

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

October, 2009

Editor: Gayler Boettcher: gboet@gte.net

Publisher: Gene Haugh: gene.haugh@gmail.com

Web Site: 4hibiscus.com

Thursday, October 22, Potluck

The last issue of PETAL POWER discussed the annual potluck at the Boettcher's at some length with the thought that this, the October issue, may not be received before October 22nd. That possibility still exists, but just in case that you are reading this prior to October 22nd, and you have not "signed up" in one way or another – and you intend to attend the potluck, please call Dottie Erikson (753-7785) and let her know of your intention. By making that call, the chance that you will have a chair to sit on greatly improves. We published directions to the Boettcher home in the September PETAL POWER, but we will repeat them – just in case.

Directions to the Boettcher home.

Go east on Route 70 (53 Ave. E.) and at the second stop light past the I75 underpass turn right on to Braden Run which takes you into Braden Woods. At the first stop sign turn right onto Forrester Drive and drive for a pretty long quarter circle to 9213. Don't let the house numbers confuse you – keep driving and you will eventually get to the 9000's. (Park anywhere except where orange flags mark sprinklers.)

That's 6:00 p.m., Thursday, October 22nd.

Don't Miss the November Meeting!

The main emphasis of the November 8th Chapter Meeting will be to discuss "New Thoughts for Promoting and Conducting Our Annual Show". Let's look at how that subject evolved into something requiring the attention of the membership at a Chapter meeting.

A relatively rough outline of Russ Kitching's visit with the Board of Directors was published in the September PETAL POWER. Dave Kaplan took that and notes made by others at the meeting and polished them into a comprehensive outline of Dr. Kitching's presentation. Then Dave sprinkled in

some of his own thoughts. Discussion of this outline was begun in the October Board meeting and continued in a special Board meeting yet to be scheduled at this writing. Therefore, it would seem that by the time the November Chapter meeting arrives, the items remaining in the outline should be worthy of discussion and consideration by the membership.

We assume that all our readers are very much aware that something must be changed in order for our Shows to meet basic objectives and indeed, for the Chapter to continue to exist. Therefore, all members are urged to attend the 1:00 p.m., November 8th Chapter Meeting at Synovus Bank. Your thoughts and participation are important – and necessary.

Ankie Watt

Ankie Watt, 91, passed away in Ashland, Virginia, on September 15, 2009. Ankie was a devoted member of the Chapter for many years and served in many capacities in the organization that was a major part of her life. She was a show judge and her home served as the Board of Directors meeting place for a number of years. A hibiscus was named for her, although it is not known if any currently exist. It has been perhaps 7 or 8 years ago since she moved to Virginia to be near her son. Ankie will be remembered as a kind hearted, one-of-a-kind person who was a friend to everyone. – and who loved Hibiscus!

The delight of defoliation...

We just liked the sound of the words "delight of defoliation", but we didn't delight in the actual defoliation. OK, let's begin at the beginning – which is not particularly original, but is rather efficient.

Several weeks ago we saw a large blue plastic bottle on the shelf at Lowe's that proclaimed itself as "*Bayer Advanced Rose and Flower Care*". (Active

ingredient is *Disulfoton*) The label furthermore stated that the product provided 6 weeks of insect protection, gave rainproof protection and was specific for spider mites. It was a granular product that was to be applied to the soil around plants and watered in. To the best of our ability we applied the material to our hibiscus according to the directions and surprise, surprise – the insect population, which were very few, infecting the leaves were reduced by approximately 60% – mainly because there were about 60% fewer leaves on the plants. Well, that's one way to decrease insects!

Some varieties lost more than 60% of their leaves and some, less. Most of the leaves that dropped didn't even wait to go through the usual count-down to yellow, but dropped while they were still green. Don't you just hate it when that happens? (We can't remember it ever happening before – thank Heavens.) We guess we wouldn't recommend the granular Bayer's *Rose and Flower Care* for use on hibiscus, but perhaps we did something wrong...

No Meeting Minutes

Fans of the Chapter meeting minutes that are a feature of almost all issues of PETAL POWER, will be disappointed to discover that there are no minutes in this issue. The September issue carried the September meeting minutes. Any minutes that chronicle a meeting that might be part of the October 22nd potluck will appear in the November issue, along with the minutes of the November Chapter meeting. So therefore, while fans of meeting minutes are deprived of their favorite reading material in this issue, they will perhaps have two meeting minutes to immerse themselves in, in the November issue. Note that we underlined the word “perhaps”, since it is possible there will be no meeting at the potluck and we don't want to get anyone's expectations too high.

November Hibiscus Gardening

According to the gentleman who was a mentor to many of us, Eric Golby, “the main word for November is – be prepared!” He went on to say that not only is November a month to get prepared, but it can have some cool north winds that produce a freezing wind chill factor. The result is yellow hibiscus leaves about 10 days later. He said this took place as early as November 10th one year. Also, it is not unknown to have a 32 degree night in

November. So we repeat Eric's statement, “be prepared.” Of course that should mean different things to different folks, depending on how far inland they live.

Preparation includes inventorying and obtaining the materials that will be needed to protect your plants from the cold weather. That would include blankets, old comforters, boxes, etc. Don't forget some bricks, pieces of 4”x4”, or something like that to anchor them in place. The spring loaded type clothes pins (remember those?) come in handy to close the sides of blankets and such that are draped over plants.

