip) - seldom seen in gardens, It may be confused with the closely related *Primula veris* (cowslip), which has a similar general appearance, although *P. veris* has smaller, bell-shaped, bright yellow flowers (and red dots inside the flower), and a corolla tube without folds. The leaves of *P. veris* are more spade-shaped than *P. elatior*. The flower heads on the oxlip all hang in the one general direction.

***P. bulleyana*** (candelabra primrose) - sturdy, erect flowering stems appear in summer and are 20–24 in long, rising in groups from a rosette of leaves. The whorls of multiple orange-yellow flowers, opening from red buds, are arranged in tiers. It thrives in a bright, moist environment, such as beside a pond. Will die if it gets the least bit dried out.

***P. vialii*** - a striking addition to the garden, especially in groups, with unlikely purple and red spires. Requires really wet conditions (even standing water) or will be small and short lived. With lots of water and some seaweed fertilizer, it can have leaves up to a foot long. Goes dormant over the winter for up to 7 months, so don't despair and dig it out by mistake. May not bloom until its third year from seed.

***P. pulverulenta*** (mealy cowslip) - with strong stems of deep pink flowers arising from basal rosettes of leaves in early summer. The flowers are grouped at intervals along the stem in a tiered formation, as with the candelabra primula. *Pulverulenta*, meaning "dust", refers to the mealy white layer (farina) covering the stems of the plant. I found this one beautiful, but hard to grow.

***P. sieboldii*** - an elegant primrose in gentle shades of purple-lilac. It grows well in moist, free draining, humus rich soil and likes to keep its roots cool and moist. It will die back completely during dormancy in winter, so mark it well.

***P. denticulata*** - growing up to 18 in tall, with rosettes of oval leaves and sturdy stems bearing spherical umbels of purple, pink or white flowers in late spring and early summer. Denticulata means "small-toothed", referring to the serrated leaf edges. A popular garden subject for deep moist soil in sun or partial shade, it can be grown from seed and will reseed itself willingly.

Now a word about the bright, rather garish primula hybrids seen in grocery stores in the spring. I feel they lack all the delicate gentility of the primrose, but make a cheerful pot plant when you are dying to see some spring colour after a long winter. They will grow if you plant them outdoors but usually are not long lived.

### Hellebores:

Hellebores are indigenous to woodland and rocky sites in Europe and central Asia. A shade plant. They prefer slightly alkaline soil, evenly moist with a high organic content, but don't like their feet constantly wet so should have good drainage. They are quite forgiving little fellows. Mine are on a sand pile, well fed with organic matter and watered well but in the sun. I was surprised when the second year after my move they came up with huge glossy green leaves and bloomed their little hearts out. They have never looked back and continue to thrive. They are **H. orientalis** or the Lenten Rose and much more forgiving than the other common hellebore, **H. niger** or Christmas rose.

Niger has a beautiful pure white blossom. Reginald Ferrar called it "blazing white innocence". The fat buds appear in March or April here (Christmas in mild England) and they shoot up even before the leaves. I have had as many as 40 blossoms on one plant. But they are fussy and do not behave well for everyone. I never had one re-seed and sometimes when you have become attached to them, they just decide to disappear.

Orientalis is a different matter. They come in colours from murky pink to the deepest purple, some even speckled. The blooms stay on the plants for 6 to 8 weeks and as they age turn slowly green. Again they like shade for most of the day. Once mature, if you leave the seed pods to mature and drop their heads to the ground you may find babies hiding under mothers skirts in the spring. These may be transplanted carefully into their own space and will bloom after about 3 years.

Both types have beautiful glossy foliage which dies back over winter. Take the old browned leaves off in the early spring to allow the new shoots to do their thing.

When buying H. orientalis you should buy those in bloom if you want a specific coloured hybrid as they do not always come true.

Hellebores do not really like dividing and in my experience it is a good way to lose the whole thing. If you want to try it, choose an old large clump after flowering and cut their tuber-like roots into divisions.

