

*November 2010*

## *Sacramento Garden Notes*

*Written and Published by Robert B. Hamm*

*1689 Vallarta Circle, Sacramento CA 95834*

*(916) 943-6183 Visitors by Appt. Only*

*[gardennotes@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gardennotes@sbcglobal.net) (free for now)*

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### **Garden Notes:**

November is definitely fall here in the valley, and while many think the gardening season is over, they are wrong. November is a month for planting spring flowering bulbs like daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, crocus, and others, along with planting trees, shrubs and hardy perennials.

Fall is also a month we deal with trees dropping leaves, and these are a good source of nutrients for the garden, so you can either put them in your compost pile, or use them directly to mulch plants. If using to directly mulch the garden, either go for the smaller leaves or run the lawn mower over big leaves like sycamore to break them up so they don't "cake" down on your plants.

For those with peach trees, right after leaf drop is the time to spray the trees to prevent peach leaf curl. Check with your local nursery for the appropriate spray mix.

Remember to cut back your sprinkler timers to water less, since the shorter days and cooler temperatures mean the yard needs less water. Too much water can cause severe disease problems in your lawn and landscaping. The city of Sacramento requires we cut back to once a week at the end of daylight savings time (November 7<sup>th</sup>).

As for containers, while they need less water, they do dry out faster than ground plantings, so watch them. Containers under porches, overhangs etc are easy to forget during the rainy season and let dry out. Don't forget that

plants under covers don't get rained on, so need occasional watering all winter, regardless of how wet or dry a year we have.

If you have tender plants around, make sure you have materials to protect them from frost handy, since the last few years we have had killing frosts as early as the first half of November.

Later in the month begins the holiday season, and a reminder to all that poinsettias, that mainstay of the holidays are TOXIC to both children and pets, so keep them out of reach so they aren't eaten.



Several of the large flowered Dahlias are still in bloom in the yard and are great late season color. I grow most of them in containers so that they don't rot out in my we clay in the winter. It also helps to get them sprouted earlier in the season, since the clay is slow to warm.

If your just getting around to buying spring blooming bulbs to plant, make sure they are still plump, now hard and dry, or soft and mushy. The exception to this rule are Rununculus and Anemone, both of which look like dried up nothings when dormant but absorb water and start growing as soon as planted.

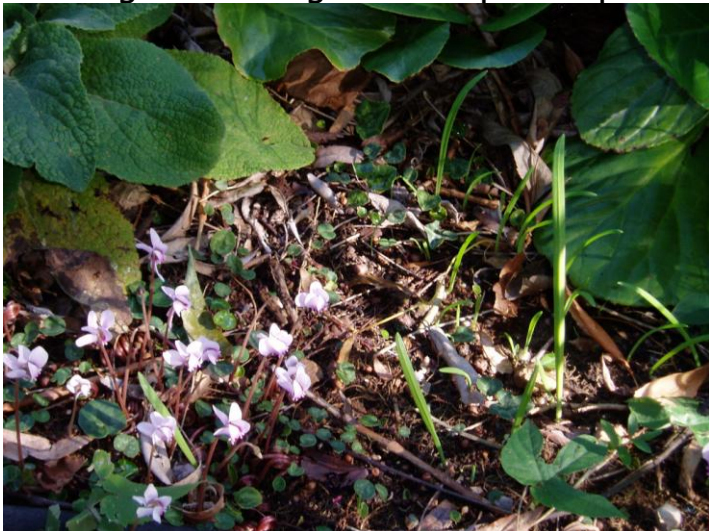


Cyclamen are often used as winter bedding plants and discarded in spring, but if planted in filtered shade and left alone, they will not only return, but will multiply.

They are drought tolerant mediteranian plants and can be used under trees or areas that don't get a lot of summer water. The species forms like *C. hereracea* are totally winter hardy, the larger flowered florist types are frost sensitive.

I've found the newer smaller hybrids are hardier than the larger flowered forms, probably because the hardy species were used to get the smaller size.

The species *C. hereafolium* is shown below, note the numerous small leaved seedlings on the right of the parent plant.



These two low growing geraniums (*Karmina* above and *Biokova* below) are more or less evergreen in our climate, growing 3 or 4 inches tall in sun and blooming early, when many other botanical geraniums are just breaking ground in spring. They make a good smaller area groundcover, and can be planted over daffodils, Dutch Iris, etc to cover the bare spot when the bulbs die back.



The Strybling Arboretum and Botanic Gardens in Golden Gate Park will have its' end of season plant sale from 10 am to 1 pm on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup>.

If your club has an event you want in Garden Notes, please get it to me by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month before the event!

## Why is variety important??

I often have people ask me about a plant they are looking for in the form of “I’m looking for \*\*\*\*\*” and then get aggravated when I ask “which one?” not realizing the plant comes in a number of forms with different heights, flower colors, flower forms etc...

These different forms may all be the same species, but different varieties. They can vary in having different growth patterns, ultimate heights, flower color, when they bloom or even in how well they grow under a particular set of conditions. A good example is Heuchera or “Coral Bells” as it used to be called when the only common one was the old spring bloomer with pink or red flowers and green foliage that grew 3 to 4” tall.

Nowadays you can get Heucheras that barely reach 2 inches to those that reach 16, with leaves under 2 inches to those up to 6”, and in foliage colors that span a rainbow of colors. Some have noticeably showy blooms, others rarely show a bloom, and bloom time is spread from just spring bloomers to those that bloom in spring, in fall, and some in between.

Another good example is the common Marigold used as a summer bedding plant. Without knowing what variety you’re getting, you could have plants that range from 6 to 8 inches, or as tall as 3 ft or more.

