

# HOOKED ON HIBISCUS

Official Publication of the Mike Bernard Acadiana Chapter, AHS

## MIKE BERNARD ACADIANA CHAPTER AMERICAN HIBISCUS SOCIETY

April 2004

Welcome to spring in Acadiana. Is there a more beautiful area right now!! As part of our spring ritual, we have Festival de Fleur coming up April 3-4. As in the past, we will have our booth with Mr. Dupont. Many of you have signed up for time slots but we still need more help, especially Friday morning about 10 to help set up, and Sunday afternoon.

We got a tremendous boost in the Daily Advertiser a couple of weeks ago with a letter to the gardening editor. Someone asked about the "Cajun Hibiscus" advertised at a Johnston Street Nursery. Hopefully we can satisfy curiosity about this "new" hibiscus.

### HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW

Hibiscus plants show be out of their winter homes and in the garden by now. Your spring shopping list should include chemicals for insect control, pots of various sizes, and potting mix. Good pruning shears are essential, and a sharp knife for root pruning will be helpful. Don't forget plant labels. Pots that will be reused should be cleaned with a dilute chlorine bleach solution. Sanitize tools before use, and between plants.

The following information is from an article in the Space City Newsletter by A.C. Moninger. After organizing all the components needed I follow these steps:

1. Examine the plant thoroughly to determine needs.
2. Remove yellow or bad leaves.
3. Trim back dead wood until I see green.
4. Remove old mulch and weeds and add potting soil if needed.
5. If plant is too large for its pot, support it (or root prune to keep in same size pot)
6. If plant needs to be staked for a nicer growth pattern I do it now.
7. If I find unwanted critters, I spray with Bayer Rose & Flower Mixture.
8. Fertilize and insect repellent come next. I add the following:
  - A. Osmocote (14-14-14) at about 1/2 the recommended amount
  - B. Copperas at 1/2 teaspoon per gallon.
  - C. Epsom salts at 1 teaspoon per gallon.
  - D. Marathon at recommended rates for size of plant. Will give 6 months protection and worth the price paid.
  - E. Space City fertilizer at 1 teaspoon per gallon (Mr. D will probably have fertilizer at Festival de Fleur).
  - F. Add pine mulch.
9. Place the plant in your beds and be sure to give them growing space.
10. Water lightly for 2 weeks; too much will wash chemicals out of pots.
11. After 2 weeks I add Medina Hosta-Grow to the soil at recommended rates listed on the bottle.
12. The following week I start twice a month spraying of fish emulsion as a foliar spray.
13. After the first month I start a monthly routine of 1 teaspoon Space City fertilizer and 1 teaspoon Epsom Salts per gallon.

14. After I see that my plants are responding by putting on new leaves is the time for my pruning. This is a necessity for me because I want a full plant with as many branches for blooms as possible. I use 2 different procedures for pruning:

- A. For plants that are large and I want as many blooms as early as possible, I trim 1/3 of the branches at 1 month intervals.
- B. For smaller plants I trim or pinch back all branches.

### **A BUG'S LIFE (OR DEATH)**

One of the more common pests you will probably encounter on hibiscus are green aphids. Color may range from yellowish green to very light green. They can be found on any part of the plant but young stem tips, flower buds, and delicate new leaves are favored sites. Plant parts can be permanently disfigured when aphids insert their sucking mouth parts into the young tissue. Large colonies often leave a sugary glaze of excrement on plant parts. A blackish, sooty mold may then grow on this waste material. The frequency of pest control should be timed to break the reproductive cycle, which could be every 7 days. A systemic insecticide will kill adults as they emerge from resistant stages.

Mealybugs are oval shaped insects which are normally 1/8 to 1/4 inch long with discernable transverse lines across the back. The body color of white to whitish- gray is imparted by a waxy powder that covers the soft body. Mealybugs are much like aphids in their feeding mechanism and the honey-like substance which they excrete. Most mealybug species deposit eggs in a cotteny sac, which they usually leave in a leaf axis or the forks of branches. This cotteny sac is often the most immediately recognizable indication that an infestation has begun.

