



# *Sowing Seeds of Knowledge Reaps Conservation with Beauty*

Environmental Edition, Mary Lovings, Editor

Landscape Design Edition, Dr. John Barnett, Editor

Horticulture Edition, Gail Berthe, Editor

Volume II, Number 9    Horticulture Edition    January 2016

GCG, Inc. Mission: Beautification ... Conservation ... Education

January 1, **2016**—how many of us marvel at the mere thought of the fact we are waking up this morning to welcome another new year ‘in which to excel’? New beginnings are a gift both to our lives and to our gardens. The new calendars are in place (ours are from Audubon Society and of course feature birds—one of GCG’s and NGC’s prime subjects this term). It is up to us to determine how to use this new opportunity to improve our lives, our gardens, and to help our world. Each small act, kind word, new insight will affect the microcosm in which we live and eventually the world around us. One drop in the great ocean of our universe— Oh my I do believe I’ve become overly dramatic, but it is true each of us effects the universe in which we live for good or not so good. That bit of unneeded fertilizer does wash down into the closest stream.....try to resolve to make each action benefit good...

---

## *The Seed Catalog Invasion and Planning Spring Planting*

The seed catalogs have arrived—so alluring and with such great possibilities. Unfortunately, my eyes are bigger than my pocket book and, at this point in life bigger than my ability or desire to cultivate. One hope is to mix some vegetables in with some of the flower beds, especially a few nice tomatoes for special times and some early lettuce because they can be so pretty, maybe a pepper or two. We do have our wonderful ‘Wednesday Market’ in Pike County—everything is local, fresh and the growers are all environmentally conscientious gardeners. Because of the movement to locally grown food most areas have

quality farmers' markets of some kind—find them, support them, and enjoy their products.

As you look through the new catalogs consider comparing their statements with good reference resources such as [allamericanselections.org/](http://allamericanselections.org/) For this area no resource can be better than Georgia Gold Medal Plants. This is an annual listing of the best ornamental native plants, annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees available for growing in our climate conditions as rated by the state Botanical Garden of Georgia, UGA Cooperative Extension, University faculty members, professional nurserymen and flower growers, garden retailers and landscape professionals in the Georgia. Winners are chosen from five categories: Natives, Annuals, Perennials, Trees, Shrubs and Vines and Groundcovers. [growing native plants—real natives, not 'nativars' which are cultivars from native plants and not necessarily adequate to the needs of the wildlife—especially the butterflies, birds, and bees et al.]

One of the most important factors to consider in selecting any new plant for your garden—does the climate and soil available where *I live* meet the needs of a specific plant. Plants for Florida do not grow (unless handled as an annual) in north Georgia! Peonies and lilacs grow profusely in Virginia, and on up the eastern United States—only special species will grow in Georgia and don't even think about growing most California plants here. This doesn't mean it can't be done—it means special conditions must be met and it takes too much work for this old lady to be a happy gardener. The best reference book I've used to choose genus and species for my mid-Georgia garden is Southern Living Garden Book. There is a new edition but so far I've not found it to purchase, but it was mentioned by the *Grumpy Gardener* in the January *Southern Living Magazine*. (Grumpy Gardener's last resort for underperforming pansies was to get down at their level and yell at the top of your lungs at them to start blooming! This is only if using a pansy specific fertilizer--standard 15-2-20, high-nitrate **pansy** formula **fertilizer** applied at 14-day intervals. In other words if your pansies aren't performing to your satisfaction try the correct fertilizer to correct your soil deficiencies!)

Self-seeding annuals can be great a great asset when flower beds are casual. A favorite is larkspur—comes up in early spring and heralds the coming of summer. Other easy self-seeders are cosmos, zinnias, petunias, marigolds, nicotiana, the list is endless and there are drawbacks (ohhh just thought of another favorite—melampodium or butter daisy, an annual aster. The correct botanical

reference is *Melampodium divaricatum*. As self seeders they are late to emerge and as a result they don't all survive because of careless weeding so I generally purchase a few seedlings at the big box store, but patience would make this unnecessary.)