There are some other varieties of hellebores, but the only other I have seen for sale is **H. foetidus**, the "stinking hellebore" because it smells when the stems are broken. Usually small nodding green flowers in clusters on long stems, it is short lived in Canadian climate.

The word hellebore comes from the Greek *hellein* (to kill) and *bora* (food). Hence, beware. Hellebores are toxic.

**BOOKS**

**Beatrix Potter's Gardening Life:** The Plants and Places That Inspired the Classic Children's Tales By Marta McDowell. Timber Press. 2013.

**Remix** by Niki Jabbour - an intriguing array of 224 plants from around the world.

**Paradise Gardens** by Monty Don and Derry Moore. Hodder Books. Follow-up to the TV series by the same name.

**CLUB NOTES**

Your new executive has met for the first time on Feb. 1 to plan the year ahead.

- The President informed the executive that District 5, which includes the Valley Gardeners, is responsible for mounting the **2019 NSAGC Convention**. The Old Orchard Inn has been tentatively booked as the venue. A committee from the clubs that make up district 5 will be struck by the district representative, Debra Carey. The Wilmot Club has disbanded as part of the NSAGC.
- Allison Scott Butler has resigned as **Program Chair**. Robin Whidden and Donna Crawford will try to pull together a program for the year. Alison will continue to help on the Committee. Should anyone be able to help with individual events or as a member of the Committee, please contact one of them.
- Communication Chair Donna Crawford has drawn up a discussion document for an **Administration Guide for the Valley Gardeners**. This would outline the background and activities of the club to assist new executive or members of committees in taking on new roles. The president is reviewing the document before striking a committee for input.
- The executive explored communications using **Facebook**. Our media relations officer uses the NSAGC Facebook page to post upcoming events. This will be continued and its effectiveness assessed at future meetings.
- The **Valley Gardeners website** has not been updated since 2015. Since there is no one who can manage the site the executive decided to take it down. The NSAGC will be asked if there is any way items can be posted on their website.
- A suggestion was made that the **plant sale** open its doors earlier than 10 am. This must be reflected on the poster.
- Sandi Carroll will be putting together a Show Committee soon to get a start on the **Show Schedule** so you can plan your planting for entries. Contact her if you are interested in helping

Your executive are:

President: Philip Longmire

Vice President: Sandi Carroll

Past President: Allison Magee

Secretary: Cinda Kalkman

Treasurer: Gerri Robertson

Program: Committee

Communications: Donna Crawford & Media Relations officer Janet Alsop.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**February 12, 2018** - Valley Gardeners monthly meeting. 7:30 Kingstec. Melanie Priesnitz will speak on Plants for People and the Planet. In today's technological world young people are losing touch with the importance of plants. It's easy to connect kids with plants if you have the right attitude and tools. We'll explore tips and tricks for getting kids outside playing in the dirt! Bring your favourite garden catalogues for display.

**February 24, 2018** - Orchid Society of NS Display, 10:30 - 3, Harriet Irving Botanical Centre, Wolfville. What a lovely way to cheer up the drear days of winter.

**March 12, 2018** - Valley Gardeners monthly meeting. 7:30 Kingstec. "The Sunshine Coast in March", a tour of Dorset gardens with club member Sue Rouleau. If you have extra seeds, bring them along to share with members.

**April 14, 2018** - District 5 Annual Meeting, The Forties Community Hall. Watch for details. This is always a fun time!

**May 12, 2018** - Valley Gardeners Plant Sale. This is our main fund-raiser so start thinking now what you will be able to bring. Larry Marsters Plant Sale Chair.

**June 1 and 2, 2018.** - NSAGC Annual Meeting, Days Inn, Bridgewater. Program, registration form and other info on the NSAGC Website under Convention.

Please advise us if you know of upcoming events of interest.

