

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

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It will be "Unbelievable" in January!

Our favorite unbelievable people from "Unbelievable Hibiscus", Cathy Grandoff and Don Mixson, will be featured in our January 13th Chapter meeting. One or both of them will be discussing grafting, however if you have a question about your hibiscus – they will have the answer. Combining the fact that it has been a while since we have had a real "sit-down" meeting and that we have a couple real hibiscus people on the program should assure a good turn out. Don't you miss it! That's 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 13th at the Synovus Bank, 26th and Manatee.

Three cheers for Dottie!

Yes, that's what we said – and meant. "Three cheers for Dottie Erikson"! Again Dottie scored big with an absolutely delightful lunch at the Bradenton Yacht Club for the G-R Chapter Christmas Luncheon. She made the right choice of entrée, worked with the servers to achieve good service, and provided lovely centerpieces that are now a part of the Christmas decorations in several members' homes. Thank you so much Dottie! And a special word of thanks to Jeanne Nathan for helping Dottie call all attendees after the Yacht Club changed the time lunch would be served.

Of course we must remember to recognize Carl and Pat Kramer for being our hosts at the Yacht Club. Without their sponsorship we would not have such a nice setting for our Christmas gathering.

We should also recognize the fact that the pile of gifts brought for the children of migrant workers – looked larger than ever. A good number of children will have a brighter Christmas as a result.

Gardening Here and There...

December gardening in Florida is a lot different for those of us that used to spend December in much colder climes. Gardening in December in central

Illinois was an indoor activity – mainly involved with thinking about what changes might be made in the coming summer's garden. December would be too early to actually make any drawings, but the thinking could take on some pretty detailed elements – elements which would undergo major changes tomorrow.

The arrival of the seed and plant catalogs (in January) seems to urge that action be taken. The thought process involved with such action centered on the concept that perhaps this year's order, whatever it was for, should be sent in a bit earlier. In some previous years they were out of half of what we ordered - in April. You'd think they would carry a bigger supply if they really want to stay in business!

Illinois December gardening seemed to best be approached in a comfy chair in front of a nice fireplace fire – dreaming about a colorful garden-to-be...

Florida December gardening is a lot lot different! Weeds, they are agrowin', bugs, they are achewing and plants they are athirsting and need water! SAY – perhaps there is something to be said for northern December gardening!!

Perhaps there is, but our mind need only recall a few weeks ago when we missed looking in on our plants for about a week – not by our choice. As we approached the garden area we were sure we would be greeted with nothing but yellow leaves, but we were pleasantly surprised! Sure, there were lots of yellow leaves, but there were many blooms – including some on plants that haven't been good bloomers all summer. Sure it may be silly, but we think the plants were saying "Welcome back! It's good to see you!!" While the indoor gardening of the north has its advantages – it is hard to beat winter gardening – outdoors (!) – in Florida!

Words of Wisdom

Honk if you love peace and quiet.

Hibiscus Gardening in January

Normally the winter months, from mid-November through mid-February, require little activity from hibiscus gardeners – other than being aware of the possibility of cold snaps. Should such a weather event occur, perhaps last month's discussion about protecting plants may be helpful. Hope so ... This year through mid-December has been noteworthy for what seems to be more than usual warm weather which may mean more than the usual number of critters being evident on your plants. The combination of warm weather and dry weather may well bring out the spider mites, too. Examine the leaves for a sandy feeling with your fingers. If you suspect they are there, use a blast of water every other day to control them or two or three applications of a miticide to (possibly) eliminate them.

It is true that the mild weather directly affects the amount of water our hibiscus requires. Both in-ground and potted plants will require less water. If potted plants contain potting material that provides good drainage it is pretty hard to over-water them. However, in-ground plants certainly can be over-watered and care should be taken when watering any of our plants – potted or not. Let common sense rule, perhaps along with a finger to test the moisture present.

If you have an irrigation system installed in your lawn, this is a good time to tune it up. Make sure all the heads work and that the coverage is as good as it is going to get. During the hot weather the once a week restriction on watering hurts some lawns, but now many lawns may only need watering twice a month or even less. That would be the case if at least $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch of water is delivered during each watering. To determine if that is happening, set several flat-bottomed containers in each zone and then measure the amount of water in each container after an irrigation cycle. Be ready to be surprised if you haven't done that for a while – or if you never ...

Early Days with Hibiscus Continued...

In three previous issues of PETAL POWER, we have quoted portions of an article that Eric Golby wrote for the Spring, 1984 issue of *The Seed Pod*. Since we are in the "slow" part of the year in-so-far as hibiscus are concerned we will share a bit more of Eric's "Rambling Reflections":

"At the Reasoner Tropic Branch Nursery at Palma Sola, Norman Reasoner has planted out (in the 1950's) probably the largest collection of hibiscus then known, for observation and comparison. Often the same variety existed under as many as four or five different names, collected from as many different sources. And often each source was sincere in his belief that his name was the correct one. Sometimes it was a matter of spelling. Others admitted to having invented or assigned a name to a hibiscus for which he had none.

