



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 III, Number 3 Horticulture Edition June/July 2016
GCG, Inc. Mission: Beautification ... Conservation ... Education

It is now almost June and just as in April the garden is still wanting my attention, however the ‘demanding’ is becoming less critical! Progress is being made! This edition of *Sowing Seeds*...will include updates on some of the ‘experiments’ in seed starting described in the April edition. Also some good news about the iris return after last year’s unfortunate accidents with loss of so many pretty iris rhizomes. Plants are so amazing. Then there is the Million Pollinator Gardens to update....Just hope I can remember all the items to be shared!

Some Thoughts about Living Plant Ground Cover

One of our readers asked for some ideas about ground covers—it couldn’t have been more timely because this has been a topic on my mind for some time. How would you define ‘ground cover?’

● Webster says “a low plant or group of plants used in a garden to cover the ground.” –but what constitutes ‘low growing plants’—the three species below are examples of low growing ground cover which will withstand some foot traffic—that is another quality to be considered

- Blue Star Creeper, *Pratia pedunculata* It is a real ground hugger with delightful blue star shaped floescence—can be very invasive, but where coverage is the key it is great.
- *Mazus reptans* grows to about two inches in height and requires moisture and some shade—but is a



great spreader with either white or bluish tiny flowers and grows happily between other established plantings—it does like to creep out into the lawn.

- *Thymus praecox* or creeping thyme makes a great low growing ground cover. I use it in flower beds and between steps. An occasional mowing or cutting back keeps it happy. Dark green leaves and purple flowers add color and there is always a supply of thyme for flavoring soup—



🌿 Cambridge Dictionary On Line states “plants that grow thickly and close to the ground, sometimes used in gardens to prevent weeds from growing” describes ground cover. This definition gives us more latitude for plant height.

- *Juniperus procumbens* ‘Nana’ is an excellent example we are using in a hardpan clay slightly hilly edge of our property. It grows about 1 foot high and spreads from 4 to 5 feet! It literally took a pick ax to dig the holes for the plants and we did use drip irrigation for about two years to get them started but beyond that they have been without problems and spread a little further into the hard pan each year! No extra fertilizer or water. Amazing !



- *Trachelospermum asiaticum*, Asiatic Jasmine is a favorite. We have it under a large area of what were enormous pine trees with assorted oak seedlings. As of last summer all the pine trees were cut out and the oaks are thriving. (Sad story here—there was a lovely Bradford pear at the end of the pine tree grouping—gave wonderful shade for a seating area. It will be taken down tomorrow because without the pine trees for shelter from the winds it ‘bit the dust’ last week. Gave us 24 years of shade and comfort—but that is a long time for a Bradford pear! Glorious fall color too. That is life when you plant short lived trees!) The Asiatic Jasmine was planted in this grove in 1993 and spread very nicely. It has not



been a problem expanding into the lawn because of the way it is mowed and has not tried to ‘climb the trees’ as it could have done. Dark green and does not bloom in my garden but understand it can have a pretty small white spring bloom. The plant spreads nicely. Twenty four years later it is thick and healthy.

- Any low growing shrub or perennial used in multiple plantings can be a ground cover. Winter hardy succulents, *Helleborus* (Lenten rose/Christmas rose, *Hemerocallis* (day lilies) Hosta, *Hypericum* (St. Johnswort) has both a creeping variety as well as a shrub...have you noticed all these last few suggestions start with the letter ‘H’—that’s because I was looking up the botanic name for St. Johnswort—Hypericum! Many other plants which could be used for ground covers caught my eye. *Helleborus* are doing double duty in several of my flower beds. Low growing hardy sedums bring spreading vegetation as well as color and texture.

🌿 Definition of ground cover as understood by your Happy Gardener—a ground cover is any recognizable plant which covers the soil in such a way as to discourage weeds, stabilize soil, and to be reasonably kind to specialty plantings which enhance the landscape.

- There are two plants I personally will never plant in the ground—
 - *Hedera* (Ivy) of any species because of its uncontrollable invasive character... maybe in a container IF the plant never touches the soil
 - *Houttuynai cordata* which is impossible to eradicate once it is established in the soil. The roots must go to China!
- Of course there are many other invasive plants which can be used as ground covers, and some that I use in the garden and enjoy. Most are easily controlled and in many cases are a special treat to our pollinator friends—black eyed susans, coreopsis, ajuga, melampodium, zinnia, cosmos, marigolds—these backbones of the cottage garden reseed, bring joyous hope to a sometimes dull landscape; the list is endless. Just know the consequences and ***be willing to deal with the control issues.***
- At some point we must also consider the heritage we are leaving for the next generation. Maybe ivy is your most favorite plant, and it can be

beautiful, but control is the issue. I let some ivy growing in containers take over a area because it was not trimmed back consistently—my solution was to pull it all up—good idea followed by a very bad idea—I threw it in the woods. There is now a large area of woods under the control of that ivy! I do keep it out of the trees by cutting the vines which allows the unsupported ivy to die—but that is not good enough. Any ideas short of brush killer? (Leave about a foot of space between the first cut and the remaining ivy—or any other vine growing in trees.)