### ON THE NET

**The Gardens of Hatley Castle** in Victoria B.C. <http://hatleycastle.com/gardens/> .

Magnificent. Has anyone been here? See also

<https://travelinggardener.com/wordpress/castle-flowers-and-vegetables/>

**Dirt, The Movie** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHhhHpohglg>

- an astonishing, humorous and substantial look at the glorious and unappreciated ground beneath some our feet.

**The Secret History of the British Garden** with Monty Don. See Youtube. Starts with the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, 4 episodes. Or if you subscribe to Hortus TV, it is there too.

### LEAVES

- "Most people, early in November, take last looks at their gardens, are are then prepared to ignore them until the spring. I am quite sure that a garden doesn't like to be ignored like this. It doesn't like to be covered in dust sheets, as though it were an old room which you had shut up during the winter. Especially since a garden knows how gay and delightful it can be, even in the very frozen heart of the winter, if you only give it a chance." - Beverley Nichols

- "Nature has undoubtedly mastered the art of winter gardening and even the most experienced gardener can learn from the unrestrained beauty around them."- Vincent A. Simeone
- "Winter is the time of promise because there is so little to do - or because you can now and then permit yourself the luxury of thinking so." - Stanley Crawford
- A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit. Greek Proverb
- "And always remember, life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by those moments that take our breath away." - George Carlin.

### CLASSIFIED

- **Are you interested in drying flowers? I have 5 cookie containers of silica gel (sand) including one specifically for drying blue flowers. Also available "The Complete Book of Flower Preservation" by Geneal Condon. If interested, call Rosaleen McDonald at 902 542 2474. \$20.00 for the works!**

*Remember that we can advertise to the club for you if you have a gardening related item or service to sell or you are in need of a garden related item or service..*

### DID YOU KNOW

→ Now is the time to start your onion and leek seeds, if you haven't already.

→ Blauwschokker is an heirloom pea variety that bears a generous crop of deep purple peas that can be picked young for sugar peas, at a shelling stage, or allowed to mature for dried soup peas. Sutton seeds.

### FROM THE GARDEN RECIPE BOX

It's the middle of the winter snowstorm and you have nothing in the house but a few wrinkled potatoes, some onions that have seen better days and a couple of wizened apples. What to have for lunch? Tasty and filling, this saved my day many times, especially in my student days.

First, make applesauce with the apples. Set aside to cool.

#### **POTATO BLINTZES**

Serves 4 as a main dish

4-5            medium potatoes

1              egg yolk, beaten

1/4 tsp        salt

1/4 tsp        sugar

1/2 tsp butter, melted  
1 1/2 cup milk  
1 cup flour  
1 egg white, stiffly beaten

Filling:

1/2 cup chopped onion  
3 Tbsp oil  
5 Tbsp bouillon or potato water  
1/8 tsp salt  
1/4 tsp pepper

Boil potatoes until tender. Set aside.

Meanwhile, beat egg yolk with salt, sugar, butter and milk. Add flour. Stir briskly until batter is smooth. Fold in egg white. Butter a 6" skillet very lightly. Pour in a very thin layer of batter- just enough to cover the bottom of the pan. Cook on one side only until golden. Turn onto wax paper. Repeat until batter is used up.

Prepare filling:

Peel potatoes. Saute onion in oil. Mix in potatoes, mashing them in the frying pan. Moisten with bouillon, Season with salt and pepper. Spoon a heaping tbsp onto the fried side of each blintz. Fold two sides into the filling, fold one end over the other. Fry in butter until brown.

Serve with the applesauce. Also good with sour cream, or rhubarb relish. Make a little salad from that red cabbage that has been sitting in the crisper waiting for a use, a grated carrot and your favourite vinaigrette and you have a full lunch at very little cost.

**GOT NEWS???**

Send to: Editor: Donna Crawford, [sparrowsong@eastlink.ca](mailto:sparrowsong@eastlink.ca).

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Valley Gardener's Club. There are purposely no coloured pictures in the newsletters to allow for less expensive black and white printing.