

WEED PATCH:

Garden Planted, And Praying For Rain

BY LINDA WUEBBEN

It took me a while to get my garden all planted this spring, but I can finally say it's finished.

I didn't want to risk a late frost, so I waited until after Mother's Day and even then it was the end of the week before I got my tomatoes in the ground. I pretty sure I have missed the frosty season by now and look to a successful gardening season.

Once again we are praying for rain over here in Nebraska. Some of the seeds I planted almost a month ago have not sprouted and I think might be lying in dry ground.

Last year the rain didn't shut off; it was wonderful. But we all knew it would shut off sometime. I hope a 40 percent change of rain over the weekend will give my garden and the farmers' hard work of spring planting a much needed boost. I know some of our South Dakota neighbors still have lakes, so more favorable weather is needed on both sides of the state's border.

Nevertheless, being a farm wife, I have this wellspring of hope. It never shuts off. Doesn't matter if it rains too much or rains too little—I still have hope. Tomorrow will be a happier day; the sun's rays will fill buckets; the humidity will be livable; and rain will drop from the sky with scarcely a plea.

I have been waiting all winter to try two new additions to my garden. I have ousted the gourds and squash and sent them and all their pesky bugs packing to a garden spot nearer the cow yard. They can spread out to their heart's content along with the pumpkin seeds. I think Bob is planning a few hills of cantaloupe and watermelon—he is also the eternal optimist. We have never had a decent crop but maybe this will be the year.

A gardening friend gave me two very interesting vegetables to try this year. We were dreaming about hitting the garden when the ground still covered with six feet of snow.



Linda Wuebben

Last summer he let me try a grape tomato he had raised and sold me on their good taste. I used to plant cherry tomatoes but got tired of the zillions of little red balls which eventually I piled in one large pot to cook for tomato juice.

The grape variety is a little bigger and very sweet—makes a great pickup anytime of the day. He kept a bagful of the freshly-washed oblong balls in his refrigerator and grabbed a couple whenever he wanted a sweet treat.

Another veggie I had never thought of planting here in Nebraska is celery. He told me of his great success and I couldn't wait to try some for myself. The celery plants were not easy to find but a local Yankton greenhouse had trays of four different varieties to choose from. He said how he would cut a few stalks off of the different plants every week and the veggie would grow back. He ate off of the leafy plants all summer long.

I also planted some onion plants this year which I have never done before. That's kind of like rolling out an instant garden, not? I'll see what we think but half of the fun of gardening for me is the anticipation while waiting for the little seeds or onion sets to sprout from the rich, dark soil.

I write this column several days in advance of when it is actually printed and as I write this month's selection, we have been slowly working through several days of severe weather warnings with no unhappy results. Of course, there haven't been any happy results either.

I knew once that famous and not forgotten Nebraska wind got wound up, it would make up for all those quiet days we had last year.

CONFEDERATE JASMINE



The confederate jasmine provides thousands of white star shaped flowers yielding a tantalizing fragrance that permeates the evening garden.

COURTESY NORMAN WINTER/MCT

A Plant For Memories

BY NORMAN WINTER

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The old saying, "to grow it is to know it," certainly holds true for me at my new home. For several weeks now I have found myself under the spell of the smell of the confederate jasmine, known as star jasmine in other regions.

I'll admit I have longed considered the tropical night blooming jasmine, *Cestrum nocturnum* to be the ultimate in fragrance but now I am wavering as I am experiencing this old fashioned southern plant. I say southern; though it is really from China, it's been here long enough to reach heirloom status.

Botanically speaking the confederate jasmine is *Trachelospermum jasminoides*. It is closely related to the ground cover Asian jasmine *T. asiaticum*, a plant often considered a scourge in the plant world, because of its aggressive nature. This isn't to say the confederate jasmine isn't packed with its own vigor.

The confederate jasmine has pretty much remained a staple of warm zones 8-11 but the variety Madison, a 2007 Georgia Gold Medal Winner, has the gardening world abuzz. This one, thanks to leaves that are finely hairy on the undersides offers cold hardiness through zone 7 and with reports suggesting a little extra protection will see it surviving in zone 6.

In addition to the intensely fragrant star-shaped blossoms, the vine, which by the way was discovered in Madison, Ga., also offers a unique bronze fall leaf color.

Your vine will perform best given at least 6 hours of sunlight a day and fertile well-drained soil. You do not want it sitting in winter-soggy clay. The next obvious consideration is to provide a good structure for support. The vine does not climb by itself but is easily trained.

As you contemplate this plant, keep in mind it has the ability to help lower utility bills. Trained correctly it can reduce absorption of heat along brick walls.

Obviously though, this is a plant in which memories can be made as your children or grandchildren will always think back to the glorious warm days as school was ending and fragrance permeated the air around their home. With that in mind, front or back porch columns, lattice fences, patio pergolas and arbors where guests are entertained are all great locations for consideration.

The vine blooms on old wood and after blooming is the ideal time to prune. In fact after the bloom you'll notice the vine putting on vigorous new growth so pruning will help keep it confined to its allotted space. Keep in mind it can reach 20 to 40 feet with ease. Watch your fertilizer, not much is needed, and refrain from being too luxuriant with water.

In addition to providing a great vertical element in the landscape and enticing fragrance, you will find it to be environmentally friendly from the standpoint there are no pest or disease pressures.

Talk to your nursery's staff about Madison and other varieties of this incredibly fragrant vine.

HOMEGARDEN

The Small Joys Of Rock Gardens

BY GINNY SMITH

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PHILADELPHIA — Fashionistas in the garden like those great big blooms with petals thick as petticoats, but there's another way to go: rock-garden plants.

