

From the Ground Up

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2008 Garden Travel



On my list of gardens to visit the end of October or for next year is another garden that is in our backyard, the Omaha Botanic Gardens, Lauritzen Gardens, located at First and Bancroft streets, just north of Interstate 80 and Rosenblatt Stadium. The admission fee is \$6.00 for visiting from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. October 25 would be an interesting day to visit because there is a plant walk, Fabulous Fall Foliage, scheduled for 10 a.m.. If you are garden challenged or like trains, there is a work-in-progress, Kenefick

Park, within the Lauritzen Gardens.

This is a link to see a map of the Lauritzen Gardens:

http://www.omahabotanicalgardens.org/visitor_information/map_of_the_gardens/index.asp

You can see two Union Pacific locomotives instrumental in developing Omaha.



Taking Stock



Before you know it, we will be anticipating the holidays. One of the better (and cheaper) gifts that your family can give you is a garden journal in either a hard copy notebook or computer software. Can there be a better time than cold and snowy January and February to take stock of last summer's growing season and to plan for next year? When you write in your garden diary, consider the following:

- * Make a note of any particular productive or unsatisfactory varieties of fruits and vegetables planted this year. Such information can be very useful when planning next year's garden.
- * Page through the a Park Seed, Dutch Gardens or High Country Gardens catalog and list the seeds and plants that you would like to try next year.
- * Monitor temperature, snowfall and rainfall for 2008.
- * Subscribe to a newsletter like P. Allen Smith's email newsletter. See his web page <http://www.pallensmith.com/>. Consider jotting down his ideas for your garden.
- * Maintain your own seed and plant databases.
- * Pen in projects that you would like to participate in or undertake for 2008. Add plans for a pergola or water feature for your yard, investigate harvesting rain water for next year by going to www.braewater.com, consider starting a healing garden with your local nursing home and/or hospital, and budget your time for volunteering for Community Gardens in your neighborhood or the gardens at the Zoo.

Finish Your Chores



This is the month to finish harvesting, to wrap up the garden chores and to collect outdoorsy decorations. Here are some tasks that you can do:

Harvesting...Continue harvesting beans, peppers and tomatoes. Be prepared to cover the plants when frost threatens. If covered, these heat-loving plants may survive a light frost although a hard freeze will do them in. You can purchase special frost blankets, which are designed to hold the heat in, OR take your

chances covering plants with old sheets or cardboard boxes. Keep in mind that blankets may be too heavy so that they smash your plants.

Harvest winter squash and pumpkins any time that they are mature (when the rinds are too tough to puncture with a thumbnail and the "ground spot" becomes orange). Some gardeners wait until a light frost kills back the vines to allow the squash as much time as possible to mature. For harvesting, use a knife to cut the stem an inch or two above the squash. If storing the winter squash over winter, harvest before a killing frost.

Cleanup...After the first light frost dig up and bring in cannas, dahlias and gladiolus. Dry, clean and store in a cool location free from frost. Clean up the orchard and small fruit plantings. Sanitation is essential for good maintenance. Dried fruits or mummies carry disease organisms through the winter to attack next years' crop. Cut down stems and foliage of herbaceous perennials after two or three hard frosts when leaves begin to brown. After the ground freezes, add mulch to your perennial flower garden. A three inch layer of straw or chopped leaves will help conserve soil moisture and protect the root system.



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Lawn and leaves... Keeping large, heavy leaves off the lawn will help it survive winter. Leaving these leaves on the lawn may contribute to matting down and suffocating the grass underneath. A better alternative to throwing leaves away is to turn them into garden fertilizer. Either mow the leaves on the lawn to make small pieces or rake and shred them (with a shredder or by running over them with a lawn mower), and use them to mulch gardens, sprinkle back onto the lawn or add to the compost pile. After the first frost is also the time to control certain broadleaf weeds in the lawn such as white clover and dandelion.



Weeding... Any weeding you do now will reduce your weeding chores in the spring.



Planting and transplanting... Peonies usually do not need transplanting so leave them be. In the author's case, heirloom peonies have grown in the same location for years and years. But if you need to move any

plants or they have gotten too large, now is a good time. Planting depth and a sunny location are critical. Choose a location that has about 8 hours of sun and place the buds, or "eyes," on the roots just 2 inches below the soil surface. If you plant at a deeper depth, the plants may fail to bloom.

