

# The Garden Path

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## JUNE 2016

### PLANT OF THE MONTH By Marty Finkel

#### Bear's Breeches (*Acanthus*)

There is hardly any other plant that provides such beautiful foliage and presents such an architectural form as Bear's Breeches. The large, deep green, lobed leaves have rather soft spines at the tips of the lobes in the species we are discussing, *Acanthus spinosus* and a couple of hybrids (plants in the *A. spinosus* var. *spinosissimus*, however, have sharp enough spines to cause pain). The flower stalks are erect and rise from the center of the large clump of leaves and are lined with hooded white and purple flowers. The stalks are 3 to 4 feet tall, and the clump around 3' across once established. Grow *Acanthus* in morning sun in the south or in light shade in any type of soil as long as it is well-drained – wet soil means certain death. These plants tolerate hot, humid summers. In his book "Herbaceous Perennials," Allan Armitage says the cultivar 'Summer Beauty' is likely a hybrid between *A. mollis* and *A. spinosus* and is far superior to either parent. It is vigorous and has white flowers with purple bracts. The cultivar 'Morning Candle' is a new, free-flowering hybrid that has deeply scalloped leaves and tolerates heat well. Its flowering stalks are 4 feet tall with the typical purple and white flowers. All *Acanthus* are virtually indestructible once established because even tiny portions of root left in the ground will produce new plants. In fact, it can spread aggressively in loose soils.



A. 'Morning Candle'



A. 'Summer Beauty'



A. *spinosus*

Photo credits: *A. 'Morning Candle'*, courtesy of Plant Delights Nursery, Inc. [www.plantdelights.com](http://www.plantdelights.com)  
*A. 'Summer Beauty'* and *A. spinosus*, courtesy of the JCRA, NCSU

## CHECKLIST By Mary Jane Bosworth

Hopefully you have been enjoying a spring display of flowers... This past month has brought out my iris, peony, clematis and honeysuckle. My oak leaf hydrangea and other varieties of hydrangea, day lilies and various flowering bushes are ready to pop. So, what is there to do in June?

- ✓ Get thee to a nursery and purchase some annuals for bits of color throughout the garden all summer long.
- ✓ Fill pots with colorful annuals and place them in areas where they can be enjoyed.
- ✓ Remove old flower blooms from annuals to keep them producing those lovely flowers.
- ✓ Stake tall flowers like hollyhocks and tall lilies before they start to have problems holding their heads up.
- ✓ Dig up spring bulbs as soon as foliage dies down in order to divide and transplant them immediately to prevent them from becoming root bound and to spread the wealth of blooms next year. This need not be done every year, just when things start to get crowded.
- ✓ Feed plants with fertilizer, following the directions on the container, after the first round of blooming.
- ✓ Set out fall blooming flowers for color in the garden later in the season. Good choices are salvia, purple coneflower, asters and Japanese anemones.
- ✓ Continue to remove spent flower heads as you check your garden.
- ✓ Spring flowering shrubs may be pruned for shape after the blooming has stopped. Don't wait too long or you won't have blooms next year.
- ✓ Snap off the tips of chrysanthemums when they are about 6" tall. This will make them bushy and bloom more profusely.
- ✓ Stake and tie new clematis stalks.
- ✓ Stake dahlias so they will have support later and will not be damaged by staking after the plants have grown large.

## GARDENING ON THE WEB By Carl Shafer

Today we will start on the Gardening web site (<https://gardening.ces.ncsu.edu/>). By clicking "Extension Newsletter" you may subscribe to be notified when new editions are posted. You can also subscribe to be notified when new news is posted. You can also check on "Subscribe to multiple sites here" to get a list of 22 sites that you can receive news from.

A new nonprofit, ad-free gardening website has been started – Good Garden Videos (<http://goodgardeningvideos.org/>). Be sure to check under the "About" tab to learn more about the website and the people behind it, as well as the "Find More Info" tab.

