Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

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April program – Succulents

After a number of Chapter meeting programs and a workshop dealing with our favorite topic – hibiscus, our April meeting will enable us to broaden our view of the plant world with a program about "succulents". Since the succulents are such a large family of plants, it is sure to be "a really big show". (Shades of Ed Sullivan – which will mean nothing to our young members.)

On April 13th, Nancy Wellford, Program Chairperson of the Succulent Society, will be our guest and program presenter. She will discuss the question, "What Are Succulents?" and will introduce our Chapter to succulents, share her experiences in growing them, and will have a number of succulents there as examples of various varieties.

We hope to see you there – that's Sunday, April 13th. Say, how about bringing some hibiscus blooms so Ms. Wellford will be able to see what hibiscus produce?

Workshop outstanding

The only unfortunate aspect of the workshop held on March 15th at Palma Sola Botanical Park is that only a few folks took the opportunity to learn about grafting and have the hands-on experience of actually doing some grafting. Dave Flanders had gathered rootstock and grafting materials, prepared illustrations and altogether made an outstanding presentation on the subject. Those who attended certainly appreciated Dave's efforts and surely learned a bunch about grafting!

PSBP Hibiscus garden

Co-Chairmen Bob Seipel and Donny Waldroup, along with a number of willing volunteers, spread topsoil and planted 60 hibiscus in the driveway circle at Palma Sola Botanical Park during the first part of March. At this writing, mulch has not been delivered, but when it is this group is set to spread it.

We saw the plantings while attending the March 15th workshop. The plants looked good (obtained from Curt Sinclair) and were blooming nicely. It was evident they had been pinched back since each plant was not over two feet tall and had about six, eight or more branches (we will discuss pinching in a future ***Petal Power***).

By the time you read this, the PSBP Spring Garden Festival will have taken place and several of you saw the plantings as you attended that event. We would urge the rest of our readers to visit the PSBP as soon as you can to see the hibiscus plantings and the rest that has been accomplished there. Of course we have a hibiscus garden to plant at the PSBP at some point. The current hibiscus plantings are just part of the landscaping.

Just in case…

you are not among the many rabid readers of meeting minutes, we will repeat a couple items from the minutes that deal with changes in the governance of your Chapter. Pat Sweeney, who is moving out of the area, held both elected and appointed positions in the Chapter. Frank Vejrostek will be assuming her seat on the Board of Directors. Len Erikson will serve as Program Chairman for the rest of the year. Many thanks to both Len and Frank for making room in their busy schedules to serve the Chapter.

Pruning revisited

A recent spate of "conversations" on The Hibiscus Mail List (THML) on the Internet leads us to revisit the subject of pruning. Our February issue discussed at some length the subject of pruning and subjects related to pruning. While that was the thrust of the article we must hasten to state that pruning, particularly severe pruning, is not mandatory for plant health and bloom production.

In-ground hibiscus, not injured by cold weather, virtually may never need pruning – if they are good neighbors in the garden community where they live (i.e. they aren't bothering other plants – or you) and they continue to flourish. On THML Gloria White from south Florida told about her six foot tall *Amber Suzanne* that never requires pruning and other varieties that are "near the 12 ft range". She does prune a few plants that are "ratty", but then she prunes a branch here and there and then goes "back a few months later and cuts anything that is out of proportion".

Plants in pots, however, will require a different approach at some point in their life. The time will come when they will require pruning – and that time will depend on a number of factors. A major factor relates to the size pot you want your plants in. But whatever the pot size, there will be a time when the plant is so large that it will tip over with the slightest breeze, in the absence of some mechanical structure to secure the pot in an upright position. Probably sometime after the tipping business begins, once-a-day watering leaves plants with limp leaves – everything else being equal, which is a pretty good sign of a root-bound plant. A root- bound plant needs relief of some type – "potting-up" into a larger pot (which will probably call for some branch pruning) or repotting in the same size pot (which will require a balanced pruning of roots and branches).

This editor doesn't like hibiscus in anything larger than a three gallon pot because they are moved in and out of a garage several times each winter (four round trips this last winter). Therefore most of his hibiscus varieties are repotted annually, with the rest requiring it only semi-annually. Those on a semi-annual "schedule" still receive some pruning in an attempt to escape the "tipping syndrome.