Perennials are, of course, the mainstay of the floral beauty. The salvias, penstemons—a favorite of mine is *Penstemon digitalis* 'Husker Red'. This cultivar has the most elegant dark red leaves and of course a lovely typical red flower. It was developed by University of Nebraska horticulture department and is very tolerant of our Georgia climate. It is easy to move to new locations after blooming or early spring as it emerges from the soil—great perennial. Another favorite is bee balm—but not all bee balm! *Monarda didyma* is a very prolific and in some cases too invasive but *Monarda didyma* 'Joseph Cline' is mildew resistant, prolific, but not too invasive and a delight. It does require a moist site. Some of the monarda I planted early on is a constant chore to 'weed out' because it is too crowded to bloom! The *Rudbeckias hirta* and the *Echinacias purpurea* are favorites—blackeyed susan, cone flower. Check images on google—the variety is unending. They multiply by runners as well as reseeding so you must do some control but after several years for me they have been long lasting, easy to maintain and very necessary for the 'happy gardener'.

Bulbs should all be in the ground by now for next year's bloom—one year I found a bag of daffodils I'd overlooked and planted them in January—they bloomed in June and were the subject of conversation in the neighborhood—what were they doing blooming in June? But they still bloom on normal schedule now—so it can be done in Georgia (but not in the northeast!)

Little of what has been written in these three pages of comments is new, or earthshattering—simply some thoughts to which you will add your opinions and preferences—get the 'spring will come again' juices flowing again. Would be fun to hear some of your thoughts on the seed catalogs and ideas for changes, improvements, and challenges for the coming season.

---

### *Productive Winter Garden Chores/Challenges*

Dormant trees and shrubs are prime candidates for pruning now that we can see there 'skeletal structure' without leaves. Many deciduous trees benefit from winter pruning—but like so much in nature *not all trees and shrubs are good*

*winter pruning subjects!* Let's highlight those genus first: “Some shade and flowering trees tend to bleed or excrete large amounts of sap from pruning wounds. Among these trees are maple, birch, dogwood, beech, elm, willow, flowering plum and flowering cherry. Sap excreted from the tree is not harmful, but it is unsightly. To minimize bleeding, prune these trees after the leaves have matured. Leaves use plant sap when they expand, and the tree excretes less sap from the wound” This information is quoted from UGA extension publication “Pruning Ornamental Plants in the Landscape. (B 961) and is available for download PDF from the web. So we learn not all trees should be pruned during the dormant season, but that leaves us plenty which will benefit from our handiwork.

What pruning tools will be needed? For our purposes only hand tools will be suggested. In the first place many mechanical pruning tools do more harm than good—shearing promotes growth only on tip ends of branches and eliminates light from reaching lower branches which stunts growth which eventually produces a really awful mess.. Listed below are some good suggested tools

- Hand pruners—two basic kinds: scissor action or ratchet pruners.
  - Scissor action pruners have a sharpened blade which cuts against a broad blade. Pictured are two different brands—Fiscars (black handle and Felco with its red handle



- Ratchet or anvil action pruners make larger cuts more easily and are especially useful for gardeners with arthritic hands



- Lopping shears are like hand pruners except they have longer blades.



- Pruning saws are very useful for pruning branches larger than 1 1/2 inches in diameter. See example of a folding saw above. This is something I use. It is easy to control and folds for safety when not in use. Keep them sharp!
- Pole pruners are used for branches that cannot be reached from the ground level. The long handle is extendable and a cord provides the lever to control the blade. They are effective but a bit scary for me.



- Hedge shears are useful for trimming such things as Lantana over growing its bounds, or to trim annuals or out of control perennials, but really do not advise using them on shrubs unless you are hoping to achieve a very formal controlled topiary shape. Use with caution! I realize this is personal opinion but by the same token it also takes into consideration the needs of the shrub

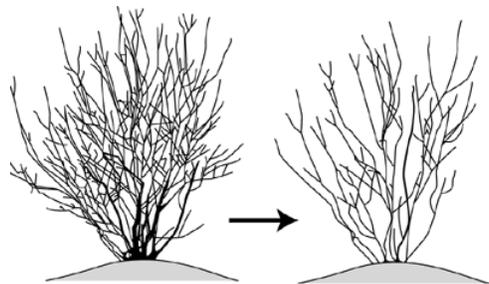


- Take good care of your tools—a good web site for specific instructions is <http://www.wikihow.com/Disinfect-Gardening-Tool>

Now that we have the necessary tools let's move on to how to prune...techniques of pruning. There are some basic 'rules' to pruning efficiently.

- What is the '*terminal bud*'? It is the last bud at the end of a stem or branch. It contains a hormone (auxin) which when cut allows new stems to grow below the cut. A good way to think of it is anytime you cut a stem it will grow two stems in its place—this is pretty basic and not exactly correct but you get the idea of creating more new stems. This is how you get nice full flowering plants with lots of blooms.

