

It's "Earth Pots" in August...

Earth Pots will be the topic of the program at the Chapter meeting on August 12th. Bringing the world of Earth Pots to life will be Richard Evanson, who may well be the inventor. The similarity of the name, "Earth Pot" to another type planter, developed locally, leads us to think that since a number of our members are now in condos or something similar – a self watering/fertilizing pot may be of interest to that group, as well as others. It is sure to be another informative program so we hope to see you there. That's Sunday, August 12th at 1:00 p.m. at Synovus Bank, Manatee at 26th Street West.

Pink Hibiscus Mealybug (PHM)

The PHM was mentioned in the AHS presentation about "Bugs" shown in the July Chapter meeting by our own show-biz personalities, the Dave and Rae Flanders. That mention led to a general discussion of the subject and then the Taaffes told about the destruction the PHM did in their neighborhood. The PHMs are indeed out and about and everyone needs to be on the lookout for them.

If you think the PHMs have arrived in your garden, carefully cut off the branch that's contaminated, place it carefully in a plastic bag, and take it to the extension service office in Palmetto. They will determine if the PHM is really what you have and if so arrange to have the gnat-sized wasps that feast on the PHM released in your yard/neighborhood. Or ... you can call 1-888-397-1517 which is the Florida Department of Agriculture hot line for calls about pests, including the PHM, and see what directions they are giving at the time of your call.

It's almost too late...

It is indeed almost too late – at least it may seem too late to record what seems to be the consensus about the Peridia Country Club as a great place to have a restaurant based meeting, - at least when the buffet is available. We have heard nothing but

good things about the June Chapter luncheon held at Peridia from those that attended. Due to a lack of space in the June issue of PETAL POWER we didn't recognize Dottie Erickson's role in choosing Peridia and making the necessary arrangements for the luncheon and for that we certainly should extend many words of appreciation. In addition, Dottie prepared table center pieces and a door hanging that became door prizes for several lucky attendees. Those were the (not so) little touches that made the very nice lunch/brunch, particularly special. Thanks, Dottie!

Circulation Manager Beege Hunter "Retires"

Beege Hunter has been the PETAL POWER Circulation Manager for several years, serving with distinction in a job that is often overlooked when kudos are being handed out to Chapter members performing other duties important to the Chapter. And so, although belatedly, we want to publicly thank Beege for the many hours she has spent in having copies of PP produced, folding them, applying address labels and postage, and finally, mailing them. Your endeavors have been greatly appreciated!

Betty Seipel has stepped forward and will be the new Circulation Manager, effective with this issue. We look forward to having Betty as a part of the PP team and can only hope that we will thank her for her efforts - before she retires. In fact, to make sure that happens we will do it now, "Thank you Betty, for the efforts you will be making in the circulation of future issues of PETAL POWER!"

Anyone for a frost blanket?

We just came upon the fact that Wholesale Landscape Supply carry plastic frost blankets in a number of sizes. As one thinks about it, particularly in July, it is pretty expensive stuff. However, in January with a frost in the forecast it may not sound

so dear. And of course, it may be available for less on the Internet. Perhaps we will revisit the subject in the fall. But then with global warming we probably will never have another frost. However, it is perhaps more likely that our great-great-grandchildren will be collecting door to door for money to buy blankets for the poor in the Sahara ...

Hibiscus Gardening in August

June marks the beginning of the rainy season, but as we write this in mid-July there has been very little rain. However, that can change very quickly and by the time we enter August we could be concerned about having too much rain – from a gardening standpoint at least. (We will consider things gardeners can do to counteract that next month.) Should the drought continue, gardeners will have to act as poor substitutes for Mother Nature and supply the water their plants need. That includes making arrangements to have someone do the necessary watering when the gardener(s) will not be able to. In August's heat a week without water will "set back" some in-ground plants and will virtually "do in" most potted ones.

If you have let the mulch around your plants recede, either in location or volume, this would certainly be the time to bring the mulch back up to the three or four inches spread all around the plants, but not touching the trunk. Just about any available mulch will do the job around in-ground plants. For years we have suggested the use of pine bark nuggets around potted plants – two, or even three nuggets deep, if there is room in the pot. If the pot itself isn't hot, pine bark will extend the need for watering from daily to every other day – if not every third day.

So what's this business about a hot pot? Well first, it's hot in Florida in August. And anything in the sun is really, really hot! Add to those two earth-shaking observations the fact that 99.99% of plant pots are black. (Yes indeed, we are calling the pot black! A statement which, of course, has no relevance what-so-ever to the subject at hand.) The color black has a way of absorbing heat and so the combination of a black pot in the Florida sun will just about cook plant roots. What to do? Put the pot in the shade comes to mind first. Of

course, depending on the variety, placement in the shade could have a bearing on bloom production. (However, many of our varieties aren't blooming much because of the heat and perhaps also because of too much hot sun.) You could paint the pots a light color too, but an easier approach is to set the plant pot in a larger pot. By doing so, the pot the plant is in is protected from the direct sun and meanwhile an insulating air space is created around the plant pot to help keep the roots cool.

On the bright side of things, the lack of rain has probably helped in keeping the insect population on your plants at reasonable levels (if there is such a thing). It is therefore possible that the critters that are in evidence can be controlled by using a spray wand to direct water under the leaves of plants daily, or every other day. Should that approach not provide the desired affect, perhaps the next step could involve the use of a soap and oil spray. Those sprays must not be used in the direct sun and should only be used in the coolest part of the day. (We have to wonder if anything that leaves a film on plant leaves is a good thing to use during the periods of unrelenting heat we have in Florida from time to time.)

If "natural" approaches do not provide the control desired the old standby *Acephate* would probably be the desired chemical approach for the hobbyist gardener. *Acephate* was the active ingredient in *Orthene*, an *Ortho* product. *Orthene* is no longer on the market, but *Ortho* has put *Acephate* in a couple other products in the years since *Orthene* was taken off the shelves. We think the latest is *Systemic Insect Killer (SIK)*, which is a pretty descriptive name since *Acephate* is systemic (it is taken into the plant) and it will kill insects. (*SIK* also has a miticide in it.) Some have had success with *Bayer's Tree & Shrub Insect Control* used as a spray (2 tbs./gal.) However, since *T & S* contains *Imidacloprid*, hailed as a miracle insecticide a few years ago, but since discovered to aid mites in propagating, you will want to include a miticide, such as *Kelthane*, in the spray. (*Imidacloprid* is indeed good stuff. We note Bayer has now marketed it in both a granular and liquid spray form for use on lawns. Since all of the really effective insecticides for lawns have been removed from the market – *Imidacloprid* may just

