

# Spring Newsletter 2010

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This winter has refused to go away. We are happy to report that as of March 28<sup>th</sup>, we are having normal temperatures. Unfortunately the rainy weather has turned stormy. Here is hoping the tornado warnings helped people get out of harm's way tonight. By early to mid-march you should have applied pre-emergent crabgrass herbicide along with a slow release fertilizer blend. We are spraying yards like crazy for broadleaf weeds which just loved this winter's snow and rain.

If you have not tilled the vegetable garden up yet, try to get it turned under as soon as possible. The soil has been wet forever and stopped a lot of folks from tilling them under in the fall. We are carrying Daddy Pete's blend of cow manure, mushroom compost and will be adding one of their soil blends later this spring. We have been very pleased with their manure and what folks said about it last year. The manure has a medium coarse texture that is great for gardens. We have a handout sheet available at the store titled "Soil Amendments from A to Z". It covers manures, compost, vermiculite and a lot of other amendments you may have questions about.

We spray quite a few yards in the Piedmont every year to eradicate broadleaf weeds. Our season starts in March and goes through the summer. It is a big part of our business. But.... help put us out of the spraying business by developing a few good habits we have talked about for years. Mow your lawn as high as possible and frequently. High grass means cool soil, shaded soil and fewer weeds. If you let the lawn get really high, do not let the clippings stay on the lawn. Bag the lawn or gently rake up the clippings. Those clumps you leave on the lawn will "heat" the grass underneath it up and kill it. The subsequent bare spot will fill with weeds. Use a mulching mower to recycle the clippings effectively. Do not over-fertilize the lawn. Quick release forms of nitrogen on a lawn in late March-May are brutal on the lawn and promote weed growth. Cats and dogs are also death on small yards. We had two large dogs that kept our yard dotted. We tried

to keep the waste up but it is amazing what a few hours of dog doo on the yard will do. If you have two or three large dogs in an enclosed yard, be prepared to have crabgrass in your lawn! Pets are better than a perfect lawn anyway. Watering is becoming a huge issue and rightly so. It is a precious commodity. If you must water your lawn, put down enough water to last the lawn for several days. Do not run it a little every day. That promotes shallow rooting and is a recipe for disaster. What is the appropriate length of time to run the water and/or how much do we recommend applying? Each yard is different because of soil type, slope, and height of the grass, type of grass and shade considerations. I tell people to pull a plug out of the yard and feel the soil to a depth of at least 6 inches. If it is cool and moist six inches down, it is still fine. Grass also warns you when it is getting thirsty. Fescue grasses get an off color bluish/grey look and wilt when they are really suffering. We do not water our personal yard at all and it still looks great. When it gets hot and dry in the summer we just let it go dormant. We have year round lawn maintenance guides available at the store that emulate very closely what we personally do.

February and March are an amazing time in our greenhouses. With the help of Ball Seed Company we have transformed our greenhouses into a breath of spring. We bring in pre-started plugs from vendors all over the United States through Ball Seeds program. The plugs enable us to get a four to six week jump on the growing season. They account for approximately 80 percent of our young plants we grow out. We are excited to be offering for the first time MiniFamous double yellow and double orange calibrachos (Plant patents have been applied for on these plants). These are miniature petunias that are great in baskets, flower beds and window boxes. We have new sun coleus, alternantheras, nemesias and lobelias, just to name a few. We also get young perennial plugs in during the winter. Most of these plugs will be put outside in unheated cold-frames to get the plants started. Even though it has been a very cold winter, the perennials are already coming to life. Come in and check them out. We have a great selection of perennials (with 35 new cultivars so far) growing out at this time. I listed in a separate article twelve hardy ferns that we are currently growing.

Last year we increased our vegetable plant offerings by growing and buying in close to one hundred different types of tomatoes, peppers and other goodies.

This year we are going to increase our selections even more. Debbie has already sown garlic chives and eight different loose leaf lettuces. I approached the idea of growing lettuce with a bit of skepticism but my mind was changed when we kept selling out. Customers were asking me if they really worked in our hot summers and I honestly did not have a lot of experience with loose leaf lettuce. I knew they would produce well in April and May but beyond that point I was certain they would fry. My mind was changed when we harvested over and over from a ten inch pot sitting in full sun on our back deck. It was placed on the deck in late May. We were still harvesting lettuce the first part of July. The picture of that plant is on the front door of our store and it is dated July 1<sup>st</sup>. It finally went to "seed" on July 7<sup>th</sup>. If we had placed it on the shade section of the deck it might have kept going even longer. Debbie has a hand out sheet on the lettuces available at the store. We have even planted lettuce with bedding plants in large containers at the store. We call them colorful edibles.

Our pepper selection was a huge success in 2009. We saved a few plants of several varieties and put them into large containers. When they started bearing, we started giving them away fresh. Seeing may make a believer out of someone but eating is even better. One customer came in weekly for a few peppers. The mini yellow bell pepper was like eating candy. It was sweet and firm, unlike any pepper we had ever tasted. Kids even liked this one. Remember what the nutritionists say, eat colorful vegetables and fruit. We will save a few and have them available again this year for you to try. Our peppers are already sown as of mid Feb. We also have a tremendous selection of tomatoes again this year. Deb has a listing of our peppers, tomatoes and lettuces available already. This list does not include varieties we will be buying in from our primary supplier in Virginia. If you do not see a favorite on the list ask us anyway, we may have it in small quantities. We are also growing some sweet onions for the first time. Varieties will be available on a list at the store.

Deb was sowing fresh basil, chives and other herbs the third week of February. They are ready now. The tender basil will have to go in a windowsill but it will be fresh and close at hand. After all danger of frost is past around April 25<sup>th</sup> of so, put your annual herbs outside in full sun. Last year it frosted in early May so watch those forecasts.

We are offering a great soil blend this spring for cacti and other succulents. It has been in use at the store for two years and is performing very well. It contains no magic bullets, just fine bark and expanded slate aggregate with a touch of perlite. Give it a try and you will be pleased.

We have added a few more hydrangeas this year and are excited about our selection. Small to very large, shade to full sun, we tried to cover all the bases. Unfortunately we cannot carry all of them. L. A. Reynolds Garden Showcase and New Garden Nursery should also be carrying a great selection of hydrangeas. Give them a call too.

We have a good assortment of azaleas, Japanese andromeda, rhododendron and mountain laurel at the store as of March 1st. These were locally grown and are excellent for this area. Please ask for a planting guide when you get plants from us. Sometimes we forget to give them out but not often. You will also get a free package of fertilizer to start your plants with.

This past year was a tremendous challenge for everyone. This winter was especially difficult. We made it through the year with the help of our family, our customers/friends and our extended family at Good Shepherd Moravian Church. With each passing day we are seeing a tremendous increase in activity at the store. When people start talking about planting gardens and spring they get such a great attitude about life. I love all the seasons but spring is still the best. God wakes plants and people up simultaneously!

One final note....we are having a raffle at our store for two prizes. First prize is worth \$200.00 worth of labor, plants or materials from Sedge Garden Nursery. Second prize is for a Moravian Star Pendant valued at \$50.00 from Singularities by Sally Bradley of Kernersville, North Carolina. All of the money raised from this raffle will go to Good Shepherd Moravian Church. The tickets are \$1.00 each.

Enjoy life and enjoy spring. Turn that soil up!

Michael