

Greetings

I am sorry to have missed the last meeting but I did enjoy the trip to Alaska. And yes, I did find a hibiscus grower. She has several garden varieties growing in a sunny location in her house and is the envy of her friends. During the short growing season, Alaska enjoys 18-19 hours of sunlight a day; combined with cool daytime temperatures, the flowers are truly amazing. Sweetpeas grow profusely. Tuberous begonias sport flowers that are 4 inches across. Pretty as all this was, I was glad to get back to my own flowers, which faired very well thanks to my daughter coming over to water those that are not on a watering system.

Hurricane Warning!!

Just as the weather is cooling off and our plants are producing buds again, we are watching Isidore in the Gulf. Hopefully, no one suffered any damage from the storm, and this will be the last one. Our fellow growers to the east may not have fared as well as we have. Let us offer a prayer that all are safe.

Grafting Party

A great time was had by all who attended the grafting party held Sunday September 21th. Father Gerlich and Ron Hendricks were there grafting and helping those who are not as experienced. Thanks Father and Ron. Both of you make it look so easy. We celebrated Father's birthday with a cake and a "choir" rendition of Happy Birthday. Mr. Dupont brought root stock, and we had a good variety of wood to work with. So grafts, do your thing and make us some beautiful new plants.



David and Mike grafting plants



Father Gerlich lends a helping hand

Fall Season

We are officially in the season of autumn. Many of the hibiscus bloom better in cooler temperatures so expect to see actively from those plants that seemed to be just taking up space during the heat of the summer. Continue to feed your plants. As the days get cooler and shorter, apply less than you would in the warmer months. This will help your plants remain healthy and strong and in the best condition to withstand any brief cold snaps. As the temperature drops, the humidity does also. To prevent dehydration, water regularly. If you plan to winter your plants in a greenhouse, you may want to cut the plants back to make them more manageable.

If you want to propagate your cuttings, use woody pieces about 4-6 inches long. Gently scrape the bark away to reveal the green cambium layer, dip in rooting hormone, and place in a pot containing rooting medium. This medium can be builder's sand, vermiculite, perlite, peat, or a mixture of any of these. Cut off all but 2-4 leaves; if these leaves are large, trim them in about half. It is essential to protect the cuttings from wind and drying out.

If you have an old aquarium, this makes an excellent rooting greenhouse. Cover the bottom with at least one inch of pea gravel for drainage. Place your pots of cuttings on this base, water well, and cover the aquarium with plastic or glass and place in bright light, but not in direct sunlight.

Another method is to place your pot of cuttings in a clear plastic bag, using 2 or 3 short stakes to keep it up. Water well and secure the bag around the pot and place in bright light, out of direct sunlight.

I have found that when separating rooted cuttings, putting the whole mass in a pan of water and letting the water wash away the medium protects the tender roots.

If you have hibiscus in the ground and plan to leave them there, you may want to start saving leaves to provide a protective cover. Mound leaves, pine straw or hay 12 to 15 inches above the level of the ground, completely around the trunk to protect the roots of the plant. If your plant is grafted, protect above the level of the graft. A cage of chicken wire can help hold the protection in place. A large cardboard box and a string of clear Christmas lights can become a mini greenhouse for a brief period. String the lights around the plant, turn them on, and cover with the box. Be sure to only use lights rated for outdoor use.

It is extremely important to lift or remove any plastic coverings each day after the temperature rises above freezing, but before the strong sun can shine through and scald the plants.

You may choose to dig up your garden-planted hibiscus and put them in a pot to be able to provide winter protection, then replant them in the spring.

At the upcoming meeting, the presentation will be on protecting your plants for the winter. Some experts are calling for a colder than normal winter. I think they said this for last winter also.

Member Spotlight

This month's featured member is Sandra Theall. Sandra is a founding member of the Chapter. She lives in Abbeville with her husband and a variety of birds, including a turkey, peacocks and peahens, geese and ducks, and cats and dogs. In fact, Sandra has a mamma with 3 little ones she is seeking a loving home for.

How did you get started in hibiscus? I have always looked forward to Festival des Fleur each spring. Three years ago the very first thing I saw when I entered the building was an explosion of color on my left! It was the hibiscus booth manned by Mr. Dupont. I had only seen the garden varieties up to this point. It was love at first sight. **I wanted in!!** I filled out the form that Mr. Dupont was distributing, attended the first meeting, and have never had one moment's regret.

Are you more partial to doubles or singles, large blooms or small ones? I was originally fascinated by the doubles until I came across "Janys". I favored the gigantic

blooms like “Fantasy Charm” until I met “Baby Blue”. I am afraid that I am hopelessly fickle. I have hardly ever met a bloom that I did not like.

What is your favorite color of hibiscus? Again, I profess to being fickle and probably greedy as well. My first purchases were the ever-popular yellow/red or yellow/orange blooms then I became fond of the “tan family” such as “Galactica” and “campfire Girl”. My next crush was on the startling blooms such as “Dark Continent” and “Wild Thing”. Right now I am fascinated and soothed by the beautiful blue/lavender blooms such as “Night Fire”, “Midnight Blue”, and “Atlantis”. Who knows where my favor will turn next?

How many plants do you have? I hesitate to say how many plants I have because it might bring me bad luck. I do have a number somewhere in the eighties. I can never be specific because every now and then I lose a few. I recently put to rest “Pain Perdu” and a “Dark Continent”.

Do you participate in shows? If so, which ones? I have attended all of the Louisiana shows since I joined the Hibiscus Society and I have attended 2 of the Lone Star shows in Texas. This coming year I believe that I will have to attend most every show in Texas and Louisiana. I will get to see an even greater variety of blooms.

In what direction would you like to see the Chapter go and/or any changes you would like to see? Above and beyond the fact that we all want to promote hibiscus in our communities, I would like to see develop a feeling of friendship among our members beyond just saying “this is a fellow hibiscus member”. I hope that someday our members will feel that they can say “this is my friend who also grows hibiscus”.

Do you hybridize or do grafting? Can you spell “KLUTZ”?! Every graft that I ever attempted shriveled up and died. Every bloom that I tried to pollinate fell to the ground as dead as concrete. Does that discourage me? Not at all. I will probably be the most excited member our upcoming grafting party. Remember, if at first you don’t succeed....

What is your favorite flower? I have thought seriously about which one flower is my favorite. Unlike the connoisseurs, I can only say that I have 11 favorites. Two of the 11 are “Midnight Blue” and “Red Snapper”.

Any other suggestions or comments? I am beginning my third term as vice president of the Chapter and for the life of me, I cannot understand why there is not a waiting line for my position. I have the very best job that anyone could have. I have the good fortune to work with absolutely great officers and board members. Every task is either challenging or fun, usually both and I have the unique opportunity to get to know each and every one of our delightful members. They make my job easy.

Next month I would like to feature one of our newer members. I will bring questionnaires to the meeting. Complete it and give it to me or mail it. We have one or two newsletters before we break for the winter, then we will resume after the first of the year. I plan to make this an ongoing feature to allow us to get to know each other. I would like to include a picture with the interview so I will have my digital camera with me.

NEXT MEETING

Tuesday October 1st at 6:30 at the Ira Nelson Center on Johnston.