



Steve Wyrick is a familiar gardener on the Facebook page called Peninsula Plantcycle. There, he and other gardeners exchange seeds, unwanted tools and gardening decor; the banter goes back and forth daily. Steve has shared and received plants, and made trellises from repurposed goods, including curbside finds.

Diggin’ In:

# ‘PlantCycle’ Fans Use Facebook To Share Gardening Information

BY KATHY VAN MULLEKOM

© 2012, Daily Press (Newport News, Va.)

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — Steve Wyrick’s yard in southeastern Virginia is all about nurturing nature and animals. He gardens for wildlife and repurposes and recycles everything possible.

Nothing is wasted. Decorative, colorful tiles from his father’s former pool business embellish clay pots. Shells from a backyard pecan tree are used as garden compost. Seeds and clippings are germinated and rooted into new plants. A newly painted rabbit hutch was rescued when it was discarded at the curb, and handles from broken tools are perches in his chicken run.

A Facebook page called Peninsula PlantCycle helps him accomplish much of it. His favorite finds on the site are strawberry begonia, a part-shade ground cover that produces spikes of white flowers, and Black Magic elephant ear, a tropical plant that thrives in the pond he crafted from leftover pool materials.

“For me, PlantCycle is all about simplistic living, nature, anti-consumerism and active environmentalism,” says the Poquoson, Va., gardener

“We exchange information, answer each others’ questions and talk about how to deal with various pests. It’s both a community and a lifestyle.”

Beverly Tidwell, a gardener in Newport News, Va., started the Facebook group when the Yahoo group PlantCycle.org shut down for unknown reasons.

“I absolutely loved the concept,” she says.

### PlantCycle Posts

Here are examples of posts you may find at Peninsula PlantCycle’s Facebook page any given day:

“This cocoon is on my Japanese maple tree. We saw him stick his head out and get a leaf, eat some and take it back into the cocoon. Any advice or info would be great.”

“My neighbor has figs and grapes (not sure what kind) that my daughters and I will be picking for her. Is anyone interested in any?”

“My angel trumpets have not flowered this year. I have fed them coffee grinds and (store bought). Compost ... but can’t get a bloom? Does anyone have advice? “Does anyone know where I can find the passion vine?”

“Does anyone have any Creeping Jenny (Golden Monewort) to share? I love to use it as a cascading feature in my containers.”

“After a few months of seeing no posts, I chatted with Steve and we agreed we needed to fill the gap. You post a picture or a description of what you have or want and people comment to let you know if they have it or want it.

“Peninsula PlantCycle friends are like me — they have a passion for gardening. The free advice you get is great — advice like: is this a good cocoon or a bad one? Is this a good or bad bug? I also like being able to give away plants so I’m sharing and also making room for other plants.”

Barbara Bahr is a PlantCycle fan, using the Facebook page to find free and unwanted stuff she can use in her 1.6-acre garden.

“For the past 12 years, I’ve worked hard on my yard,” she says.

“I’ve planted many flowers and islands and dug many ponds in those years. I reuse and recycle materials. One item that stands out in my mind is a recycled hot tub that I saved from going to the landfill. It was made into a koi pond. Beverly and I have exchanged pond plants many times.

“PlantCycle is a fun way to make new friends and at the same time you can share ideas for your yard and gardens. It’s like Pinterest on a smaller scale. We all share the same passion with planting and making our yards a beautiful showcase for ourselves and our neighborhood.”

Now, Tidwell’s goal is to replace the Yahoo PlantCycle.org with a new, improved and functional website her husband, Andrew, designed and launched at <http://peninsulaplantcycle.webs.com>. The Facebook version will continue to be its social media partner.

“The concept of sharing and trading has been around since the beginning of time,” says Tidwell.

“We have simply lost touch and I hope Peninsula PlantCycle can change that. If we’re successful, we’ll expand.”

ONLINE:  
*Peninsula PlantCycle at Facebook.com.*  
*New website at <http://peninsulaplantcycle.webs.com>.*



MCT  
The scarlet rosemallow produces an abundance of scarlet star-shaped blooms that will delight both hummingbirds and butterflies.

### On Gardening

# Scarlet Rosemallow Is A Treasured Native Hibiscus

BY NORMAN WINTER

© 2012, McClatchy-Trib. News Service

No matter the type of garden you have, the scarlet rosemallow has the ability to steal the attention of your visitors. To be honest I hate that name from a marketing standpoint and I actually learned of the plant as a Texas Star hibiscus. As luck would have it some taxonomic board has concluded it is not native to Texas. I hear there is now even an argument that it is not really native to the Southeast. But for now we can sleep blissfully knowing indeed it is a treasured native from Louisiana to Florida, northward to Virginia.

Don’t let native status or an ugly name like swamp mallow or scarlet mallow deter you from growing one of the most picturesque perennial hibiscuses available at the garden center. To clarify my first sentence, the tightly formal need not try to use this plant. But those with a grandma’s cottage feel, a passion for the Caribbean or the backyard wildlife enthusiast, this is definitely a plant for you.

