

WEED PATCH:

The 'Perennial' Signs Of Spring

BY LINDA WUEBBEN

It is so exciting to walk around my house this time of year and check the perennials I have planted last year and longer ago to see if they survived the winter.

From what I can tell, so far so good. There are those species which are thriving and I cannot kill like hen and chicks or sedum. I have a daylily which also multiplies every season and is coming up strong.

I love the bright orange blossoms and this year, I will have a daylily with a yellow blossom which came from a friend last fall. As I check all the spots I planted the new arrival around my house, I realize I can't wait to have it bloom. Even though the winter was long and a challenge for us humans, it seemed the flowering population fared well.

I look longingly at my garden and think about the hoeing, weeding and watering. I'm getting spring fever — can't wait to plant something — anything. But it won't happen on Good Friday next week like many old-timers used to do. There is no tilling going to happen in that black dirt by then. The moisture accumulated throughout last year's growing season, fall rains and winter snows is still sitting there in my garden. It will be wet for a while.

I even find myself checking out garden spots as we drive down the road. Is their garden tilled? I would be so jealous. We're all pretty much in the same boat though — wet, wet, wet.

I have ordered some of my seeds and the sweet corn seed for Bob is on the way. Spring has sprung and summer will soon be upon us. I can smell and taste those juicy tomatoes. They are always the first veggie on my mind. I want to plant grape tomatoes this year. This variety is a little bigger than the cherry tomato and a friend gave me a taste of some last year — very sweet and juicy. I will have to



Linda Wuebben

keep Bob away from them though. Sometimes he takes a casual walk through the garden on the way to feeding the livestock and picks a couple to eat on the way.

But that is the fun of having a backyard garden.

The Missouri Valley Master Gardeners group here in Yankton has planned a Spring Fling event again this year. On Tuesday, March 30, the group will present Dan Flyger of Freeman at the Avera Sacred Heart Pavilion in Yankton at 6:30 p.m. The doors will open at 6 p.m. with a free will donation to defray the speaker's expense. There will be handouts and door prizes from local nurseries and gardeners.

Flyger has taken great interest in preserving vegetable seed from bygone years. He remembered a carrot seed planted by his grandfather which had great success. He was unable to locate the variety and was frustrated because today's genetic research has phased out many seeds.

The presentation will include a power point presentation created by Flyger which he presented at the State Fair and to other historical and gardening groups. It addresses the issue of heirloom seed and how one can help preserve the varieties for future generations.

It should be an interesting evening. I often find when I have a vegetable which is very successful one season, I try to save the seed, if I can, and use it the next year. It has worked great for me when planting squash, pumpkins or harvest corn. I always have good luck with seed I have dried in my basement and then planted the next season.

For more information on the Spring Fling event, contact Cindy Nelson at (605) 661-7418.

MOLD



Many people are seeing snow mold as drifts of snow melt in their yards. This photo, taken in Brookings County, shows gray snow mold, which is mostly harmless, according to Extension Plant Pathologist Larry Osborne.

Many S.D. Lawns Showing Signs Of Mold

BROOKINGS — Two forms of snow mold are appearing on lawns across South Dakota, in places where snowdrifts have melted.

South Dakota Cooperative Extension Plant Pathologist Larry Osborne said that snow molds are common, and in many cases, the problem is mostly cosmetic.

"It's quite common, but usually not so abundant, and really, not a big deal," said Osborne. "In many cases, it looks worse than it is, and even with minimal intervention, it usually clears up."

Osborne said the two fungi or molds that cause the unsightly condition are pink snow mold and gray snow mold. The differences between the two are subtle, and for treatment purposes, they can be considered one problem.

"Snow mold most often occurs when snows accumulate on soil that is between 33-45 degrees because the snow forms an insulation that allows the fungi to grow," Osborne said. "It's most commonly found on grassy areas with abundant thatch that provides food for the fungus, or in leaf litter, matted turf, or areas with excess nitrogen."

Brown County Extension Horticulture Educator Jerry Mills said the mold looks like "drier lint" on the top of turf. Mills added that rainfall and new growth will usually eliminate it from the surface.

"Most soils around the state are very tender right now, so it is probably best to wait until the soil dries and then lightly rake the areas affected," Mills said. "When it comes time to mow, collect and dispose of the clippings to remove potential inoculum for next year."

Osborne added that warmer weather will lead to a decline in mold growth. To combat the fungus in the fall, Osborne recommends removing excess thatch. "Clean out your yard as best as possible of leaves and other debris," said Osborne. "Take care to avoid over-fertilizing or fertilizing too late in the season as nitrogen applied to some plants can reduce their winter-hardy nature."

For more information on snow molds or other emerging spring lawn and home garden topics, call your county Extension office. Call Osborne at (605) 688-5543 for answers to your plant pathology questions.

HOMEGARDEN

To Raise Or Not To Raise?

