



June 2016 Newsletter

“Notes from Dot”

The June sometimes....

President's Message

With summer around the corner things are getting fired up. Not only have our speakers been red hot but the temperature has been rising. This month we will see the sun almost directly overhead with a due east to west path and the days are so long they seem double. That also means that the year is nearly ½ over. Have you thought about accomplishing your goals for 2016? Looking to the second half of the year we have lots of excitement. The fall ramble can be an overnight with double the number of stops and nurseries that most people don't know for unique shopping experiences. Please give some feedback if you think an overnight is a something you will do because we will need good participation to make it a success. The monthly meeting raffle tables have been well supplied so thanks to all who bring plants. The refreshments have been getting better and I'm hoping we can keep the momentum up by each bringing a bag or box or can of something to share. The speakers have been great so far and the speakers for the rest of the year are nearly all confirmed. We have Bruce Macalpin for June with a hands-on talk. Bruce is old school in that he taught horticulture for many years before retiring but also that he doesn't do electronic slide shows and email. No worries about plant import permits for this talk. Bruce has a greenhouse collection of very unique plants that he's accumulated over a lifetime and he plans to bring things to make a great show-and-tell talk as well as a good sales table. For July we have Dennis Cathcart from Tropiflora Nursery in Sarasota. Isn't that exciting! Dennis always gives a good talk making you realize he's a serious collector of more than frequent flier miles and hotel shampoo bottles. Dennis started collecting reptiles and that took him to places with amazing plants. Now, nobody argues that he has the greatest collection of bromeliads in the world and he enjoys sharing his knowledge and amazing us with gorgeous photos of bizarre plants and interesting landscapes. This month's message is to remember that when it's hot outside you can come to garden club events and you'll be cool.

Remembering May

Thank you Chip, and congratulations on winning Best Encyclia at the Redland's Orchid show and sale in May. If you attend this sale and still have plants growing in sphagnum moss, get them out. Sphagnum is a great substrate for plants growing in a greenhouse with controlled watering, but it is a rainy season death sentence to plants growing outside here.

Jeff Searle was our May speaker and we were beyond lucky. He made me glad not to sample some of the Thai foods we saw in the market, but breath-taking gardens, special palms, elephants and a tiger produced one of the best programs ever. Also great were the food and raffle tables. I don't know who brought all those tempting plants, but I do know about some of the food producers. They were: Betty Costanza and Nan Keegan, our newest members, Gary Petonke, Jose Santos, Joe Snell, Wayne Musgrave, Bill Crepage, Bob Henley, Jane DePadro, Sue Zimmer, Chuck Ross, and real birthday person, Bob Isaacs.

Another thing that worked well in May was Pizza night at California Pizza. This was arranged by Ron Halpin with our thanks. Even if California Pizza had not contributed to our bank account, it was fun to be together. The food was great and even if we hadn't made a dime, it was a worthwhile event.

On May 29th the 'Peanut Butter Sandwich Club' had its one-time-only meeting. The club was made up with those who went on the last bus ramble. We said that we bought so much that we would need to eat peanut butter all month. The purpose of this club was to show off what to add to peanut butter and where to go on an overnight ramble to the west coast in the fall. While you may, or may not, want to add potato chips to your sandwich, you do want to eat a few cheap meals and save your money for an overnight.

Allergy Season Help

If you are one of the 30% of Americans with allergies, read on. If something inside your habitat is making your eyes and nose drip, get one or two plants for every 100 square feet of your space. Lady palms, bamboo palms, rubber plants, ficus, and peace lilies work best according to former NASA scientist, Dr. Bill Wolverine.

More of us are allergic than before due to climate change and more pollen, more air pollution, and more people. This onslaught is more than many immune systems can take. So improving your immune system might help. Ways to do this include: taking a digestive probiotic, not using anti-microbial soaps, taking allergy medications, eating only cooked or peeled fruits and vegetables, keeping humidity low, parking your car outside, increasing your vitamin D, and exercising late in the afternoon when allergens are lower. For more details read the May issue of Real Simple, pages 115-118.

Some Plants Can Count

The Pigeon Orchid (*Den. Crumentatum*) blooms 9 days after a heavy rain, and coffee trees bloom 9 days after the first hard rain when the rainy season begins. Short day plants need a rest, and 8 hours of light sends them in to the needed rest.

Able Aphids

Except when they are eating our plants, I am in awe of aphids. They live like cows and ants keep them the way dairy farmers keep cows. Ants take the aphids out onto plants every day to graze on juices, and bring them back to their nest and night to squeeze these juices from the aphids. In return the ants look after the aphids young. When a female aphid hatches she has the next generation of aphid larvae developing in her body.

