

Gardens Are Noisy Places

BY MARY ANN KING

Just Listen! The birds sharing sounds and songs along with bugs happily buzzing from place to place working hard to create a most lovely garden. Of the bugs you hear, 95 percent of those bugs are either beneficial or benign.

Throw out the pesticide and get to know and recognize your garden visitors. Pesticides kill indiscriminately and your garden loses many helpful and beautiful insect friends. Who doesn't love seeing a butterfly floating from plant to plant or a dragonfly resting and opening and closing its wings on a bloom? Overuse of pesticides will rid your garden of these lovely creatures.

Beneficial bugs can be divided into four categories. First, the predators, such as praying mantis and spined soldier bugs that tend to eat every insect in sight, good and bad. Ladybugs, the darlings of the garden, are more specific to the choice of prey and are less likely to kill good insects.

Second are pollinators; these insects do not kill other bugs. Their relationship is with the plants. Through blooms and fragrances the insects are attracted to the plant and are rewarded with nectar and pollen. Bees are the most common and well-known pollinators.

Next are the parasitoids that are most efficient receiving nourishment from the body of a host insect. A tiny Braconid wasp can consume an entire plant's worth of aphids.

Last and very beneficial are the soil builders such as earthworms and nematodes. These types of friends live underground and in compost piles working ever so hard to make that lovely garden soil rich with nutrients.

A partial list of the most common garden friends are lady bugs, lace-winged insects, beetles, butterflies, bees, wasps, moths, centipedes, sow bugs, dragonflies, praying mantis, spiders, hover flies, earthworms and nematodes. In addition, birds, bats and toads help to assist the plants and soil to thrive and maintain a balance of elements for a healthy garden.

There are many books and websites so available today to help the gardener learn about establishing a pesticide-free garden. My three favorite bug books are: "Good Bugs for Your Garden" by Allison Starcher; "A Guide to Natural Gardening" by Boring, Glasener, Keator, Knoff, Scott and Wasowski; and "American Horticultural Society Pests and Diseases" by Greenwood, Halstead, Chase and Gilrein.

To get started with your beneficial insects, one can buy a beginners package of bugs from www.gardeners.com. In addition to the bugs you can also buy habitat supplies to encourage lovely insects to join your garden. So please keep in mind when managing your garden, "do no harm." Those pests can be your garden's best friends.

Plant Exchange: Blog With Us!

This blog is an interactive site for people of our USDA Zone 4-5a region to exchange ideas about plants. Want to read some past Plant Exchange features you missed? Want to share a comment about plants?

- What are container gardening tips for growing flowers, herbs, and vegetables?
- Want to see and read about what's growing and blooming around the United States and elsewhere? Select "Garden Bloggers Bloom Day" June 15 link.
- How did local gardeners use raised beds and soaker hoses to achieve a bumper crop in last year's drought?
- What are some lawn and turf maintenance tips?
- See a gardener's plan for watering.

Check our blog at: www.brendakjohnsonplantexchange.wordpress.com

Plant Exchange

The Best Flowers Of The 2012 South Dakota Drought

Share tips from your outdoor or indoor plant experience, give us a tour of your plant site, or just let us know what you enjoy most about the plants and people who grow them. Contact news@yankton.net Attn: Brenda Johnson or write to P&D, 319 Walnut St., Yankton, SD 57078, Attn: Brenda Johnson.

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON

P&D Correspondent

Standout flowers that bloom well in a drought year may be worth a second look.

TOP PERFORMING ANNUALS (2012)

Star performers at McCrory Gardens in Brookings last growing season included cultivars of coleus, hibiscus, and petunia, according to Dr. David Graper, Director of McCrory Gardens and horticulture professor at South Dakota State University. Trial plants grown as annuals in the gardens last summer were judged on their ability to thrive with moderate maintenance and produce showy flowers in distinct colors for last year's hot growing season.

One of Graper's favorite plants is a sun or shade coleus called Solenostemon 'Honey Crisp'. "This plant had an overall golden color to the foliage but it was blended with pinks, purples and greens to provide a really stunning plant," Graper said.

Graper has many flowerbeds of petunias at McCrory Gardens that give continuous color in sunny locations. Many cultivars of petunias were trialed, but Graper mentioned these grown from cuttings. "A few of my favorites this year included 'Vista Bubblegum' and 'Vista Silverberry'. Both of these plants are nicely spreading or cascading plants that are loaded with nice big flowers all season long. We had these in our large containers at McCrory and they were real show-stoppers."

Another of Graper's picks is Hibiscus "Mahogany Splendor."