"The issuance of Bulletin #1 (price \$1.00) as Mr. Reasoner had hoped, brought in a lot of correspondence from both originators and collectors who helped put legitimate names and descriptions into the future Bulletins. A few defied complete identity for as long as ten years. There are a number whose origin is a complete mystery to this day.

"To name one, Miami Lady appeared on the Miami scene around 1950 and no one knows from whence it came. The late Clarence Bass theorized that it was a chance self-sown seedling. It was quickly spread in that area as a strong growing, free blooming, easy-to-grow single pink soon seen everywhere as a hedge. Later, it was the dominant, or most widely used understock for grafting, both for its ease in rooting, and for the success of scions placed on it. Later it was found that it shortened the life of plants grafted on it. They flourished the first two or three years, then began to decline – why, I don't know.

"It had been given the name "Painted Lady" until Norman Reasoner pointed out that the USDA at Chapman Field, Miami had named a "Painted Lady" several years previously, and though it was not a world-beater, there still were plants of it around. So he suggested the substitute name of "Miami Lady" as most of us know it today.

“Each subsequent issue of *The Florida Hibiscus Bulletin* brought new varieties and corrections. He had intended it to be an annual, but as changes dictated; he stepped up the frequency of the issues, though it was a time-consuming job done on a used mimeograph machine that Mr. R. said to be a cross with a mule because it worked only when it felt like it. He said he knew that his hybrid was a biological impossibility, but he had the proof.

“On the cover he listed a dozen collaborators who had helped him with the input and comparisons even to their votes for the “Ten Best Hibiscus of the Year”. I don’t have a copy in front of me at this moment, but I can recall some the collaborators’ names: Ross Gast, Pic Thompson, Jim Hendry, Oliver Coffee, Harry Goulding, Jack O. Holmes, and Bruce Parnell. I am especially proud of the fact that Mr. Reasoner included me as one of his collaborators on his last issue of the *Bulletin*.”

(Editor’s Note: It is interesting to note that among those who Eric listed as collaborating on Hibiscus Bulletins are several who later were honored by having their names being made a part of Hibiscus Society chapter names – of course Eric Golby and Norman Reasoner being among that number.)

Chapter Website news

Our website is doing pretty well during 2007. So far it has been visited 45,486 times. And where do these visitors come from? From the US, Canada, UK, Australia, Sweden, Malaysia, Switzerland, Singapore, Ireland, Germany, Norway, New Zealand, Fiji, Uruguay, India, Japan, China, Indonesia and South Africa.

Below is a sample from an article on the site. If you have any suggestions about additional items that could be included in the website ... please contact Gene.

Botany 101

Plants and animals are composed of mostly tiny cells. Plant cells have walls and can contain chlorophyll. Animal cells have neither. Plant cell walls are composed of ... cellulose, needed for plant rigidity. But would you ever guess that in a living tree, 98% of the cells in the trunk and branches are dead?

Tropical rain forest trees can reach 180 feet in height, yet have roots that are only 3 feet deep. On the other hand,

some desert shrubs have tap roots that are 90 feet deep. The largest of all seeds: Coconuts. The smallest seeds: Orchid seeds (these are like dust particles, are wind-born and require a certain moss as a substrate before they can germinate).

To quicken seed germination, nick the seeds. You can also dip them in concentrated sulfuric acid and then wash them. So why do seeds have hard coats? It promotes survival of the species during unpredictable seasons.

Oxygen is required for germination to break down stored starch, protein and fats to soluble sugars and amino acids. Young smooth bark has breathing pores that look like scale. Leaves also have breathing pores (take in carbon dioxide, give off oxygen by photosynthesis and create food). These pores also allow water loss, so plants close them at night when there is no photosynthesis (how?) Roots also need to breathe. They store food and water, and require oxygen. That’s why clay soil is no good.

Water moves from the roots to the leaves. It leaves as water vapor through leaf pores, but this is not all bad. Water movement acts literally as a pump transporting minerals from the soil to the leaves. A 50 ft tall silver maple pumps 60 gallons of water per hour!

There are several plant hormones that control growth and flowering. You have probably used Auxin, which stimulates root growth. Plants actually form it at their stem tips. Strangely, it inhibits budding below the stem tip, so the plant grows upward. Remove the stem tip by pruning and you allow budding which leads to branching and more flowers.

Ethylene gas is another plant hormone and it promotes fruit ripening -- it is used commercially for bananas. One way to ripen unripe fruit, is to brown-bag it and include chopped pieces of a ripe apple (ethylene source).

Much of the above information is excerpted from a book by Brian Capon entitled, “Botany for Gardeners”.

Coming Events

January 4, 10:00 a.m. Board Meeting at the Boettcher home.

January 13, 1:00 p.m. Chapter Meeting, “Grafting” by Kathy Grandoff and Don Mixon at Synovus Bank, 26th and Manatee.