

NORTH COAST YARD & GARDEN

HORTICULTURAL NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR THE OHIO GARDENER

BY ROGER S. BOLGER
Roger@RogerBolger.com



15 JULY 2007
VOLUME 2, NUMBER 9

IN MY GARDEN

Vacation time for gardeners means a chance to get out in the yard and finally give the garden the kind of attention it deserves. Sometimes this means a major project such as preparing a new bed for fall planting, installing pavers for a patio or walkway, or building a pergola or gazebo. For people in the plant business who see their garden in spring only in the dark, this may mean finally weeding some (or most) of the garden, or trying to get it into a condition at least presentable for someone who is supposed to know what he's doing.

One thing very hard for gardeners to do is relax in their yards. Our eyes are inevitably drawn to a branch that needs pruning or a weed that needs pulling. I have been guilty of getting up out of the hammock to grab a pad of paper and start listing chores or sketching out ideas. Every time I try to just enjoy watching the birds and squirrels, I get restless and have to start moving. I tell myself that if I finish this job and straighten out that bed, I will be able to settle down and unwind this afternoon, or tomorrow, or next week. I just can't read a book outdoors if I want to actually read – I have to go indoors where there are fewer distractions. I enjoy my fire pit so much because it is hard to garden by firelight.

That need to participate in the environment has a lot to do with what makes us gardeners. Some people like to orchestrate the environment and make their plants

perform like trained animals, and some like to get taken along with the changing demands of nature through the seasons and the weather.



Crocosmia 'Lucifer'

I like to see plants and wildlife take over and grow and change what I have started. It is amazing how quickly things can flourish and mature with just a nudge in the right direction, but at the same time go their own way so that my plans and ideas fall apart faster than I can make them. Good gardeners learn to work with nature and anticipate what their plants will do and where they will go, but no one can live long enough to see all the variations of plant combinations, climate and pests. Gardens will always be a source of surprise and disappointment, frustration and joy.

Even if there was never another new plant to grow, there will always be plenty to do and try in the yard. Gardeners grow old, but gardens are forever new.

FEATURED PERENNIAL

HEUCHERA

Perennial plants are great additions to the landscape because, unlike annuals, they do not need to be replanted each year. Unfortunately most perennials only bloom for four to six weeks, while annuals flower all season. I am particularly fond of perennials that have nice foliage because they add interest to the garden, even when not in bloom, with variations in shape and texture. Better yet are perennials that have colorful leaves, and there are few plants that can compete with the variety of colors in the cultivars of coralbells.



There is a lot of confusion over the proper pronunciation of the botanical name *Heuchera*. The way I hear it most often is HYOO-ker-ah. According to Dan Heims and Grahame Ware, authors of the book [Heucheras and Heucherellas](#), the correct way to pronounce it is HOY-ker-ah, since it

is named after Professor Johann Heinrich von Heucher (HOY-ker). Of course, the proper way to say fuchsia is FOOKS-ee-ah, since it is named after botanist Leonhart Fuchs. Not many people will know what you are talking about unless you say FYOO-shah, so the most important thing is to be understood. Call them coralbells if you like.



Coralbells were a mainstay in my grandmother's garden. Their star-shaped foliage is evergreen, although often hidden by snow. Fine sprays of tiny coral colored flowers dance high over the leaves throughout much of the summer, attracting hummingbirds. They will regularly produce two or three cycles of bloom if the old flower stems are trimmed off. The rosettes of foliage slowly spread to form a groundcover that keeps out most weeds.

Grandma would be delighted by the coralbells we have available today. Dozens of horticulturalists have bred and crossbred *Heuchera* since their discovery, but the modern king of coralbells is Dan Heims of Terra Nova Nurseries in Oregon, with hundreds of new registered varieties to his credit. Exciting leaf color is the chief characteristic of new cultivars, including light green, dark green, yellow, orange, purple, silver and chocolate brown. Some types have flowers so tiny they are

considered insignificant, but many have stunning floral displays in white, red, pink and the classic coral.



Some of my favorites for leaf color are 'Plum Pudding' with purple leaves, 'Amber Waves' with mostly golden leaves going to green and red, and 'Dolce Key Lime Pie' with bright lemon-lime foliage. All three of these have small white flowers that do not add much to their appearance, although they do contrast nicely with the dark foliage on 'Plum Pudding'. My favorite coralbells for flowers is 'Hollywood', which has candle-like stalks of huge pink flowers. The old fashioned coralbells I got from Grandma may not be front-of-the-border showy, but they have their place tucked in among other perennials where they can send up their airy flowers, or in shaded areas too dark to sustain fancy leaf colors.

All coralbells can take a good amount of sun, and actually show the best leaf color with at least four to six hours of morning or evening sun. They are remarkably undemanding, requiring only reasonably well-drained soil. Be careful not to bury the crown when planting *Heucheras* – they will quickly rot and die if planted too deeply. Fertilize lightly in spring when new growth appears, preferably a slow-release or organic fertilizer. Too much food will result in poor blooming and floppy plants, and

quick-acting fertilizer in the heat of summer will surely burn them. While I have heard from gardeners whose coralbells were regularly devoured by rabbits, mine have never been bothered despite a high rabbit population. Deer should show similar lack of interest in coralbells.

It is rare that gardeners are treated to season-long color from a maintenance-free plant that comes back every year. Brighten up those perennial beds that seem so green this time of year with some of the new varieties of coralbells.

