Village Garden Center
& Landscape Service
ISSUE 27 April 2012

Gaura

"Passionate Rainbow"

By Eva Soued

Gaura is a hardy, herbaceous perennial that is almost constantly in bloom. Its full scientific name is Gaura lindheimeri, but it is also known as 'bee blossom.'

The unique and wonderful thing about gaura is that its blooms resemble real life butterflies (and yet another name for gaura is 'Butterfly Bush'). The plant is very eye-catching due to these butterfly-like blooms and they make the plant well worth considering for inclusion in your garden (gaura also attracts real life butterflies as well!).

Gaura is relatively easy to grow. It thrives in loamy or sandy well-draining soil and is very hardy due to a long taproot that makes it virtually drought resistant.

You can plant gaura by itself or use it to fill in various areas of your garden. You can also line your driveway or walking paths with it. Gaura grows into a vase-shaped bush with hairy stems, and the blooms will be about an inch wide with four petals each. The petals will be either pink, white, or a deep rose color. The stems of the plant will be erect and wiry. . Gaura will bloom from early spring to early winter and it's very resistant to frost and cold; occasionally you will even see blooms appearing in deep winter.

To plant gaura, find a sunny location. Put a tiny bit of organic fertilizer in the hole before setting the plant. Then put the plant in at the same depth it was in the container. You should space the plants out about one to two feet apart. Finally, you should water the soil until it is very moist. But after that, water it only occasionally.

There will be no serious disease or insect problems with gaura, even though pollinating insects love all gaura plants. So they really are low maintenance.

In this issue

What's that weed?

Identifying Spring weeds

"Imagine the possibilities!"

What a fantastic floral display Mother Nature puts on in Spring!

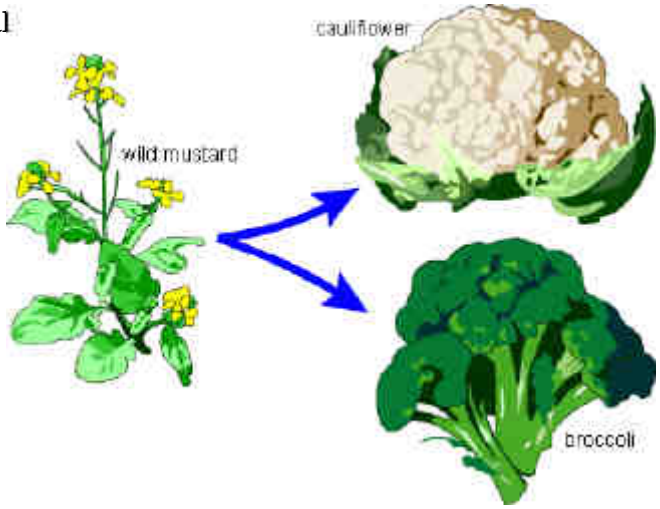
And to think that some people would call her brush strokes weeds.

Right now, yellow rocket *Barbarea vulgaris*, is in full bloom. This plant is classified as a ***winter annual***. This class of weeds germinates in the fall, survive the winter in a vegetative state and then bloom and set seed in the spring… fading away as the days lengthen and the heat of summer approaches. They produce a nice crop of seeds which will lay dormant until fall when the whole annual cycle begins again. Isn't Nature cool?

Of course this plant can be a weed if it is growing in competition with garden or crop plants. In fact there is a good chance that your garden is full of winter annual weeds right now. Many of the Brassica family (also called crucifers or mustards) are winter annuals. The family includes Virginia pepperweed, Wild mustard, Shepherd's-purse, Bittercress, and Field pennycress. They are closely related to cultivated plants such as broccoli, cabbage and Brussels sprouts.

Homology: A Bouquet of Broccoli

One wouldn't normally munch on a rosebud or snap off a dandelion flower for a quick snack. But in fact, in terms of homologies, when you eat broccoli or cauliflower, you are doing just that. Although not scented or suitable for centerpieces, the green tips of broccoli and the white tips of cauliflower are actually flowers. Through many generations of artificial selection, farmers modified the bright yellow blooms of the wild mustard plant into the edible, vegetal plant parts you'll find nestled next to the ranch dip on the hors d'oeuvre tray.



