

From: Paul Parent Garden Club <newsletter@paulparentclub.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 17, 2012 3:59 PM
To: rickmorin@earthlink.net
Subject: Paul Parent Garden Club News - May 17, 2012

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Edition 12.20	Paul Parent Garden Club News	May 17, 2012
	<p>FEATURED QUOTE :</p> <p>"I love spring anywhere, but if I could choose I would always greet it in a garden." ~ Ruth Stout</p>	<p>Gifts for the Gardener</p> <p>Here are some great ideas for gifts your favorite gardener will just love!</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 20px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>		<p>Contact Information:</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Plant Thrive from Alpha Bio Systems</p>		<p>E-Mail: Click to contact us.</p>
<p>Soil Conditioner & Mycorrhizal Root Stimulator-- perfect for seedlings and growing plants of all types.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p>Telephone: (207) 985-6972 (800) 259-9231 (Sunday 6 AM to 10 AM)</p>
<p>The hottest gardening product for 2012! From existing plants to seedlings--THRIVE Helps plants get off on the right "root." The beginning is often the most important part of your plants' lives. Maintaining soil quality for them to grow is imperative.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p>Fax: (207) 985-6972</p>
<p>Liquid Plant THRIVE contains a concentrated dose of the microbes already found in nature that will ensure a strong root system, require less watering and help you do your part for the environment. Don't worry about over-treating; you can't with this great all natural product. THRIVE promotes a productive soil environment and plant root structure that helps to produce superior plant growth and vitality. Research tested, earthworm approved.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p>Address: Paul Parent Garden Club 2 Blueberry Pines Dr Kennebunk, ME 04043</p> <p>Regular Phone Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8 AM to 6 PM Sunday: 10 AM to 6 PM</p>
<p>For more information, visit the Thrive website.</p>		<p>Tell your friends about Paul! Send them a copy of Paul's latest newsletter.</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 20px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>		<p>(Note: this will not subscribe them to the newsletter, nor retain their email - it will just send them a copy from you.)</p>
<p>To most of us, blueberries are a wonderful, juicy, and sweet flavored blue food, something rare in nature. But research has shown it is much more, as this wonderful berry is packed with antioxidants that help to slow down the aging process, it will help forestall memory loss and help make you more stable on your feet, with better coordination. The state of Maine is the country's leading producer of the lowbush blueberries, and this industry of managing and harvesting thousands of acres of wild plants is truly a remarkable feat. This type of farming is known as sustainable agriculture and with the help of the state University it will continue to grow and prosper each year.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p>Your e-mail []</p> <p>Your name []</p> <p>Their e-mail []</p> <p>Their name []</p>
<p>The blueberry is a plant native to North America and was eaten by Native Americans for hundreds of years for the berries they produced. It was used in pies, jams, and dried fruit during the winter months and as a dye for their clothing. The wild blueberries on today's farms in Maine have much the same taste as the plants of their ancestors so many years ago. The wild Maine blueberry is the smaller type of berry and often considered a gourmet blueberry. If you are looking to purchase some of these plants, ask for low bush blueberries, "Vaccinium angustifolium." They can be found at specialty berry plant producers rather than the retail nursery.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p style="text-align: center;">[Send >>]</p>
<p>The highbush blueberry is also a native plant of North America and was also used by the Native American as a fresh food and dried for the winter use. Neither of these types of blueberries was grown under cultivation until the mid-1920, as they were widely available and easy to find and pick in the wild. The highbush blueberry got its start in New Jersey where it is still a major farming crop today! This crop quickly spread all over the Mid-Atlantic states and then to Michigan in the 1930, where it found the perfect soil and climate to grow. Today Michigan is the leading area for highbush blueberry production in the world. During the 1940 the highbush blueberries moved to the Pacific Northwest but the soil had to be conditioned, as</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%;"></div>	<p>Where can I find Paul on Sunday mornings?</p> <p>Click here to find Paul Parent</p>

this plant loves acidic soil and the soil there was alkaline. The cost was worth the effort taken by the farmers and it grew to become a major fresh-pick crop for the local market rather than for processing like the Mid-Atlantic states and Michigan.

