

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

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

Meet Randy Cox at February meeting

We are pleased to say that February's Chapter meeting program will be in the capable hands of Randy Cox, a member of the Harry Gouling Chapter in Punta Gorda. Randy is an active hibiscus grower and an active member of AHS. He will be on the 2004 AHS ballot as a candidate for First Vice-President. He is currently the AHS Seedling Evaluation Coordinator. This is a meeting hibiscus folks should enjoy – it's going to be about – hibiscus! Hope to see you there!

NOTE: A member and past president of our Chapter, David Flanders, is a candidate for the Board of Directors of the American Hibiscus Society. We hope everyone will vote for Dave when they receive their ballots – and when will that be? We will find out and let you know.

Thanks to Circulation Managers

We want to take a few lines to recognize the folks that have served as Circulation Managers for *Petal Power* during 2003. The Circulation Managers are the people, on a rotating basis, that actually “put out” *Petal Power* every month because they duplicate, fold, stamp, and mail every copy. In 2003, the Circulation Managers were Len Erikson, Rae Flanders, and Trudy Topolosky. Thank you for the great job each of you did – and thanks too, to the spouses who helped in the effort.

As we enter 2004, we are happy to announce that Trudy Topolosky will be the Circulation Manager. After serving several years, Trudy didn't want to be an officer or Board member this year. However, she wanted to contribute to the Chapter so she volunteered to be *The Circulation Manager* for all the 2004 issues of *Petal Power*. Needless to say, we thank Trudy for “stepping to the plate”. Thanks Trudy!

Quiet and Gardening

A recent *Sound and Vision* magazine article reflected at some length on the fact that, for hundreds of centuries, the world was a very quiet place. The sound of the wind, crickets, and birds established the expected volume level. The occasional thunderstorm was the loudest event in the lives of early folks. It's easy to understand why those extraordinarily loud sounds commanded such fear and respect in people who were accustomed to quiet.

Considering the presence of quiet as a condition of existence in the not too distant past, led us to wonder if the quiet of the garden was an element that, combined with other things, makes gardening so appealing to those in the 21st Century. There certainly is something therapeutic about gardening, whatever the specific activity might be, and the absence of a blaring television or music system may be a major part of the appeal. If we accept the therapeutic effect of gardening, perhaps a slogan of future gardeners will be, “Pulling a weed a day will keep the doctor away”.

Blooms – no leaves?

Have you noticed hibiscus losing their leaves, progressing from the bottom to the top? The result may be, as a Chapter member mentioned in the January Chapter meeting, a plant with blooms but no leaves. While the objective of raising hibiscus is to have blooms, disregarding the foliage, a plant with blooms and no leaves is taking the objective a bit far. In addition, of course, the plant will not live without leaves. While there are some pests that will defoliate a plant, it appears to be generally accepted that a plant that loses its leaves from the bottom up (with virtually no new leaves sprouting) is suffering from root distress of some type. There are not

many avenues the hobbyist gardener has available to treat root problems. Tom Miller from the St. Pete area, who always attends our shows, is a major advocate of bleach drenches. Tom advocates that when the disappearance of leaves is noticed, the soil should be drenched with a one part bleach/10 parts water solution. (We have always assumed that Tom was talking about treating potted plants.) Locally, Donny Waldroup rather severely prunes plants with the no-leaf condition and has had some recover. We don't recall Tom Miller ever saying anything about pruning plants he had drenched with bleach, but the combination of both approaches may bear fruit – or leaves in this case.

The Hibiscus Mail List

Our world has undergone significant change, both in our business and private worlds, due to the advent of email and the internet. We all might wish that email and the internet had been available when we went to school and during our life in the business world – or whatever. What a great source of information and means of exchanging information and knowledge that we didn't have available just a decade or so ago. Wouldn't Eric and Sally Golby have had a ball participating in discussions on The Hibiscus Mail List (THML) had email been available twenty or thirty years ago? They would have been the “king and queen” of the group, with their knowledge and sense of humor.

However, Eric and folks many years his junior find it amazing and difficult to think of a group of 500 or so folks interested in hibiscus, from every continent except Antarctica, “talking” daily via email about hibiscus. It is amazing! True, perhaps only 15 or 20 folks are regular participants in THML discussions and perhaps there are only 25 or 30 messages placed on the List on the average day. But, how long would it have taken thirty years ago to accomplish what the THML does in one day? How long would it have taken, and what would have it cost, for 15 people to exchange letters, perhaps several times and send 480 folks carbon copies (remember those?) of each letter? Disregarding a direct answer – the fact is it just wouldn't have happened. And that is the real benefit of email and the internet, things are accomplished today that just would not have happened not too many years ago.

THML has just begun its eighth year. Since its inception, about 43,000 messages have been posted, on just about any subject you could imagine that pertains to hibiscus – and the interchanges are pretty much confined to hibiscus related subjects. It is one of the largest plant-specific mail lists.