(Pepperweed)

The History of Dandelion Delicacies

Beleive it or not, this plant was not always thought of as a weed. It used to be referred to as a "common herb" and was used for medicinal properties. The dandelion is rich in nutrients including protein, calcium, iron, Vitamins A & C.

Other winter annuals include Common chickweed, Purple deadnettle and Henbit. Purple deadnettle, is lovely but I am more partial to Henbit's scalloped leaf margins and daintier flowers.

In addition to being pretty, many winter annuals provide forage for bees. They cover the soil and prevent soil erosion. Some call them the poor man's cover crop.

So enjoy the pretty spring flowers produced by winter annuals. They won't be here long. Instead, the flip side of annual weed life cycles is beginning. The summer annuals...crabgrass, pigweed, foxtails and ragweed are just getting started. It's a little harder for me to warm up to these plants. And they are more likely to occupy your time in the garden than the winter annuals

(Henbit deadnettle)

.The young shoots, leaves and flowers of the Henbit deadnettle plant are edible and, once washed, can be simply cooked by adding to frying pan with a knob of butter some spring onions and plenty of seasoning. When sautéed for ten minutes they are ready to consume. Ideally finish with a twist of fresh nutmeg and a squeeze of fresh lemon juice before serving. The tops of young plants can also be used in salads or can be stir-fried as a spring vegetable. The flavour is best when the plant is in flower as it can be very insipid when young.

(Yellow Rocket)

Weeds are really just one type of plant that we have decided shouldn't be growing in one particular place. Wild orchids growing in Hawaii are considered weeds. It's just your point of view as to what makes a weed a weed. Some weed-type plants are invasive and fast growing. Their growth habit overtakes our cultivated turf plants, depriving them of food and water. Other weeds are extremely noxious and cause problems for humans if they get close them.

From the garden of Eva

Ever wonder how many seeds sit on a typical strawberry? Two hundred, to be exact. But even more impressive is the amount of vitamin C strawberries pack. One serving, which equals about eight medium berries, provides 130 percent of our bodies' daily requirement.

Strawberry Shortcake Snake

Ingredients

SHORTCAKE BISCUITS:

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

4 teaspoons baking powder

3/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup margarine (1 stick)

1 cup milk

STRAWBERRY FILLING:

1 quart strawberries

4 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

WHIPPED CREAM TOPPING:

1 cup whipping cream

2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

GARNISHES:

4 whole strawberries

Green fruit leather

Mini chocolate chips or M&M's

Instructions

1.Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Sift together the flour, sugar, baking powder and salt into a large mixing bowl. Cut in the margarine with a pastry cutter. Once the dough is crumbly, slowly stir in the milk.

2.Turn out the dough onto a floured working surface and gently roll or pat the dough into a 1-inch-thick rectangle (it should measure about 6 x 8 inches). For the best results, handle the dough as little as possible.

3.Slice the rectangle into four 1-1/2- x 8-inch strips. Place the strips on an ungreased baking sheet, then mold and curve them into S shapes that resemble snakes. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes until the bottoms are golden brown. Transfer the baked shortcakes to a wire rack and let cool. Carefully slice the cooled shortcakes in half lengthwise or split them with a fork and then set aside.

4.Wash the strawberries and select four to use for the snakes' heads. Slice the rest of the berries lengthwise into a mixing bowl. Toss with the confectioners' sugar and let stand while you prepare the whipped cream.

5.Combine the whipping cream and confectioners' sugar in a chilled bowl and beat with an electric or hand mixer until stiff peaks form.

6.Just before serving, arrange berries on the bottom half of each shortcake, then cover with the shortcake top. Spread on whipped cream and add a layer of sliced strawberry "scales."

7.For the snakes' heads, cut mouth openings in the tips of the whole berries and place one at the end of each shortcake. Press a pair of mini chocolate chip or M&M's eyes into the sides of each head and add a forked tongue cut from green fruit leather.

Living with Nature

The Turkey Vulture is one of our largest birds. It grows as big as an eagle; up to 32 inches long, with a six-foot wingspan.Turkey Vultures are black with a bare reddish head. They have a yellow bill and yellow feet. The flight feathers of this bird are silvery-colored, and you can see them from below when they are soaring. Turkey Vultures are found in forests, fields, roadsides, farmland, and dumps.

