

The Green Patch

October 1, 2014

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Wildflowers By Vicky Hingst , Dixon County Master Gardener

Pictures never seem to do justice when one has experienced such beauty. These flowers are all wildflowers that grow throughout British Columbia, Canada, and Alaska. They have such a short growing season that perennials do not do well for the short lighted season. However, they encourage you to enjoy the annuals as they put on a beautiful force of color. You are asked to not pick the annuals as they are a cost to the grower to display for your enjoyment. Baskets are overflowing and boxes and plats in the yards just burst.

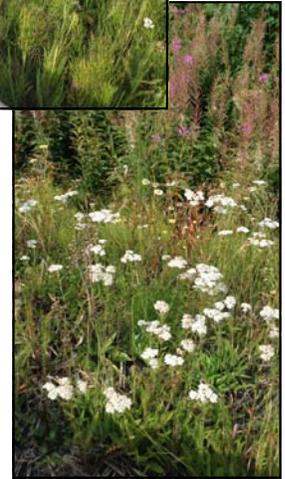
Back to the wildflowers: Queen Ann's lace was abundant in the road ditches along with a plant called fireweed. This was a magenta color that bloomed from about 12 inches through the season from the top to the bottom. You can see the summer days approaching by the length of the bloom. This was everywhere, up through the woods, ditches, yards, etc. Lots of yellow clover also...but when we got to Alaska the white clover is a noxious weed which they can't seem to control.

While on a 'rest' break, Veri picked the bouquet for me. Imagine my surprise! They were all wildflowers...a sturdy form of daisy, maltese cross, the fireweed, and coreopsis. There were many forms of coreopsis. The bottle brush plant was from northern California. While in Alaska, I toured their University test garden and was amazed to see lots of sedums, forget me nots (which is Alaska's state flower), forms of willows, and phlox. I was disappointed in that their labeling needed attention. I also visited a state master gardener project in Washington....labeled beautifully and lots of xeriscape plants.

We enjoyed our trip!



Pictures taken by Vicky



Inside this issue:

Garden Phlox	2
Weed Control	2
Fun Fall Activities	3
Mistakes Anyone?	3
Stanton County Horticulture Contest	4
Share That Bountiful Harvest	5
Mountains to Rich Black	5
Native Sunflowers for Fun	6
2014 American Garden Award Winners	7
What is It?	6

Garden phlox, also known as phlox paniculata, is in a group of 67 annuals and perennials known in North America. Phlox is Greek for "flame", an appropriate term for their fiery burst of color. All types have similar flowers but growth forms are very different. They may be trailing, upright, border or ground cover.

The vigorous hardy perennial we have in our area forms thick clumps of upright stems with oval lance-shaped leaves. The flowers are on large round heads. The colors are pink, lavender, purple and the newer variety, David which is white. Phlox grow up to 48 inches with a 40 inch spread. They like sun to part shade with well drained moist soil.

Phlox are easy plants to raise, with main problem being mildew. They need to have air circulating around them and no overhead watering. The new varieties are noted to be mildew resistant.

I had many types of the perennial garden phlox until four years ago, when the phlox bug started attacking the plants. They are a small brown beetle type bug with two orange strips on their back and less than a half inch long. They fly from plant to plant sucking the juices from leaf tissues, causing whitish areas and if not stopped will kill the plant. I tried many types of bug spray until I finally realized it was a specific "phlox" bug. In years past, I had removed all plants and destroyed them and still they returned as they had laid eggs and I kept spraying. Last year I sprayed and sprayed and also this year, but fewer bugs. The chemical to use is pyrethrin or permethrin. The spraying must be done repeatedly to prevent their return. This year I have phlox blooming and they look so nice.

The information is in the Horticulture Guide also.



Picture from Corrine's garden

Weed Control

By Tom Surber , Madison County Master Gardener



The gardener can never completely get rid of weeds. They are carried in on other plants, by birds, by wind, by various creatures, by us ourselves, from the long lasting seed bed almost all areas have in the ground, and by rain. Nature abhors a vacuum and will fill in any empty space. Her idea of a suitable plant certainly does not jive with our ideas of suitable, desirable plants. So we have a constant battle on our hands to have only the plants we want in our gardens. There are several techniques of control depending on the ID of the weed target, the season of the year, the purpose of the garden (food vs flowers vs play ground) the tolerance we have for poisons and chemicals, and the size of area concerned. Due to space limitations, this article will look briefly at a few of these techniques.

