

# Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter  
American Hibiscus Society

October, 2005

Editor: Gayler Boettcher: [g.boet@gte.net](mailto:g.boet@gte.net)

Publisher: Gene Haugh: [gene.haugh@gmail.com](mailto:gene.haugh@gmail.com)

Website: [www.4hibiscus.com](http://www.4hibiscus.com)

## November Meeting features Website

At the next chapter meeting, Gene Haugh will tell us where the chapter website came from, what it has, and where it's headed. The website has been visited over 20,000 times this year ... so far.

## How did she do that?

That's the question many at the October Chapter meeting were asking as they watched Yvonne Santiago perform her magic, creating all sorts of things from a ball of what looked like clay. It was both fascinating and informative to see how the creations are made that we have come to recognize being used as gifts for our Chapter meeting program presenters. Thank you Yvonne for sharing your talent with us!

Each year all the chapters of the AHS are expected to provide items to be auctioned off at the national convention. This year, Yvonne created and donated an outstanding porcelain hibiscus arrangement for our Chapter's contribution. We all should send Yvonne a big vote of thanks for sharing her creative gifts so willingly. Thanks Yvonne!

## A look back...

As we make our way through the months when not too much is going on in our gardens, we thought we would spend some time discussing the spread of hibiscus in the early years of the twentieth century, the history of the American Hibiscus Society and our Chapter, and the people who were important to those histories. We will be following this story for the next several months.

In 2000, Eric Golby was asked to speak at the convention of the AHS, as it marked its fiftieth anniversary. His health prevented his attendance, but he sent his written speech. We acquired a copy of it and although it may have been read or otherwise made available at the convention, we feel it has not been reproduced otherwise. Reading about the history of hibiscus as it was written by a

man who was such an important part of that history is not often experienced. Therefore, we are quoting liberally from his 2000 speech including the portions that show the fondness Eric felt for his "Hibiscus Friends".

"Good evening my many Hibiscus Friends....I am really sorry I am unable to be with you in person because of my health, on this tremendous anniversary of the fiftieth founding of the American Hibiscus Society...in 1950.

There was only an occasional hibiscus plant among the few settlers in Florida when nineteen year old Pliny W. Reasoner left Princeton, Illinois in 1881 to come to Manatee, Florida. Manatee was then a huge county that stretched from Hillsborough County to the north, Charlotte County to the south and Lake Okeechobee to the east. There were only a few thousand residents in this whole area.

Here in Oneco, Pliny started a nursery that later become known around the world for its collection of rare and unusual plants. His catalog of 1885 listed twenty-five varieties of hibiscus, obtained mostly from Cuba and Henry A. Dreer of Philadelphia. This collection of hibiscus was continued by his brother, Egbert, when they became Reasoner Brothers Royal Palm Nurseries of Oneco. In this period some hibiscus were imported from Hawaii. In 1913 some twenty five seedlings bearing the names of Greek gods and muses were put on the market. ... Egbert Reasoner's son, Norman, took over on Egbert's death in 1926 and gradually added to the collection. The end of WWII began to bring more people to Florida and the interest in hibiscus grew. In the 1940's a number of people began crossing and raising hibiscus from seed. This new interest naturally caused a rash of people wanting to acquire these new ones, and folks were crossing the state to get hold of the latest kinds.

Here is where the problems arose. The names of the hibiscus just acquired were often passed by word of mouth, or sometimes on a piece of paper so that by the time the purchaser got home and planted the hibiscus in the ground, the confusion grew. Later as propagation started, the spelling or pronunciation was not the same. The introduction of the plastic plant label in the early 1950's was one of the best things that ever happened to hibiscus and all other kinds of plants.

By this time, Norman Reasoner had quite a collection at his Tropical Branch Nursery at Palma Sola in 1950: over 500 varieties. (Not far from the new Palma Sola Botanical Gardens.)

In the Nursery trade, a variety might be grown by as many as five different names. Trying to describe them by memory became impossible, and there needed to be order out of this chaos. Norman Reasoner began correspondence with interested hibiscus growers ... They began to compare notes on names, description of color and growth. Information was gathered by mail, telephone and personal visits. Then in the late 1940's Mr. Reasoner put his first "Descriptive Hibiscus bulletin" and mimeographed it on legal size yellow paper of several pages. The first pages gave credit and location of the several helpful correspondents who had assisted in straightening out the mess and confusion. The bulletin sold for a dollar and was in great demand. Norman put these bulletins out for four years, making corrections and additions each year. Many a rainy afternoon when it was too wet to work in the nursery I came into the office and cranked the handle on the mimeograph machine (non-electric) as the demand began to grow.

At all conferences and meetings, the bulletin gave impetus to forming some sort of group for growers of hibiscus. By this time there seemed to be more hibiscus people on Florida's east coast, so more of these get-togethers were held there. At one time, the name "Florida Hibiscus Society" was proposed, but eventually, "The American Hibiscus Society" was chartered in Palm Beach County in 1950. The exact date, I don't remember.

The founders were somewhat disappointed by the small number of charter members, so another meeting was held to hold the charter open for more members. This is when Norman Reasoner asked

me for my five dollars. I believe I am the last charter member still alive.

Boy Oh Boy! Have I had my five bucks worth!!

