

Suzanne Frye

From: The Gardener's Workshop [info@thegardenersworkshop.com]
Sent: Monday, July 23, 2007 4:48 PM
To: Suzanne Frye
Subject: TGW Fresh from the Garden!



Fresh From the Garden July 2007

In this issue:

- Who wants to garden now anyway?
- Free "In the Garden" Programs
- Seed-Starting Supplies 25% off in August
- Taking the Mystery out of Hydrangeas
- TGW Community Discussion Board
- Save the Dates

Who wants to garden now anyway?

Whew-we!! It is hot and dry and no one should be outside doing much of anything other than relaxing in the shade sipping ice tea and eating watermelon. Mid-summer is not the time to get out in the garden and correct past gardening mistakes that are becoming more visible with each passing dry day. It is time to sit in the creature comforts of your home and plan your attack for the greatest gardening season of them all, the fall!

For those who haven't been in the TGW community during the late summer, fall and winter--you are about to hear me go on about the best-kept secret in gardening. As commercial cut-flower growers for the past 10 years, we've learned how to grow many fabulous flowers that typically don't perform well here in Virginia and south when planted in the spring. Our summers tend to end them before they can even get a good start. The secret is to plant them in the fall; they literally thrive in our winters. These fall-planted plants spend the winter getting ready for spring and what a show they put on!! Think of these plants as you would pansies. To name just a few of these beauties: sweet peas, snapdragons, delphiniums, larkspur, calendula and many more.

All of my recommendations are based on my experiences. I have grown these flowers for years outdoors in our garden with little fussing if any at all. As a grower, we depend on these fall-planted plants and seeds for our cut flowers from April through June. To the amazement of many and to be honest to me

even after all these years, each spring when those little fall-planted, winter-wind-whipped plants start sending up multiple shoots at the first sign of spring, it still delights and surprises me.

I have saved the best part of all of this for last: fall-planted plants really require little care after planting. Once planted and watered in, there is little else to do for these plants except wait for spring and the flowers.

If I have enticed you and you want to learn more, please join me in my Newport News, Virginia garden for one of my free programs.

Regards,

Lisa Z.

Thursday, August 2 at 6:30, "The Easy Cutting Garden." Includes soil preparation, varieties that keep the blooms coming, getting started from seed, and harvesting flowers in the garden.

Thursday, September 6 at 6:30, "Fall Planting is for Lazy Gardeners like me!" Includes soil preparation, what to plant in the fall, getting started from seed and planting seeds in the garden.

Thursday, October 4, 6:30 "Organic Gardening Grows the Biggest and the Most Beautiful Flowers!" Includes the benefits of organic gardening, and how you can make the changeover.

Registration is required, and seating is limited for all programs. Confirmation along with directions will be emailed in response to registrations. Include your name, and what program you are attending. To register [click here](#).

Fall planting facts FYI:

- Soil preparation is far easier to do in the cool fall weather than in the heat of spring and summer.
- August and September is the seed-starting season for fall planting. A full listing of fall-planted seeds will be posted August 1 on our store.
- To plant in fall, you will most likely have to start plants from seed yourself. You might find snapdragons available, but little else. Seed starting is much easier than you think. I demonstrate our seed starting method at most programs.
- There are many seeds that can be planted directly in the garden in the fall--no need to start them indoors.
- Trees, shrubs and perennials have a better survival rate when planted in the fall/winter versus spring/summer.

Price of plants got you down? Start your own!

It's easy and we will show you how!

Get started in August with our seed-starting special:

All seed-starting supplies are 25% off!

This includes the Blocking Kit, and the Complete Seed-Starting Kit!

All seeds 25% off!

Sale begins August 1 through August 31.

To shop [click here](#)

Taking the mystery out of Hydrangeas

We have lots of hydrangeas here at TGW; it is one of our best cash crops. We begin harvesting them in early May when they are young, crisp, and green right up through the fall when they are dry on the bush. When I take the blooms to the Farmer's Market to sell, they cause quite a stir and lots of how-to-harvest questions. So I thought I'd share some of my tips, but first, a little about growing Hydrangeas.

Plant Location: In general most hydrangea varieties are shade lovers in the lower half of the country where summers are normally hot and dry. In New England they can tolerate full sun; here in Virginia they definitely need shade protection from the hot afternoon sun. If your plant is fighting the afternoon sun, it is worth moving it. Hydrangeas bounce back quickly after transplanting when done in the fall or early winter. They will not only forgive you for the move, but will reward you next year for it! Once your hydrangea is in a happy spot, your work is done.

Soil Conditions: Hydrangeas thrive in rich, moist conditions. The ideal rain fall/irrigation would be 1-2" of water a week. Planting in rich, well-drained, moisture-retaining soil makes them very happy. We use a garden fork to poke holes in the soil from the drip line of the plant and out to apply compost as mulch each spring and/or fall. This allows us to feed and improve the soil and also increases the moisture-retaining qualities. Mulch is essential to retain moisture for these thirsty plants.

