

MIKE BERNARD

ACADIANA CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

November 08
Newsletter

Big Day

This coming Tuesday will be the last meeting for the year 2008 for the Mike Bernard Acadiana Chapter of the American Hibiscus Society (boy, that's a mouth full) I realize that it is also Election Day for all of us however the meeting will be held as usual so get your votes in and come to our final meeting. We'll tend to our closing year business and I'll get you out in time to get home and check in on the election results. I'm interested too.

Most of meeting Tuesday night will focus around 3 main things.....our chapter shirt (I'll have several samples), next years officers, and finally our main topic for the evening, "Wintering Your Plants". The article included should give you some great hints as to how to best care for your plants through our colder months. We'll again have open discussion so bring your questions and we'll get them answered. Remember most of what you hear is from personal experience.

Looking Back

I thought our hibiscus year went well for the year 2008. Because I believe so strongly in basic skills I was determined that our meetings would focus around what was happening with your plants "right now". Here is a quick reminder of what we covered.

March..... We started off with discussing the importance of pruning back your plants and root ball at the same time. What was most interesting to me was the comment about changing the potting mix about every year and a half. That was something I had never done.

April.... We talked about and demonstrated what I call the 6 basics of maintaining tropical hibiscus in South Louisiana. That article is available for anyone who was not in attendance or has misplaced the text.

May.... Was getting ready for the show season and David and Sandra did an exceptional job of telling you what to do to get your best results.

June..... Our chapter show!!!! What a spectacular event! I looked over several pictures again and couldn't help but walk away with a big smile on my face.

July.... Come Celebrate was our theme and we did just that with a barbeque at my home. It was a fun event and hope you came.

August.... Heat, heat, and more heat.....what to do? Find your babies some shade. That deserve it!

September. Hurricanes Gustov and Ike come rolling through so the September meeting was canceled. Our topic for the canceled meeting was "own roots or grafting". With the damage to plants that would have been a very appropriate topic.



Madame Dupont



6th Dimension



High Voltage



Antique Treasure



Byron Metts

October..... Hybridizing or as I like to call it, "Hibiscus baby birth". What could be more fun than creating a one of a kind. Until you experience it you will have no idea of the true excitement.

November....wintering your plants. I guess we'll see come Tuesday night.

So there was your agenda for the year 2008. I hope you learned something throughout this year. If you did, then we as a chapter accomplish something. Maybe your hibiscus year 2009 will be that much better. I hope so.

Remember, the only reason why a chapter exist is to share information and experiences. That we are willing to do so never ever fail to ask a question. We'll do our best to give you the right answer and if you follow through then your babies will be smiling and rewarding you with their beauty. After all, isn't that what this is all about?

I look forward to seeing you Tuesday night but go vote first.....**Buddy**

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Here are your quotes for the month.....

"The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra"

(be exceptional in your pursuit)

&

"One thing you can learn by watching the clock is that it passes time by keeping it's hands busy."

(a busy gardener is a happy gardener. I speak from experience. Keep your hands busy.)

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The following article was written by hibiscus expert and master hybridizer Barry Schlueter. It appeared in the Petaloid which is the official monthly publication of the Lone Star Chapter of the American Hibiscus Society in Houston, Texas. His words are magic and so appropriate for South Louisiana. Thank you Barry.

What Hibiscus Growers are Doing in September/October

It is hard to feel sorry for ourselves because Hurricane Ike damaged our hibiscus when we read of loss of life or see people without homes now. I know of people whose hibiscus collection was inundated with salt water; was mostly washed away, or was crushed by falling trees. We lost about half our greenhouse space and lots of seedlings but in the cosmic scheme of things, we who didn't have storm water in our homes are probably fortunate.

Having more or less adjusted to Ike's passing, now we face the more predictable hibiscus calamity that looms before us: Winter. Of course Houston (as well as South Louisiana) is not all THAT predictable, but most years bring us some frost and a light freeze or two. Most of us try to prepare for that by protecting our hibiscus in some way.

Because these exotic hibiscus are somewhat expensive, most of us grow in pots to enable us to protect them from cold by moving them into protected areas. When we had only thirty or so varieties, we grew them in the ground and around Thanksgiving each year we dug them up and repotted them and moved them to the driveway, much to the chagrin of the neighbors. When frosty or freezing weather came along we'd move them into the garage for a night or two. In March, they were replanted.