The first task is to identify the weeds you are going to battle against. There are numerous books, neighbors, and garden stores who will help you. Remember that none of these are foolproof, so two out of three is usually a good bet. Long term experience in the garden helps to ID the common weeds. The other cravat is to never kill any plant you are not sure you do not want. Biennial

flowers are hard, as the first year is often not easily identified as something you want. If you are moving into a home with an established flower garden, a good rule is to water, pull the obvious weeds and keep a log of the plants that appear.

The average home owners first defense is pulling the monsters out. It is easiest when they are small and in damp soil. Most of us spend hours on our knees (roofer's knee pads help) or bent over just removing the weeds. Remember that some of the weeds, like dandelion, will mature and spread the seeds if left lay. So be sure to bag and dispose of the seed heads. Remember that many tree shoots must be pulled or dug to remove their roots, otherwise they will regrow from the root. Some plants, like bind weed, and spurge are not well controlled by pulling as their roots are too extensive. But most weeds are fairly easily controlled, unless too numerous, by pulling.

Most of us will then reach for chemicals. The garden stores have several different kinds of chemicals for different kinds of weeds. 2,4-D and its relatives will not kill grasses. Grass-be-gone will not kill broadleaved plants, but check the label to be sure. Some of the chemicals are better for woody plants. Most of the box stores personal are not well trained to help with the purchase of chemicals. So, unless you know exactly which chemical you need, get advice from a specialty garden store. Always read the label for species the chemical will kill and for species it will not kill. Always read the warnings on the label for yourself as all of these chemicals are toxic. When applying chemicals wear water proof boots, long pants and gloves and if spraying the chemicals, goggles. Always at least wash your hands, if not a complete showering after applying the chemicals. Wash any clothes you wore before re-wearing them. Always follow the directions on the label.

If you are using an application technic that will spread the chemical to the plants you want, you can take a cloth or brush and directly apply the chemical directly to the leaves of the weed. If you have a large area and lots of weeds, you can time your application to when the weed is taller than the desired plants and use a wick bar behind (not in front as that will spray the poison over you) a garden tractor. Applying shrub killers to a tree stump will usually prevent the stump from spouting new branches. Beware of wind causing drifting.

Some weeds can be controlled by mowing. e.g. Smooth broom does not tolerate lawn style mowing. Cedar trees die if ALL their branches are cut off. Some weeds just get mad and become harder to kill if mowed or not removed completely, e.g. scotch thistle, a common weed in our gardens.

In general, be sure you know what you are killing, and are using the least toxic way to kill it.



Fun Fall Activities

By Jane Jensen , Pierce County Master Gardener

Where did our summer go? Now it's football and hot chocolate and a slower pace than Spring's planting and Summer's work of weeding and mowing. The glads I planted in July are just now blooming and look so nice in the garden among the cosmos and zinnias. Weeding is so much easier now with cooler temps and plenty of grass clippings to mulch with and soon autumn's leaves. Still there are lots of fun things to do.

Bulb catalogs are out for those spring flowering bulbs. Now is the perfect time to select and plant them. As long as the ground can be worked bulbs can be planted. Be sure to water them in well. That may well be a difficult job, choosing from all the colors and types.

Garden centers are having great sales on their inventory. It's a good time now to plant trees and shrubs while the soil is warm for root development. Read the tags well for full grown tree and bush heights. You don't want to have things growing near your favorite window and obscure your view of goings on. And don't forget to notify Diggers' Hotline if you must dig a large hole for a big tree. That will spoil your work in a hurry should something go amiss not to mention the cost. If it turns dry don't forget to water your trees and shrubs going into winter. The roots need moisture for the dry months if there is no snow cover again this winter.