When doing a web search for gardening information, it's often useful to confine your results to ".edu" domains (look for an "advanced search" option in your search engine of choice to use that option). Doing so will generally direct you to unbiased, research-based reference material. However, at the Garden Professors website, a post on November 1, 2015 discusses an interesting scenario where contradictory information may result (<http://gardenprofessors.com>).

## THE TYROS' CORNER By Eileen Novak

This spring, as I cleaned up the remnants of last year from my garden, I pondered at what my husband and I were still cleaning from the rest of the land.

When we bought the property 5 years ago, we walked around and saw that there were 5 abandoned cars around the area, rusting into oblivion. Luckily for us, the price of metal was high enough at the scrap yards to make it worth someone's while to get in and haul them away. But this was just the tip of the iceberg. In the area where there had once been a house which burned in the '40s, we found the solid remains of a kitchen midden: glass jars, shards mostly, and well-rusted metal cans. Some of the glass jars were still intact, and had within them what I assumed was the remains of cooking grease. I didn't attempt to open the jars to find out. We also found lots of rusting metal, a cast iron stove, cast iron pans, the remains of bed springs - enough to posit that

the place had either been a boarding house or that many different people had dumped unwanted mattresses in a convenient place.

Thanks to the price of metal, my husband and I carted out large metal oil drums, lots of barbed wire, some that we collected, some that was already wound into rough coils, we found and removed paint cans, a 3-legged washing machine, lots of metal roof panels and even a couple of advertising signs. We found the gas tank for a motorcycle. Haven't found the rest of the bike yet.

Then this spring as we cleared away some Chinese privet at the end of a field, we unearthed no less than 27 old tires, a propane tank and an outboard motor, all thrown out of sight and out of mind, along with lots of glass and metal junk which we consigned to the county landfill. This was a newer dumping ground, due to the plastic items we found. The other dump had not contained any.

This isn't much on beginning gardening, yet, but hear me out. 2 years ago I read an article on weed prevention, which extolled the virtues of putting down cardboard, and topping it off with straw to hold it down and let it be reclaimed by the earth. I did so with a great deal of joy, reusing the cardboard locally was a better deal for me. Of course I found that I must have missed an important piece of the instruction: This year as I work through my garden I see things glittering at my feet: the cellophane tape that I cut through and left attached to the cardboard as I commissioned it to its new task of mulch. And the gummed labels that I didn't pull off of the newspaper. This is worse than the glass and plastic in the newly discovered dumping ground because I can pick up those pieces – the cellophane crumbles as I attempt to remove it, and leaves lots and lots of mica-like sparkles to reproach me for my lack of attention. <sigh>

So tyros, if you are attempting to recycle papers or cardboard into mulch and to return the wood fibers to the soil eventually, do yourselves a favor and remove the stuff that just won't decompose politely. You don't want to be looking at it two years from now and you don't want some new owner, 50 years down the road, saying "gee that gardener was a real slob!"