"While most hibiscus are grown for their large showy flowers, this one is grown for just its great looking foliage. Mahogany Splendor can reach 5 to 6 feet in height in one summer and become a small bush with multiple stems. It is a great background plant or as a large filler in a bed or large container and even as a cut 'green' for bouquets. It didn't seem to mind the heat and drought."

Graper also likes the silver white foliage of Cyryscephalum 'Silver Sunburst.' "Like the dusty millers, this plant provides a wonderful silver-white color to flower beds and containers. It only grew about 6 inches tall and 12 inches wide, but it provided a wonderful contrast to the typical green plants with their showy flowers."

Other standouts in their trial beds and gardens that grew well and had additional traits included: Angelonia angustifolia 'Serene Purple' for its long bloom, Catharanthus roseus 'Hotlik White GL' for its white large flowers, and Cyperus papyrus 'King Tut' for its use in mixed containers. Ipomoea batatas 'Bewitched' and 'Raven' both had nearly black foliage. Pennisetum glaucum 'Jade Princess' was chosen for its addition to millets. Among many petunias grown, Petunia 'Sangria Charm' was noted for its red purple flowers with dark throats. Sources: "McCrory Gardens News & Notes", March 2013 and McCrory Gardens Trial Results.

See Graper's McCrory Gardens website for views of their All-America Trial Gardens, Hummingbird Garden, and their specialty gardens of irises, daylilies, peonies, rhododendrons, shrub roses, and others. www.mccrorygardens.com Visit McCrory Gardens to see plants this season. Gardens are located a few blocks off Interstate 29 in Brookings.

AMAZING AGAVE

Agaves, sometimes called century plants, seldom bloom but this one appears to now for the first and only time.

"In 36 hours or so the stalk grew about a foot," said Jay Gurney of Yankton Nurseries. He had marked the wall of the greenhouse to see its progress. The stem or mast nearly reaches the fifteen-foot ceiling inside the greenhouse now.

"It's been here in this (twelve inch) pot thirty-five years." He acquired the perennial about 1978. "It's been out of the wind and weather in this dry spot," he said. "It takes little water and is quite root bound by now. In summer it can get up to 120 degrees in here."

Succulent leaves store energy needed for what appears to be a spectacular single bloom event. Factors that affect when agaves bloom include

Russian sage, or Monarda (bee balm) can be pruned back in July.

• Best time for all watering is early morning. Check garden daily for water needs daily. Water with booster fertilizer every 10 - 14 days. Use a nozzle to reduce water waste. A water timer also saves water.

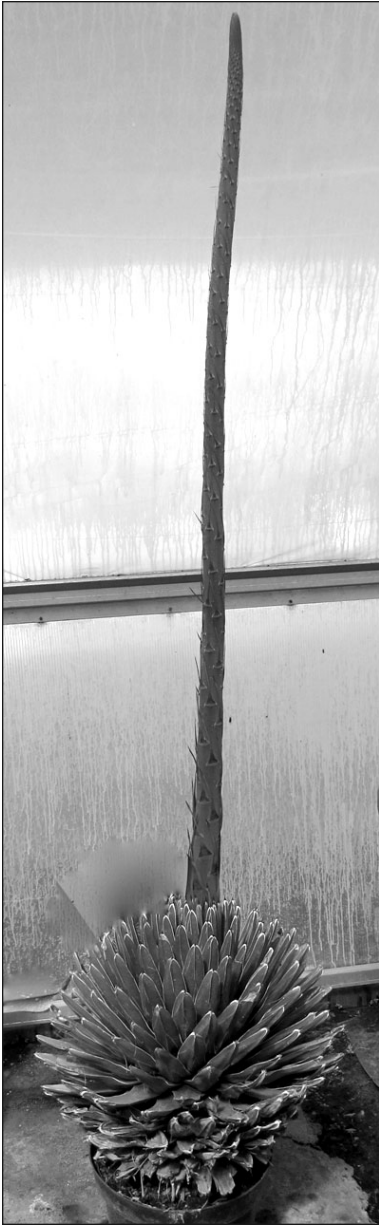
• Apply extra mulch to help cool the soil and conserve water. Always leave a small amount of space between stems and mulch. Soybean mulch is at Fensels.

• This is a good time to apply your second application of pre-emergence herbicide. Water well following the application.



PHOTOS: BRENDA K. JOHNSON

ABOVE: Victoria Regina agave leaves in rosette pattern have sharp barbs. Succulent leaves store water and energy for its big bloom event that lasts for months. The agave matures for 20-40 years and then has a spectacular summer bloom and produces seed before the plant dies. RIGHT: Victoria Regina agave has lived out of the way in Jay Gurney's greenhouse for about thirty-five years. Infrequent watering and greenhouse environment favored the slow growing agave. Now it blooms. The mast nearly touches the 15-foot greenhouse roof.



