

Groff's Plant Farm

Now Open

Monday-Friday 9-5 Saturday 9-5

CLOSED SUNDAY Except 4/21, 4/28, 5/5, 5/12, 5/19, and 5/26

Update on Downy Mildew or Where are the Impatiens?

It has now been over a year that gardeners from Florida to Maine and as far west as Chicago and St Louis have struggled with the impatiens downy mildew disease. We know it is a water mold, carried by spores on the air, and causes devastating damage to one of the most popular bedding plants in the United States.

You may have read about it in the newspaper, seen it in gardening magazines or had your own shade beds affected last summer. It is a big problem, and may be for the next several years.

There is no cure- and nothing homeowners can do to reduce their risk. Professional growers have a few chemicals to prevent the disease, but they only last for six weeks at the longest.

We attended several grower meetings over the winter where the largest topic of conversation was downy mildew. Professional opinions vary as to what to do. We are not growing them.

At Groff's we are looking at this as an opportunity for those of you who have always planted impatiens to try something new. We want to give you the absolute best plants we can for your yards because your money and time are valuable, and we want you to be successful. We would rather see no impatiens in the landscape for a few years to minimize the risk of further spreading the disease, and hope we will get them back in the future.



Torenia 'Kauai' series

While there are few things that match impatiens in ease and color range, there are other great plants for shade.

Begonias immediately come to mind. One of my favorite new plants is the begonia 'Whopper' series. Offered in both green or bronze foliage, and either red or pink flowers, they were a stand out at last summer's Penn State field trial. Large flowers, height and spread of up to 3 feet, this is one bodacious begonia.

A lesser-known plant is torenia, or wish-bone flower. Either spreading or upright, it comes in a range of colors from white, yellow, blue, pink and dark purple. Torenia does well in shade to partial sun areas.

Luckily, New Guinea impatiens are not affected by downy mildew. Most people are familiar with the vegetative New Guineas. They have large flat flowers, and reach 2-3 feet in height. The 'Divine' series is grown from seed, and has slightly smaller stature and flowers. Sunpatiens, a form of New Guineas that do well in sunnier areas, are also a great choice. I would not put them in deep shade, however, as they will stretch.

Foliage plants offer many colorful options. Coleus gains in popularity each year, and thrives in the same situations as impatiens. Caladium bulbs produce colorful large elephant ear-shaped leaves. They naturalize in Florida, but need to be dug up in the fall if you want to keep them year to year in Southern PA.

My advice is stay away from impatiens from a year or two and see what this disease is going to do. When life hands you lemons, plant begonias or torenia.

Victory Gardens Then and Now



Over the winter we were fortunate enough to listen to a new class of Master Gardeners present talks on a variety of topics they researched independently. One that piqued my interest was on Victory Gardens.

Victory gardens were widely planted in the US and Europe during World War I and II to ease the pressure on the food supply and transportation needed for the war effort. During 1943 and 1944, almost half of the fresh fruits and vegetables in this country were grown by private individuals according to Department of Agriculture statistics. Lawns and balconies were commandeered for pots of tomatoes, cabbage, beans and squash patches. Over 200 plots were cultivated in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Boston Commons, New York's Riverside areas and even the famous Hyde Park in London were all ploughed for food. An estimated 20 million Americans planted victory gardens during the war years.

Famous posters touted slogans like "Our Food is Fighting", "Of Course I Can" and "Sowing the Seeds of Victory". Michele Obama had nothing on Eleanor Roosevelt's White House victory garden.



Downy mildew caused defoliation.

Photo courtesy Hyannis County Gardens

Something I did not know; a large portion of the fruit and vegetable shortage occurred in the first place due to the President FDR's policy of Japanese-American internment in California. This left over 200,000 agricultural acres unattended until dustbowl farmers or recent Eastern European immigrants could be relocated. Unfortunately, vastly different growing conditions left these farmers unequipped to match previous production levels.