- Shearing vs thinning—remember my tirade against shearing in the tool section. When you shear all the tip ends (terminal buds) of a plant there is an abundance of growth at the end of the branch producing an excess of growth at the periphery of the plant.



Thinning on the other hand makes the cuts deep within the plant and results in a well-balanced regrowth. This picture shows the unpruned plant on the left—you can see how the thinning pruning has benefited the structure of the shrub by removing not just tips but pruning our branches from the interior of the plant. Regrowth will come from throughout the plant.

- But what about tree pruning? In my opinion, and you know the Happy Gardener is not shy about giving you her opinion, it is best to leave big tree

pruning to the professionals. But there are occasions when you may need to remove some obstructing limbs from bigger trees. Here are some guidelines.

- To prevent a larger branch from stripping the bark from the tree trunk make a three part cut with your pruning saw
  - Cut about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the way through the **bottom side** of the branch about a foot from the main trunk of the tree.
  - Second cut on the top side of the limb about a foot away first cut (second cut will be further from the trunk than the first cut.)
  - Third cut is made to remove the branch from the tree. It is necessary to understand this but is made at the *branch collar* (the swollen area where the branch joins the tree) Do not remove the branch collar from the tree and do not leave long branch stubs on the tree. It is not necessary to use a wound dressing on cuts.
- Then there is this thing called renewal pruning! This is accomplished in one of two ways
  - If you want to maintain the shrub as a part of the landscape a three year approach can be taken to prune an overgrown shrub. For three years in a row take out one-third of old growth to the ground. By the end of the third year your shrub will have ‘renewed’ itself. This is especially useful for flowering shrubs such as Forsythia, Spirea, Azalea
  - The more intense method is to simply cut the entire shrub to the ground and it will rejuvenate itself within a year or two.
    - My neighbor when we lived in Buffalo asked me what to do about his bush honeysuckle—I said cut it to the ground and it will come back—it didn’t. You must account for climate differences! It was our first year in Buffalo.
    - Buddleia needs to be cut to within about a foot of the ground each year just as new growth begins to keep its growth in check.
- One general rule which is pretty universal
  - Spring blooming plants are pruned right after bloom
  - Summer and fall blooming plants are pruned in early spring as growth begins

- Roses are special—ask the rosarians about these rules. I do my few roses in the late winter. In fact last spring I cut one knockout rose to the ground and it came back like gangbusters—the knockout roses are very hardy!

The information given above is very general. For more specific details please refer to specific genus for which you need information.

---

### *Dealing with too Much Rain*

Obviously it is not in my area of expertise to advice about drainage problems but it is a topic of great importance in this El Nino year. Our winter has already been disrupted by unusual temperatures and too much rain which has caused great harm in various areas of the country including Georgia. Site selection, decisions made relating to building and changes upstream of personal property all relate to drainage problems.

Serious drainage problems are best addressed with the help of a reputable expert. But the home owner can take some basic steps to protect the home and garden from damage.

- Landscape so that rain run-off is directed away from the house
- Keep the house gutters cleaned out and intact
- Make use of boggy areas by designing a bog garden
- Berms and mounds can be used for plantings—it also creates interest for the garden
- Know what kind of soil you have—hard pan clay just isn't conducive to good drainage! Sand on the other hand allows for a lot of damage from washing away
- A high water table is another issue
- A pound of prevention is worth a ton of “wish we'd done this sooner!”

My best suggestions for opening a discussion of solution of drainage problems is to consult google...I found a pretty good site at a *Good Housekeeping* website but as you might guess there was quite a bit of advertising. <http://www.bhg.com/gardening/landscaping-projects/landscape-basics/improve-poor-drainage/>

Another site which looked good was from Fairfax County Virginia—the country adjacent to Washington DC. The site had some good suggestions and the Virginia area is not too different from Georgia except the climate is colder. <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/nvswcd/drainageproblem/control-runoff.htm>

---

Let us all make this New Year the best ever for all our actions, dreams, and aspirations. It is a great privilege for me to be able to write “Sowing Seeds of Knowledge” to hopefully pass along some facts and opinions about gardening—always remember it is YOUR GARDEN. Learn from each mistake, but have fun and enjoy the beauty of creation. The Happy Gardener welcomes each question and will try to give a good answer. [gail.berthe@gmail.com](mailto:gail.berthe@gmail.com)

*Happy Gardening,*

*Gail, the Happy Gardener*