

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

February, 2003

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<http://web.tampabay.rr.com/hibiscus>

Bugs R Us...

does not mean they have finally won and we have joined them – an “if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em” kind of thing. Not!

“Bugs R Us” is an AHS slide show, with a script, that Dave Flanders will present as the program for the March Chapter Meeting. The programs provided by the AHS Slide Bank are well produced, informative, and best of all, they relate specifically to hibiscus! While critters aren’t much of a problem right now, in a few weeks the battle for supremacy will once again be ongoing in our gardens, so a program concerning “bugs” is right on target. See you at the meeting – that’s Sunday, March 9th.

“Bring A Friend”

Officially, the March 9th Chapter meeting is “Bring a Friend” meeting. Such an event needs very little explanation and to do so should be viewed with disdain by all readers. To escape said disdain, we will only say that all members should make every effort to bring a friend or an acquaintance to the next Chapter meeting. We members are such fine folks your friends will be greatly impressed that you are part of such a great group of people.

Workdays coming...

Just so you aren’t terribly surprised, it is possible that you may soon receive a call enlisting your aid in planting hibiscus at Palma Sola Botanical Park (PSBP). This has been a topic of discussion for a number of years and its time has finally arrived. At press time the dates and times when the planting will take place were not known, but it is pretty much assured that the plants will need to be in the ground before our next issue!

Workshop, March 15th

The Golby-Reasoner Chapter First Annual Spring Workshop will be held on Saturday, March 15th at 10:00 AM at the PSBP. This workshop is not just for the newer members; however, it would surely be of more value to them than to members of some “tenure”. Therefore, newer members are particularly encouraged to attend. The workshop will treat rooting, grafting and spring hibiscus care. The materials necessary will be available.

We know that a good percentage of members know how to get to the PSBP because they attended the January Chapter meeting there. Most of those arriving at the PSBP for the meeting probably did so because of the fine directions provided in the December, 2002 *Petal Power*. If you want to attend the workshop and need directions, please refer to your file of past *Petal Powers* (available at the chapter website) or call an officer or board member.

PSBP Spring Garden Festival

The PSBP will be having their First Garden Festival March 22 and 23, 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. This replaces the May Festival which for the past five years has been held in May (surprise!). The change

Remember! Bring a friend to our next Chapter Meeting.

occurred because May is part of summer here, insofar as temperatures are concerned, and May is at the end of the spring gardening season.

According to the PSBP Foundation January newsletter, “all the major construction should be completed ... and the weather will be wonderful!” It would appear that that statement is pretty much on target in regard to the construction, and only time will tell about the weather. We hope they are right about that, too.

The Golby-Reasoner Chapter will have a booth at the spring festival and members will be selling plants from Curt Sinclair’s nursery. Whether you have or haven’t been to one of the annual events at PSBP, plan on attending. Several of the horticultural societies usually have booths, as do some commercial nurseries, conservation groups, etc. While you are there, make sure to stop by the Chapter booth, pull up a chair and palaver for a while. You could also sell a plant or two – or buy a plant or two.

Bring blooms...

Last month was the first (recent) month *Petal Power* asked that Chapter members bring hibiscus blooms to Chapter meetings. Of course, the weather the day of the February meeting made it somewhat difficult for most members to venture outside to gather what blooms they may have had. However, there were a number of blooms brought by a few members for all those in attendance to admire. Tom and Sandy Brown brought the most blooms by far and had some real beauties to be proud of – and rightfully so.

If it isn’t raining prior to the March 9th meeting (like it was before the February meeting), we hope to see some of the relatively big growers (“big” in terms of the number hibiscus they have – not their body size) bring in lots of blooms. Having said that, we are confronted by the fact that...

Pruning brings no blooms...

Many of our members will be doing major pruning before or around the time of the March meeting. So what does that mean for the availability of blooms? How long does it take for our pruned plants to produce blooms? We could tell you, but as you might imagine that subject was recently discussed on the internet so we’ll let that exchange treat the subject first.

Pat Merritt, AHS Secretary, in Houston said, “I told someone just a couple of days ago that it takes about 60 days (that’s two months for you folks in Florida) (*Editor’s note: Thanks a lot Pat.*) for a tropical hibiscus to recover from a light pruning (not being cut all the way to the ground) to start setting buds. This is assuming warm, sunny weather.

“The winter of 2001-2002, our huge grounded *Amber Suzanne* had to undergo a major pruning and was cut back from about 16 feet to about 3 feet because of freeze damage. This was done about mid-February and we did not get a bloom on it until mid-July.”