April Gardening

April is part of our dry season, in fact, historically it is our driest month, so it is likely you won't receive an inch of rain a week. Therefore, from time to time during the month, you will need to get out the hose or turn on the irrigation system to give your hibiscus a drink. April temperatures are normally mild, with highs averaging less than 82 degrees. However, it also tends to be a windy month and plants may dry out more quickly than you might expect, in view of the temperatures. Don't forget to mulch, both in-ground and potted plants, in order to conserve water.

April is the month when we see our plants starting vigorous growth. This is particularly noticeable in hibiscus planted in the ground, since ground temperature needs to get above 65 degrees to initiate root growth.

The insect population begins noticeably with the new growth. Once, the rule was to spray with *Orthene* in the first week of April and at the same time spray other plants and nearby lawns with *Sevin* to control other insects that may transfer to your hibiscus. As we move toward the use of fewer chemicals, we tend to wait until the insects or the evidence of their presence is seen, before spraying. However, to do that, we need to be very observant. Aphids are difficult to spot and they may show up with new growth. When spraying with insecticide is approached, if you don't have *Orthene*, use something with *Orthene* in it like *Iosotox*. Some might be interested in trying the "next generation" systemic insecticide and use something containing *Imidacloprid*, like Bayer's *Tree and Shrub Insect Control*.

Apply a good hibiscus fertilizer early in the month – watering both before and after the application.

April is a pretty good month to pollinate hibiscus blooms to make new seedlings. The sun is not too hot to dehydrate the pollen.

Bugs - R – Us

The Bugs – R – Us slide program obtained from the AHS and presented at the March 9th Chapter meeting was so informative, we felt obligated to attempt to capture in ***Petal Power*** as much of it as we could - for the members who weren't at the meeting. Of course the focal point of the show was the slides, which are a little difficult for us here at ***Petal Power*** to reproduce in print. We will therefore try to pass along what we can *sans slides*. We should hasten to credit Frank Renault for the original script – and we do. It was indeed very well done.

Your average backyard garden is a virtual jungle of crawling, jumping, flying critters that *may* think of your garden as a salad bar! The good news is that there are also beneficial critters (insects) that can help us keep the damaging insects under control. Too often we destroy the beneficials as well as the pests with our insect control programs. Hopefully, after this program you will be able to identify the helpful ones, let them do their thing, thereby cutting your work and costs, and helping the natural environment. Remember, you may win a few battles with these pests, but never the war. They were here long before the dinosaurs and will be here long after you and I are gone.

The LADY BUG BEETLE is one of the more common and easily recognized insects to be found in the garden. Its name dates back to the Middle Ages when it was called "The beetle of Our Lady", referring to the Virgin Mary. Now its name has been shortened to Lady Bug. It is also known as the Ladybird beetle. Some Lady Bugs have two spots, others as many as 32 spots. They come in different colors and most are about the same size. There are about 400 varieties found in the United States alone. They are very beneficial in keeping aphids under control. As a suggestion, don't go out and buy some from a commercial source. They will just fly away in a few days after eating all the aphids, and the aphids will soon reappear.

A Lady Bug in the larval stage doesn't look like anything you would want in your garden, but don't grab the bug spray! In the larval stage they have an even greater appetite for aphids than in the adult stage. Lady Bugs prefer aphids, but when food is in short supply they will eat mites, thrips and other small Insects.

There are four stages of development of an insect: egg, larval, pupal and adult. Since each stage varies dramatically in appearance, recognizing an insect can be difficult.

APHIDS are the most common insects to be found in a garden. They tend to gather on tender new growth, are soft bodied, and don't fly. They come in many colors, but green is the most common. Over 1350 species of aphids are found in the United States. They reproduce rapidly without egg fertilization. In limited numbers they are not a major problem, but they can carry plant viruses which kill plants.