Now...how about you growing blueberries in your garden and what do you need to know about this plant? The first thing you need to know is that your soil **MUST** be acidic, with a pH of 4.5 to 5.0, for the best growth and production. Next your soil needs to be kept uniformly moist, **not wet**, and (really important) your soil must be nutrient poor! Your soil must be conditioned with compost, peat moss, or seaweed to help get plant off to a good start. Organic matter is important because it releases nutrients slowly to the plant but not enough to make it grow quickly.

Blueberries have something special that lives on the roots of the plant, called Mycorrhizae fungus. This fungus is able to take unavailable fertilizer from the soil and change it to available food for the blueberry plant. In return the blueberry plant provides carbohydrates for the fungus to grow. This unique behavior with the root and the fungus is called "mycorrhiza." In Latin myco means fungus and rhiza means roots. So the fungus is able to take nitrogen fertilizer from the organic matter you add to the soil and make it available to the plant. In return for the nitrogen, the blueberry plant makes sugar for the fungus through the photosynthesis process in the foliage and passes it on to the fungus.

If you listen to the radio program regularly you have heard me talk about mycorrhizae fungus for your garden known as "Plant Thrive" at www.alphabiosystems.com, and available at most garden centers. This is the new technology that has been added to fertilizer to help plants grow stronger with less fertilizer, and it's all natural and organic. It is now available in some potting soils and some granular fertilizer also.

The roots of the blueberries grow shallow and are fibrous. Their main job is to collect water and nutrition in the soil; if roots are damaged by cultivation around the plant your plants will suffer and will not thrive and produce fruit. One important thing for you to do is cover the garden soil with a 3 inch layer of compost, saw dust, seaweed, pine needles or straw to help control weeds around the plant and to hold the moisture in the soil during periods of hot weather. NEVER cultivate around the plants, and always use organic matter.

The foliage opens first in May and is followed with the flower buds a week or two later, depending on the weather. By June the plant is in full growth and fruit production; this is called a flush of growth. Now, blueberries have a second flush of growth in August to September; during this time the plant is making the new leaf and flower buds for next spring. The leaf buds are on the lower part of the new growth while the flower buds, larger and fatter looking, are found on the top of the new growth. So, you can tell what your plant is going to do for next year in the fall this year. The genetics of the variety you selected will determine the size of the berries on the plant, along with moisture and nutrition available to the plant in August and September.

Now that you know this, keep the garden watered regularly--but not wet, as too much water can make large fruit with a bland taste. Fertilize with a fertilizer such as Holly-Tone with Bio-Tone microbes or Dr. Earth fertilizer for Acid loving Plants with Pro-Biotic. The use of organic fertilizers is the secret, as they feed the plant slowly and contain beneficial microbes; apply them in the spring as the plant begin to grow and again in early August. Stay away from chemical fertilizers like 10-10-10 or 5-10-5 as they have not beneficial microbes and feed the plant quickly, forcing a lot of foliage to develop on the plant--but little fruit.

Here are the best varieties for your garden if you live in a cold climate and have snow during the winter months.

Very early varieties:

- 'Weymouth,' very hardy and medium producer.
- 'Earliblue,' hardy and medium producer.
- 'Bluetta,' hardy and medium producer.
- 'Duke,' very hardy and high producer.

Early varieties:

- 'Blueray,' very hardy, high producer.
- 'Bluetta,' hardy and medium producer.
- 'Collins,' very hardy and medium producer.
- 'Patriot,' very hardy and medium producer.

Midseason varieties:

- 'Bluecrop,' very hardy, high producer.
- 'Berkeley,' hardy and medium producer.
- 'Brigitta,' hardy and high producer.
- 'Sierra,' very hardy and high producer.