## INTERESTING TID-BITS By Marty Finkel

- A beautiful bed of perennials can be established under trees – IF the trees are good candidates for the project and shallow-rooted plants are used. Although tree roots extend beyond the branch spread of the tree, Scott Josiah, state forester and director of the Nebraska Forest Service in Lincoln, reminds us that the area from the trunk out to this drip line is the most critical area when it comes to root disturbance. The roots grow in the first one or two feet of soil in the case of most ornamental trees, so even shallow digging will disturb the fine feeder roots found in the first foot. Plan to add two to four inches of compost to provide a base for planting-- this will not suffocate the tree roots. Do not let the compost come into direct contact with the trunk. Use small plants and work them into spaces between roots, keeping in mind that different trees have different root systems, e.g. maples have a thick, dense mass of fibrous roots and oaks have larger horizontal roots that are easier to see and work around. Mulch the areas after planting. Some good choices for planting in dry shade are: wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*), green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*), hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctilobula*), barrenworts (*Epimedium* spp.), white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*, syn. *Aster divaricatus*), Hakone grass (*Hakonechloa macra*), hellebores (*Helleborus foetidus* and *H. x hybridus*), lilyturfs (*Liriope* spp.), Mondo grasses (*Ophiopogon* spp.), rock fern (*Polypodium virginianum*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), blue wood aster (*Symphotrichu, cordifolium*, syn. *Aster cordifolius*). There are many other shallow-rooted perennials and groundcovers, small bulbs, etc. that are suitable. Native plants, such as wild iris (*Iris cristata*), native pachysandra (*Pachysandra procumbens*), foamflowers (*Tiarella* spp.), and others work beautifully. Information in this tidbit is from "Planting Under Trees," by David Oettinger in the Nov/Dec 2015 issue of *The American Gardener* magazine. Oettinger was a professional arborist and forester for over 25 years
- The Maryland Department of Agriculture has a "bee dog" on staff to detect American foulbrood (AFB) in beehives. AFB is a highly contagious bacterial disease that infects honeybee brood and eventually kills the colony. Mack, the bee dog, was trained by Cybil Preston, Chief Apiary Inspector for the Maryland Department of Agriculture with the help of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services K-9 trainers in a 14-week training program. At the end of the program, Preston and Mack were certified as an American Foulbrood detection team. The Maryland DOA has had a bee dog on staff since 1982 and is believed to be the only state agency in the U.S. to use a dog to detect AFB. Mack is the fifth dog to hold the

position, replacing Klinker, a black Lab who retired the year before Mack came on board. Preston said that AFB would be a lot more prevalent if they didn't do dog inspections – every hive Klinker alerted on was 100 percent correct and certified by the USDA as confirmed AFB. Mack can sniff-inspect 100 hives in 45 minutes, while it takes an average human inspector one day to inspect 45 colonies because he/she has to open the hives to visually inspect (Preston can inspect 10 hives in 45 minutes.) Mack works from November to April, moving from beehive to beehive, sniffing each for the distinct odor of AFB infestation. When he smells it, he sits to alert Preston that she needs to inspect the hive. Preston stated that “The program is a unique asset to our department and we didn't want to let it go.” Information for this tidbit was found online in NPR's “the salt” section of “Food for Thought,” 4-28-16 and from the online MD Dept. of Agriculture News Room Nov. 10, 2015

## HERB OF THE MONTH By Edna Gaston

As an accent in almost any garden, plants with silver grey foliage is so striking. But combine several plants with this color foliage and you have a masterpiece. Not only is the foliage stunning, the flowers, seed heads and fragrance just can't be beat. As with most herbs these plants need good soil, excellent drainage and full sun. Here are some suggestions.

Not as frequently seen as its green cousin, Grey Santolina (*S. chamaecyparissus*) also known as Lavender Cotton, makes quite a statement. It can be lightly groomed to grow in a ball shape.

There are several *Artemisia* that fit this theme. Some of the more popular ones are Silver Mound, Silver Queen and the well-known Powis Castle. Another member of the *Artemisia* family is Wormwood, don't forget it.

As always there are sages like Silver Sage and Tri-color Sage. Another standard herb are thymes and its best representative is the beautiful Silver-Edged Thyme. Never leave out the wonderful fragrance of lavenders. There are two *Lavendula angustifolia* – ‘Nana Alba’ and ‘Munstead’ which grow extremely well for me.

Lamb's Ear (*Stachys*) is great for the front border of the silver garden. In a pot place Pineapple Mint (*Mentha suaveolens* ‘Variegata’) to keep it confined and add height and additional interest to the garden.

Russian Sage (*Pervoskia*), Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis russeliana*) and Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) should not be omitted.

There are many other plants that would enhance the silver garden – what a reason to visit local nurseries. But do we really need an excuse? So go shopping, plant a silver garden and enjoy the cool ambiance on a hot summer day!

Happy Gardening!

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