

It's February - and it's Donny!

Not that Donny Waldroup constitutes our February program every year – or that he does a program every year. All we mean is that Donny Waldroup will be the February Chapter meeting program and we consider that pretty special. Donny is one of our very best green thumb folks who delight in growing all kinds of things including, of course, hibiscus! Expect to hear a nuts and bolts discussion about whatever he decides to talk about – including, but not limited to the “advertised” topic, “Waking up Plants”. You are sure to learn something – and have a few laughs.

That's the February Chapter meeting – and it's on February 10th – and it's at one o'clock – and it's Donny!

Full house for December meeting!

While our reporter did not make it to the December Chapter meeting, we understand from other sources that it was almost standing room only! We may be stretching a point, but apparently there were 35 in attendance – which is a pretty good crowd for the Synovus room. (Of course, what would really be neat would be to have to look for another place to meet - due to overcrowding!)

It was really wonderful to hear that among the 35 in attendance were 7 visitors – and four of those visitors were guests of current members! That is the very best way to grow the Chapter!! How many guests have you brought to Chapter meetings or other events?

And we also understand that Kathy Grandoff and Don Mixon did their usual fine job – and even sold a few plants to attendees. We also understand that Don told Dave Flanders that the plants being raised to be sold at our Show look bigger and better than ever. Also, Kathy and Don contributed to the raffle which set what must be a “recent-times” record of \$41.00. Wow, perhaps we should have them back more often!

Talking about folks doing a fine job at the Chapter meeting – we understand that First Vice-President Janet Love did her usual great (is that better than “fine”?) job conducting the meeting and filling in for the absent President Boettcher, who about that time was probably kicked back somewhere - with a cold one. Having

planted that picture in your minds we must now admit that we hear Boettcher was involved in a kick-off banquet for a 50th anniversary celebration at his church – and he is chairman of the group heading up the celebration. While that's what we hear, one sometimes wonders...

Don Mixon retires!

Although we at PETAL POWER were not represented at the January Chapter meeting, we know that Don Mixon was on the program. We do not know if the fact was mentioned that he was retired (by election) from the Sunset Chapter presidency – so we are mentioning it right now! This coup d'état occurred at their chapter meeting on December 3 and ended Don's nine year presidency. According to the Sunset Chapter newsletter, “That was not the space shuttle breaking the sound barrier ... it was Don Mixon's sigh of relief when Fred Roush was elected to replace him as president ...”

We know that several of our Chapter members have been (so very) happy that the writers of our Chapter's bylaws limit our presidents to two consecutive years in office. We'd recommend that the Sunset Chapter consider a similar restriction – and rejoice that they don't have it now – since they would not have had the opportunity to enjoy and profit from Don's leadership.

AHS Seed Bank Booming

Bob Carran, who operates the AHS Seed Bank, on January 3rd made kind of an end-of-the-year report to a group of AHS folks who are members of a Yahoo group on the internet. The Seed Bank sends hibiscus seeds all over the world to those who request them. Bob started out by reviewing a few previous years – 2005 being the busiest when 2600 seeds were sent out to 132 people. He then said that “2007 wound up with 4,549 seeds sent out to 388 people around the world. That was a lot of envelopes and stamps. Every continent participated except for Antarctica (not much demand from the penguins there).”

We thought our members would find Bob's report interesting and that it would show that there are interesting ways in which folks can become involved in AHS matters.

* Words of Wisdom *

Be modest, and be proud of it.

Gardening with Peggy

Peggy Dessaint, an Extension Agent, a past Chapter member, and a Chapter meeting speaker on several occasions writes a column for the *Bayshore Banner*, in addition to writing for at least one other newspaper. Not too long ago she wrote an article related to renovating landscapes which is pertinent to this time of year and while not being directly related to what we are all about, hibiscus in (perhaps) most cases also need to fit into the landscape. So if you know you need to do something about your landscaping, but don't know where to start, perhaps what Peggy wrote will be of value as she began by writing:

“See if what you have falls into one of these four common landscape mistakes.

Hodge-podge planting: This means too many different types of plants in a landscape without any rhyme or reason. It gives a very busy impression with no sense of uniformity. When you look at it, your eyes dart from spot to spot. They don't rest anywhere. The solution is ‘keep it simple.’

Use one or only a few types of plants, rather than many types. For visual impact and ease of maintenance, mass together bright colors (e.g., the same type of flowering shrub, croton or annual) rather than scattering them here and there in isolated spots.

Over-planting: This means too many plants jammed into one defined space. One and three gallon plants are small when purchased, so the tendency is to use way too many for an “instant mature look.” Plants grow fast in this neck of the woods. Lickety-split, a landscape bed is overcrowded and messy-looking. One solution is relatively easy – dig out some of the plants and let the rest fill in.

Another is to pull them all out and start over. This makes sense especially if the plants are loaded with insect pests, disease problems or have become thin and scraggly. Measure in square feet the amount of space. Select new plants based on size at maturity (both height and width), and calculate the amount of space each one will take up. Pieces of cloth cut in 2, 3, 4 or 5 foot circles laid next to each other on the ground help visualize arrangement and spacing. This way you'll buy the right number of plants, too.