### **QUESTIONS FROM THE TROPICAL HIBISCUS WEBSITE**

Q. Do I have to water hibiscus every day?

A. Hibiscus do not like wet feet, but neither should they be allowed to dry out, especially in hot weather. Organic matter in the soil and mulch on top help to maintain a constant level of moisture in the summer. In pots or not, good drainage is very important!.

Q. How much sun?

A. They like a lot of direct light, but under a blazing sun from dawn till dusk with temperatures in the 90's and many of these hybrids will reduce their blooming. A little shade during the heat of the day and they will reward you with more and larger blooms.

Q. Why does my hibiscus have yellow leaves?

A. Basically for 2 reasons: 1. The leaves are old and the plant is discarding them. 2. The plant is under some stress. The stress may be from a too strong dose of fertilizer it got recently or its soil has been too wet recently or some insecticide was applied improperly or its root system was disrupted or lighting conditions in a new location are very different. It could also be a disease. There are many possible reasons. Sometimes yellow leaves ( from stress ) are indicative of a problem and sometimes it simply indicates a temporary discomfort the plant is having.

Q. How do I get my hibiscus to be bushy?

A. By carefully pruning and pinching back of new growth, you can shape your hibiscus. Some varieties make magnificent bushes and excellent hedges, while others may tend to be spindly. Each variety seems to have its own "personality".

Q. How long do tropical hibiscus plants live?

A. Some of the older garden varieties have been known to live for 50 years or more. Some of the newer hybrids may have lifespans of 5-10 years.

**COMING EVENTS**

FESTIVAL de FLEURS.....	APRIL 3-4
CHAPTER MEETING.....	APRIL 6
SPACE CITY EXHIBITION.....	APRIL 18
LONE STAR I (FORT BEND COUNTY).....	APRIL 25
CHAPTER MEETING.....	MAY 4
SPACE CITY.....	MAY 16
B.R. RED STICK SHOW.....	MAY 23
DAYLILLY FESTIVAL.....	TBA
NEW ORLEANS.....	JUNE 6
CHAPTER MEETING.....	JUNE 8
LONE STAR II.....	JUNE 13
AHS CONVENTION PUNTA GORDA, FL.....	JUNE 20
MIKE BERNARD ACADIANA.....	JUNE 27
CHAPTER MEETING.....	JULY 6
SPACE CITY II.....	JULY 18
CHAPTER MEETING.....	AUGUST 3
LONE STAR II.....	AUGUST 15
CHAPTER MEETING.....	SEPTEMBER 7
CHAPTER MEETING.....	OCTOBER 5

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**

Brandi Hebert (Daughter of Robin & David) .....April 10

**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY**

Carolyn Cormier.....April 7

**MINUTES FROM LAST MEETING**

The meeting was called to order. The minutes and treasurer's report were approved.

A discussion was held regarding the donation to ULL in Mike Bernard's name. Billy Welch, from the ULL Horticulture Center said the Center is in dire need of equipment. The decision was made to authorize Mr. Welch to make purchases up to \$1000. He will handle publicity for the donation.

Festival de Fleur will be before our next meeting. A sign-up sheet was passed around. Help is needed on Friday morning to set up and all day Saturday and Sunday. Vendor tags will be available for those working the booth.

We will need fliers to advertise our upcoming show. These will be distributed at any venue we can attend, as well at nurseries and garden centers. Gwen will get them printed.

**New Business**

Plans for the Chapter show were discussed.

Joyce Melebec has agreed to put together ideas for a new-member Welcome Packet.

A demonstration on repotting and supporting was given by Gwen Williams.

The meeting was adjourned and refreshments were enjoyed.

Next meeting will be April 6 at 6:30 at the Ira Nelson Center.

**NEXT TIME**

The educational offering for the upcoming meeting will be on entering blooms in a show and how flowers are judged. Bring your blooms, perfect or not. A panel will review a selection and give the merits/demerits, awarding ribbons. Volunteers are needed for the various roles: senior judge, junior judge, clerk, observer.

Until next meeting, good growing