Considering what they eat, these are some of the cleanest animals around. Having few feathers on their heads means they can wash them easily, and Turkey Vultures often bathe in water. They constantly preen (cleans out its feathers with its bill). Turkey Vultures eat a great deal of carrion, the more rotten the better. Some common carrion consumed by vultures includes: shrews, moles, squirrels, woodchuck, mice, rabbit, birds, reptiles, insects, muskrat, opossum, raccoon, skunk, and fox. They also eat a great deal of plant matter, such as leaves, grass, and Seeds.

Turkey Vultures have a terrific digestive system, which kills any bacteria or disease from the carrion they eat. Their droppings (poop) and pellets (thrown up bones and fur) are disease-free. Vultures are very important to the environment, because they clean up dead animals and make it so diseases are not spread.

Turkey Vultures nest in rock crevices, hollow trees, caves, fallen hollow logs, or ledges. They don't build nests; they just lay their eggs on the ground. These birds lay two whitish eggs with dark brown markings. Young vultures are able to leave the nest about 10 weeks after hatching.

Turkey Vultures are usually seen soaring high up in the sky. They can soar for hours at a time, searching for food. They are able to fly with very few wing beats because they ride on thermals. Thermals are batches of warm air that rise up. Vultures have excellent sight and hearing, but are best known for their tremendous sense of smell. Because they have small claws, Turkey Vultures rarely kill their own prey. They occasionally kill weak or young animals. At night, Turkey Vultures gather in large roosts. They like to roost in tall trees, or sometimes on towers. Vultures usually return to the same roost every night. In fact, each vulture usually roosts on the same branch each time! Some vultures will occasionally wander off to visit another roost, but they always come back. Certain Turkey Vulture roosts are known to be over 100 years old, meaning young vultures stay at the roosts their parents and grandparents were from. Turkey Vultures live in our area year-round. In the summer, vultures cool off by going to the bathroom on their own legs. If cornered, they may roll over and play dead. As a last resort, Turkey Vultures will throw up on their attacker with a very foul-smelling liquid.

Predators of Turkey Vultures are usually animals which attack eggs or young. These include: Raccoon, Red Fox, Virginia Opossum, Black Rat Snake, and domestic dogs.