As you plant your spring-flowering bulbs such as tulips and daffodils outdoors, consider planting a few in pots to force for late winter bloom. Closely space the bulbs in a shallow container filled with potting soil, then add more soil until most of the bulb is buried. The bulbs will need to be chilled in the refrigerator, cool basement, or in a protected spot outdoors for several months before bringing indoors to grow and flower.



Crafting... In fall, nature provides a kaleidoscope of decorations for your home in winter. Take a walk to collect dried hydrangea flowers or grapevines for wreath-making. Gather assorted seedpods such as milkweed pods for flower arrangements, and prune bittersweet branches with berries for drying to use in fall decorations. If you have autumn flowers, press and create framed collages. Use dried herbs to make fragrant wreaths and dried flower arrangements.

The Frugal Gardener

Storyline by Todd Meier and Photos by Jodie Delohery

Are you a frugal gardener? Your attendance at the Minnehaha Master Gardener Plant Sale in May would suggest that you are. For buying, selling and gifting, we all like plants that we can divide. Propagation by root division is more than a cost-efficient way to increase your collection of perennials; propagation also promotes vigor by stimulating new growth both above and below ground.

End of August and September are optimum months for dividing in order to allow time for the plants to acclimate to the fall weather and become established before winter, there is still time. You may have more energy due to the sense of urgency to divide during a rainy day in October when the temperature is hovering degrees above freezing and your hands are losing a sense of feeling.

Although gardening tips tout dividing herbaceous perennials every two to five years, you may choose to consider a plant's shape and condition before taking a spade to it rather than abiding by a calendar. If a plant looks crowded and is performing poorly, it probably needs to be divided. If a perennial is doing well to flower year after year, the gardener's motto should be: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Size up the root ball

The success of any transplanted division depends the root system. Some divisions fail because they do not have sufficient roots to support their foliage. To avoid shortchanging plants when digging them out of the ground, it is better to have more soil and roots than less. You can remove the excess dirt, but you cannot put severed roots back on.

To approximate the size of a root ball, place the tip of the spade at the base of the plant and make a mark in the soil at the end of the spade's head.

This distance, 8 to 12 inches, is enough to ensure that you will not be digging into any valuable roots. Pry the plant out of the ground by pushing the head of the spade straight into the ground and pulling the handle back. Shallow-rooted plants come out of the ground easily, but deeper-rooted plants may require a bit more effort.



Quarter clumpers with a spade Perennials with fibrous root systems and clumping growth habits are known as clumpers. Small clumpers like bugleweed (*Ajuga reptans*) and lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) can be dug up and pried apart by hand.

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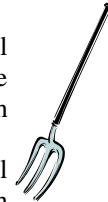
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Use tools like a spade, two pitchforks, and a handsaw to divide larger clumpers like daylilies (*Hemerocallis* cvs.) and larger grasses. When using a spade to divide, lay the rootball on its side and position the spade in the center of the rootball's crown. With a jabbing movement, split the crown in half, and repeat the process. Slice fibrous, clumping rootballs like those of hosta into viable pieces with a spade. Replant the divisions at the same depth as the original plant with the crown slightly above the soil level.

For those gardeners lacking upper-arm strength, two pitchforks can be inserted back to back into a clumper's rootball to divide it. By slowly drawing the handles away from each other, pry the rootball apart without breaking a sweat. Some clumpers, like astilbes, form tough root systems that cannot be divided with a spade or pitchfork. For these, use an 8-inch-long handsaw to cut the root system apart. Each section should contain a piece of the woody root and growth points.

Division size is a matter of personal taste and the garden size. Pieces with the size one quarter the original rootball are big enough to reestablish themselves quickly but small enough to not need division again for a while. Those with large gardens may prefer larger divisions that will fill in a space quickly while those with smaller spaces may prefer smaller pieces.



Slice rhizomes and tubers with a knife or shears

Plants that grow from rhizomes and tubers are good candidates for propagation by division. Rhizomes are thick, fleshy stems that grow horizontally just beneath the surface of the soil, while tubers are swollen sections of stems or roots. As new rhizomes and tubers are produced, the plants expand outward, and small roots grow to anchor them to the ground. Iris and lilies are examples of rhizomatous species, while dahlia is tuberous plants.



Dividing rhizomes and tubers requires more finesse than the brute force used to divide clumping plants. Once the rhizomes or tubers are out of the ground, shake or wash off the soil so that you can see what you are working with. Use a sharp knife or pruning shears to cut rhizomes and tubers into pieces that contain at least one growth point or dormant bud.