With the end of the war, interest in victory gardens waned, and by the late 1940s, our food supply was again in the hands of commercial growers and professional farmers.

But times change, and there is no denying the resurgence in the popularity of home vegetable gardening in the last 5 years. Our own sales of vegetable and herb starts are up over 400%. Whether you call them victory gardens, or "independence" gardens people are planting for many reasons; the eat-local movement, wanting a better handle on where our food comes from, the economy, or even higher food prices at the grocery store. Latest figures indicate an estimated 30+ million American families have some vegetables and herbs planted at their homes.

Whether you are new to vegetable gardening or have been home canning for years, growing your own food is an excellent way to provide for your own family in these uncertain times. In addition to the herb and vegetable starts we have always grown, we are pleased to offer onion sets, strawberry plants and garden seeds this year.

If you have any question on when or how to get started in vegetable gardening, we have several handouts in the store and are happy to help.

Keeping a Garden Journal

My mother has kept a journal for most of her life. This came in handy when I was a teenager and struggling with the things 15-year-old girls struggle with. She was kind enough to let me read her diaries from when she was my age. Disregarding the parts where she talked about ironing her skirts for school the next day, it was very helpful to see that 30 years previously, she had the same troubles with friends, boys and school that I had.

My grandmother also had a miniscule 5-year diary with the same date, but 5 years on each page. After she died, we found this little tome interesting. She mainly recorded the weather, what was planted and harvested and which of her 6 grandchildren she babysat that day. On the same date from year to year was snow, pea planting, greenhouse transplanting and usually mention of myself or one of my cousins.

Why all this talk about diaries? In our culture today where our gratification is instant, and our memories are short, keeping a garden journal can be VERY helpful. It doesn't have to be every day, but on a weekly basis, keep track of what you have done in the garden, what's blooming, major weather events, and any trouble with bugs or disease. You may not remember that freak frost in late May after a year or two. How long you were able to harvest the lettuce before it bolted? Were you having trouble with aphids and then an inch of rain washed your trouble away?

If you are really ambitious, take some pictures for your journal. I attended a garden lecture from a woman in her 70s who had lived in the same

house for 50

years. She was an excellent gardener and a humorous speaker- but what really made her talk was the photo progression of her property. She had taken pictures from mostly the same angles of the yard before, during and after the pool, the patio, the ill-conceived raised beds, the evergreen border, the vegetable garden moving around her property to follow the sun, and pots that she had spray painted different colors to follow the trends. (Do any of you remember the aqua phase from the 70's?) It was wonderful to see the changes.

If you are starting some new beds or even adding to existing ones, a few before and after pics will refresh your memory and add to your reward in a few years.

You may have never kept a journal before, make this be the year you start- you'll be glad you did.

Find us at:

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Visit us on the web
at
groffsplantfarm.com



Thanks to all who entered photos in our contest last fall. The pics are all posted in our store. Take a look if you need some inspiration.

Congratulations to our photo contest winners!

Best Photo Category

1st Bessie Friend, Jarrettsville, MD
2nd Sabine Rehm, Paoli, PA
3rd Jennifer MacNeil-Traylor, East Petersburg, PA

Best Garden Category

1st Nancy Reynolds, Colora, MD
2nd Cheryl Fuss, Reinholds, PA
3rd Carol Cole, Rising Sun, MD

What's New With the Family

There have been quite a few changes for our family these past few months. Mom and Dad moved off the farm for the first time in over 50 years. They are now closer to my mother's mom, who just recently celebrated her 90th birthday, and still lives very independently at home. The move to two acres in the woods has given dad an opportunity to play- and created a lot of fodder for *Chronicle* articles. Jon and I bought the farm, (literally, not figuratively) and moved to the dome house. The kids and dogs are enjoying a little more room.

We will be having a multi-family "garage sale" with the neighbors in greenhouse #6 on Saturday April 6th from 8am-close. Lots of kids stuff, kitchen, and decorating, etc. Rain or shine.