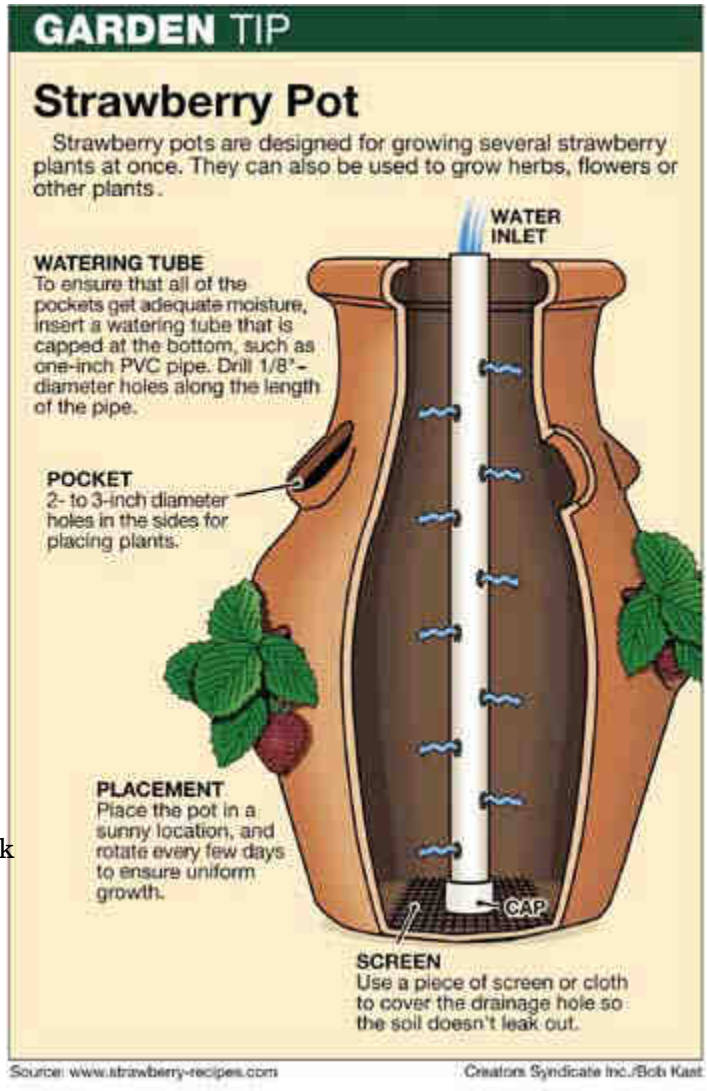
How to plant a Strawberry Jar

First don't just think Strawberries

All it takes to plant one of these layered pots is to cover the bottom hole with a piece of screen, cloth or anything that will let the water out, but not the soil. Never add a layer of gravel to the bottom of the pot. It does not increase drainage. In fact, it slows the drainage in the bottom layer of soil. Fill the pot to the bottom of the first set of side holes and spread out the plant roots, then add more soil up to the next holes and repeat until you can plant a few in the top. You can add some crumpled up newspaper or sphagnum moss around the plants to keep the soil from washing out of the hole. If you replace the plants, you should replace at least half the soil, if not all of it.

To make it easier to water every plant in the pot without over-watering the top plants and under-watering the bottom ones, you can insert a pipe into the pot before adding the soil. You can use any type of pipe and all you do is drill holes into it to have water seep out at all levels.

Now if you are a messy gardener like me, there will be dirt all over the pots, the table and you. This is a happy thing! You can rinse the dirt off later, just sit and enjoy your work for now. In no time at all, you will have pretty, full strawberry jars, and fresh berries for breakfast each day, and who wouldn't love that?



The bagworm, Thyridopteryx ephemeraeformis (Haworth) is the larval stage of a moth native to Pennsylvania that is reported to feed on over 100 different plants. On pine trees, its cone-shaped bags are often mistaken for cones, which go unnoticed until the infestation is severe. Bagworms spread slow because the female is unable to fly, however, bagworms can be windblown or crawl to other host plants.

Young Bagworm larva feeding on eastern arborvitae

It's a bug eat Bug world


Bagworms on spruce

Plants Attacked

Bagworms attack both deciduous and evergreen trees. Some of the more common evergreen host plants includ arborvitae (Thuja), fir (Abies), hemlock (Tsuga), juniper (Juniperus), pine (Pinus) and spruce (Picea). Deciduous host plants include black locust (Robinia pseudoacacia), honeylocust (Gleditsia triacanthos), sweetgum (Liquidambar styraciflua) and sycamore (Platanus occidentalis)

Insect Identification

The cone-shaped bags, which they form, easily identify bagworms. These are carefully interwoven using silk and bits of leaves and twigs from the host plant resulting in a well-disguised covering. The tops of the young larvae are shiny black and their body undersides are dull amber. When fully grown, the bagworms are a dull, dirty, gray with darker markings toward the head. The adult male develops into a moth that can fly, but the female remains grub-like and stays inside the bag.

Winter The eggs over-winter inside the bag made by the previous year's female.

Spring Egg hatch occurs from late May to early June, at which time the larvae crawl out in search of food. Each constructs a small bag around its hind parts with silk and plant material.

Summer Feeding, growth and molting continue until August, at which time the mature larvae attach themselves to twigs. They close the bag and reverse themselves so that they are head down in the bag. They remain there for about 4 weeks as pupae.

Fall During September and early October, the female releases a sex attractant pheromone and the males leave their cases and fly to the female bags to mate. Females lay 500-1000 eggs in each bag.

Mechanical In the fall, winter and early spring, before the eggs have hatched, the bags can be picked off the plant and destroyed. Chemical Insecticides are more effective when the larvae are small and just emerging from the over-wintering bag. Larger larvae and molting larvae are not easily killed.

