Plant of the Month
Bletilla striata
(Chinese ground orchid)
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener

Coming to us from China, this beautiful orchid blooms anywhere from the last week in April, in our area, to the end of May. The flowers range from pale pink to deep fuchsia, and there is a white one as well. The plant gets about 12 to 18 inches tall and can slowly colonize an area about that wide. As many as 12 flowers may be on a stalk, opening successively, with 3-4 open at a time, thus flowering for over a month. It grows from a corm-like pseudo bulb that is planted in the spring about four inches deep in average soil that drains well. Put some gravel in the soil if it doesn’t drain well. Plant in dappled shade or where it gets morning sun. Keep watered through the first summer. They may take a year or three to bloom from a first planting, and they do quite well in our area. They can be found in many mail order catalogs.

ROSE TIPS
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener

I’m sure some of you have thought about companion planting as a natural way of controlling pests and diseases as opposed to chemical treatment. Things to consider if you would like to try companion planting
are: a pleasing color scheme, plants with similar growing needs, and plants that help deter insects and diseases as well as help enhance the soil.

Herbs and other aromatic plants make wonderful rose companions. Marigolds are one of the most popular plants for supposedly warding off insects and diseases. You might also try culinary sage (salvia), lavender, catmint, yarrow and oregano as an insect deterrent. Lavender and catmint are also alleged to be good for keeping rabbits away. It is said that tomato plants prevent black spot, but they are usually not something we plant in our rose gardens. Scented geraniums, parsley and thyme are alleged to keep Japanese beetles and aphids away. Four o’clocks and larkspur are believed to act as decoys by attracting rose-loving Japanese beetles to eat their poisonous leaves.

Whatever your decisions regarding good rose companions are, they should enjoy the same growing conditions as your roses, but not aggressively compete for water and nutrients from the soil.

Basic garden hygiene is also one of the best ways to help deter insects and diseases. Be sure to keep all debris from gathering near your plants, as they are prime locations for harboring eggs and larvae of harmful insects and to cause fungus and diseases to grow. Remove infested leaves from plants and cut back infected canes when necessary. If a fungicide is needed, be sure to be diligent in spraying every 7-10 days to prevent onset of black spot and powdery mildew.

Another important issue to be aware of during rose growing season is to be on the lookout for suckers that will appear to be growth that seems to shoot from way below the soil surface and appears to be different from the canes already present. It is important to remove soil from around the sucker and determine the root source. It will be necessary to clip the source of the growth as far down to its root origin as possible. If left unattended and allowed to mature, the new growth will actually take over the whole plant, thus overpowering your expensive hybrid rose bush.

Information source: NY Botanical Garden website

[Note from Extension Agent: There is little scientific evidence to support the pest-fighting benefit of companion plantings. That’s not to say companion plantings don’t work, only that the possible benefits have not been well-documented by the scientific community. At the very least, however, planting a variety of herbs and flowers will help to attract beneficial insects. Gardeners are encouraged to experiment. After all, that’s the fun part of gardening!]
GARDEN TO DO – FRUITS & VEGGIES
By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener

Check previous TO DO lists as many items continue to be relevant. Note spray and thinning recommendations.*

Prune out fire blight damaged wood on your fruit trees. Sterilize your pruners between cuts.
All the warm and hot weather vegetables can be planted now.

Get Strawberries in the Home Garden, HIL 8205, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8205.html) to find the needed steps to renovate your strawberry bed.

When cool season crops (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and green, sugar snap, and snow peas) begin to mature, harvest every couple of days for best quality. Hot weather can cause these crops to be over mature very quickly.
Mulch tomatoes and keep them evenly moist to reduce blossom end rot.

Extend your sweet corn harvest by successive plantings every two to three weeks or by planting early, mid, and late maturing varieties all at the same time.
Make repeated plantings of vegetables based on space availability and your likes.

Control annual weeds by mulching and hand-weeding.
For information on fertilizing, both preplanting and side dressing, get Home Vegetable Gardening booklet AG-06 from the internet or the Extension Service center.*
Check your garden every day or two to spot and solve problems early.

If you are planning to raise your own transplants for a fall garden, you need to start seeds in June to have plants ready to set out in late July and early August. Plants to try include Brussels Sprouts, Broccoli, Cauliflower, and Cabbage.*

For more information on planning a fall garden, see the article in the July 2007, Garden Path, or Growing a Fall Vegetable Garden, HIL 8001, (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8001.html).


Poison Ivy - Taxicodendron radicans
By Merwin R. Dieckmann, Master Gardener

Poison Ivy is a plant of the family Anacardiaceae. It is usually found as a woody vine many times at the edges of cleared areas. The skin irritant, urushiol, causes an itching rash in most people. Poison Ivy grows in all of North America including the Canadian Maritimes, as well as in Mexico, and in all states east of the Rocky Mountains except North Dakota. It seldom grows above an altitude of 4900 feet. Variations of growth include small shrubs and ground cover.

The deciduous leaves of Poison IVy are trifolate with 3 almond shaped leaflets. Usually, the leaves are dark green but in the fall they can be red. Early leaves in the spring may be fleetingly red, as well. Leaves alternate on the vine and the vine has no thorns. It has some hair like growths from the vine to attach it to the structure upon
which it is growing to support its weight. In the fall you may see some tiny white fruit.

Identification characteristics: 1) clusters of 3 leaflets 2) alternate leaf arrangement 3) lack of thorns. Avoid all plants of this description to avoid the painful skin eruption rash occasioned by contact with this plant. Rare reactions of anaphylaxis are recorded and even the smoke of burning debris can give pulmonary symptoms and the skin rash. Just remember: Leaves of three; let it be!

The reaction caused by urushiol is an allergic reaction and most people, if not at first exposure develop the itching rash, will over time develop a sensitized state.

Related species of the same irritating agent include poison oak and poison sumac. You may have to look for pictures of these species.

Poison Ivy picture by Dr. Merwin R. Dieckmann at the 4-H camp site in Warren County

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