For many years, hibiscus growers gave their plants an application of a high potash fertilizer, something like 0-10-10 or 2-10-10, during the first week of November. The rationale for this, again according to Eric, “was to ‘harden off’ the tissues of the plant, to withstand the cold better”. Then Eric said, “Gainesville said it won't – and I say it will!” Apparently, “Gainesville” determined that the high potash treatment is not any more effective as a normal feeding. Take your choice! Due to the difference in temperatures, those on or close to the islands could probably lightly fertilize throughout the winter, but those further east should indeed make their last fertilizer application, until February or March, in early November. Likewise, “easterners” shouldn't do any more pruning after early November until February; however “westerners” could probably continue selective pruning throughout the winter months. Of course the rationale for the cessation of both pruning and fertilizing is that it reduces the production of new leaf growth that cold weather could easily damage.

We have said it many times before, but it should be said again. Never fertilize a dry plant. Water the plants to be fertilized, put the fertilizer on and then water again. This applies to both granular and water soluble fertilizers.

Particularly if you have used a broad-spectrum insecticide, continue to look for spider mites on your plants. A trashy, salt and pepper looking webbing on the undersides of the leaves are a dead giveaway that you have spider mites. Other than the heaviest infestations of spider mites can probably be controlled with the daily spraying of water that we have recommended for several years. A spray wand is a virtual necessity to achieve a

good spray of water on the under side of the leaves. Almost all garden centers have spray wands available in a significant range of prices. We have found that some of the less expensive wands are best since they will provide a good volume of water at low pressure for fast watering, but will also support a higher pressure for washing down (or up) plant foliage. If you find the spraying approach wanting, application of a miticide, such as Kelthane, will provide good control.

Bleach and you...

Or, bleach, you and your hibiscus. The use of a diluted bleach mixture as sort of a last ditch remedy for bringing back plants from the edge of death has been discussed in various venues from time to time, including a 2002 issue of PETAL POWER – and the September, 2009 Chapter meeting. The advocates of bleach say that its use has at least the possibility of “bringing back” plants that have lost many or most of their leaves, have wilted leaves (and have sufficient water), and just generally look sick. The idea is that bleach kills various bacteria, viruses, and fungi in the soil.

The discussion about bleach usually relates to the dilution rate – the frequency of use is thought of as being “once is usually enough”. On the subject of dilution, Tom Miller (Sunset Chapter), a significant proponent of using bleach said several years ago (on the Internet):

“We usually say about 15% bleach and 85% water and drench until the pot begins to drain. When I spray my plants in the yard (Ortho Dial’n Spray hose-end sprayer), it’s probably a weaker dose. I have a handful of germinating seedlings in the garage and I was afraid some seeds may have gotten too soggy so they got heavy mistings with a fairly strong solution. These have been my experiences and I can’t vouch for others’ successes”.

However, ... an elementary school project (not a lab test) reported on the internet goes considerably further and netted the following results:

“My son did a science fair project – watering plants.....The ones watered with ¼ bleach mixture did the best. 1/3 bleach came in second. Even ½ did as well as those watered with tap water. That included seeds, seedlings and established plants, as well as my orchids. Which seemed to have less problems with fungus growing on the leaves and pests were fewer (scale and leaf chewers).

Anne in FL zone 9b”

The school project “report” indicated that bleach mixtures were used continuously as the plants were watered. Now what caused that to be the subject of a science fair project – your guess is as good as ours. However, it does suggest that the frequency and dilution rate we suggested shouldn’t harm the plant.

As the Internet discussion of 6 or 7 years ago continued, Amy said in a discussion of bleach:

“... it’s a pretty strong disinfectant. It’ll permanently get rid of humans, too, if the gas is breathed in, or you combine it with anything containing ammonia - - don’t mix household cleaners together!”

After that comment and more that Amy had to say on the general subject, we here at PETAL POWER, in our never ending quest for the whole story, turned to our resident chemistry expert, Dr. Eugene Haugh. Well folks, you need not know everything Gene said on the subject of mixing bleach and ammonia. We think the first two paragraphs will convince you that such a mixture is really “bad stuff” (a technical term). Gene said:

“You get rapid evolution of chlorine gas – used in WW1 as poison gas. You always smell some when you use household bleach (hypochlorite), but when mixed with ammonia, the danger is it comes out all at once and doesn’t disperse that quickly.

The reaction between ammonia and hypochlorite yields an intermediate called nitrogen trichloride, a yellow liquid which is stable enough at low temperature, but explodes when you warm it up or shake it.”

After those happy thoughts we again turned to Amy who ended the subject, and we will too, as follows:

“... we must respect all chemicals and compounds....using them for the wrong thing, in the wrong place, in the wrong amounts, and ESPECIALLY mixing them together can cause disastrous results in not only your plants, but you.”

Coming Events

Thursday, October 22, 6:00 p.m. Annual Potluck
The Boettcher home, 9213 Forrester Dr.
(Braden Woods)

Monday, November 2, 6:30 p.m. Board Meeting,
Central Library

Sunday, November 8, 1:00 p.m. Chapter Meeting,
**New Thoughts for Promoting and Conducting
Our Annual Show**, Synovus Bank, Manatee and
26th St.