Thyme in the Garden

with Andi Parr

As beautiful as our weather has been, there is still many nights ahead that will be too chilly for our tender garden plants and annual flowers. Why does the cold damage our plants? When the water inside a plant freezes it causes ice crystals to form that pierce the cell walls of the plant. When the temperature warms up, the cells leak out their fluids as they die and turn to mush. Freeze damage first shows up as dark, water-soaked tissues which then turn black to brown, and dry up.

There are a few ways to protect your plants from frost and freeze, covering, and watering.

The most common way to guard against frost is with the use of some type of covering. Most anything will work, but old blankets, sheets, and even burlap sacks are best. When covering plants, drape them loosely and secure with stakes, rocks, or bricks. The lighter covers can simply be placed directly over the plants, but heavier covers may require some type of support, such as wire, to prevent the plants from becoming crushed under the weight. Covering tender garden plants in the evening will help retain heat and protect them from freezing. However, it is important that the covers be removed once the sun comes out the following morning; otherwise, the plants may fall victim to suffocation.

There are two ways to protect your plants with water, watering a few days before the frost, and sprinkling the leaves of your plant as it freezes.

First of all plants under drought stress can be more susceptible to cold damage. By watering plants several days or more before cold weather threatens you can relieve stress if they are suffering from drought. Water is also a great "heat sink." That is, it holds warmth and releases it slowly, more slowly than plant surfaces or air. Watering your plants right before a freeze creates a source of warmth that will slowly lose its heat over the course of a long cold evening. This alone is not going to provide protection from a hard freeze but can be used with covers to make a small difference on a marginal night, and every little bit helps!

The second way water is used is by sprinkling plants on a cold night. The basic concept involves the physics of water. If you were to chart the drop in temperature of water you would see that it drops steadily to about 32 degrees and then levels off before dropping again after the water freezes. It takes a lot of energy to push water to change from liquid to solid. That is the key to using water to protect plants. Water is sprinkled on the plants and then freezes causing a small amount of heat to be released as it changes from liquid to solid form. Then another drop lands and freezes releasing more heat. As long as there is a thin layer of liquid water on the surface, the interior of the ice will not drop below about 32 degrees.

While this all sounds easy and you think "why not spray everything with water and be done with it?" the process is actually more difficult than it seems. Most people end up using lawn sprinklers which put out too much water, so after a while the plants end up drowning in soggy soil while we create a major swampy mess in the landscape. Additionally if the freeze lasts very long we end up with an ice load that shatters our fruit trees like toothpicks and flattens the garden. Most importantly when using water you must not stop sprinkling after the temperature rises above 32 degrees. You have to continue to sprinkle until almost all the ice is melted. Otherwise the process works in reverse. As the ice goes from solid to liquid water it absorbs heat causing supercooling. So you theoretically could have made it through the freeze but then lost plants in the morning after temperatures started rising.

Happy Planting!

Bits n pieces

Household items to fight those pesky weeds that come up on your patios and walkways.

Vinegar

Are dandelions sprouting up in the cracks of your driveway or along the fringes of your patio? Make them disappear for good by spraying them with full-strength white or apple cider vinegar. Early in the season, give each plant a single spritz of vinegar in its midsection, or in the middle of the flower before the plants go to seed. Aim another shot near the stem at ground level so the vinegar can soak down to the roots. Keep an eye on the weather, though; if it rains the next day, you'll need to give the weeds another spraying.

Salt

Those weeds that pop up in the cracks of your walkways can be tough to eradicate. But salt can do the job. Bring a solution of about 1 cup salt in 2 cups water to a boil. Pour directly on the weeds to kill them. Another equally effective method is to spread salt directly onto the weeds or unwanted grass that come up between patio bricks or blocks. Sprinkle with water or just wait until rain does the job for you.

Borax

Get the jump on those weeds that grow in the cracks of the concrete outside your house by sprinkling borax into all the crevices where you've seen weeds grow in the past. It will kill them off before they have a chance to take root. When applied around the foundation of your home, it will also keep ants and other six-legged intruders from entering your house. But be very careful when applying borax — it is toxic to plants.

Bleach

Do weeds seem to thrive in the cracks and crevices of your walkways? Try pouring a bit of undiluted bleach over them. After a day or two, you can simply pull them out, and the bleach will keep them from coming back. Just be careful not to get bleach on the grass or plantings bordering the walkway