FEATURED DISEASE

POWDERY MILDEW

Powdery mildew is one of the most common diseases of landscape plants, and it is named for the white, dusty appearance of infected leaves. Nearly every plant is capable of getting powdery mildew, but it is generally a problem only on certain plants that are particularly susceptible. These include trees such as dogwoods, buckeyes, crabapples, some oaks, silver maples, walnuts and willows. Ornamental shrubs such as azaleas, honeysuckle, lilacs and roses are likely to be infected, as are perennials and annuals including phlox, chysanthemums, zinnias and snapdragons. Kentucky bluegrass and some fescues are also susceptible. Fruits and vegetables including apples, cherries, grapes, raspberries, melons, squash, cucumbers and pumpkins may be affected.

While dozens of landscape plants are susceptible to powdery mildew, nearly every plant has its own species of fungus that produces the disease. For example, powdery mildew on grapes is caused by the fungus *Uncinula necator*, apples are infected with *Podosphaera leucotricha*, turf grass gets *Erysiphe graminis*, and vining

vegetables are susceptible to either *Sphaerotheca fuliginea* or *Erysiphe cichoracearum*. This means that one infected plant can not spread powdery mildew to an unrelated plant. However, most types of powdery mildew thrive under similar conditions, so different plants may become infected at around the same time.



Powdery mildew is most likely to become a problem when temperatures are between 60° and 80° F, and relative humidity is around 90%. These conditions describe a typical summer night, so it is no wonder this disease is so widespread. Shade and dense growth contribute to high humidity by reducing evaporation and air circulation. Powdery mildew is one of the few diseases that does not require the leaf surface to be wet in order to become infected. In fact, some species of powdery mildew spores can not survive if they are in water, so rain and heavy dew will actually prevent new infections. Existing infections are not harmed by moisture.

Leaves infected with powdery mildew show the characteristic white or gray fuzzy or dusty appearance that begins in small spots and may spread to cover the entire top and bottom of the leaf surface. Some plants, especially lilac, rarely show more advanced symptoms. Most other plants will

begin to show other signs, including twisted or cupped leaves, yellowing or browning leaves, and leaves that fall off. Powdery mildew rarely kills a plant, but it does reduce its vigor, lowers crop yields, and results in misshapen or disfigured stems and fruits. Most plants first get powdery mildew on the youngest leaves, although vining vegetables are most likely to be infected on older leaves.

Prevent powdery mildew by buying vigorous, healthy plants, and especially disease-resistant varieties. Space them properly to avoid overcrowding, and do not put susceptible plants in too much shade or in damp areas. Avoid overhead watering, or water early in the day so excess moisture has a chance to dissipate. Keep plants healthy by watering and fertilizing regularly, but avoid over fertilizing and the lush tender growth is most vulnerable to powdery mildew. Do not handle or work with plants while they are wet as fungal spores are easily spread in this way.

Treat infected plants by pruning out diseased parts and disposing of them in the trash, not in the compost pile. If spraying is necessary, begin at the first sign of disease. I prefer to use potassium bicarbonate to treat and prevent powdery mildew, although it may be difficult to find it as there are few manufacturers selling it today. Some old timers like to use sodium bicarbonate (also known as baking soda), but I can not recommend this because plants are sensitive to sodium, and baking soda is not registered for use as a pesticide. Nearly any general purpose fungicide will control powdery mildew, including chlorothalonil, thiophanate-methyl and propiconazole. Spray every seven to ten days, especially during cooler weather, and be sure cover the tops and bottoms of the leaves thoroughly.

GARDEN CALENDAR

- For a late season harvest, plant seeds outdoors for beans, corn, melons, cucumbers, pumpkins and squash.
- Plant pepper plants outdoors for late harvest.
- Watch vegetable gardens for pests including cabbage worms, Mexican bean beetles and cucumber beetles.
- Side dress vegetables with compost or well-rotted manure.
- Pinch off the tips of herbs to keep them bushy. Remove flowers from herbs as they change the flavor.
- Raspberry canes that bore fruit earlier this year should be cut down to the ground. Leave canes that had no fruit standing for next year's berries.
- Prop up fruit tree branches that are overloaded with fruit.
- Donate extra vegetables and fruits to a hunger center.
- Prune out suckers and waterspouts from fruit and ornamental trees.
- Remove dead flowers from annuals and perennials to encourage more blooms.
- Water containers and hanging baskets regularly. Check them each day, especially when temperatures are above 85°.
- Give roses their last dose of fertilizer by the end of the month.
- Sharpen lawnmower blades before grass begins to grow quickly again.
- Avoid walking on browned out turf grass.
- Keep up with weeds before they set seed.
- Watch for sales at garden centers.
- Water plants deeply to get water deep in the soil, but infrequently to encourage roots to grow deep to find water. Once a week is good for most plants, or twice a week for lawns or newly purchased plants.
- Japanese beetles are particularly bad this year. Spray infested plants weekly with acephate (Orthene), malathion, esfenvalerate, permethrin, or carbaryl (Sevin). Apply a grub control containing imidacloprid to your lawn now if you haven't already done so.



ROGER S. BOLGER HAS OVER TEN YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL HORTICULTURAL EXPERIENCE AND HAS GARDENED ALL HIS LIFE IN NORTHEAST OHIO. HE HAS GIVEN DOZENS OF GARDENING TALKS AND SPECIALIZES IN WOODY PLANTS, PERENNIALS, TURF, ENTOMOLOGY, INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT, ORGANIC GARDENING, PONDS AND BACKYARD WILDLIFE.

© 2007 ROGER S. BOLGER. NORTH COAST YARD AND GARDEN IS PUBLISHED TWICE A MONTH. ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (24 ISSUES) IS \$20 VIA EMAIL, \$45 FOR US MAIL. SEND CHECK OR MONEY ORDER (PAYABLE TO **ROGER S. BOLGER**) TO: 4200 WEST 229TH ST, FAIRVIEW PARK, OH, 44126