

Petal Power

Golby-Reasoner Chapter
American Hibiscus Society

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Carl Kramer brings joy to the world.

Festive Christmas Party

The annual Christmas Party, or Luncheon, was just what one would hope it would be – “festive”! It was complete with the always beautiful Christmas tree bedecked with hibiscus blooms surrounded by colorfully wrapped Christmas presents and Christmas carols rendered by several enthusiastic singers. Overall, it was just what was needed to bring the Christmas season into focus for everyone attending.

Special thanks need to be extended to numerous people who made the event special. Dottie Erikson and Trudy Topolosky were co-chairs and did an outstanding job. Petey Birchall, as a member of El Conquistador, was our hostess. Jean Tourt was again pianist extraordinaire and the Eriksons and Gayler Boettcher contributed door prizes. And thanks to everyone who helped the Chapter get back

the money it had invested in plants for the Manatee Garden Club booth – by buying all but two of the left-over plants. If we are forgetting anyone, we apologize. Having said that, we have now remembered that we should thank the Chapter for buying the deserts, which were not a part of the cost of the tickets purchased by the members.

The receipt of the annual Chapter Directory of members has become a part of the tradition of the Christmas Party. We look forward to Gene and Sue Haugh making their way among the members passing out the new edition, featuring Gene’s latest hibiscus art on the cover. Thank you Gene, we all appreciate having, annually, up-to-date directories that exceed the commonplace due to your works of art.

It was evident to our reporter on the scene that the number of gifts for the children of migrant workers under the Christmas tree were more numerous this year than in years past – particularly considering the number of members in attendance. What a wonderful way to express one of the meaningful aspects of the Season! And many thanks to Eva and Donny Waldroup for taking charge of the presents and getting them on their way.

Next year’s Christmas Party will be on Saturday, December 9th at the Bradenton Yacht Club, which is always a beautiful setting and one enjoyed by everyone.

Gobs of Pretty Blooms...

That’s right – many, many pretty hibiscus blooms will be at the January meeting! The fact that they will be shown on a screen by means of a slide projector is inconsequential – they will still be beautiful! The Flanders have obtained one of the slide shows, entitled “Old and New”, from the American Hibiscus Society library for our viewing in the January 8th Chapter meeting. Rae Flanders will be the presenter and if past shows are any indication of what can be expected, it is a program

everyone will enjoy. That's Sunday, January 8th, at 2:00 p.m.

More "A Look Back"...

During these months when not much is going on in our gardens we are using some of our newsletter space to write about various historical hibiscus topics. In this article, the third of a four part series, we will look at some of the history of hibiscus and the American Hibiscus Society, according to Eric Golby.

The Chinese Hibiscus, *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, was a native of the warm southern part of what was once the huge empire of China. It is believed that the original wild flower was a small single pink – it possibly no longer exists.

The early Chinese traders, in their search for sandalwood, spread the Hibiscus from their gardens through the islands of the South Pacific, and later to Hawaii. The gardeners of the emperors, mandarins, and the royal court, in never ceasing efforts to provide something new and different, produced various other colors and forms that were mostly double.

That is no doubt why the first Hibiscus introduced into Europe in the 1700's were all doubles. From Europe's conservatories of the wealthy, they came to America, first to Philadelphia in about 1842. The first catalog in Florida to list Hibiscus was that of the Reasoner Brothers of Oneco, who in 1887 listed twenty-five varieties. These had been obtained from Henry A. Dreer in Philadelphia and from a collecting trip to Havana in 1885 by Pliny W. Reasoner. The Hibiscus in Florida was truly on its way.

Everyone noticed that a great deal of confusion in variety names existed. For instance, when tags or labels were lost or unreadable, new names were guessed at or invented to suit the owner. Also, no information on Hibiscus care or culture was available at all. It was seen that a way of cataloging them by correct names and descriptions was of great importance.

In 1948 the late Norman Reasoner of Bradenton began mimeographing a descriptive bulletin with

the help of ten collaborators in Florida, Texas and California.

These people and a group of Hibiscus enthusiasts in the Palm Beach area began the task of getting others interested. The American Hibiscus Society was chartered in 1950 with more than 200 members. The first President was Norman A. Reasoner.

The Society grew rapidly and the need for localized groups or chapters soon became apparent. The first was the James E. Hendry Chapter of Fort Myers, begun in 1952, and soon others became active.