When aphid genes were mapped at the University of Arizona, a gene was found that make carotenoid pigments. These pigments turn the aphids green or red and were picked up from bacteria millions of years ago. Bacterial gene transfer is pretty common in plants, but this was the first known transfer into an animal. Carotenoids produce sunset colors in plants. Animals, including man, consume plants and get required carotenoids to promote immunity and reduce cell damage.

From Moran, N. et al. Science, 4/10/10

Species Orchids, Many Will Take a Summer Rest

The Southern Hemisphere is the home to most of the species orchids that we grow here, thus it about to be winter and the dry season where the orchids originated. It's not surprising that these same orchids are not blooming now. South America is the home of the most species orchids by far, Africa comes in second, and Australia trails at half the African number. New Guiana has the most species per square mile. Much of Africa and Australia are too dry to support the symbiotic fungi needed by orchids. In the Northern Hemisphere Florida has by far the most species. No surprise, we live in fungi heaven. Look at the leather shoes in the back of your closet.

Confession: I Love Roots and Leaves More Than Flowers

Flowers can be beautiful and of course they are responsible for baby plants, but I do a dance of joy when I see healthy roots. I finally learned to uproot a potted plant when it looks puny. I usually find sad roots. I've over or under watered, or used too much fertilizer and burned the roots. Nematodes are also a possibility if I've potted the plant in our soil. The nice thing about aerial roots, think orchids, aroids, and many climbers, is that you don't have to un-pot to see damage. No green on the very tip of such roots is usually a bad sign. A healthy aerial root is often covered with a layer of velamen which is a 3-24 cell layer of dead cells. Velamen acts as a sponge when water is present, and often turns more green when hydrated. Blue-green algae which can fix nitrogen, and sometimes green algae and fungi also live in the velamen. The exodermis of the velamen contains 3 kinds of cells: they are

live passenger cells for the transport of water and gases; fibrous bodies, and trilosomes. The trilosomes keep the root from losing water to the environment and they protect the plant from pathogenic bacteria and fungi. Just as roots take in water, leaves expel waste water during transpiration. Next month I get to emote about the wonder of leaves, which are to me the most fascinating plant organ.

June To-Do List

1. Bake out nematodes? So you had some vegetables planted in big tubs last winter, and when you removed the spent plants you found knots of nematodes on their roots. Now is the time to cover the nematode laden tub with 2 layers of plastic. Anchor the plastic tight around the tub and leave the plastic in place for a couple of months. The heat produced by the summer sun will kill the nematodes and you grow better vegetables in the tub next winter. When you replant don't dig too deep, surface weed seeds will have been killed, but if you turn up deep seeds they may be living.
2. Divide and repot too- big house plant types. You can keep one and bring one to our raffle table. Give the newly repotted plants a week or so in more shade to recover and then fertilize with half strength balanced fertilizer. If house plants are looking peaked, rotate them into more light and put a cast iron plant or a peace lily in that dark corner.
3. Keep an eye out for pests. Look for yellow spots on top of leaves and white fuzz under leaves. You need to destroy the insects. Snails and slugs just leave slime trails and holes in leaves. Mollusks usually travel in pairs, so get out on a damp night and pick these pests off and bag them. A second plastic bag makes a good hand cover.

Aroid of the month- Colocasia, aka elephant ear, aka taro

About 1,000 large leafed plants are called 'elephant ears', and most of them belong to the genus *Colocasia*, some are *Alocasia*, and possibly all are Aroids. Recent Logees catalogs describe some hybrids. Thai Giant can have leaves that are 4 feet across, Pink China and Maximus also have huge leaves. I ordered White Lava for its white veins and I've been tempted by others. Our raffle table often has an elephant ear baby and if you win one, keep it in light shade and know that it is a water lover.

Of course you are going to have to learn some history. *Colocasia esculenta*, taro, was man's first cultivated plant. This happened more than 10,000 years ago. 400 million people still include it as part of their diet, and 6,57 million tons of it are grown in tropical and subtropical areas each year. All parts of the plant may be consumed, but all parts are toxic before they are cooked. Even eating taro, called poi in Hawaii, over a long period is thought by some to cause varied physical problems. A leprosy outbreak in Africa was thought to be brought on by eating taro.

Taro has been important in medicine in the past. The raw product has been used to rid cattle and children of worms. Native Americans cured surface cancers with a paste of taro. This paste has also been used to induce abortions. Today it is used mostly in Oriental medicines, but research is going on to see whether it can be used to destroy internal cancers.

Most of this came from: Brown, D. Aroids. Timber Press, pp. 249-255

Area plant events, mark your calendar

Fairchild: Mango Festival, July 9-10