Here at the Columbus Botanical Garden our complex is designed around a late 1800’s farmhouse with many of the original outbuildings. The scarlet rosemallow fits this garden perfectly as nearby we have planted rudbeckias, Joe Pye weed, and other perennials known to be favorites of butterflies and hummingbirds.

It is a cold-tolerant perennial hardy from zones 5 through 10 and produces some of the tallest plants for the flower border. Ours has been producing scores of scarlet, star-shaped flowers in abundance and to the delight of the ruby-throated hummingbirds. The foliage is a striking glossy-green and has a maple-like shape. If you are into the tropical

look, you can create your corner of paradise by combining it with large banana trees like the cold-hardy Japanese fiber banana or with elephant ears. Try using in combination with the yellow bush-form allamanda or yellow blooming canna lilies. Place the hibiscus to the back of the border to hide their giraffe leg-like stalks.

Though considered a plant for all soils, requirements for the scarlet rosemallow hibiscus are much like those of other perennials. Plant in well-drained, well-prepared beds and use a good layer of mulch to keep the soil evenly moist through the season. This hibiscus is found growing naturally in sandy, moist, acidic soils but I have seen many fine plants in central Texas. Expect them to easily reach 6 feet in height and width, so space on 3-foot centers.

Choose a site with plenty of sunlight. Morning sun and filtered afternoon light are just about perfect in our state. Hibiscus blooms on new growth, so it is important to keep it growing vigorously throughout the season. Keep them well fed and watered during periods of drought.

After your hibiscus has frozen in the fall, cut them back to ground level and add a little extra mulch. I always go for nursery-grown plants, but many gardeners ask if these can be grown from seed, and indeed they can. It does help to lightly scrape with sandpaper for easier germination.

You may be in love with the tropical Chinese hibiscus but I predict once you can look past the name you will fall in love with the scarlet rosemallow, or if you will, swamp mallow, too, and welcome it to your perennial garden.

# San Francisco Experiments With 300-Square-Foot Micro-Apartments

BY LEE ROMNEY

© 2012, Los Angeles Times

SAN FRANCISCO — The tiny apartments are touted as “affordable by design.”

New York City has launched a pilot project to test them out. Boston is doing it too. But here in San Francisco, where a growing number of residents are being priced out of the housing market by a revived tech economy, city leaders are considering the smallest micro-units of all.

At a minimum 150 square feet of living space — 220 when you add the bathroom, kitchen and closet — the proposed residences are being hailed as a pivotal option for singles. Opponents fear that a wave of “shoe box homes” would further marginalize families of modest means who are desperate for larger accommodations.

On Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors tabled until at least November tweaking the city’s building code, which requires newly constructed units to be at least 290 square feet.

The number of micro-units that could be built under the proposal would not be capped, although critics are pushing for controls on the experiment. New York Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, for instance, has signed off on just 60 apartments that would be 275 to 300 square feet small.

Patrick Kennedy — a Berkeley, Calif.-based developer who in

November will unveil a building with 300-square-foot units in San Francisco’s South of Market neighborhood — has said he hopes to build several thousand even smaller models.

The mini-apartments’ schematics include window seats that convert to spare beds and beds that transform into tables. Bay windows offer sweeping views.

“You could obviously build more of them if you don’t have to do them as large,” said Kennedy, adding that pricing would be determined after he sees “what the market does with our 300-footers.”

Supervisor Scott Wiener, who drafted the legislation, said smaller units will mean cheaper and more plentiful housing options. With a tech boom underway, thousands of new hires have been snapping up San Francisco’s rental stock.

The micro-units will probably go for \$1,200 to \$1,500 a month, Wiener said. According to the real estate service RealFacts, an average studio apartment in San Francisco now goes for \$2,075.

So in a metropolis where 41 percent of residents live solo, Wiener said, the units would fill a niche by allowing people to stay who might otherwise have to take on roommates or leave town.

“Although in our fantasy world everyone would live in a single-family home or a huge spacious flat, the reality of life is that



PHOTO: SMARTSPACE VIA LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT  
Artist rendering of 300 square foot apartment in San Francisco “micro-units” or shoebox apartments by developer SMARTSPACE.

not everyone can afford that,” he said, noting the micro-units with shared common space would be ideal for students, artists and seniors.

But some critics worry that the swank model units getting kudos from officials might not be the norm. What’s to stop other developers, tenants’ rights advocates ask, from building grimmer versions, with low ceilings and poor light?

“I say no shoe box legislation,” Carmelita Perez, 67, told

demonstrators at a recent news conference, where a small child sat inside a mock unit taped to the sidewalk in front of City Hall. “We are humans, not spiders.”

Supervisor Jane Kim, whose district includes South of Market, said she feared the push for ever-smaller apartments would do nothing to benefit families that already are being driven out of town.

The price per square foot of Kennedy’s proposal, she and other skeptics said, was less af-

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