

# Groff's Plant Farm

Monday-Friday 9-5 Saturday 9-5 CLOSED SUNDAY

July 4th 9-4 and July 17th CLOSED

## Your Questions Answered Issue

Summer 2013

### How Do We Pick What to Grow?

We peruse magazines and trade journals and attend grower meetings over the winter, but the best way to decide what to grow is to see how it does in the actual ground.

We are very fortunate in this area to have many top notch botanic gardens and research trials within easy driving distance. These institutions expose visitors to plants they have never seen before, and spark a love of gardening. They also help landscapers and growers like us choose between endless varieties of plants.

Our growers visit Penn State's variety trials, research plots at two local growers, and Mt Cuba Center in Hockessin, Delaware. They recently refurbished their trialing site and are currently looking intensively at two genera: coreopsis and heuchera. This multi-year evaluation is already producing valuable information- (see Why Didn't My Perennial Come Back?) This year we have one more place on our list.

Longwood Gardens, in Kennett Square, has been privately trialing plants for use in their displays since the 1950s. This year they brought their trials out into the open for public viewing. Unlike many public plant trials, where breeding companies pay an entry fee to have their varieties evaluated, Longwood's varieties were selected by their head designer. Over 250 plants comprising 10 genera including agastache, canna, clematis, ornamental pepper, colocasia (elephant ears), dahlia, lantana, peony, pentas, and salvia are being evaluated in the Idea Garden. Plants are judged on size as well as attractiveness. Another difference between the Longwood trials and others, is the level of attention these plants will get. At Longwood plants are staked, deadheaded, fertilized, pinched and otherwise loved to reach their full potential.

On your next trip to Longwood- check out the new trial and note your favorites. Maybe you'll see them at your local greenhouse next year.



Coleus evaluation at Penn State Landisville Trial

### Make a note:

The Penn State trial at Landisville is holding their Summer Garden Experience Saturday July 27th from 9-2. Sponsored by the Extension and the Master Gardeners the trial is open the public for workshops on pruning, garden photography, veggies and herbs, pollinators, and many more topics. Featured special guest wildlife expert Jack Hubley will speak at 10am and 12pm. Wagon tours of the farm, and trial gardens, plant sale and Ask the Expert Master gardener booth also available. For more information check out their website. <http://extension.psu.edu/cumberland/events/files/summer-garden-experience-brochure-2013>

### Why Did My Plant Die?

We love to chat with you when you come to our farm, and one of my biggest pleasures is helping customers find a plant for a problem area, put a beautiful container together or to identify a bug or disease problem. It is usually a learning experience for both of us! One question we heard a fair amount of this year was "Why didn't my plant come back?"

This wasn't a particularly hard winter. Not a lot of snow. No prolonged periods at low temps. Yet we have heard from some of you that certain things didn't come back. There are several possible reasons for this.

Plant is a biennial. There are several plants, most notably foxgloves, hollyhocks, some black-eyed Susans, sweet William, and forget-me-nots that are biennial. In this lifecycle, the first season plants form a basal rosette of leaves then vernalize over the winter. The second season they bolt (send up a flower stalk), produce seeds, then die. To



**Now is the time to plant fall veggies- broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts. Cabbage and Brussels Sprouts should be in the ground by late July. You can plant broccoli and cauliflower as late August 15th. Lettuce, and spinach can wait until late August.**

keep them year to year, allow the seeds to fall and germinate to regenerate the patch. Of course breeders have been monkeying with this list and there are some varieties that are now truly perennial.

Plant is a short-lived perennial. In my experience there are long lived perennials (think peonies and hosta) and those that live several years and then die. This list includes heuchera, scabiosa, yarrow, columbine, echinacea and delphiniums. The saving grace to this list is that many of these will reseed- coneflowers and columbine especially. Others have a long bloom period or especially fantastic flowers or foliage and you may be willing to treat them as annuals.

Mechanical damage. The dog peed on it, it got weed-whacked too many times, stray Round-up, etc. The best way to kill a butterfly bush is to cut it down in the fall. Water can get into the crown and freeze. This cracks and kills the plant.

Too wet over the winter. Some plants need especially good drainage over the winter which can be challenging in some of our native clay soils. This seems to be a problem with lavenders, coreopsis and penstemon to name a few. Even the experts lose some from time to time- Mt Cuba Center in Hockessin, DE is currently trialing heuchera and coreopsis. This winter they were firmly in USDA zone 7. They lost no coral bells, but nearly one third, or 100 coreopsis plants succumbed despite being listed at least zone 6 hardy. In their winter wrap up newsletter, they attributed this loss to poor drainage. I lost two 'Cosmic Eye' coreopsis in my garden this winter.

Act of God. Sometimes plants just die. Plants that are true perennials, long lived, not damaged and you think you have done everything right can still die. They are living things, and sadly, won't live forever. This just gives you room for a new find!