Gardener to Gardener

Share what you find useful for gardening.

Lois Quatier of Yankton gardens and is an active volunteer in Town & Country Garden Club. She shares tips to attract birds, conserve water, work with simple tools, and compost vegetable scraps.

• I attract birds to my garden by putting up birdhouses. A birdbath in the front yard and pond in the back yard gives them water. During the cold months I put out birdseed and peanuts. In spring snows I put raisins out for the robins and they really liked them. In summer I put out jelly and nectar for the orioles and the hummingbirds. I also have a trumpet vine and flowers to attract the hummingbirds.

• I save water by watering with soaker hoses. I also

have a rain barrel. Mulch in the flowerbeds helps prevent water loss by evaporation.

• I made a garden trellis out of the sides of an old baby crib. I stood each side on end, and attached them together with a 2" x 2" board forming an L shape. Then I covered the crib sides with chicken wire for vines to attach. I stood the crib sides on two sides of my rain barrel. Last year I had beautiful blue morning glories climbing on them.

• My 3 favorite garden tools are a serrated kitchen knife, a little garden trowel and a spade.

• To improve garden soil, I bury as many vegetable kitchen scraps as possible such as vegetable peelings, rinds from melons, and coffee grounds. I do this in the early spring before planting and late summer and fall months after the vines, etc., have started to go dormant.

Dibbles & Bits

• "2013 Year of the Wildflower", is so named by National Garden Bureau. Wildflowers grow without cultivation and include indigenous plants found locally and naturalized plants that adapt over time. At Mount Vernon, George Washington grew Lobelia cardinalis or Cardinal flower. Thomas Jefferson at Monticello also grew this plant, along with many native plants from the Lewis & Clark Voyage of Discovery. Among these were blanket flower and purple cone-flower. Informal, cottage, and wildflower gardens became popular as a contrast to formal gardens. Wildflowers, once established, live in balance with their habitat and require less maintenance. Wildflowers supply food for pollinators and birds. National Garden Bureau website: http://www.ngb.org/year_of/index.cfm?YOID=35

• Slow trickle watering bucket can be made using a 5 gallon plastic bucket with an 1/8th inch hole drilled in the side about three inches from the bottom.

When you fill the bucket with water for a tree, shrub, or perennial to be watered, check to be sure the water trickles out in the area of its roots. A newly planted 1-2 inch tree may need 10 gallons of water per week, so move the empty bucket to the other side of the tree to complete the watering. Adjust the amount of water according to what you plant and water needed to supplement an inch of rain per week. August 2013 Garden Gate Magazine, found in the Yankton Community Library.

• Easier gardening fits busy lifestyles. Pick a space to garden where you see it often for the reward of your efforts. Fewer plants in a smaller space save time and money. Consider the light and moisture growing conditions for the space and select plants that thrive in those conditions. Plant trees, shrubs, or perennials that give the space structure first and fill in with repeating color plants. Choose low-maintenance plants with extra features such as self-deadheading,

long season, wide tolerance to growing conditions such as All-America Selections (AAS) plants. Plants that can grow by direct seeding such as sunflowers, cosmos, and zinnias, require less time than growing these plants from transplants. February 2013 Garden Gate Magazine, found in the Yankton Community Library.

• Use containers of colorful plants to draw attention to areas of the garden. Stabilize the container on a stool or other object that adds height and is proportional to the container. Container can become a screen to block unpleasant area behind because the eye is drawn to colorful plants. Highlight best bloomer of the moment colorful plants in an area and rotate in other colorful plants to highlight them in the same spot when they reach full bloom. Use existing structures to dramatize your colorful container of plants such as a blank wall that frames the plants or a fence with repeating lines. More ideas and visuals in August Fine Gardening Magazine.

• What is your first impression as you enter the area where you're considering a makeover in your yard? Overall, how does it look to you? What are the strengths of the area? Do the plants and landscape fit with each other? What needs to be changed? Or do you need a trusted friend to answer? More considerations in May/June Northern Gardener Magazine.

• How do we garden in the United States? National survey results show that 29 percent of American households already have lawns or gardens, most of them both. The survey sponsored by Garden Writers Association Foundation shows that 11 percent of those gardening also have plants in containers, a rising trend. Among all US households, 51.9 percent (about 57 million people) plan to grow edible plants this year, an 11.3 percent increase. Respondents' top challenges to growing plants: Time, insects and disease control, irrigation and costs.

• Plants can be transplanted and divided all month. Water properly and fertilize regularly for good bloom success.

• We have a large selection of perennials, shrubs, fruit, ornamental and shade trees.

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