These local groups had more in common with local growing conditions. They were able to pass on information and get acquainted with the steadily increasing number of new varieties as they were developed. The flowers that members proudly took to chapter meetings were exposed to public view, and the first Hibiscus show was born. This soon evolved into a yearly culmination of each Chapter's efforts to get more people acquainted with more Hibiscus.

Excerpts from December 2 Board Meeting

Treasurer Shirley Adams reviewed the financial report for November 2005. As of November 1st there was a balance on hand of \$3,842.05. There was income of \$87.00 and expense of \$346.56, resulting in a balance on hand, November 30th of \$3,582.49.

The following programs have been preliminarily scheduled:

January 8: AHS Hibiscus Slide presentation

February 12: (Flower arranging – Dottie Erikson?)

March 12: (Mini-show or workshop: "Who does what at a Show?")

April 9: Picnic (Who?)

May 14: Final Hibiscus Show Planning (Loves)

A motion was made and seconded that up to \$3.00 per person be spent for a dessert at the Christmas Luncheon. The motion passed.

Marilyn Young reported that members have been lined up to serve refreshments at most of the forthcoming Chapter meetings.

All those who signed the “Interested” sheet at the Manatee River Garden Club booth have been sent emails by President Flanders. The list was given to Betty Seipel, new Membership Chairperson, for follow-up.

Donny Waldroup has taken on the planning for establishing hibiscus in the landscape of The Historium.

The tripods for signs at the Show have been constructed and some are presently being used at the Crosley Mansion. Dave Flanders and Mark Love will be getting prices on the signs required.

Hibiscus Gardening in January

For most hibiscus gardeners, January is a month of little activity. Of course, those living where frosts or freezes are likely to occur must keep their cold protection materials handy and pay attention to the weather forecasts. January is, after all, the coldest month of the year.

Since damaging cold weather is possible, however remotely, everywhere in our area, the question of what course of action to take if the gardening family is going away for several days is a real problem. Plants in pots might be moved into a protected area. However, both in-ground and potted plants will greatly benefit from the ministrations of a willing neighbor that will do the “heavy lifting” of protecting the plants if necessary.

Remember, although we may not appreciate the winter weather, one of the benefits of cool/cold weather is that if there is enough of it to lower the ground temperature, fewer insects in the spring could be the result.

January can be expected to be a very dry month and therefore, if it isn't quite cold enough, spider mites could be a problem. Feel the leaves with your fingers – a sandy feeling is an indication that mites are present. Use a miticide or a spray with acephate in it.

Some would say that you should lightly fertilize hibiscus during the winter months – as a maintenance move to keep the plants healthy, but

not enough to make growth. Let your conscience be your guide.

Those with oak trees will have some leaves to rake during January. Use them for mulch or to pile on your compost pile. Use this “off season” time to do things like having the pH of your soil checked. The Extension Service can help you with that. Check irrigation systems for leaks and inoperative spray heads. Turn your automatic timer to ‘manual’ since during cool weather, lawns and plants require less water. Watering, particularly lawns, once a week or even twice a month may be sufficient. Certainly hibiscus require less water during the cool weather, but don't let them dry out!

Cold, or wind too?

The question comes up occasionally as to whether a cold wind will damage plants or is it only a freezing temperature that does damage? A recent exchange of messages on the subject recently took place that was concluded by the following message from Gene Powell:

“... for me some of the worse damage I have had was from a cold wind. It seems to burn the leaves. Last winter ... I had a lot of damage from the cold, but hardly lost a plant that was in the ground. The ones that caught a cold wind like about 20 miles an hour or so looked fried. Most of them also lived but the ambient temperature was not freezing. So I personally would rather see a low temperature of like 26 for a couple hours than a strong wind with a temperature of 35 or so. That's my 2 cents worth.”

Of course we would just as soon see neither a temperature of 26 nor a strong wind with a somewhat higher temperature. Given either situation, protecting plants with some kind of cover would be a prudent move. Be that as it may, those with histories in the North find it comforting to consider the possibility of having a temperature of 26 for a couple hours rather than a temperature lower than 26 for a couple of weeks!

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Coming Events

January 6, 9:30 a.m.: Board Meeting, Manatee
County Library South Branch.

January 8, 2:00 p.m.: Chapter Meeting, “Old and
New Hibiscus”, Rae Flanders.