6. ANTS love eating the honeydew that aphids excrete and will protect them, and herd them like cattle from one plant to another. There are two easy non-insecticidal ways to deal with the ant-aphid connection. The first is to apply a sticky ant barrier strip around the base of the plant trunk. This forms a mechanical barrier that keeps the ant off of the plant. A second way is to spray the plant with diatomaceous earth (DE). This non- toxic powder is very sharp and cuts the soft under-bellies of ants (and other soft-bodied insects) if they crawl over it, and they will die within a few hours. Use the agricultural grade DE, and not the type for swimming pools. Also follow the manufacturers safe use recommendations, such as wearing a mask to avoid inhaling the DE powder. Also, Safer Soap and Orthene can be used to kill aphids. *(Editor's note: Orthene as such is no longer available, however it is in an Ortho product Isotox, along with a miticide "Vendex".)* Remember when spraying plants with insecticides, to be sure to spray the underside of the leaves as this is where most insects prefer to live.

A fungus known as SOOTY MOLD will begin growing in the secretion of the aphids and other insects. It is black in color, unsightly, and looks as if you have cleaned out the fireplace and thrown the ashes on your plant. An oil emulsion sprayed on the leaves at night will loosen the fungus. The next morning before the sun has

dried the leaves, direct a strong blast of water to the leaves. That will wash off most of the mold. Additionally, the water will wash off the aphids. If you rid your plants of the aphids, the sooty mold problem will disappear by itself.

THRIPS are 1/16 to 1/4 inch long and slender. These bad bugs live in the flowers and tender new leaves. The adult lays its eggs in the flower buds where they will hatch in a few days. They then suck fluids until they drop to the ground where they pupate in the soil. Eventually they emerge as flying adults. Their life cycle is two to three weeks.

SIX-SPOTTED THRIP is one of the many varieties of thrips. A few are actually beneficial and eat other thrips, aphids and spider mites. The six-spotted thrip eats spider mites. As a general rule, however, most are not beneficial. You may control those thrips with *Safer Soap, Neem* oil. Predatory mites and lacewing larvae can be purchased from a commercial source, and unlike Lady Bugs, are not as likely to leave the area of your plants. For chemical control, if required, use *Avid, Orthene, Mavrik* or *Dursban*. Garlic cloves and peppers, can be boiled together to make a tea, which can then be sprayed on the plants for a more environmentally friendly insect control.

The bad news about the PINK HIBISCUS MEALY BUG is that it is now in Florida. It is in many of the Caribbean Islands and was also recently discovered in California. It attacks hibiscus and more than 200 varieties of other plants. Pesticides do not penetrate its waxy coating and are virtually useless. It also reproduces extremely rapidly. A tiny wasp (*Anagyrus kamali*), which has been imported from China, is a parasite of the Mealy Bug and kills it by laying its eggs inside the adult Mealy Bug. It has proven to keep it under control where it has been released, and has reduced the Mealy Bug population by up to 90 percent. The Department of Agriculture is prepared to use this wasp in the United States. Another natural predator that is already in the U.S. is the Mealy Bug Destroyer. One Mealy Bug Destroyer can kill 3 to 5 thousand Pink Hibiscus Mealy Bugs in its life cycle.

Again, the larva stage of the LARVA MEALY BUG DESTROYER does not look like the adult stage. In fact it looks very similar to a Mealy Bug. They move very fast and are larger than a Mealy Bug and have legs, which helps distinguish them from Mealy Bugs. So look closely before you start killing this insect to make sure it's a Mealy Bug and not a Mealy Bug Destroyer.

Please wear your green chapter shirts to meetings and outside gardening events!

The IO MOTH is a common moth in South Florida, and is of little worry to gardeners, until it turns into the IO CATERPILLAR. There are two major problems with this caterpillar. First, it has a tremendous appetite. A few of them can strip a hibiscus plant of all its leaves in a day. Second if you come in contact with one you will feel intense pain for several minutes. Simplest control is to grab a set of gloves and a pair of clippers and cut them in half. Another effective control for most caterpillars is *Bacillus Thuringiensis* (B.T. for short). This is a spray that contains bacteria that will kill most caterpillars in a few hours and is available at most garden centers.

The common GARDEN SPIDER is not dangerous and should be encouraged, at least in the garden. Like most spiders they are beneficial destroying many pests in the yard.