If you are reading this – which must mean you like hibiscus – and you have an email account, you will find THML interesting and informative. Becoming a subscriber is easy – email Gene Haugh ehaugh@tampabay.rr.com for instructions. (Did you notice that the known email addresses of Chapter members are shown in the “Directory”?) If you join THML and what you are interested in isn't being discussed, don't “un-subscribe” in a few days – ask the group your question. You may get more answers than you wanted. In our opinion, most of the information provided by list members is good, but most subscribers are amateurs just like us. However, there are some professional hibiscus growers, agricultural advisers, and folks with degrees in botanical areas that are frequent participants. Join THML – the price is right (free)!

The real story...

Thanks to Eric Golby, here is the real story about this year's weather – according to the *2004 Old Farmer's Almanac*. The Almanac says Florida's winter will be wet and mild overall, with below-normal temperatures in December and January and above normal temperatures in February and March. Don't know about the “wet” part of the forecast, but the below normal temperatures part is “right on”. Now let's see what we can look forward to in February and March – above normal temperatures. Sounds good! Oops, what's this – stormy weather in the second week of March? Have to put that on the calendar. We will try to keep you informed as the year goes along so that you can be prepared for weather trends – according to the *Old Farmer's Almanac*.

What soap?

While a soap/water mixture is recommended as a defense measure against numerous pests, the soap to be used tends to not be discussed to any degree. Here is part of a THML email from Pat Merritt in Houston that treats that part of the subject, plus:

“.....We have used Palmolive (the green one) and Dawn (the blue/green one) and Ivory with good results. One or no more than two tablespoons per gallon of water. Spray early in the morning or after the sun is off the plants in the evening. I would stay away from the citrus-flavored ones.”

We have felt that true soaps, not detergents, were preferred for use as sprays. Therefore, we found it interesting that Pat said they have used Dawn (a detergent) with good results. That could simplify shopping for some; however we will probably stick with the real soaps. We had not thought of nor been confronted with citrus laced soap in the garden, but it could, logically, have an adverse affect on plants.

Hibiscus gardening in February

No! Not yet. That is, those who are in areas that have freeze/frosts should **wait** to prune, until the first part of March. Some of the areas our members live in have experienced frosts well into March. Since pruning encourages new growth which is easily damaged by frost it makes sense to wait a few weeks more to prune. We will discuss pruning, repotting, and potting-up in the February issue of *Petal Power*.

As a part of Florida's dry season, February normally has very little rain. Hibiscus gardeners should expect to water plants, but they should be watered only when needed, which may not be very often since, in most years, the plants are almost dormant.

In most Februaries, hibiscus would be rather dormant, but this year parts of January's weather were warm enough that blooms were and perhaps still are being produced. Perhaps there should be some gardening axiom that would state, "If it is warm enough to have blooms, it is warm enough to have critters looking for a meal". Whether there is such an adage or not, it is pretty much the way things are, so be on the lookout for various and sundry varmints, mites in particular.

Some say that after the 20th a light fertilization –half strength - helps plants phase out of the dormant stage as they enter the warmer weather and the possible pruning in March. This should be easy to remember because, in this area, late February (and early March) is when everything in your landscape should be fertilized, including lawns. And February is the month to prune crepe myrtles. Some folks here at *Petal Power* have a hard time remembering that.

February is a good month to do things you won't have time for during the growing season. For instance, if you haven't before, take several soil samples from your hibiscus growing area (or any other area) to the extension service office in Palmetto and have your soil pH tested. (The satisfactory pH range for hibiscus is 5.5 to 7.8.) The extension office (in Manatee County - 722-4524) will tell you how to collect your samples. If you are interested in determining the other elements in your soil, the extension office has a kit you can use to send a soil sample to Gainesville. The results will be mailed to you.

Golby-Reasoner Chapter, AHS

Chapter Meeting Minutes

January 11, 2004

The meeting was called to order by President Pat Grant at 2:10 PM.

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the December 13 Chapter meeting be approved as published in *Petal Power*. The motion passed.

No Treasurer's report was available.

President Grant recognized all those involved with the outstanding Christmas Party. Specific reference was made to the work of Karin Delbert and Marilyn Shields for their overall efforts and to Carl Kramer for hosting our group at the Yacht Club.

President Grant introduced the following subjects, several of which received discussion:

- a. The plants have been ordered for the show from the Schneiders.
- b. Reconfirmed that indeed the Show will be held at the First Baptist Church.
- c. The oriental lantern has been purchased for the memorial garden at PSBP. Additional work is required, prior to obtaining a plaque for the memorial.
- d. Several subjects for meeting programs were introduced by President Grant and several others were suggested by meeting attendees.

Randy Cox, a hibiscus grower, will be our program presenter for the February meeting.

Pat Grant led an interesting slide show about the sex life of hibiscus, which included pictures of the blooms of mothers, fathers and their offspring.

A raffle was held for a *New Idea* hibiscus, which was “won” by Pat Grant. Sure.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:47 PM.

Gayler Boettcher, Secretary

CLASSIFIEDS

BANANA Lovers! Large Staghorn fern for sale that thrives on banana peels. Call Karin Delbert @ 794-5271.

Cold Porcelain Creations! Lifelike Hibiscus and other flowers, singles/bouquets. Yvonne Santiago: (941) 727-7293, vonry01@aol.com, or www.coldporcelaincreations.com