I’m sure many of you have bought tomatoes at a store and found out later, they weren’t what you wanted turning out as cherry rather than slicers, yellow rather than red, etc.

The same happens with ornamentals if you aren’t careful about variety when buying them.

I’ve seen people (even landscapers) goof by just grabbing a bunch of gallons of say agapanthus or azaleas and later having a mishmash of not just flower color but size. When small a large grower can’t always be distinguished from a dwarf.

Imagine planting a tree that is supposed to be for shade, and turns out to be a compact dwarf! By the time you realize the mistake you may have wasted several YEARS.

Knowing what variety you want can be just as important as knowing the plant itself. So, next time that you are asked “Which One?”, or something similar, remember that the person is just trying to help you get the variety that is best for you and your conditions.



Above is one of the newer double flowered Amaryllis (Hippeastrum). These bulbs are often given as Holiday Gifts and people ask how to get them to rebloom.

First, the ones you get for blooming at the holidays are specially treated( handled) by the growers, so forget Holiday bloom.

However, they can be kept and gotten to bloom again next year by following the directions below, this is what I do:

- 1) When done blooming, put in the sunniest window you have, keep watered and fed as any houseplant.
- 2) When the weather warms in spring, place outside in part shade so the leaves don’t burn. Keep fed and after a couple of weeks move to more sun.
- 3) In late summer/ fall, withhold water and let the leaves dry up (note, they don’t always do so, some newer hybrids are evergreen)
- 4) Bring inside before frost and keep on the dry side till buds show.
- 5) Resume watering and repeat above.
- 6) They can be planted in the ground as long as the bulbs do not freeze.

## Stress relief for nature lovers – a personal opinion.

With all the stress many of us are under with the financial mess that has resulted from the economic mess that banks and the republicans under bush got us into, a few suggestions for moderate to low cost stress relief :

It's a great time to take a car ride towards the mountains and enjoy the fall color and scenery.. even an overnight to Yosemite or one of the coastal state parks can give you a wonderful escape from the daily stress.

A trip up the coast from San Francisco to Ft Bragg, stopping at beaches to walk the shore, and the huge number of state parks is a great getaway that can be done on the cheap or high end, depending on what you want .

Remember California has a world of parks, great scenery and lots to do to escape your problems if you only take the time to look around at what is available. The CA state parks website can give you some ideas..

A day in San Francisco looking around, maybe visiting Strybling Arboretum and Golden Gate Park is a nice change also. Remember that a day or two away can be MUCH cheaper than weekly counseling sessions.. think of it as therapy for your mental health!!



One of our coasts many state park beaches.

## Fall & Winter Planting:

When talking of HARDY plants, be they perennials, shrubs or trees, most of our area except for higher elevations can plant whenever the ground is not frozen.

For this reason, there isn't much of a break between Fall Planting and Spring Planting, except for people getting busy during the Holiday Season.

Some hardy plants may be dormant, but can be planted all winter. Bareroot material starts coming into the nurseries right after the Holidays.

Admittedly, it becomes less pleasant to work outdoors as our temperatures drop and the rainy season makes yards wet, but if you know you'll be planting an area, covering it with straw or mulch will help prevent it being pure mud unless we get above normal precipitation.

**Breaking Barriers needs help with their holiday meals program, both donations and people to deliver food boxes to clients. Contact them at (916) 447-2437**



Navaho River Redwoods State Park takes you through redwood groves on SR128 not far off US 1 and the coast. This 11 mile tunnel through redwoods is an inspiring site, and there are numerous dirt pulloffs if you want to take a stroll or pictures.



Muscari armenicum is an easy to grow, spring blooming small bulb. It puts up its foliage in fall, stays green all winter and blooms with grape scented flowers in spring.

It likes sun or part shade, naturalizes fairly easily, can be used around winter dormant perennials to fill in, in a spot in the front of the border, or in containers where the blooms can be easily reached to smell ( this bulbs only gets about 6 inches tall). It goes dormant for the summer.

For your info, other bulbs that put up foliage in the fall include Paper white Narcissus, Watsonia, some Crocosmia, Chasmanthe, Dutch Iris, Ipheon, Scilla peruviana, Cyclamen, and many South African natives – so no, your plants are not behaving abnormally.

### **Odds & Ends:**

A large pot of Daffodils or Tulips planted now can make quite a show come spring, and it does NOT have to look empty all winter!

Your can plant low growing evergreen plants, or even Violas or Pansies for winter color and the bulbs will come up through them for double effect!

In the garden, this same technique can be used to provide additional color, and especially daffodils and taller bulbs make a great show coming up through groundcovers, or low

creepers, plus you don't have a bare spot when the bulbs die back in summer!

For those of you who like Abutilon (Flowering Maple, though its not a Maple, it is a Mallow) but think the smaller flowered varieties flop too much, a word of advice: grow them tree form!

Take and stake one branch upright and cut off all the others. Then when the branch is the height you want the flowers, pinch the tip to encourage branching, while taking off any branches the come out too low.

Pinch tips occasionall to keep bushy. The results is a neat flowering abutilon tree with blossoms at eye level without it flopping everywhere.

### **Enjoy Garden Notes Online?**

If you do, I would ask you to send a donation (even a small one helps) to help cover the costs of computer upgrades, web access etc.) Any extra received will go to the Adopt A Child Holiday Program of Sunburst Projects.

Send to:

Robert Hamm  
1689 Vallarta Circle  
Sacramento CA 95834.

Thank you!

Native succulents growing in cleft in rock face.