Planting too close to a structure: This means stems and leaves are in direct contact with where you live. This is good for ants, roaches and other bugs (easy access),

and bad for plants (lop-sided appearance, poor stem and root structure). If the plants are healthy, renewal pruning may be the answer. Cut them back to bare wood, several inches to a foot above the ground. As stems re-grow, snip off the tips to make branches fill out. Keep a clear space (a hand-width or more) between the wall and the shrubs.

An alternative is to dig out the shrubs and select a different species. Use a ½ plus 1 foot rule: place shrubs half of their mature width, plus at least one more foot, away from walls. For example, a Burford holly that grows six feet wide at maturity has a root ball placed at least 4 feet from the wall.

Cluttered lawns: This means trees, palms or shrub specimens scattered in a lawn. This gives the whole landscape a patchwork look. A relatively easy solution (and one that makes lawn maintenance easier) is to pull scattered plants together in one or more large mulched beds. Consider massing a ground cover or a low-growing shrub, e.g., dwarf India hawthorn, to fill in space between palms or trees.

How did your evaluation fare? Great weather for landscape renovation lies ahead from now until the infamous summer heat sets in. Get going and get growing.”

Hibiscus Gardening in February

February is an unpredictable month “weather-wise”, sometimes cold and sometimes warm and almost always – dry. And to date, most of our area has been very, very dry so far this year – and the latter part of last year wasn't much better.

The newsroom of PETAL POWER receives the occasional telephone call from distressed gardeners looking for an answer to some hibiscus related problem. In the second week of January we had such a call from a home-owner asking what was wrong with her hibiscus – their leaves were turning yellow and falling off – virtually all of them! After ascertaining that she lived in an area that most likely would not have had any plants damaged by the cold weather we had around the first of the year we asked if the plants, which were in the ground, were being watered. She replied that their lawn irrigation system watered once a week (due to the watering restrictions).

At that point we knew to apply the old rule of hibiscus gardeners. (Or is it – “the rule of old hibiscus gardeners”?) That rule states that when almost all the leaves on a hibiscus turn yellow and fall off it is a sign that they either have had too much water – or not enough. (Of course there could be some other things

that could cause major leaf drop, but most of the time the cause would have something to do with water – or the lack thereof.)

Let's see, where were we? Oh, yes a woman called with naked limbs – no, her hibiscus had leafless limbs. After hearing her watering schedule and knowing something about the rain she may have had - we knew there was no way that the plants were getting too much water. After making a simple deduction it was clear that the cause was that the hibiscus were not getting enough water. We recommended that she water by hand once a week - giving each plant enough so that she felt each was getting an inch of water. Ah, another satisfied PETAL POWER "customer."

Of course the reason behind telling about the lady with dry hibiscus is not just to show that we earn our salary, but to illustrate that there has been very little rain and therefore our hibiscus look to us for "rain."

Recently there was weather cold enough to harm some plants, including hibiscus, in areas removed from the gulf – at least we assume there was no damage in coastal areas. For some then, pruning this year will perhaps include removing cold-damaged limbs. Whatever pruning you have in mind, if any, should wait until very late February or early March. With that in mind we will wait until our next issue to discuss pruning.

In the meantime, continue to be alert for mites – the most likely pests to be noticed. A miticide will give control. However since you will most likely be watering you could spray your plants (with a wand to get up and under the leaves) and keep the mites under pretty good control in that way.

Hibiscus are rather dormant during this time of year, but some would recommend a very light application of fertilizer late in the month to sort of recharge their batteries. If you are planning somewhat severe pruning, we would wonder if fertilizing is appropriate.

Since the plants are rather dormant they will be producing only a few blooms and some of those may be somewhat "off" in size and color, but still probably quite nice. Blooms produced this time of year seem to last longer than summer blooms. This is particularly true if they are left on a porch or deck, perhaps in a bit of shade. In those conditions some blooms will last three or four days. And – **that's what it is all about!!** (Not the Hokey Pokey.)

Chapter Meeting Minutes, January 13, 2008

The meeting was called to order by First Vice President Janet Love

Guests were introduced. There were a total of seven guests – Betty Seipel brought two while Mark Love and Petey Birchall each brought one.

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the October 25th meeting be approved as they appeared in PETAL POWER. The motion carried.

In the Treasurers absence Vice-President Love reviewed the financial report. There was a beginning balance of \$3307.11, income of \$623.00, expense of \$884.95 resulting in an ending balance of \$3045.16. There was a motion and a second that the financial report be accepted as reported. The motion passed.

Mark Love gave an update about the show location and indicated that consideration was being given to renting a tent for plant sales.

The afternoon's refreshments were with the "compliments" of Jennifer Murdock and Donny Waldroup.

Frank Vejrostek has a new supply of Handbooks available at \$15 each as well as an ample supply of "old" Seed Pods.

We will be acquiring new/additional wires for displaying blooms.

Rae Flanders announced that Donny Waldroup would present the February Chapter meeting program and introduced Kathy Grandoff and Don Mixon for the afternoon's program which was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Carl Kramer conducted the raffle for a plant, with a handmade plant bag, contributed by Kathy and Don - which was won by one of the guests.

Submitted by:
The Invisible Secretary

Coming Events

February 1, 10:00 a.m.: Board Meeting at the Topolosky home, 606 137th Street E. (Mill Creek)

February 10, 1:00 p.m.: Chapter Meeting, "Waking Up Plants for Spring", Donny Waldroup