Late season:

- 'Bluegold,' very hardy and high producer.
- 'Corville,' hardy and medium producer.
- 'Elliot,' very hardy and very high producer.
- 'Jersey,' very hardy and high producer.

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Is there a shrub that will grow anywhere? How about a sunny or shady location, along the side of the road, or where salt is in the soil because of the snowplow or how about under large trees to create a privacy hedge? There is one plant than can do all this and more: the shrub called the Bridal Wreath Spirea. This shrub is one of the most popular plants in the American garden today. Because the plant can tolerate very cold weather with temperatures to minus 30 below Zero, it is grown as far north as Canada. During the month of May, there is no plant that outshines the Bridal Wreath's show of color. Plan your wedding around the flowering time for the perfect outside garden wedding complete with white flowers for the occasion.

Most shrubs and trees go through periods of not flowering because of weather, soil fertility, moisture, light, care, or all of the above, but the Bridal Wreath just keeps on flowering every May like clock-work, no matter what you do to the plant. The Bridal Wreath grows like a fountain of branches filled with white flower clusters in the shape of a small flower bouquet. The foliage is about 1 inch long, looks like a small-elongated maple leaf, blue green in color. The flowers develop after the plant opens all the leaves after a long winter rest. The flowers are on short 1-inch stems above all the leaves. The flower bouquet is made up of 15 to 25 individual 4-petal white single-petal flowers in the shape of a ball or a handheld bouquet. The center of the flower is yellow but not noticeable until you look at the flower closely. The flowers are very durable and will stand up to the wind in your yard, unlike most other plants. The flowers will last on the plant 3 weeks or more, depending on the weather (hot weather shortens the blooming time).

Bridal Wreath will grow 6 to 8 feet tall and 10 to 12 feet wide, sometimes more. If the plant is getting out of control, wait to cut it back until it has finished flowering in early June. Please do not cut it back into the shape of a ball or you will lose the beautiful shape of weeping branches. Rounded shape plants belong at Disney World, not your yard. Your yard is as real as Disney's make believe! Cut each branch back as much as 50% with hand pruners--not hedge shears--to keep the plant looking natural. If pruned after flowering, the plant should make a foot or more of new growth and flowers for next year's spring flower show.

Bridal Wreath will grow very well in a shady location, even under trees or in the back of a tall building. When you plant, be sure to add compost or animal manure to the soil when conditioning. If the soil is dry or sandy, add a couple of tablespoons of Soil Moist to help keep the roots moist so they can develop properly and quickly. Once the plant is well established and growing on its own in the yard, it will tolerate dry soils. If planted in the sun give it extra room to grow. When using it in hedges, be sure to space the plants six feet apart and be sure to stay back from sidewalks or it will quickly block the walkway and require frequent pruning. Fertilize in the spring with Plant-Tone or Dr. Earth Shrub fertilizer. Water 2 times a week for the first couple of months and then weekly until the fall season arrives.

If you like the Bridal Wreath 'Vanhouttei' and want more, look for the Spirea prunifolia, as it is a double-flowering white variety. It is not as large-growing, but by itself in a garden, it is striking. Also look at the dwarf variety called 'Snow Mound,' growing only 3 to 5 feet tall and perfect for a small garden bed. Enjoy.

A little over 10 years ago, I went to Plymouth Plantation, in Plymouth, Massachusetts, with friends and family to revisit this unique living museum. I have been there before many times and every time I go, I always learn something new about our American heritage. This year I noticed several containers with fig trees growing in them--and, to my surprise, they had fruit on them. Our guide told us that many homes on Cape Cod grew figs in their gardens and they were able to survive unprotected during the winter months.

He lived in Boston, in the North End, and he was able to grow them in his garden as long as he built a ring of straw bales around them during the winter months for added protection. There were several figs that were ripe on the plant and he picked two for us to taste and I was hooked! I expected "Fig Newtons," but got something much better tasting, and then I had to add figs to my garden--but how? Let me tell you how to grow figs no matter where you live, and you too will be able to enjoy their wonderful flavor this summer.