Curt Sinclair, past AHS president then said, “Figure about 3 months. Some lower limbs or ones you just tip cut, a little sooner. You can also leave one or two limbs whole and blooming and go back and cut them when the new growth starts blooming.”

As we view what we think of as “annual spring pruning”, as demonstrated in several Chapter meetings, we tend to lean toward the three month figure as the length of time before blooms appear. However, the time required is certainly influenced by temperature, sunlight, fertilization and appropriate rainfall/watering. This seems like a

long time without blooms – after all it is about 25% of the year. However, most of the hibiscus in a garden will benefit from pruning. Pruned plants will reward the gardener with increased vigor resulting in more and larger blooms.

Hibiscus booth - first prize!

We understand that the hibiscus booth at the State Fair won first prize. That is all we know about the prize, but whatever it was for, first prize is always good. Right? The picture of the booth that was on the Internet, looked like the Sunset Chapter had certainly expended a large amount of time, talent, and treasure on the project. Congratulations to the Sunset Chapter. Perhaps our Chapter members who staffed the booth or attended the show will tell us more about the booth.

Bargain Handbooks

The Hibiscus Handbooks remaining in the Chapter's stockpile will be sold to members at cost (\$6.60) and to non-members (and why are there any, or at least as many as there are?) at \$7.00 each. We want to make sure all members know that a new edition of the Handbook will be available this summer. We have no knowledge about how many changes are being made to the Handbook. However, the current version is quite useable and remains a fine guide to the subject of hibiscus.

And why does the Chapter have a number of Handbooks in stock, you may ask. And so you should. And so we will attempt to tell you. The story goes like this. Year after year, we would run out of Handbooks at the Annual Show – with a number of people still interested in obtaining one. So prior to the 2002 Show a larger number than previously ordered were ordered. Result? The number of Handbooks sold at the 2002 Show was something like – “two”. OK, maybe it was three, but it was very few. (Is this an example of market saturation?) Anyway, we think we have something over 25 Handbooks. No one seems to know exactly how many remain, but we feel it is safe to say that it is more than we would like to have.

Gardening College, March 22nd

The Manatee County Extension Service and the Master Gardner Advisory Committee are sponsoring the “Grow It! Gardening College” on March 22nd at the Fairgrounds. A number of our Chapter members will be involved with the Spring Festival at PSBP, but for those who aren't, the Gardening College would be a worthwhile way to spend a Saturday morning. For information “call (941) 722-4524, from Manatee County or (941)

Pruning brings no blooms, but can you figure out how to bring some to our next Chapter Meeting?

742-5986 Ext 231, from South Manatee County or Sarasota County”.

As usual, the Master Gardeners will be having a plant sale on the same day as the “College” - from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM, at the Fairgrounds. These folks have usual and unusual plants and most all look to be well cared for. Some of our members have found it helpful to arrive early.

In the mail...

was the following note:

To: The members of the Golby-Reasoner Chapter. Thank you so much for the gifts you gave to the migrant children. You are so generous and the help you give is needed. The children and their families will pray for each of you. Thank you so much. Love, Sally Beesley

In case there is need for an explanation, the thank you note was for the many gifts for the children of migrant workers that Chapter members brought to the Christmas Party.

Burning hibiscus questions.

Rather often, Bob Carran, a Tampa Bay contributor to The Hibiscus Mail List on the Internet, apparently feels a compulsion to address the larger than life questions of our time – mostly in relation to gardening subjects. Consider the following in that context:

“Sometimes people are faced with unanswerable questions that seem to burn to the core of one’s existence (wow, I like that).

“It was nice when I just had to worry about the midge, or a bit of drought, or freeze, even a fungus or a bug or two. But lately I find myself questioning ‘is it all worth it’? For instance:

1. Why do the squirrels constantly root around in my gallon pots looking for acorns?
2. What are the little white birds with the long legs and long white beaks digging for around the base of my in-ground plants?
3. Why do the moles always seem to burrow under the roots of my hibiscus?
4. Why does my big black dog (Trixie) love to eat my blooms and my newly developed seed pods?
5. And last but not least, why does my cat all of a sudden want to walk across the tops of my seed trays? Is it the crunching sound of the plastic tray lids or is it the immediate attention she gets when I begin screaming at her?

What will ‘Mother Nature’ think up for me next?”

While we don’t wish Bob bad luck, we enjoy the outlook with which he views his really big problems. He seems particularly eloquent when writing about “she who cannot be disobeyed”.

More Chapter Web-Site Doings...

Gene Haugh has somewhat updated and streamlined the chapter’s website at:

<http://web.tampabay.rr.com/hibiscus>

One late addition is a picture of a bloom of the Curt Sinclair hybrid, *Gator Pride*, that was “taken” by placing the bloom face down on a scanner and scanning it. Then Gene fiddled with the picture to make it suitable for a Windows wallpaper. Explore the site and you’ll find it.