Harvesting fresh blooms: I consider "fresh" blooms from the time they start blooming until about mid-summer when the blooms start to change color and begin to feel less soft and more like paper. This fresh stage is when the colors are the most vibrant. The day before harvesting, water the plant thoroughly. Harvest the fresh blooms the following day as early in the morning as possible. I generally do it around 7am before the sun and heat start draining the plant. Hydrangeas prefer straight cold water no floral preservative. I make the cut with our cut flower shears on an angle. I have not found it necessary to smash the stems or any other special handling I have heard done. I let them sit in our air-conditioned building for several hours and then move them to the cooler, which is around 36 degrees. Refrigeration revitalizes hydrangeas; it crisps the blooms just like lettuce. Hydrangeas in this "fresh" stage do not dry. Our fresh hydrangea blooms last 1-2 weeks in a vase.

Blooms for Drying: Hydrangeas are well known for their superb air-drying qualities. You can hang them upside down in a hot dry area and they will dry while keeping their shape and color. The secret to drying the blooms is primarily the stage the bloom is in when it is cut off of the plant. Blooms for drying should be left on the plant until they begin to change color and get that paper feeling. Unfortunately, many plants are planted in too much sun and the blooms get burnt-up before they get to this paper feeling stage. Some varieties of hydrangeas are better suited for drying. Those with larger, thicker petals hold up longer than the smaller, fine petals. Other varieties hold their vibrant color better. I have some deep blue dried blooms that are over 10 years old and are still holding color. The most common mistake people make trying to dry hydrangeas is cutting the blooms before they are mature enough to dry.

Changing Bloom Colors: Next to drying blooms, this is a frequently asked question. I will add now that

I do nothing to the soil to change the color of my blooms. I am happy for whatever blooms come naturally. The soil pH determines the color of your blooms, keeping in mind that not all varieties react to pH. In general, alkaline soil produces pink blooms and a more acidic soil blue blooms. Add aluminum sulfate to the soil for blue or lime for pink to red flowers. If you have a strong need for a for sure color, hydrangeas may not be for you.

Pruning: It depends on the variety and the age of the plant, but I will offer some general guidelines that I go by. I don't prune any plant less than 4 years old. I have primarily "Mophead" plants that bloom on last year's wood; they have the big round fine petal blooms. Plants are thinned by cutting ¼ of the oldest wood to the ground in the late winter. All remaining dead blooms on the bush I leave until new growth in spring, when I cut the old blooms off just above the first vigorous buds. Do not shorten the stems in an attempt to prune; this cuts off next years blooms. If you need to rejuvenate an old tired Mophead that is not blooming or is out of shape, mid-summer is the time to thin and reshape. This allows the new growth to develop blooms for next year and to harden off before frost. Now is the perfect time to do this. PeeGee Hydrangeas grow more in a tree habit; the blooms are white and are shaped like a cone. They bloom on new wood, so a late winter pruning of shortening the stems will stimulate more stems and blooms.

I hope this answers some of your questions about Hydrangeas. Our new discussion board is up on our website and has a Hydrangea category. Please bring on the questions!! It is brand new, so come back often and check out the garden chat! [Click here](#).

TGW Community Discussion Board

What could be more fun than sharing ideas, tips, experiences (good and bad) and asking for advice from other gardeners in the TGW community? Sounds like fun doesn't it?

This is how it works; anyone online can read the posts on our discussion board. To add to a discussion by posting a message you just need to register and you're in! You can also customize your profile to have any new posting in a specific category or all the categories emailed to your email inbox.

My first experience with a discussion board like this was with the Association of Specialty Cut Flower Growers. I attribute gaining much of my problem-solving gardening knowledge straight off that member-restricted board. When you have a large group of folks contributing, it is great. Chances are if you are experiencing a certain pest or problem, somebody else is also. When faced with an issue in the garden, I can't tell you how many times I would come in that evening, go to the board, and find that somebody was already posting about it.

By posting your questions or concerns to the TGW community, others will offer their suggestions and still others will benefit from reading the posting. It will just get better, as we build our community of every level of gardener from those just getting started to the seasoned pros. Don't be shy!

The first 10 folks to register and post a question, suggestion or tip will receive a free gift!

[Click here](#) to view the board.

Save the Dates:

For TGW Fresh Cut Flowers:

Yorktown Market Days at the River

9am to 1pm, every other Saturday:

July 7 & 21, August 4 & 18, Sept 8 & 22, Oct.13 & 20, Nov. 17 & Dec. 8.
Bulbs, Garden Gifts and more at the Oct., Nov., and Dec. Markets!
(Market located on Water Street in Historical Yorktown.)

The Williamsburg Farmer's Market

3pm to 6:30pm Every Tuesday until August 28.

(Market located on Duke of Gloucester Street in Merchants Square.)

TGW will be a retail vendor at these 2007 shows:

- Sept. 22, **Virginia Garden Festival** held at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden.
- November 9 -11, **Christmas at Williamsburg** held in the WISC complex.
- Nov. 29 – Dec. 2, **The Bizarre Bazaar** held at the Richmond Raceway.

Visit our website for more details on our events. [Click here.](#)

Happy Gardening!

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