- Some common sense ‘rules’ for choosing ground cover plants
 - Research invasive qualities (consider native plants if possible)
 - Flowering or non-flowering choices—might not want to use flowering ground cover where children will be going barefoot in the area—adults too!
 - What qualities will the ground cover be serving—cover bare soil; define specific area; cover small area between stepping stones; color; stop erosion on hillside...
 - Follow basic horticulture suggestions—know soil condition...fertility, hydration, amount of sun/shade; sustainability; personal tolerance for maintenance
 - Safety concerns—using vinca or any ground hugging vine in an area where foot traffic is high is not a good idea because you can get tangled in the vine (Personal experience speaking!)
 - Determine amount of plants needed to achieve desired effect in an acceptable amount of time
-

Rose Rosette Virus

Georgia Gardening, June 2016 ‘Ask the Expert’ Sid Mullis answered a question about a serious rose virus which is reoccurring in areas where roses are numerous, specifically the beautiful but ubiquitous Knock-out Rose that has become so very popular because of its disease resistance and excellent bloom display from May to October/November. Hybridized by Willian Radler and introduced to the public in 1999 it has become the most popular rose in North America! If horticulture was always simple! As the rose became more popular it was widely use in both

home and commercial settings in large swaths of single species plantings. This type of multiple plantings can lead to trouble—disease is easily spread between single species plantings. (Consider the Bradford Pear...) Knockout Roses are becoming more susceptible to this virus which had its origins in the Multiflora Roses used extensively in the late 1920's/1930's as roadside plantings, (ground cover!) They became invasive and in fact are restricted as invasive plants in some states.

Kathryn Litton, who writes *Inside Your Garden Gate* for GCG, Inc. *Garden Gateways* has reprinted her 2013 article about the rose virus because it is becoming more common. All members of GCG, Inc. receive this magazine quarterly, and you are advised to read the information and act on it. Thank you Kathryn

Because of the *Georgia Gardener* article my plans for *Sowing Seeds*...included discussing the virus situation. As stated previously it is significant to also understand any mass planting is susceptible to 'contagious plant diseases.' To help your garden remain disease free and sustainable it is best to vary multiple plantings in small groupings. This will not prevent disease, but it does prevent a total disaster based on losing a large area of a single species planting.

Two other excellent sources for information include [Clemson University Cooperative Extension](#) and [Missouri Botanical Garden](#). Both resources are available on the internet. Excellent examples of signs of the virus on your Knockout roses (which can spread to your other roses as well) plus specific advice to destroy the diseased plants—they must be totally removed from the garden especially the roots. The information from Kathryn Litton's article plus the two excellent web sites will enable you to recognize the virus and if necessary to eradicate it from your garden.

Happier Garden Information!

Our Bradford Pear is gone. It is a few days since the initial writing for *Sowing Seeds*... There is a large bare spot in the back lawn, which is being developed as an area which includes a swing, a picnic table and several chairs and some shade. All the mulch from the Bradford was deposited in this area and David, our wonderful helper, has bedded out an area which will be filled with the mulch and much enjoyed this summer. I'm sure there is a moral here!

Remember my latest seed starting technique—using the commercial seed starting pellets. I did successfully start four different species—2 groups of different

species of *Zinnias*, 1 group of *Gomphena* 'Strawberry Fields', and an unusual species of *Tagetes* (marigold). Had a real crisis keeping them from drowning because of 3 inches of rain in one night plus a few days of drizzle, but all plants are safely in the ground and as of yesterday are growing happily but too little to take any pictures! Have one more container of 72 pellets to plant—hope to get that done tomorrow. More *Zinnias* and *Tagetes* to plant plus some cosmos and larkspur which will just be seed in the ground. The larkspur will be for next year and probably won't put the seed out until late in the year. This really was a successful experiment in my opinion because it is nice to have a compact plant to set in the ground as opposed to seeds which don't always germinate as planned! This was a more controlled method.

How are you coming with your Pollinator Gardens? My *Asclepius tuberosa* (milkweed) are planted and growing—I think. Planted two different areas and one planting I'm sure is doing just fine, but the other area has an established stand of *Helianthus angustifolius* (Perennial or swamp sunflower). It is very aggressive and I pull more out than I let mature, but the milkweed has a very similar leaf structure...but the stem is not the deep red of the sunflower so hope I'm keeping them separate! Time will tell. The daffodils finally shed their leaves and can be put to bed until next spring. The new *Gailardias* are installed over the daffodil bulbs and settling in with their brothers and sisters in a sunny bed. This is a plant which loves sun, drought, and thrives in Arizona! It has done so well for a couple of years that the bed has been enlarged and should be pretty all summer with very little care—full sun and not easily watered. *Gailardias* are also reseeding perennials! Short lived perennials but the reseeding should take care of that.



If you've been reading these newsletters, Sowing seeds....and Basic Horticulture, for the last several years you know I'm a proponent of dead heading annual plants so they will continue to bloom as long as possible. Remember, an annual has one purpose—to bloom, set seed, and die. It can be easily made to bloom again and again by cutting old flowers from the plant. (It seems a bit cruel but effective). One article about Pollinator Gardens stated it was better to not dead head annuals because the seeds provided nutrition for the pollinators! I'm not sure I agree with that. There is only going to be one set of seeds per annual and what difference does it make if the pollinator gets it early in the season or later in the season!

On the subject of cutting back: it is a good idea to cut back fall blooming perennials in mid-season. Chrysanthemums will bloom mid to late June if not cut back. Perennial Asters fall in the same category—cut them back in the next few weeks.

One more happy idea—a successful method of using cut hydrangeas in a floral design—cut the needed flowers and immediately get them into a container to carry the flower to the work area—have a large vessel full of tepid water ready to receive the flowers. Make a fresh diagonal cut in each stem and IMERSE the hydrangea into the tepid water—the water should cover both flower and stem. Allow to soak at least three hours and more is possible. Make the arrangement using the well hydrated blooms and you will be surprised at how long it will last! I have one on the dining room table that has been there 8 days and still looks acceptable. Another amazing fact is you can sometimes revive a wilted hydrangea by renewing the fresh diagonal cut and soaking technique. (I use the kitchen sink) I've been doing this for a few years, and it works. Don't remember where I read this but enjoy passing this technique on to our gardening friends.

Happy Gardening
Gail, the Happy Gardener
Gail.berthe@gmail.com