Well, I thank you, my friends ... It is YOU who have built this wonderful organization to the great heights that it is today!!

One last story...many of you have heard it... Back at the beginning of the Society, we set up some "displays" of hibiscus flowers ... back before we had shows. This one was held in the lobby of the old San Juan Hotel (built in 1914) in downtown Orlando. Blooms were displayed on tables by each member and growers. Mr. Reasoner thought if they could be judged, it would add a little dignity. He asked me "Eric, do you have a pen?" I answered, "Yes," He said, "Eric, I now pronounce you to be a Judge." So that is how I came to be the first AHS judge.

### Hibiscus Gardening in November

This is the month in which we normally prepare for the coming cold weather – particularly those in the eastern portions of our membership coverage. However, the way things are going this year, our preparations may include getting ready for the kind of storm we do not mention in these pages. (Hopefully, we are not recovering from the effects of one of those storms.)

Eric Golby felt that in some Novembers, it was not unusual to have strong, cold winds of 30 to 40 mph with temperatures around 40 degrees. That combination produces a wind chill factor of 30 – 40 degrees. When that happens, about 10 days later unprotected hibiscus will have a host of yellow leaves. In addition, he felt that about every second or third November we will get at least one 32 degree night. It seems that at least in the near past we have enjoyed somewhat warmer weather, but that does not mean that we will not return to past cycles at any time.

Therefore, those living in the eastern portions of the counties should start gathering the materials needed to provide protection for our hibiscus plants. Old quilts, blankets, and drapes are always good items to have. Sheets have limited value in protecting plants from cold weather, however they are better

than nothing and can be used, particularly to shield plants from cold winds. Large cardboard boxes that would completely cover plants and rest on the ground are excellent and store well broken down. Rain (or, heaven forbid, snow) may pretty well wreck them, but they may survive one perhaps two such occasions. As the winter nears, we may discuss winter protection techniques.

Hibiscus growers living in areas that “never” have frosts or freezes may find it appropriate to continue with their fertilizing program, but at half strength, throughout the winter months. We say “half strength” because plants grow slowly during the cool weather and therefore need only a little to eat, plus, if the unusual happens and a frost occurs in these usually frost-free area, reducing the amount of tender new growth may limit the amount of damage the frost will do.

Hibiscus growers who live in areas that experience frosts or freezes should apply their last fertilizer no later than November 10<sup>th</sup> – if time release fertilizer is not used. If you use a time release fertilizer, such as the fertilizer sold by the Chapter, and you fed your plants since early October you are “good” – feed no more. If you fed your plants prior to October, feeding time release fertilizer now is probably more than you really want unless you make it a very light application.

Where ever you live, there are still critters that would like to make lunch out of your hibiscus. They will continue to be a problem until we enter the really cool weather of the winter. At least that’s the theory! Continued attention to what is going on – on your plants followed by the appropriate action is still required.

If you have some shaping/pruning to do and you live in a “cold” area, do it before the 15<sup>th</sup> so the resulting sprouts will be hardened off before winter sets in – to the extent it is going to.

We found through personal experience that the milder weather we experienced in mid October was not “mild” enough to allow a noticeable stretch in the timing between waterings. The result was a zillion yellow leaves. Our defense is that we were out of town and couldn’t see that the plants needed water, but the lesson learned is that somewhat

cooler weather does not necessarily mean that watering can be decreased.

## Golby-Reasoner Chapter, AHS Chapter Meeting Minutes October 9, 2005

First Vice-President Janet Love called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

Several visitors were introduced by Mark Love.

A motion was made and seconded that the minutes of the previous meeting be accepted as published in *Petal Power*. The motion carried.

Treasurer Shirley Adams reported that the amount on hand September 30, 2005 was \$3,777.05. There was a motion and a second that the report be accepted as reported. The motion passed.

A note from Mike Bossert was read by Sunshine Chair Dotty Taaffe.

Vice-President Love asked for volunteers to chair the Chapter’s booth at the Manatee River Garden Club Holiday Festival, November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. Since no volunteers were forthcoming, Gayler Boettcher volunteered himself and Donny Waldroup. A sign-up sheet was passed for additional volunteers to staff the booth.

A Hawaiian theme is suggested for the October 27<sup>th</sup> potluck at the Boettcher home. A sign-up sheet, with Hawaiian recipes attached, was passed among the attendees.

A motion was made and seconded that the proposed amendments to the Bylaws be accepted. The motion passed.

Vice-President Love discussed the AHS Katrina Relief Fund.

A motion was made and seconded that the current Chapter Life Members be renamed as Honorary Chapter Members. The motion passed.

A program concerning the used of cold porcelain in the making of figurines was presented by Yvonne Santiago.

A raffle was conducted by Carl Kramer and the prize, a “Miss Vermont” hibiscus, was won by Carl Kramer (!).

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Gayler Boettcher, Secretary

### **CLASSIFIEDS**

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

## Coming Events

October 27, 6:00 p.m. Potluck at the Boettcher Home

November 4, 9:30 a.m. Board Meeting at Manatee County Library South

November 13, 2:00 p.m. Chapter Meeting. Gene Haugh, "Chapter Website"

December 11. Annual Christmas Party!