Many insects are so small it is difficult to see them with the naked eye. A ten power hand lens will make your detective work in the garden much easier. In order to see SPIDER MITES you will need a hand lens. If you don't have a hand lens you can detect their presence by the webs they weave between leaves and branches, hence the term "spider" mites. You can readily tell the presence of spider mites by the damage they do. First, several small areas of the leaf will turn yellow. These areas grow in size until the leaf is entirely yellow and falls off. Spider mites are a frequent and severe problem, especially in warm, dry weather. Treatment includes spraying the underside of leaves with a jet spray of water, and washing them with *Safer Soap* or *Palmolive Gold* soap. Certain chemicals such as *Sevin* should not be used because it causes the mites to reproduce faster.

Spider mites produce dark scarred tissue on the underside of leaves by sucking fluid from the leaf. Note that spider mites are located on the underside of the leaf. Luckily there are natural predators of this pest. The spider mite destroyer is actually a type of Lady Bug. As its name implies, its main meal is spider mites. Other natural predators include predatory mites, six spotted thrips, as mentioned earlier, certain flies and lacewing larvae.

ADULT LACEWINGS need nectar, pollen or honeydew to feed on or they will fly away, and you don't want them to do that. So always keep flowering plants around for them to feed on.

The LARVAL LACEWING is also called the “aphid lion” because it has a lion of an appetite. It will eat as many as 200 aphids per day. They also eat mites, thrips, Mealy Bugs, and immature white flies. Now, is this a great fellow or what? Unfortunately, if no other food is around, they will eat each other. In the larval stage they can travel 80 to 100 feet per day. Don't confuse them with thrips, which look similar. Also, commercial food is available to keep them in your garden.

Now let’s talk about MEALY BUG. The good news about these bad bugs is that they are easy to spot. Their bodies are very soft and they look like small flakes of cotton. Unfortunately they do multiply rapidly and quickly spread on the infected plant and to other plants. Small outbreaks can be treated with isopropyl spray or Murphy's Oil spray. Again, always be sure to spray the underside of the leaves. And a great natural predator is the Mealy Bug Destroyer, discussed earlier.

Not to be confused with the larger Lacewing is the greenhouse WHITEFLY. As its name indicates it is white in color. Shake a branch and you can easily see these pests flying for a few seconds and landing back on the plant.

Another way to detect whiteflies is with the use of sticky yellow traps. They are attracted to yellow and are easy to recognize on the trap. Yellow traps are usually made of plastic and are covered with a sticky material. Since many insects, especially thrips, are attracted to yellow, this is the color most often used. The sticky stuff is called "tangle foot" and is available from mail order garden suppliers. Some have tried the trap in their garden and gave up on it because too many beneficial insects and newly hatched insect-eating lizards were getting trapped. Natural enemies of white flies include larval lacewings, ladybug beetles, and *Encarsia Formosa* (more about E. Formosa later). Chemical controls include *Neem* (a natural insect repellent from the Neem tree), insecticidal soap, *Orthene*, *Avid* and *Merit.* A tiny parasitic wasp, *Encarsia Formosa,* lays its eggs in the larva of the white fly. This is another beneficial that is available through a garden supplier.

The name of the HAND GRENADE SCALE refers to its resemblance to a miniature hand grenade. It grows on the main stems and trunk of the hibiscus bush. Several years ago it was a major problem but today it occurs less frequently. Control them in cooler weather with 3 applications of *Cygon* at two-week intervals, and expect to lose a few leaves from your plant. On a small outbreak, use a brush and paint the affected area to minimize the dropping of leaves.

WHITE SNOW SCALE is easy to spot growing next to darker colored bark. It prefers damp warm weather. Mulch against a bush trunk also encourages its growth. It usually is spotted on the trunk near the soil line, and

in time works its way up the stem, eventually covering the entire plant. Small outbreaks on stems and trunks can be treated with PAM cooking spray or WD 40. *(Editor's note: Apply Pam or WD40 to wood only –not leaves.)* For larger outbreaks, spray them with *Cygon*. Remember to use *Cygon* in the cooler months of the year to minimize leaf damage.