Replant only plump and healthy-looking rhizomes and tubers and discard those that are old, withered, or diseased. Rhizomes should be planted no deeper than half their width. A 1-inch-wide rhizome should be buried about 1/2 inch deep. Tubers should be planted in the soil with the growth point or dormant bud just peeking out of the ground. Space rhizome and tuber divisions 10 to 12 inches apart to give them room to expand.

Divide plants in spring or fall

The best time for division sometimes depends on the type of plant being divided. Ornamental grasses respond better to spring division while irises, peonies and astilbes are partial to fall division. The area of the country you live in may also dictate the best time of the year to divide perennials. In areas that experience early frosts and harsh winter weather, plants divided in fall may not have enough time to establish roots before the ground freezes.

Although some perennials can be divided at any time during the growing season, it is best not to divide when plants are channeling all energy into foliage and flower growth (spring) and during the hot summer months. Early spring and early fall are the best times of the year to divide perennials to provide transplants with enough time to devote to root growth before the hot or cold weather sets in.

Some sun exposure is inevitable, but try to divide when there are overcast skies. When exposed to sun, newly divided plants with compromised root systems cannot draw enough water from the soil to support the foliage which can lead to wilting and death. Two tactics to help minimize water loss through transpiration are trimming foliage back to be in proportion with roots AND shielding plants from bright sun with small lath structures until they are acclimated to their new environment.



Day Tripping to Chanhassen, MN—by Karin Woltjers

The Minnehaha Master Gardeners joined the Sioux Falls Garden Club on a bus for a day trip to the Minnesota Arboretum. Travel time was 4 hours with a bathroom stop. We entered the gates of the Arboretum after paying \$7.00 for the entrance fee. Once there we inquired about the 1-hour free guided walking tour and purchased tickets at \$2.50 for the 1-hour tram ride around the garden. We were glad to see a Master Gardener installed at the Information Desk who was available to answer any arboretum-related questions that we had.

My daughter and I started on the Art To A-Maze Exhibition three mile trail. Our goal at the end of the trail was The Maze Garden which was advertised as “They twist and they turn, they zig and they zag. They’re equal parts amazing and amusing. They’re mazes and they’ve been delighting and perplexing people all over the world for centuries.”

We cheated to exit from the maze early because we had 20 minutes to get back to the Center for the guided walk (or was it because the 4 year old girls ahead of us were doing a better job at getting out of the maze than we were?). Consider bringing your bikes because you can tour the Arboretum on its 12.5 miles of garden paths and hiking trails.

The University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum features more than 1,000 acres of woodlands, wetlands and prairie. In particular, we wanted to view the hosta collection which had many healthy hostas. MG Richard Dickey pointed out that a tree had been taken out so that there were a group of hostas getting a lot of sun. We also noticed that the garden workers were starting to water the wildflower gardens due to lack of rain.

Odds and Ends



Q: How do you take care of a pumpkin until Halloween carving time?

A: Pumpkin and its relative, winter squash, are harvested when mature. One way to check for ripeness is to press the skin with your thumbnail. The skin should be hard and not easily pierced. Another test is watching for a yellow spot to form where the pumpkin sits on the ground. If both of these conditions exist, the pumpkin is ripe.

In the garden, a light frost will not harm the pumpkins. If the pumpkin has not ripened when this occurs, this light frost will not prevent ripening. If a hard frost be expected, the pumpkin should be harvested. Do this by removing a small portion of the vine with the pumpkin. Do not remove the stem where it attaches to the pumpkin because you lost your handle for the pumpkin top as well as making the pumpkin more prone to decay.

The pumpkin will need to cure because curing increases the usable storage time. To do this, place it in a warm, dry place for a few days. The tough skin is resistant to decay. If the skin is pierced or opened in any way, decay will quickly start so do not bruise before using the pumpkin. Your pumpkin will now keep until you carve or paint it. Decorate safely.

Master Gardener Training

If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener, sign up for the 2008 Master Gardener class in Sioux Falls. You can do this by either contacting the Minnehaha County Extension Office at 605-367-7877 or signing up at the Minnehaha Master Gardeners booth at the 2008 Lawn and Garden Show in March, 2008. Hurry, the class may fill quickly!

Signing off--see you in 2008

This is the last issue of From the Ground Up for the 2007 gardening season. We hope you have found the issues helpful, informative and entertaining... The Minnehaha Master Gardeners and the staff of the Minnehaha County Extension Office wish you and your family a safe and joyous holiday season.



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