Gene would like to get any of your suggestions for proposed additions which could make the website more useful or interesting. How about a collection of hibiscus food recipes? A set of portraits of all chapter officers? Or perhaps for reference purposes, a full year’s worth of Gayler’s monthly hibiscus care methods (as has been and is being expounded here in *Petal Power*)?

If you have some thoughts, send an email to:

Hibiscus gardening in March...

March is a busy month for the Sun Coast hibiscus gardener – for any kind of gardener for that matter. It is cool enough to be comfortable in the garden and since rain usually isn't much of a factor, not many gardening days will be lost to that act of nature. Many plants have been dormant or nearly so during the previous several months and March brings their awakening.

Since we rationalized in last month's *Petal Power* that we were going to, if anything, err on the safe side and approach the subject of pruning as though all our readers lived close to I75. With that guideline in mind, March is the month we remove cold-damaged limbs (if any) at least down to live wood and generally shape the plant for the long growing season ahead. See *The Hibiscus Handbook* for a rather detailed description of the “do's and don't” of pruning, complete with a few illustrative drawings.

If you have been thinking about moving in-ground hibiscus, this is the time to do it. They are semi-dormant now and are less prone to suffer severe shock than if you wait a month or so. Of course, prune the plant to compensate for the roots you will cut in the moving process. The rule of thumb is to water transplants daily for 10 days to 2 weeks, however, the weather and your local soil conditions will play a role in this exercise. While transplanted hibiscus must not dry out, they will suffer from over-watering just like any hibiscus. Furthermore, since the pruning process removes many, if not most, of the leaves which reduce the transpiration, the plants will require less water. Covering the transplant with a piece of burlap or an old sheet for four or five days will help reduce leaf loss.

March is a good time to mulch your hibiscus (and everything else) before it gets any warmer. Correct that to, “before it gets any hotter”. If you haven't been mulching all your plants, both in-ground and in pots, this would be a good time to start. The decrease in the amount of watering required is amazing. If you haven't climbed on the water conservation wagon, you may find the decrease in the amount of time necessary to water your plants appealing. We have found that mulch may cut the number of waterings necessary in half.

Going hand-in-hand with the pruning process is the staking or re-staking of your larger (or less sturdy) hibiscus (in pots and in the ground too). If you use wood stakes, don't assume last year's stakes are still able to support the plant. Wiggle (there's a word one doesn't write much) the stake a bit and you'll find, it's even money, it will be rotted off and will need to be replaced.

Also to be considered as pruning takes place is the need to repot or repot-up your potted plants. If your potted plants have been in the same pot two years or more they are most likely candidates for either repotting or potting-up, because they are probably root bound. To define our terminology, “repotting” involves both above and below ground pruning and replacing the plant in the same size pot, while “repotting-up” or “potting-up” involves moving the plant to a larger pot with limb pruning and disturbing the root ball.

When potting-up, it is recommended that you increase the pot size only to the next larger size, whatever that might be since, as you can imagine, the number of times potting-up can take place is limited by the size pot you want to manhandle from place to place. Use only new potting mix and rough up the root ball with some abandon, or score the root ball with a knife, as you move the plant from the old to the larger pot.

Repotting involves taking the plant out of the pot and using a really big knife or a sharp hatchet to cut away least a third of the roots, including a portion of the swirling root mass that has probably formed at the bottom of the root ball. Put what's left in the same pot, using only new potting mix to replace what you have cut away. While you may use the same pot or another one the same size, it's always best to clean them up with a 10%

bleach solution. If you are repotting a number of plants at the same time and you have a big bucket, submerging the clean pots in the bleach solution really works well.

If about a third of the roots are cut away while repotting, then about a third of the limbs should be removed from the above ground plant. The major pruning of limbs most members conduct at this time of year will, in most cases, be more than a third and will therefore be more than sufficient to compensate for the roots the plants lose during the repotting (or potting-up) process. Of course, it is much easier to do either of the potting processes after the plant is pruned.

After pruning, repotting or potting-up, thoroughly drench the plant and thereafter provide only modest water. As is the case with in-ground plants, after pruning most of the leaves are gone, which dramatically reduces transpiration and the need for water. So cut back the water without letting them go bone-dry, thereby avoiding damage to the root system.

Hibiscus do not have many fungus problems, but a thorough spraying with *Funginex* or something similar after pruning is recommended.