Wrapping a PLANT LABEL around the main trunk of a plant is similar to the effect that mulching close to the trunk has and will greatly increase the chance of getting snow scale. Placing a label stake away from the plant trunk will reduce the chance of developing snow and other scales. Incidentally, if you mark the labels with a Number-2 lead pencil, the markings last much longer than those made with indelible pens and laundry markers, and they don't fade even after several years.

Unless you get up early in the morning or it's a rainy day, you may not see SNAILS, but you can easily see the damage they do. If you see leaves with large holes, especially in the center of the leaf, snails probably did it. Unconventional ways of controlling them include sprinkling salt on them or filling a flat dish with beer. The only problem with the beer method is that often they do not drown, and they may keep you and the neighbors awake all night with their singing. A favorite and effective method, if there are just a few, is the hammer and brick method. If you see a possum or raccoon in your garden, they may be looking for snails as it is one of their favorite foods. Commercial baits such as *Bug-Geta* or sprays like *Slug-Fest* also work well. A spray mixture of 3 to 4 ounces of *Clorox* in one gallon of water applied to the soil late in the day reportedly is also effective.

The GALL MIDGE, first recognized in 1997, is now prevalent throughout Florida. A small fly lays its eggs in a developing flower bud, causing the bud to drop off before flowering. When the bud falls to the ground, the larva burrows into the ground. The small larvae are 1/8th of an inch long, and light yellow to white in color. If you have buds that are dropping and suspect it may be due to midges, there is an easy way to confirm your suspicions. Take some buds that look like they are about to fall off, cut them in half and put in a clear, sealed plastic baggie. If midges are present they will come out of the buds in a few minutes and will be easy to see by holding the plastic baggie next to a dark background. If you want to be absolutely sure they are midges, put a couple in your hand. If they jump several inches, they are midges. Effective control is difficult and still under research.

If all else fails, learn to SHARE. The war with insects is one you cannot win. Be happy to keep them under reasonable control. Give Mother Nature a helping hand when needed, and use chemicals sparingly. Why spray an entire yard when only one plant may be infected?

GOOD LUCK !!

Golby-Reasoner Chapter, AHS

Chapter Meeting Minutes

March 9, 2003

The meeting was called to order by President Flanders at 2:04 PM.

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the February 9th Chapter meeting be approved as published in ***Petal Power***. The motion passed.

Treasurer Phyllis Mohn reviewed the financial report. The balance on hand February 1, 2003, was $3,740.29. There was income of $63.10 and expense of $118.70, resulting in a February 28th balance of $3,684.69. A motion was made and seconded that the report be filed. The motion passed.

Under a heading of “Committee Reports”, Marilyn Shields, Hospitality Committee Chairperson indicated that refreshments were going to be provided following the meeting by Dotty Taaffe and Jeanne Nathan.

President Flanders reminded Board Members to call Jeanne Nathan if they will not be at Board meetings.

President Flanders reviewed highlights of the February 28th Board meeting:

1. He discussed several areas of interest in relation to Palma Sola Botanical Park (PSBP):

    - Received a report that $90.00 had been donated by Chapter members to the PSBP.
    - The planting of a hibiscus garden was discussed. (Donny Waldroup reported on the progress to date.)
    - The booth at the Spring Garden Festival was discussed. (Gayler Boettcher discussed elements of booth planning.)

2. Pat Sweeney resigned from the Board of Directors. As a result:

    - Frank Vejrostek has been selected to fill the vacancy.
    - Len Erikson has agreed to replace Pat as Program Chairperson.

Several announcements and reminders were made by President Flanders:

- The Spring Workshop will be held March 5th at PSBP.
- Everyone was urged to wear their green Chapter shirts to meetings and outside gardening events.
- Bring blooms to Chapter meetings.

The Chapter May picnic will be held at PSBP this year.

A slide program from the AHS entitled “Bugs R Us” was shown and narrated by Pat Grant.

A short Q&A period about hibiscus plant care was held.

A motion was made and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion passed at 2:57 PM.

A raffle was held for a *Brandy* hibiscus. The winner was Carl Kramer. Sure.

Gayler Boettcher, Secretary

CLASSYFIEDS