Their flowers are small, subtle, and every bit as beautiful as their hefty peers, as Ann Rosenberg of Bryn Mawr, Pa., discovered around 1985. On a trip to England that year, she delighted in some small penstemons, which sparked an interest in other plants commonly used in rock gardens.

"They're so cute!" she says. They're usually less than 4 inches tall, maybe as tall as 12 inches if you count things like dwarf conifers, another popular rock-garden feature. Their flowers can be very colorful and disproportionately large, and you can squeeze a lot of them into a small space, something all gardeners seem genetically wired to do.

Shaped like buns, mats and cushions, these tiny plants are tucked into crevices and fissures, where there may be little soil, their diminutive stature intended to show off the color, form, size and texture of the rocks.

That "small space" can be a container, a trough or a raised bed, a bonsai dish, antique sink, or perennial patch. Fill can be a mix of topsoil and sand, or gravel, or weathered rock fragments known as scree. The "garden" can even be a wall: Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia's Chestnut Hill, has a six-foot wall made of Wissahickon schist that's tufted with jewel-toned alpine plants.

Rosenberg doesn't have a rock garden per se; she uses home-grown rock-garden plants to create a dreamy woodland behind her house. There, clouds of soft-blue forget-me-nots and ultraviolet wildflowers known as bluets (or Quaker ladies) line the gently curved paths. They brighten a cloudy day like minuscule sparklers, set against the tart spring-green of everything else.

Rosenberg also grows primula and armeria, daphne, dianthus, gentian, and mini-hosta and mini-narcissus in there, and in rough troughs made by her husband, Dick.

Gentiana acaulis is a favorite. It's a kingfisher-blue gentian, 4 inches tall, an Alpine native with solitary trumpet-flowers measuring 2 1/2 inches long. Imagine a hillside dotted with these.

Which recalls this advice: Whatever form it takes, a rock garden should look natural, as if this craggy scene has been growing undisturbed for some time.

Pat Valentine puts it simply. "A rock garden consists of plants planted next to rocks, but it's not just that. There's an extreme art to it," he says. "You try to copy what's growing on the side of a mountain."

Valentine owns Valentine Gardens, a specialty nursery in Coatesville, Pa., that propagates and sells unusual plants for rock, water, sun and shade gardens. He's built a figure-eight rock garden in the sunny yard to show visitors how it's done, at least in this country. (There are many distinct rock-garden cultures around the world.)

But when asked to explain the attraction of these miniature landscapes of deep-rooted plants, Valentine's as mushy as Rosenberg.

"They're so cute," he says. "Touring" this garden is nothing like a spin through a bizzard of perennials. We stand at the edge, bend over, look closely. We move six inches to the right, bend over, look closely. It takes nearly an hour to make our way around the figure eight, which is 22 feet long and 10 to 12 feet wide, with a pitcher's mound in the middle.

"It's a real neat facet of gardening," says Valentine, who's made a living in the nursery and landscape trade for 47 years. He bought this nursery with partner Patricia Schriber in 2001.

The couple's rock garden is only 2 years old but already is a draw for tunneling mice, voles and ants. Today there's a break in the action, allowing us to safely inspect the funny habits of these curious plants.

They creep. They mound. They poke out of cracks and hug the ground. Valentine finds them quirky and romantic and says grandly that working with them can involve "major character development."



CLEM MURRAY/PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/MCT

This photo shows "Hens & Chicks" or *Sempervivum Arachnoideum*, *Tomentosum* variety, as grown by Pat Valentine, of Valentine Gardens, in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, April 29, 2010.

There's an alpine baby's breath, really just a green cushion with pinhead-buds. There are dwarf conifers and rugs of thyme and sedum inching around mounds of a moss phlox called "Crackerjack" and "Little Jock," a frilly dianthus.

Everywhere, you see *sempervivum* or "hens and chicks." There's no mistaking those chubby leaves of pink or green and those distinctive cobweb hairdos. And get a load of the red or black tips. They resemble sharpened fingernails.

The "chicks" are the rosette-shaped offspring that grow in a ring around the "hen" or mother plant. As some indication that, even in a rock garden, the action is hot and heavy, the "chicks" naturally "fill the

vacancies," as Valentine describes the holes left after the mothers flower and die.

He uses feather rock, lichen-covered limestone, jagged lava rock, granite street stone, and the occasional piece of quartz. Some were bought, but most were dug out of his yard or discarded by clients, friends or contractors. Size and shape vary, but none is a boulder.

"Look for natural stone," Valentine says, "and scale is very important."

Which recommends the rock-garden concept to urban gardeners and others without much space.

"These plants grow well in containers and troughs, which you can put at eye level in a condo on the porch or deck,

and they'll work very well," says Bobby Ward of Raleigh, N.C., executive secretary of the North American Rock Garden Society. The society has 38 chapters in Canada and the U.S.

Ward acknowledges that rock gardens, regardless of size, may not appeal to everyone. "They're not garish. They're not big and bold," he says.

They require attention to detail, an artistic eye, and, sometimes, a tolerance for finicky habits. If you can manage all that, you'll be a goner for buns, mats, and cushions. Soon you, too, will be saying, "They're so cute!"



We remember the men and women who have so honorably served this country throughout history. We remember their courage, their selflessness and their dedication. We remember the hardship, the suffering and the sacrifice they endured. On Memorial Day and every day, we remember with respect those who have fought to defend our democratic ideals and secure our freedoms. With deep gratitude, we salute our country's brave and honorable veterans.

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