

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

February, 2007

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Dave Kaplan receives a New Member Survival Kit from Gayler Boettcher

Visitors from the North...

At the next Chapter meeting **Sunday, March 11th** we will have visitors from the north to star in our program! Of course I am talking about Don Mixon and Kathy Grandoff and in the world of hibiscus, they are indeed are "Stars"! Of course they gain that stature as the proprietors of the Unbelievable Hibiscus Nursery in Wesley Chapel. Don makes no secret of the fact that the nursery is evidence of a hobby gone completely out of hand. Our Chapter couldn't be happier about that since we have enjoyed the fruits of that terrible wrong turn of events in the form of the beautiful hibiscus we have had the pleasure of selling at our last several Shows.

Don and Kathy will be visiting with us about how to go about preparing blooms for a show and, time permitting, they may discuss the art of grafting. Whatever the subject, they are a wealth of knowledge and are willing to share it with any interested listener. This will be a meeting you will not want to miss since in addition to Don and Kathy's presentation we will also be signing-up for our annual picnic. This year's picnic will be on Sunday, April 1st at the Palma Sola Botanical Park.

Everything's expensive - copies too...

It certainly seems that everything is expensive. At least it seems that way to those who view the present with the perspective of "what used to be". Who would have thought that copies would cost a nickel* – or more? The realization that a two sided 8 ½" x 11" copy costs a dime – and just 100 of those would cost ten bucks (!) – Certainly wakes a person up to the reality of today's costs.

It was that reality that brought the Chapter Board to a discussion of the "printed" items we that we have historically handed out at our Show and other events where the chapter has had booths. The result was that we will continue to only have fliers about our Show on quarter sheets of

paper (we think that was the only size we had last year) and an effort will be made to revise all our hand-outs so they would still be meaningful, but would only utilize half sheets – which would decrease our costs to a nickel!

And so why do we bring up such a dreary subject?

Simple. Please let any Board member know if you have access to a copier at your bank, church or whatever and could produce our fliers/hand-outs for the cost of the paper or some such.

Hibiscus Gardening in March

It seems like March is always a windy month – and it is certainly dry, with mild temperatures. After all, the "Boys of Spring" are here with all that accompanies

*The Editor easily recalls the early sixties, when the only copier in an office of several hundred people was one Photostat machine that made a white on black copy in eight minutes and, logically, a black on white copy in sixteen minutes! And the cost? The exact figure is hazy, but something over 20 cents each sounds right.

them – the call of “Cold Beer”, the smell of hot dogs, and the sound of ball against bat. Can anything be better? Baseball fan or not, there is nothing like an afternoon spent at McKechnie Field or Ed Smith Stadium during the Spring Training Season. But meanwhile, back in the garden things are waking up and there is work to be done somehow between the games.

The main hibiscus gardening issues to consider in early March concerns pruning, repotting, and potting up. Of course the easiest decision is to do none of the above, but most gardeners will end up doing one or more of those items to one degree or another.

The February Chapter meeting was attended by our ace reporter and he reports that our Editor did not totally embarrass the PETAL POWER staff during his discussion of “Pruning and Repotting” and that he pretty well covered the subject. Therefore, the 30 some that attended the meeting don’t need a rehash of the subject, but for those who didn’t attend (shame shame) we will provide a not-so-brief recap.

As one confronts the subject of pruning, the first issue to consider is whether any needs to be done at all. In broad terms, if we are talking about potted plants it is very likely they will need to be pruned annually (and now is the best time) because they will otherwise be a candidate for tipping over – assuming a reasonable sized pot. (A twenty gallon pot with a hibiscus in it would rarely tip over.) However, if we are contemplating the pruning of an in-ground plant it is likely none will be required – assuming it is not crowding its neighbors and it displays vigorous growth with a blooming habit appropriate for the variety. While pruning is used to correct undesirable growth patterns, its main benefit is in reestablishing vigorous growth and in-ground hibiscus can thrive for years without pruning.

In addition to answering the whether or not to prune question, the hibiscus gardener must also determine when to prune. Certainly pruning should wait until the danger of frost/freeze ceases and even those who live where frost is never/hardly-ever a problem should attempt to time their pruning to not too long before the spring growth spurt occurs. Around here, in most years, that seems to be in March sometime.

As you prune, use scissor-type shears to clean out the middle of the plant along with crossing branches. Cut back freeze damaged branches until good wood is reached. Your final cut on a branch should be at a slight angle with an outward pointing eye or bud on the high

side of the cut. This is the preferred pruning cut on many plants. (On weeping or drooping varieties, make the final cuts to an inside or top bud to encourage more vertical branching.)