Speaking of cost, soon our perennials will reseed, like hollyhock, bachelor buttons and coneflower. No fertilizer is needed for plants now as they will be thinking of root strength, not lush leaves and flowers. It's sort of a sad time when the lovely colors are fading but many things can be divided now and shared. Sedums are easily parted and shared. Early September is probably not too late to move some iris and give to others. They can really benefit from a good thinning out. I want to move a clematis but I am told it should wait until spring.

Pansies love cooler weather. Their roots should be mulched after planting so maybe they will survive a quick frost. Now is not the perfect time to plant mums but I did so two weeks ago. They might not have enough time to get their roots established but I'm giving it a try. It was difficult to decide on a color. There are many to choose from now. I will mulch them and hope they survive winter.

When my roses stop blooming I do not cut them back to the ground in the Fall. I leave them about a foot tall so as to prevent bending and breaking if there are harsh winter winds.

There are lots more chores - harvesting pumpkins and gourds, digging potatoes, canning, freezing, and making jellies and pickles. I hope you enjoy all of them.



Mistakes Anyone?

By Janelle McIntyre , Platte County Master Gardener

Have you ever made a gardening mistake? I've made too many to recount but I'll try.

Here are a few:

I've planted more than one thug. Some I've bought and some have ridden home secretly in another plant. The one I am battling now is the latter. It is tall and blooms yellow and spreads and spreads. Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia punctata*). When it bloomed the first year, I knew it had to go. My beds are in the cool season color range: blues, purples and pinks. A yellow flower just didn't fit in. Thankfully, I started destroying it that first year. Who knows how bad it might have gotten. As it is, after killing every shoot I could find again this spring, it sent up new ones in July. After another treatment, it is again in various stages of death. It is anyone's guess if it will come up again, but this time I'm ready for it!

One plant that I did bring home intentionally was an "obedient plant". Not so obedient. It is a ruthless thug. I dug up the bed deeply--removing the white runners--quite a lot of work. Only to find out a piece had hitched a ride in a peony root. I had inadvertently transplanted it to the new bed. Not one to give up I used as strong a chemical as I possessed. Victory was mine but the peony took several years to recover. The moral of this saga is: not to impulsively buy a plant you know nothing about and it is the only one doing well at the end of the season in a greenhouse you stumbled upon by accident. A bad sign!!!

I am of the opinion plant catalogs lie about the size of their plants and shrubs. How could so many outgrow their dimensions? At first vanity kicks in and I assume my greenish thumb has caused this abundant growth. Doubtful! My husband uses a tractor and chain to remove my mistakes. With a little too much relish, if you ask me. Viburnums, barberries, climbing roses, arborvitae, and red twig dogwoods are among the many overgrown plants, we have pulled out. It is difficult to remove a plant that is doing well even if it does cover a window or knock the downspout off. Too big for the site, is it my mistake or the label's? Beware it could happen to you!

Another problem is being too fond of a flower, no matter how poorly it does; I plant it over and over. I can't count the number of times I have planted yet another ajuga thinking this one will be here for longer than a couple of seasons. The "delphiniums" that bloomed this August, how many times have I started them in the basement and they didn't make the next winter? How many dianthus have disappeared, some even during the growing season? Once I ordered a "Blue Paradise" phlox, year after year for many years. I finally had to write a hate message to myself not to order it anymore or I might still be throwing the dead carcasses away. Some plants can't survive our Nebraska weather, but there are so many that do, I need to let the weak ones go.

Some plants are too vigorous and hog up the spaces of others. A sharp spade remedies this mistake. And the plant that reseeds itself doesn't bother me either. Pulling up seedlings isn't that hard. Occasionally putting a plant in the wrong place isn't so bad. I just move them somewhere else. My real problems have stemmed from the weak and the wicked. It's identifying them that can cause me the most trouble. I hope one gardener sharing her mistakes will bring comfort to others who have their own.