BY BRENDA K. JOHNSON
P&D Correspondent

When is the "old" about plants new? Dan Flyger's presentation about heirloom plants is the chance to learn new information about how to grow and collect seed like those used, and sometimes forgotten from past generations. Flyger lives near Freeman and teaches at Oaklane Colony in the Hanson School District. His photo-illustrated talk will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Pavilion auditorium on Avera Sacred Heart Hospital campus in Yankton March 30.

Flyger has raised a garden annually since he was eight years old and has been an heirloom seed saver for the past 25 years. He calls heirlooms open-pollinated "purebreds," from which you can save seed, unlike hybrids that do not breed true.

If you're looking to grow vegetables without blemish like you find in the grocery store, you want to grow hybrids," Flyger said. "Hybrids are bred for characteristics such as uniformity and ability to transport, but not necessarily for flavor and nutrition like heirlooms."

Flyger comes from a long line of farmers. His interest in finding, using and saving heirloom seeds started when he tried growing carrots in clay soil.

"I remembered my grandfather from Geddes growing the carrot variety 'Oxhart,' a stump-rooted carrot," he said. "I looked for the seed, but found they were no longer commercially available."

He found someone who saved this seed, which heightened his interest in heirloom plants, but he still had a problem.

"Carrots are biennials; they require two years of growth to



PHOTO: BRENDA JOHNSON

Dan Flyger of Freeman plants heirloom seed for taste, nutrition and to eat some of the same varieties as his grandparents. Beginning or experienced gardeners and those interested in learning about heirloom plants may learn from his presentation in Yankton March 30.

produce more seed," Flyger said. "In this part of the country, carrots can't overwinter in the ground. I had to find some special methods. Now I dig them up carefully in the fall. A root cellar

allows ideal conditions for overwintering carrots, and I set them out again in the spring.

"To me, growing heirlooms is like planting a piece of living history," he said. "You can eat some

same varieties as your great grandparents. More is discovered all the time about the value of heirlooms."

Rats in his shed showed Flyger one of the features of heirloom seed.

"I had dried hybrid and open-pollinated corn in the shed. Rats ate the heirloom corn. They knew which tasted better," he said.

Flyger doesn't sell heirloom seeds but he is an avid collector of seeds that grow well in conditions of this region.

"I think we need to preserve genetic diversity of seeds because someday we may need those traits," he said. "When the potato famine happened in Ireland, they grew one variety of potatoes and it was wiped out by blight. If they had grown several varieties of potato, perhaps they might not have had famine."

Flyger will talk about Seed Savers Exchange of Decorah Iowa and other sources for heirloom seed. His presentation will include methods for beginning and experienced gardeners.

Missouri Valley Master Gardeners are sponsors for this event.

"Dan Flyger has a lot of experience in many aspects of gardening," contact Cindy Nelson said. "We hope everyone will learn something new about gardening that they can take home and use in their own gardens."

Nelson said door prizes will be provided courtesy of area businesses. Master gardeners appreciate a freewill donation to offset event costs. Doors open at 6 p.m. Parking is available in front of the Pavilion.

Contact Nelson for questions at 661-7418.

Denver Daisy's Performance Thrills Gardeners

BY NORMAN WINTER

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Whether you call them gloriosa daisies, Black-Eyed Susans or rudbeckias one thing is certain, they are among the showiest plants in the summer garden. In last summer's trials it was the Denver Daisy that caused the commotion in the gardening public.

You may wonder what the public has to do with trials, the answer is voting. Not all trials are the same but in several instances the public gets involved on specific field days and as they tour they are given a flag to place by the flower they admired the most. The more flags the greater the recognition for the flower. It seemed everyone loved the Denver Daisy.

