

Yard and Garden – 06-29-09 – Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

The first time I saw it, I thought it was a sniglet. Students of the English language might refer to it as a neologism.

According to *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, a neologism is *a newly coined word or a new meaning for an established word*. The newly coined word may be in the process of entering common use but has not yet been accepted into mainstream language. Neologisms are often directly attributed to a specific person. For example, take the word sniglet.

In the early 80's I regularly watched an HBO program called *Not Necessarily the News*. On that show, comedian Rich Hall created the word sniglet. Each episode featured a regular segment called *Sniglets by Hall*. It became so popular that Hall's own sniglets along with submissions from his fans were compiled into several books. Sniglets became so entertaining that Rita and I often attempted to make up our own. I discovered later that one could purchase a board game entitled *Game of Sniglets*.

The ways to create a sniglet include a blend, creating a word from parts of two other words; a spelling change by altering a word; or a pure nonsense word. Take the word *phonesia*, created by Hall. Can you guess its meaning? *Phonesia* is the affliction of dialing a phone number and then forgetting whom you were calling. Here's another. *Arachnidiot* is a person, who having wandered into a spider web, begins gyrating and flailing about wildly. As probably expected, both remain sniglets, yet neither appear in the dictionary.

So what does all this sniglet nonsense have to do with horticulture? For the past few years, I've attended the *Spring Affair Plant Sale* in Lincoln, and each time there has been a group of plants labeled *temperennials*. "How clever," I thought. "A sniglet indeed." *Temperennial* is not found in any dictionary that I own. It's quite obvious the word is a blend of two words, temporary and perennial. My interpretation for this odd word is *a perennial plant destined to live temporarily*. For the seasoned gardener such a definition must sound confusing. After all, the botanical definition of a perennial is a plant which lives more than two years. Many perennials such as peonies live for decades.

A temperennial is a perennial which has a minimal chance of survival for any length of time in the area where it is planted. The state of Nebraska is divided into two USDA Zones. North of I-80 is approximately Zone 4 and south of I-80 is approximately Zone 5. If one plants a perennial rated for Zone 5 in Zone 4, or if a plant rated for Zone 6 is planted in Zone 5, both would be called temperennials. Depending on the severity of the winter, each may live one year or more; however, sooner or later both will likely perish from the cold.

If they were to die in one year, one might argue they were annuals. Such is not the case. By definition, an annual plant is one which completes its life cycle in one year. When the seed is planted, it vegetatively grows, it flowers, it produces seed and it dies — all in one season.

Temperennials are true perennials planted where growing conditions are marginal. Generally, a temperennial planted outdoors would need to be taken indoors for the winter in order to survive; it could then be set outdoors again the following spring. This process could repeat itself year after year.



Recently, Rita and I were visiting our friends, Jack and Sue. While there, Sue asked me about a plant she had purchased at Spring Affair called *Tecoma stans*. The plant was purchased from the temperennial section, and yet the plant label indicated it was a perennial. This plant is presently blooming beautifully in her flower border. She asked me if it would live through the winter. Not being familiar with the plant, I conducted a little research. A number of cultivars of *Tecoma stans*, frequently referred to as yellow bells, exist. All are rated for Zone 7 or higher. If Sue were to leave her plant outdoors for the winter, it would surely perish within the first year. However, since it is a temperennial, she could take it indoors, give it proper care, and then next spring, return it to the outdoors.

At present, temperennial does not appear in the dictionary, thus it remains a neologism; however, I prefer to call it a sniglet.

By the way, I've made up my own sniglet.

Gardenator....one who is obsessed with running the cultivator in the garden. Here's a fun idea. Make up your own gardening sniglets and send them to me. I'll make a list.