And how much should an in-ground plant be pruned? As we said earlier, in-ground plants may not need pruning for many years, but when they exhibit the undesirable qualities that might lead to pruning, removal of a third of the top growth might be adequate with the taking off of one half being pretty unusual. However, hibiscus that haven’t been pruned for many years and just aren’t growing anymore may benefit by cutting them back to two or three feet above the ground. If a plant is just taking up space, drastic measures are worth a try and those measures will most likely be successful in producing a vigorous plant again.

Of course if you have pruned garden varieties (plants that grow off their own root – are not grafted) root all the cuttings if you want the plants – some grafted plants may root so give them a try if you feel lucky, or if you have some root stock try your hand at grafting. You will want to make sure you root cuttings from Albo or Pride of Hankins since those varieties accept grafts the best. See the Hibiscus Handbook for information about rooting and grafting.

And how much should a potted plant be pruned? If a 3 gallon pot is being used, the answer is “Pretty darn much”. Timid pruning of a three gallon plant that will receive adequate care during the summer, including fertilizer, will result in a plant that will need external support (what’s that?) or by fall they will spend a good amount of time tipped over on the ground.

Next, when should a potted plant be repotted or potted-up? One sign that probably something should be done is when roots are coming out of the pot’s drain holes. A sure call for repotting or potting-up is when a plant requires watering more than once a day, for example, if the leaves on a plant continue to droop after one watering and only start perking up after a second (or a third) watering. Of course that thirst isn’t a sign of diabetes as it might be for the gardener, but it is a sign the plant is root bound, i.e., the pot is full of roots – so many it can’t supply water to the plant. Repotting or potting-up is the answer.

Simply put, “repotting” means that the roots are pruned and the plant, along with new potting soil, is returned to the same size pot. The roots are pruned with a knife or whatever you have handy, making sure to remove the

swirl of roots that had been packing the bottom of the pot.

Again, simply put, “potting-up” means putting the plant in a larger pot, making sure to disturb the roots before doing so. An easy way to do that is to use a utility knife with the blade extended a quarter to a half inch to make vertical cuts several times around the root ball and a couple more cuts across the bottom. Subsequently, the plant is placed in a larger pot with new potting soil.

Doing pruning before doing either of the potting exercises makes life somewhat easier. Plants being potted up may not require as much pruning since they won't tip over as easily in their new home, but since you will be disturbing their roots some pruning should take place. The concept is that any time you prune or otherwise disturb the roots, the limb/leaf structure above the ground should be treated equally. When in doubt, prune the top of the plant more than you think is required – a plant with insufficient roots to support its foliage is in some kind of trouble.

After either repotting or potting up, the plants should be watered well and, we recommend, mulched with something like (new) pine bark chips. Plants that have been pruned will require very little water for some time – the actual length of time will depend on how much pruning took place.

The opinions vary widely as to when pruned plants should be fertilized, but it seems to range from at the time the plants are pruned to when two or three true leaves are formed - with a time or two being mentioned in between. We have tried three of the times suggested and have noticed no difference. We therefore wouldn't be too concerned about the “when”, but would be more concerned that indeed fertilization takes place.

March is an active month for gardeners and more topics could be discussed, but we have used more space than we should have so until next month...

We welcome a new member

Ms. Jennifer Murdoch
212 23rd St. W.
Bradenton, FL 34205
795-4653

Please add Jennifer to your directory.

Golby-Reasoner Chapter, AHS Chapter Meeting Minutes February 11, 2007

President Boettcher called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. in the Synovus Bank meeting room, and welcomed several guests and visitors. He gave New Member Survival kits to Dave Kaplan and Jennifer Murdock.

A motion was made to accept the January 14, 2007 minutes as published in Petal Power. It was seconded and approved.

Treasurer Adams' report for the month of January showed an initial balance of \$3,900.60, income of \$125.70, expenses of \$83.04, and ending balance of \$3943.26. The report was accepted.

Rae Flanders discussed the upcoming Chapter meetings: March will be put on by Mixons, the annual picnic will be held on April 1, the May meeting will deal with show planning, and the June meeting will be the annual restaurant meeting.

President Boettcher then covered these items:

- The nominating committee headed by Carl Kramer is preparing a slate of officers and Board members for election at the May meeting.
- The June Restaurant Meeting will be held at Peridia Country Club.

There was no new business.

Rae Flanders introduced President Boettcher who gave a talk and demonstration dealing with “Pruning and Repotting”.

The meeting adjourned at 2:13 p.m., and Belle Hilt and Sandy Brown provided refreshments.

Gene Haugh, Secretary

Coming Event

March 11, 1:00 p.m. Chapter Meeting, Synovus Bank, Manatee & 26th St. W.: Don Mixon and Kathy Grandoff, Unbelievable Hibiscus Nursery, “Bloom Preparation for Shows”.

CLASSYFIDES-----

Cold Porcelain Creations! Lifelike Hibiscus and other flowers, singles/bouquets. Yvonne Santiago:
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or www.coldporcelaincreations.com