

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

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Christmas Luncheon, December 14

The Christmas Luncheon will be on December 14th at the SaraBay Country Club. Dottie Erikson is again handling the arrangements in her usual meticulously efficient – and festive manner. The cost is very reasonable – just \$13.00 each, which includes tax and gratuity – everything! Dottie must drive a hard bargain! Everything begins at 12:30 p.m.

If you have not been contacted about attending the Christmas Luncheon and would like to attend please call Dottie Erikson at 753-7785.

There will be a Christmas tree waiting for hibiscus blooms to transform it into a one-in-a-million beauty. Of course the blooms have to come from the members attending the luncheon, so bring whatever blooms you have - but leave the ants at home. For some strange reason, restaurant managers take a dim view of ants being brought into their dinning rooms. Picky-picky.

For a number of years, it has seemed to help Chapter members get in the Christmas spirit by bringing presents for the children of migrant workers to the Christmas Luncheon. It is either that or we just like to help less fortunate folks, because there is always a bunch of presents under the Christmas tree full of blooms. Bring one or more gifts of new clothing, in Christmas wrapping, with a note or tag on the outside indicating the gender and age of the child for whom the gift is intended. Join in this expression of giving that is so much a part of the Season. Besides, the gifts really look good under the tree!

Directions to SaraBay Country Club: Perhaps all that needs to be said is to take Whitfield Av. east (away from the Gulf) off US 41 for three blocks and the Country Club will be on the left. (To perhaps confuse matters – as you proceed on Whitfield, you will pass Manatee Street, Buena Vista and turn left on Willow Street and then the Club will be on your right.)

-OR-

Perhaps all that needs to be said is to take Pearl Avenue east (away from the Gulf) off US41 and after two blocks – stop at the stop sign at Willow Street – and then turn left on Willow Street and the Country Club is on the right.

Eric Golby Remembered

Some would perhaps feel that the “Golby” in the name of our Chapter refers to only one individual – Eric Golby. As those who knew Eric and Sally Golby decrease in number, we feel that from time to time it is appropriate to mention that it is our understanding that the Chapter designation was meant to honor both Eric and Sally. Eric has been on our mind as we approach the Chapter “Christmas Party” because Eric dearly loved it. Also, it seems appropriate to note that Eric would have been 100 years old just a few days before this year’s Christmas “Party” – on December 11th – had he not passed on a bit more than 4-1/2 years ago.

A Tree of Hibiscus Blooms at Crosley - Again

Thanks to many volunteers there will again be a Christmas tree decorated with hibiscus blooms at the Crosley mansion Festival of Trees this year. While we have heard no one really express the thought that this year’s tree of blooms is a means to celebrate Pat Grant’s memory and dedication to it year after year – but it surely must be.

Those representing the Chapter at the tree during the Festival are as follows: Janet and Mark Love, Sue Haugh, Petey Birchall, Marion and Judy Duncan, Frank Vejrosteck, Tootie Baldini, Yvonne Santiago, Jeri Lovett, Jennifer Murdoch, Betty Seipel, Jack and Dotty Taaffe, Norm and Marlyn Marshall, Maynard and Dee Pastorius, and Bob and Beege Hunter.

Making the drive to pick up blooms at Randy Cox’s (and many thanks to Randy!) are: Tom and Sandy

* Words of Wisdom *

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
Groucho Marx

Brown, Dave Kaplan, Bob Haendel, and Dave and Rae Flanders.

Christmas is a special time of year and the continuation of traditions are part of what make it special. Thanks to all those listed above, the tree of blooms will again be part of the Festival of Trees. Pat must be happy to see that tradition continue.

Of December Hibiscus Gardening

Everyone looks forward to the cooler weather of winter in Florida, however if December is a tad colder than November has been this year, which it often is, we can perhaps look forward to some frosts and, perish the thought, some freezes. Since we may have some cold weather in our Christmas stockings this year – and since it seems like it has been some time since we discussed at some length the processes involved in protecting our tender plants from cold weather – we are going to spend some time on that subject this month.

Before getting into the distasteful subjects related to cold weather, let's spend a small amount of time discussing the aspect of hibiscus that we grow them for – their blooms! And the thought may cross your mind that November/December is a strange time to write about blooms. And well you might think that, but some of you will be enjoying blooms approaching the numbers seen during the summer – and some of them will be larger and be lasting longer than those summer blooms. Of course, the cold weather will cause some varieties to exhibit smaller blooms than usual and other varieties will display different coloring than you are used to. However, the bottom line is that if your plants were healthy as they entered the cooler weather you will continue to have blooms for your kitchen table (or where ever) and those blooms will tend to last longer than the summer blooms did.

Cool weather normally brings an absence of garden critters, however warm spells could bring about an appearance of aphids and if mites were a problem during the warm months and they weren't controlled – they will most likely still be a problem. We would like to say that cool weather limits hibiscus gardening to picking blooms, however that

is not the case – darn it. Critter control may still be necessary; however major fertilizing and pruning will be out of the picture, except for our coastal friends who might bend those general rules.