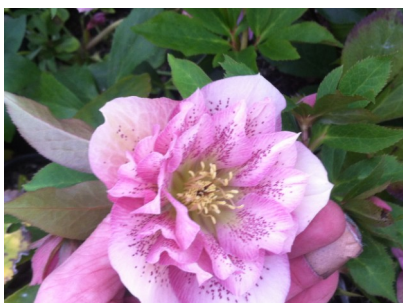
We have now had our chickens for 6 months- they reliably lay between 5 and 6 eggs a day and are quite funny. Despite our best efforts to keep them inside the electric fence, they fly over it every day. I just don't have the heart to clip their wings. They follow us around the yard and greenhouses and even try to hop in the car to take Ali to preschool from time to time. Even though mom told dad over 40 years ago that getting chickens was grounds for divorce, Jon and I are still enjoying matrimonial harmony. If you bring your dog to the farm and don't trust him around chickens, please keep him leashed.

Liam is in 1st grade and is loving school now that he is reading chapter books. Both he and his sister can be found around the farm. Ali informed me a few weeks ago that she no longer wanted to do chores in the house for her allowance; she wanted to work at the plant farm instead. A girl after my own heart.

Brother Tom and Erin are doing well- Tom continues his job with computers, and Erin expresses her love of animals by working for a local vet a few days a week. Their kids are 6, 4 and 3 and keep them busy.

Many of you have been customers for many years, and we appreciate your loyalty to our business and are always so touched when you ask about our family. Thanks again from all of us at Groff's.

What's Blooming At Groff's?



This is definitely the season for hellebors- We have many beautiful cultivars including this 'Mardi Gras Double'

To remove your name from our mailing list, please [click here](#).

Questions or comments? E-mail us at groffsplantfarm@epix.net or call 717-529-3001

Directions

FROM THE NORTH:

Take 222 south through Quarryville. Turn left on Blackburn Rd 1/4 mile past Solanco High School. Continue 3 miles to the stop sign. Turn left. Continue 300 yds across the bridge. Turn right onto Street Rd. Look for the sign and the lane on the right in less than 1/2 mile.

FROM RT 1:

Exit north onto 472 (away from Oxford). Continue EXACTLY 5 miles, crossing the reservoir. Turn left onto Street Rd. across from the Union Presbyterian Church. Continue 1.7 miles to the stop sign. Continue straight and watch for the sign and lane on left 1/2 mile

Better yet: Use the Google Map directions link on our website: Groffsplantfarm.com

Recipe Corner

Last year we grew Napa cabbage in our garden for the first time. I tried lots of recipes but this one reprinted with permission from America's Test Kitchen *The Best Simple Recipes* was my families favorite.

Shanghai Chicken Salad

- 1/2 cup rice vinegar
- 3 TBSP + 1/3 cup soy sauce
- 1/3 cup hoisin sauce (found in Asian sect of grocery store)
- 1/4 cup sesame oil
- 1 TBSP + 1 1/2 tsp grated fresh ginger root
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts about 1 1/2 lbs)
- 1/2 head napa cabbage, shredded
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and sliced thin
- 1 bunch scallions sliced thin
- 1 cup chow mein noodles

1. Whisk vinegar, 3 TBS soy sauce, hoisin sauce, sesame oil and ginger together in a bowl. Place chicken in a single layer in a Dutch oven. Pour 1/2 cup vinegar mixture over chicken. Add remaining soy and 3 cups of water. Bring to boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low and simmer chicken until cooked through, 7-10 min.

2. Transfer chicken to plate, cover with plastic wrap and put in fridge to cool. When cool, shred into long thin strands.

3. Transfer chicken to large bowl, toss with 2 TBSP vinegar mixture and season with salt and pepper. Add cabbage, scallions, bell pepper, and remaining vinegar dressing. Top with chow mein noodles.

4. Enjoy cold. Yum!

**Because the cabbage leaves are thicker than lettuce, the salad will last dressed in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.