Figs are one of the oldest cultivated plants of all, dating back more than 11,000 years. The Ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans grew figs for their flavor (and they were thought to be an aphrodisiac). If you have seen any classical sculptures, you might have noticed that the leaf of the fig was often used to cover parts of the body to preserve a little modesty.

Figs are a warm climate plant but no matter where you live, they can be grown--and you do not need to have a greenhouse. Cape Cod and the Islands are the one exception where figs will survive when planted directly into the garden without winter protection in the northern part of the country. If you live from Boston south to Washington D C they can be planted outside if you follow the following steps for winter protection. Begin by planting in a sunny, warm, and sheltered location that is protected from strong winds, like up against the house, or a solid fence that faces south to south west for late in the day sunshine.

Your soil must be well drained or the roots will rot in wet soils--so keep plants away from downspouts from your gutters and planting beds that have irrigation. Your soil should be on the alkaline side, so adding lime or wood ash every year will help with fruit production. Start with a soil that is conditioned with compost to help hold moisture during the hot days of summer but do not add animal manure as plants do better when the soil is not too rich. A rich soil or one that is fertilized often will encourage the plant to grow quickly, making more foliage and less fruit on the plant.

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The plant will grow all by itself without much care by you, but there is one thing you must do to encourage fruiting on the plant and that is to restrict the roots from getting too large. If you're planting in your garden begin by digging a square hole two feet wide and just as deep. Place 2' by 2' concrete patio blocks on each side of the hole, so the hole is lined with concrete to keep the roots confined to this area only. Once the sides are in place, dig the hole 6 inches deeper and fill to the bottom of the hole with 6 inches of gravel or broken concrete pieces for drainage and again to restrict root growth out of the box. This will keep the plant from getting too large; the plant will be easier to manage, and it will encourage fruit production rather than foliage.

Now fill your hole with your conditioned soil and set the plant in the middle of the planter you created but at the same level it was in the container it came in originally. Water well after planting and if you can use Plant Thrive Fertilizer with Mycorrhizae to help stimulate root development, the plant will be on its way to producing many figs even the first year you plant. Water as needed the first year to insure that the roots develop in their new home properly and then add 2 to 3 inches of bark mulch or straw to keep weeds out and moisture in during the heat of summer. The only feeding this plant will need is in the late spring when the foliage develops on the plant. Use plant-Tone or Dr. Earth organic shrub food with Pro-biotic and that's it for the year.

Winter protection will be necessary to protect this plant and it is easy to do. Make a square cylinder with bales of straw around the plant and stack them on top of each other until you cover the plant fully. This is done after the frost knocks off all the foliage from the plant in October. Now fill the cylinder with pine needles or leaves to the top of the bales of straw and cover the top of the straw cylinder with a sheet of plastic and tie in place for the winter. In late March remove the plastic covering and in mid-April remove the rest of the protection from around the plant. You can use hay bales in place of straw but the straw is weed-free and can be used as mulch in the vegetable garden to prevent weeds and hold moisture in the soil during the summer. In the fall till the straw into the soil and it will become wonderful organic matter during the winter months.

If you live north of Boston, upstate New York or where the winters get real cold, it is best to grow figs in containers as I do. My plant is 5 years old now and I grow it in a 24 inch plastic pot on my front patio for the all-day sunshine it receives. Figs in a pot will require weekly watering--but I fertilize it only once yearly, like the garden grown type. The foliage is beautiful to look at and fruit forms early on the plant. My fig has 3 inches of new growth now and small fruits are already beginning to form on the plant. This fruit will be ready by August to harvest and eat. My plant is 6 feet tall and makes a wonderful decorative plant for a patio or deck. If you have fruit that is late to ripen bring the plant in your garage at night when a frost is predicted to give the plant additional time to ripen, and back outside during the day if the temperatures are above freezing.