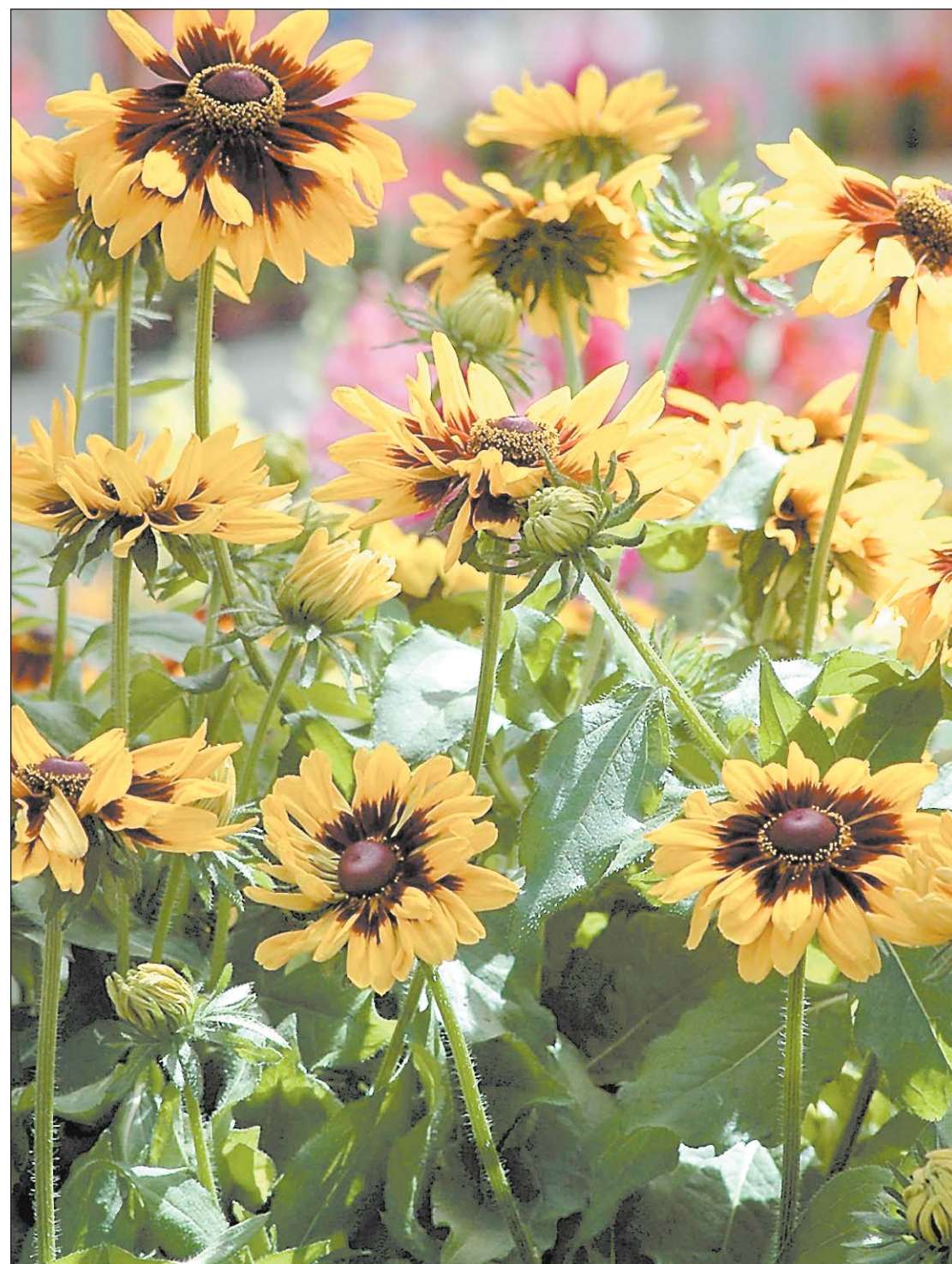
But last season's trials weren't the only predictor for this showy new rudbeckia as it was the celebratory flower chosen for Denver's 150th birthday in 2008. Botanically speaking Denver Daisy is a Rudbeckia hirta and is a cross between the native species and a prized selection known as Prairie Sun.

The flowers are large, 6 to 8 inches and feature golden yellow petals with a blaze of red around the brown cone. The plants grow upright easily reaching 24 to 30 inches and are well suited to cutting for the vase. You'll also notice they are favorites for bees and butterflies.

Rudbeckia hirtas have the opportunity to be short lived perennials but most gardeners treat them as annuals. You'll notice they are good about reseeding but the subsequent flowers though showy may or may not look like the parent. On the other hand you may see some you think are just as showy. But even treated as an annual like a petunia or marigold rudbeckias still represent one of the best buys for your gardening dollar.

Another selection getting rave comments is Tiger Eye, the first fl hybrid rudbeckia. The flowers are smaller reaching around 3 inches but the 24-inch tall plant produces them in larger quantities than you see on many Black-Eyed Susans. You'll also notice that the flowers are semi-double with light yellow petals that darken to gold with even a little hint of orange toward the cone.

Tiger Eye is also well suited in designer artistic containers. Try using it as the center or thriller plant and partnered with complementary colored flowers like blue petunias or torenias. Add a touch of a grassy element and you'll have a stunning decorative piece for the porch patio or deck.



NORMAN WINTER/MCT

Denver Daisy was created to celebrate Denver's 150th birthday in 2008. It produces 6 to 8 inch flowers attracting both bees and butterflies.

Rudbeckias perform best in full sun with fertile well-drained soil. Tight compact clay or soggy soil yields less than satisfactory results. So if you find yourself in this situation incorporate 3 to 4 inches of organic matter like compost, peat or humus before planting. While many plant shoppers have a tendency toward instant gratification and buy them already in full bloom, you'll find them acclimating to your landscape better if you buy a transplant just

comprised of healthy foliage that is still actively growing.

Space your plants 18 to 24 inches apart planting at the same depth they are growing in the container. Since these are tall plants you'll want to place them to the middle or pack of the border. Plant them in bold drifts versus spot planting. They are the quintessential cottage garden plant and look great in combination with spiky blue flowers like

tall Mystic Spires salvias or Angel Mist angelonias, and purple coneflowers. For the front of the border use blue or violet verbenas like Tapien, Lanai or Homestead purple.

Nothing adds enjoyment around the home like dazzling displays of color and rudbeckias like Denver Daisy or Tiger Eye are will certainly do their part. Put them on your list.

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