Don't fertilize right after pruning. Some say to wait a week or so before fertilizing. Others say to wait until the first full leaves appear. We have tried both approaches as well as fertilizing right after pruning. Although the "tests" were on a relatively small number of plants, we can't say we see any great difference in the results.

One more item related to pruning. The result of any pruning is a quantity of cuttings which can be grafted if appropriate (if root stock is available) or rooted. If you have root stock, but grafting is a mystery to you, wait with your pruning until after the workshop on March 15th, which will include a session on grafting. Otherwise root the cuttings in some rooting medium, see *The Hibiscus Handbook* for details (rooting will also be discussed at the workshop). Those attending the February Chapter meeting heard Curt Sinclair say that many of the hibiscus varieties that once were thought to propagate only by grafting will grow on their own root. That thought makes it fun to try to root every cutting that results from your pruning, garden variety or not. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. (We think Curt mentioned that *Red Snapper* will not root.) So what do you do when 90% of your cuttings root? May we suggest planting them in small pots and using them as gifts or – contribute them to the gift table at our Show in September. Need we remind you to track the names of the cuttings, from the time they are cut to their first blooms? This is no small issue when you are pruning many plants.

Golby-Reasoner Chapter, AHS

Chapter Meeting Minutes

February 9, 2003

The meeting was called to order by President Flanders at 2:00 PM.

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the January 12th Chapter meeting be approved as published in *Petal Power*. The motion passed.

Treasurer Phyllis Mohn reviewed the financial report. The balance on January 1, 2003, was \$4,172.62. There was income of \$46.00 and expense of \$478.33, resulting in a January 31st balance of \$3,740.29. A motion was made and seconded that the report be filed. The motion passed.

No reports were provided by the various committees, however the efforts of the Hospitality Committee were represented by refreshments provided by the Regis', Bree Pressimone, and the Delberts.

President Flanders reviewed highlights of the January 31st Board meeting.

Discussed several areas of interest in relation to Palma Sola Botanical Park:

- Although several members have made personal contributions to the Palma Sola Botanical Park (PSBP) fund raising campaign, it was decided that a “pass the hat” opportunity to contribute would be given to Chapter members in the February meeting. (The “hat” in the form of an envelope was indeed passed around during the meeting.)
- Reviewed the status of the planning for the Chapter booth at the PSBP Spring Garden Festival. Everything “go”.
- Reviewed a request received from the PSBP Board (via Bob Hunter) to install a hibiscus garden at the Park by March 15th. That request was denied.
- Reviewed various alternates whereby some hibiscus plantings could be installed prior to the Garden Festival. A meeting was arranged for Golby-Reasoner Board members to meet with PSBP representatives on February 3rd to establish a basic plan. President Flanders indicated that the meeting had occurred and areas of agreement had been reached.
- A sign-up sheet for those willing to work on the PSBP garden was circulated.

The Board decided to lower the price of the Hibiscus Handbooks remaining in our stock to our cost (\$6.60), effective immediately, to recoup the Chapter’s investment before the new issue comes out this summer. It is believed that the selling price to non-members will be \$7.00 to alleviate the making of change.

It was decided to try some new things:

- The next meeting will be “Bring a Friend” meeting.
- All members are encouraged to obtain and wear the Chapter green shirts at all garden-related functions outside our regular meetings, in addition to Chapter events and regular meetings.

Annual Show items:

- The Chapter was advised that it would be helpful if a cell phone number were listed in the Seed Pod show ads for use on the day of the Show. Calls on the day of the Show to the home phone number of a Chapter member by those seeking directions don’t get answered. Petey Birchall volunteered to have her cell phone number listed in the ad.
- President Flanders displayed a hibiscus figurine that was approved by the Board for use as prizes at the Show. The Chapter is obtaining them at a very reasonable price and they will be available to members at only \$15.00 each.
- By action of the Board, the 2004 Annual Show will be held at the Bradenton Auditorium.

President Flanders surveyed those present in regard to the rules of the Amateur class of entrants at shows. It appeared that the most votes were given to an alternate that indicated an entrant with less than 25 plants would always be an “amateur”, not just for two shows.

President Flanders distributed tickets to the State Fair to those that were going to staff the hibiscus booth or enter blooms in the hibiscus show on February 15th.

Attendees were reminded about the Spring Workshop that will be held March 15th at PSBP.

President Flanders introduced Curt Sinclair who provided a very interesting program centered on the many beautiful blooms he displayed and discussed. He also fielded several questions related to the cultivation of hibiscus as the “answer man” of the Q&A period.

A motion was made and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion passed at 3:12 PM

The winner of the raffle for a hibiscus plant was Jeanne Nathan.

Gayler Boettcher
Secretary

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events!**