Once the fruit is off the plant let the cold weather knock off the foliage and allow the plant to go into dormancy for the winter. By mid to late October, depending on the weather, I bring in the fig plant into the garage for the winter months and water well. Before I built the garage I put the plant in the basement--or you could lay it down in a crawl space for the winter and leave it alone until April first. April first, bring it upstairs from the basement or crawl space into the light and water well with an application of Plant Thrive fertilizer to wake the roots and get the plant active again. If it's in the garage--water, feed and place the plant near a window but the rest of the year, tuck the plant in the back of the garage away from everything and sheltered from the cold. I stick my fig in the back corner of the garage and wrap the plant with burlap for extra protection. My garage is insulated, so it does stay warm during the winter months; if your garage is not insulated use your basement or crawlspace.

I only prune the plant to control the size and shape, in the early spring before the new growth begins and that's it. Insects and disease have not been a problem and there is no spraying of the plant like other fruit trees in the yard during the year. Figs are easy to grow, trouble free and they taste great! The best variety for a cold climate is the 'Brown Turkey' fig. Enjoy!

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A Customized Gardening Tour of England and the 2012 Chelsea Flower Show

Paul Parent hosts a tour that includes the Wisley Gardens, the Chelsea Flower Show, Tower of London, Roman Baths & Pump Room, Riverford Organic Farm, Garden House, Rosemoor Gardens, Lost Gardens of Heligan, Village of Mevagissey, Stonehenge, the Wilton House Garden Centre and more.

[Click here for details.](#)



This Week's Question

Which of these IS a plant?

- A. Algae
- B. Moss
- C. Mushroom
- D. Seaweed
- E. None of the above

This Week's Prize:

Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus
All Natural Plant Food Enhanced with Bacteria and Mycorrhizae

- Microbe-enhanced all natural plant food
- Includes both endo and ecto mycorrhizae
- Grows larger root mass to help plants establish fast
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For more information, [see the Espoma website.](#)

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Last Week's Question:

What is the meaning of the name "hydrangea"?

Last Week's Winner:

Cindy Taplin

Last Week's Answer:

Water vessel or water jar

Last Week's Prize:

Espoma Bio-tone® Starter Plus

One winner per question - we choose winners from the list of those who answer correctly. Winners must be newsletter subscribers. We'll ship you your prize, so be sure to put your address in the form in case you win!

Are you looking for a great gift for a gardener (or yourself)? This garden journal helps make planning and organizing easy. This journal, *autographed personally by Paul*, makes a perfect gift for gardeners. The cover holds a 5x7 or 4x6 photo and a heavy-duty D-ring binder.

Also included:

- 8 tabbed sections
- 5 garden details sections with pockets for seeds, tags...
- Weather records page
- 6 three year journal pages
- Insect & diseases page - 3 project pages
- 3 annual checklist pages
- Plant wish list page
- 2 large pocket pages
- Sheet of garden labels
- 5 garden detail sheets
- 5 graph paper pages for layouts
- 5 photo pages, each holding four 4x6 photos in landscape or portrait format

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Featured Recipe: Fried Green Tomatoes

A great southern dish for those impatient for the first tomato of the season. It's also useful at season's end when frost is approaching and you still have unripened tomatoes.

What You'll Need:

- 3 to 4 unripened tomatoes, cut into approximately ¼ inch slices
- Vegetable oil, butter, or bacon grease for frying
- 1 cup flour or fine-ground cornmeal [1]
- Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

- Heat enough oil to cover the bottom of a large skillet over medium-high heat.
- Dredge the tomato slices in the flour to coat both sides; shake off excess.
- Place in hot pan and brown quickly until golden (tomatoes should be slightly softened but not mushy).
- Adjust heat as needed. Add more oil as needed between batches.
- Place briefly on paper towels to remove excess oil, then on a large platter in a single layer.
- Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

[1] You can also use coarse-ground cornmeal or breadcrumbs; if you do, you'll need to first dip the tomato slices into beaten egg.

Yield: 4-6 servings



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