Now for the topic of hibiscus gardening and cold weather – which is certainly a bad combination. The first thing to do is gather or identify the items that will be required to protect your hibiscus from cold weather. You will hopefully be able to determine the items you will need as you make your way through the following. Of course as we approach the time of year when low temperatures could occur we should stay aware of the weather forecasts and “translate” what the forecast says into the impact it will have on the particular area you live in.

Protecting plants from the cold has a lot to do with where you live in relation to the gulf and how many plants you have. As we have said before, those on Anna Maria or thereabouts have little to be concerned about. Folks living east of I75, or thereabouts, could have lots to be concerned about almost every year. Somewhat similarly, you may be capable and willing to do a great deal to protect your plants if you have very few, while the same expenditure of effort per plant may be out of the question if you have lots of plants. Each gardener will have to make their decision about the course to take based on his/her situation.

We will not discuss the basic basics, but let's start with the concept that draping a sheet over a large in-the-ground hibiscus will perhaps provide some protection from a wind on a below freezing wind chill night, but that's about all. During a real cold snap, a single sheet is not adequate to provide protection. Multiple layers of sheets may work. A quilt or blanket is what is needed – and it needs to reach the ground. Unlike up north where the ground is about as cold as everything else, the ground here is almost always going to be warmer than the air when it is cold enough to damage plants. That is why it is important to drape your old draperies (or whatever) over the plants and puddle them on the ground (and hold them down with a brick or something if it is windy). The use of the ground to obtain a modicum of warmth is why appropriately sized cardboard cartons are ideal for protecting plants from the cold since they rest on the ground.

We have read somewhere, but have no experience in the matter, that a combination of sheets, or cloth something, and plastic sheeting is an acceptable approach to protecting plants from the cold. Plants should not be covered with only plastic since, if there is damaging temperatures, the foliage will freeze wherever it touches the plastic. However, apparently if the plant is first covered with a cloth “something” and then covered with plastic that touches the ground all around the plant, good protection is provided. Plants covered by plastic alone will cook in sunlight. The same thing will probably happen to plants covered by a combination of cloth and plastic. However, it may take somewhat longer for the plants to get “well done” so the gardener would have longer to get the plants uncovered the day after a cold night.

Plants in pots have the advantage of mobility and can, if the pots aren't too large, be moved into a shed, garage, living room (sure – right) or some such. If that approach is not possible or practical, the same protection techniques used for in-ground plants come to the fore for their potted brethren – with some additional approaches being available.

We have heard numerous stories of gardeners with numerous potted hibiscus that lack protective structures and enough materials to cover them. To solve their problem, they lay their plants on the ground overlapping each one. The result is a pile of plants that take a lot less material to cover than they would individually and they are on the ground thereby getting the advantage of whatever warmth the ground has to offer. This approach is pretty much guaranteed to provide the gardener with plants with a number of broken limbs – which is a small price to pay for live plants if the alternate is frozen plants. We have also heard of folks with large in-ground plants who dug up one side of them enough to bend them over on the ground and then covered them.

We have heard about, seen, or have actually constructed a plastic covered/PVC pipe structure that easily provides plants protection from the cold. They can be simple or complex, again, depending on each gardeners' needs and situation.

As we wind down the subject of caring for our hibiscus in Florida's winter, we can't pass up the opportunity to sign-off with a quote from “Mr.

Hibiscus” Eric Golby, who said something like, “December is a good time to reflect on what you should have done differently in the garden in the past year – and to make plans for the coming year.” Perhaps if we did that every year, we might save ourselves a lot of work.

Chapter Meeting: November 8, 2008

Fourteen chapter members and one guest gathered at 1:00 P.M. at the Earth Box Headquarters in Ellenton on a beautiful Saturday afternoon. The owner and developer of the Earth Box, Blake Whisenant, demonstrated the principals of his invention by planting two peppers and one tomato plant in an Earthbox, describing each step. Everyone agreed it was an interesting and educational experience. Mr. Whisenant kindly donated the planted box for our raffle. Betty Seipel was the lucky winner.

President Flanders passed around the sign-up sheet for workers at the Crosley Festival of Trees. We still need people to pick up blooms from Randy Cox's nursery, and also more members to talk with the public as they view our hibiscus-covered tree.

The Christmas luncheon will be December 14 at SaraBay Country Club, at 12:30 P.M. Call Dorothy Erikson for tickets at \$12.95 each, including gratuity.

President Flanders announced that Belle Hilt called from her northern home in Michigan. She is having medical problems and will not be back in Florida until January. Her address is: 221 Riverfront St., Spring Lake, MI 49456.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 PM. Members then toured the nursery and shopped for plants and supplies. Several members went to Hickory Hollow Restaurant following the meeting.

Rae Flanders
Secretary

Coming Events

Monday, December 8, 6:30 p.m.: Board Meeting, Central Library

Sunday, December 14, 12:30 p.m.: Christmas Luncheon, SaraBay Country Club