But when the pots would no longer fit in the garage we knew solutions had to be found. Like most of you, we investigated greenhouses to which we could move the plants in winter. Like most of you, we filled our greenhouse space to the point that crowding and disease took it's toll.

This obviously called for more greenhouse space, more greenhouses, etc. After many years it occurred to us that growing fewer hibiscus might be the solution. With the help of Ike, that will simplify our winter protection this year.

Historically we have tried moving potted hibiscus into greenhouse space between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but be prepared for surprises from the north. Sooner or later you will find yourself toting pots in the cold, rainy dark because the storm is NOW forecast to be worse than you expected. Kind of like guessing where and when the hurricanes will arrive. Cold front analysis makes us all weather experts to some degree over the years. I don't like pruning in winter but it may be necessary to shoehorn all your plants into available winter space. Very little feeding is needed during this season, but don't ignore the hibiscus plants. You really must be vigilant about disease control and drainage or

you will have lots of winter losses. Keep watering to a minimum, just enough to avoid wilt. Nothing kills hibiscus more predictably than damp, cold soil under low light conditions, if grown on their own roots. Pride of Hankins rootstock will probably reduce your winter losses of grafted hibiscus because it tolerates wet feet pretty well. That's why we prefer it to other rootstocks in this climate.

Most of us learn the hard way that a poorly ventilated greenhouse becomes an efficient oven during warm winter days here. We used to build our greenhouses with lots of doors for ventilation, but when we learned to roll up the sides, life got simpler. Most of the winter, we roll down the plastic on the north and west sides of our houses, but leave open the south and east exposures. If a scary cold front is forecast it takes little time to roll down the plastic to enclose the house.

You won't often need to heat greenhouses in Houston (or South Louisiana) and some folks keep electric or butane heaters available for that purpose. We use 40 pound propane tanks with simple tank-top heaters, one per about 500 square feet. On a night forecast below 34 degrees F, we light the heater about dark and turn it off in the early morning, and the heater is run on it's own setting, so one tank can provide several nights of heat. Most years here we use the heat no more than ten nights.

If you have populations of spider mites, mealy bugs, whiteflies, and snow scale under good control when plants are moved to greenhouses, you will enjoy the winter display and your plants will be reasonably happy in March when you rescue them. If you introduced disease to this crowded environment it will multiply and make life miserable for you and your hibiscus.

In the absence of greenhouse protection for potted hibiscus, move pots under trees for several degrees of protection from cold. Water them well just before cold weather arrives. In an extreme case you can lay pots down and cover them with a big tarp, secured at the edges. We rarely lost plants using this method.

Moving potted hibiscus near a heat sink like a swimming pool will help during winter, as will sites near the south wall of your house. Unheated garages always protected our hibiscus from freezes dependably.

For hibiscus you grow in the ground, we recommend pruning too tall and errant branches, the fitting a large tomato cage over the plant. When a freeze is forecast, place an old sheet or blanket over the plant, and cover that with a large plastic garbage bag and secure it. But when freeze danger is past, be sure to uncover the plant. Tomato cages greatly simplify this kind of protection strategy.

For those grounded hibiscus, remember that the amount of wood you save determines when you will see flowers in the following year. A little mulch can save the roots but if most of the top dies no flowers will be seen until August for many varieties. But if you protect lots of wood, March and April are likely to begin your flowering season.

There are spray-on polymers like WiltPruf and Cloud Cover that can give hibiscus a few degrees of protection from cold. Apply them in advance of actual freezes for best results. For large collections this is an expensive treatment.

When you do have winter blooms, remember that this is hybridizing season. Make some crosses and tag the potential pods with date and name of parents as an investment in adventure for years to come.

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Fabulous article and so appropriate for us this month. I took the liberty of hi-lighting certain important areas for you to make special note of. Follow his points and keep those babies protected and happy. They'll love you for it and continue to show you why we are all Hooked on Hibiscus.....

See you Tuesday night at 6 PM but go vote first!!!!!!!!!!!!.....**Buddy**

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of the American Hibiscus Society

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