## What Can I Plant in Hot, Dry Sun?



Doesn't seem we've had much of that recently, but we love delosperma, or ice plants, for the sunny border. This

low-growing succulent hugs the ground and soaks up the sun. Think sedums, but with open daisy-type flowers. They are very drought tolerant which makes them a great choice for banks or rock gardens. Ice plants spread quickly, forming a dense mat to repel weeds. They range in colors from yellow, orange, soft pink, hot pink and purple. There is a new series called Jewel of the Desert- bred for increased bloom period- these little beauties bloom in neon colors from late spring through the fall.

## What is the Plant of the Week?

We have been having a lot of fun with our Plant of the Week feature. Each week we chose an annual, perennial or shrub to highlight near our store. Pictures and a short description can be found on our facebook page or our website: groffsplantfarm.com

Recent selections include astilbe, everblooming hydrangea, angelonia, tropical milkweed, dianthus, achillea, verbena bonariensis, and deciduous azaleas.

## What Do I Do With All These Tomatoes???

### Roasted Tomato Sauce— from A Sweet Pea Chef

My guilty pleasure is reading food blogs; I found this recipe last summer when I had tomatoes coming out of my ears! Great on pizza, or spaghetti all winter long.



**2 lbs Roma tomatoes cut in half or larger tomatoes quartered**

**5 garlic cloves, smashed**

**1 medium yellow onion, quartered**

**1 carrot, unpeeled, cut into 4 pieces**

**2 tsp kosher salt, plus more to taste**

**Pepper to taste**

**2 TBSP olive oil**

**3-4 basil leaves**

**1/4 dried thyme or 1tsp fresh thyme**

**2 TBSP unsalted butter**

**1/4 tsp sugar to taste**

**Preheat oven to 350**

**Arrange all vegetables face down on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.**

**Drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle generously with dry thyme, salt and pepper. Bake 60-70 min until edges of tomatoes and onion begin to turn black. Transfer everything to a food processor add basil leaves and purée until smooth.**

**Cook in a skillet with butter, sugar, fresh thyme salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy fresh or can!**

## What Should I Put in the Hole When I Plant? Directions

Another question we get asked a lot if “What should I put in the bottom of the hole when I plant?” My answer is usually NOTHING!

Your garden dirt is comprised of four things, air, mineral particles (clay, sand, silt), water and organic material. The organic material should make up no more than 5-10 percent of the total mix. Air and water occur in the spaces between the mineral particles and the organic material. Not enough air, the soil gets compacted and plants suffer; too much water, the plants drown.

In this area there is a lot of native clay. Clay has a small pore size, usually holds moisture in wet weather and hardens when dry. A natural inclination is to then add sand to improve drainage. Unfortunately, this usually results in cement. Another thought is to add compost or excessive organic material. Over 2-3 years, compost breaks down resulting in a sunken hole. This becomes a lake in your flower bed and the plant drowns.

If you do add a pocket of soft potting soil or compost to the bottom of the hole, the roots of your plant will happily grow into the pocket then hit the surrounding native soil and stop, or circle back into the pocket. Eventually this root girdling will cause the plant to suffer.

A better plan when planting perennials, shrubs, and especially trees, is to dig a hole wider (NOT DEEPER) than the plant root ball to loosen the surrounding soil. Open up the root ball knocking off most of the potting soil. Point any circling roots outward. Don't be afraid to cut these to open them up. Water well, then backfill with the topsoil, being sure to keep the crown at the same level it was in the container.

If you want to add organic material to your soil profile, topdress or mulch with woodchips, compost or even mushroom soil. This will improve the moisture holding capacity of the soil, reduce compaction and dissuade weeds.

The only situation tilling large amounts of organic material into the soil makes sense is in a vegetable garden or annual flower bed where the soil is worked yearly and the plants are using nutrients up quickly and harvested regularly. Here a soil test is a good idea to make sure your

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### 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: [Groffspantfarm.com](http://Groffspantfarm.com)

## When is the Sale?

Despite the crazy weather, thanks to you, we had a great spring. To show our gratitude, it's time for our annual Customer Appreciation Giveaway!

Beginning at 9am Saturday July 13 you may pick **1 flat of free annuals or summer vegetables from greenhouses 4, 6, 7, 8 or the front outside annual display benches**. Additional flats can be purchased for \$10. A flat is defined as 1 hanging basket, 4 gallon annuals or however many smaller pots you can fit on a standard tray. We anticipate the sale will only last one day.

We always keep a reserve of annuals for your late season needs in greenhouse #5. These will be available at regular price. This is also where you will find fall vegetables. The fresh herbs in greenhouse 3 are **NOT** included in the sale — we'll keep fresh herbs for your cooking needs throughout the summer.

The four inch perennials are marked down to half price to make room for the new crop in September. A flat of 18 is \$20 or \$1.25/pot. You'll find these in greenhouses #1 and #2 and in the sun perennial section. There are also a few hostas and other odds and ends we'd like to find good homes. Look for these to be marked down near the store.

We will be **CLOSED Wednesday July 17th** as our entire staff will be visiting Longwood.

**E-mail: [groffspantfarm@epix.net](mailto:groffspantfarm@epix.net)**

**Visit us on the web at**  
**[groffspantfarm.com](http://groffspantfarm.com)**