Photo from Missouri Botanical Garden

Stanton County Horticulture Contest

By Tammy Furstenau , Stanton County Master Gardener In Training

I worked with the Stanton County Extension Office to create a Horticulture Contest with the local 4-H groups. They were required to design a whiskey barrel located in front of the Extension Office. The 4-H groups did such a great job and not one of the barrels are alike, which is GREAT. To determine the winner of the contest, I had the Stanton Garden club judge each barrel by this criteria:

- ◆ Use of Color in Overall Design (Consider the use of a single color or the use of multiple colors that compliment the overall design)
- ◆ Use of Plants in Overall Design (Are the plants appropriate for the container they are planted in? Did they take into consideration the amount of sun exposure, soil quality, and water needs of the plants?)
- ◆ Creativeness of Design (Was there a theme used in the design, did they keep the design within the perimeter of the container. Did they add height and dimension to the design without making the container look out of proportion?)
- ◆ Overall Appearance (Please rate the overall design. Keep in mind this design needs to leave an impact upon you!)

Six 4-H groups took part in this contest.

First Place - Wildcats, Second Place—Stanton County 4-H Shooters, and Third Place—Bloomin Blossoms.

Other groups that participated were Country Kids, HillView, and Purple Ribbon.

Congratulations to all that took part in this Horticulture Contest!



This is the time of year when virtually everyone encounters a generous gardener offering the surplus of his or her bumper crop of cucumbers, tomatoes, zucchini or other prolific garden or orchard plants. The abundance is of course a blessing, but the urge to get rid of it can be a curse.

Some gardeners (I'll raise my hand) sometimes get more enjoyment growing the crop than eating it. We sometimes simply don't consider how much we'll produce or how to possibly use it all. Other gardeners plan well, yet there are years when the stars align and production far exceeds expectations. In the case of fruit trees, they continue to produce even when the owner has lost interest or moved on.

Of course there are many options for preserving the excess, including freezing, canning and drying. But to the gardener who successfully grew that beautiful State Fair-worthy veggie, it seems a shame to reduce it to unrecognizable pulp or shriveled mass to be ignored on the shelf for months. This is a favorite excuse for those of us who lack the time or enthusiasm to preserve (again, hand raised).

Yet gardeners hate to see the fruits of their labor go unappreciated and meet an inglorious end rotting in the compost pile. So instead they (we) load the surplus in salvaged grocery bags or boxes and beg friends, neighbors, co-workers and yes, sometimes even strangers to "please take some, enjoy." We're not above going door to door. Plus it's a great way to get to know neighbors and co-workers, while also presenting an opportunity to brag about gardening expertise (real or imagined).

This random, sometimes frantic distribution system does move some of the excess. Unfortunately a significant portion still goes unused, part of the estimated 100 billion pounds of food thrown away each year in the United States. After seeing all that's gone through our office already this year, my bet is that estimate is low.

The good news is better options are available. A top choice to consider is donating to organizations that accept and distribute this abundance to people who can use it. The growing interest in this effort is displayed by the success of national organizations, including AmpleHarvest, a group that helps promote a network of nearly 7,000 food pantries across the United States. Local groups accepting excess produce include the Food Bank of Lincoln and Foodnet, along with other food pantries and churches. Be sure and check for details before loading up your vehicle.



Another option is to organize a neighborhood network, working through a neighborhood association, nearby church or civic group. The produce can be exchanged within the group, or gathered and taken to a food pantry as mentioned above. A simple system can be set up to announce what's available and where. A Facebook page or email list can be a great help.

A neighborhood network like this also works well for sharing excess garden seeds and plants, divided perennials, and even tools. It's a great way to reduce waste, and maybe more importantly, connect with others and build community.

Sources: Kendall Weyers, sustainable landscapes specialist, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, 402-472-6693, kweyers2@unl.edu Karma Larsen, communications associate, NSA, 402-472-7923, klarsen1@unl.edu

Mountains to Rich Black Soil

By Tom Surber , Madison County Master Gardener

Yes, the mountains are truly the multi-great grandfather of that rich, black, loamy soil we all love. The mountains are raised by either volcanic eruptions or tectonic plate activity. These are actually actions that bring either older rocks or newly born rocks high above the surface of the Earth. The Appalachians are much older than the Rockies, and thus are much shorter with broader valleys.

These mountains are worn down by wind and water, helped by falling rocks. They form huge rocks, truly monoliths. Gradually over centuries these are all broken down into smaller boulders, then rocks you and I can lift, then talus, gravel and pebbles.

Slowly the smaller rocks, talus, gravels and pebbles are ground and pulverized by action on each other, or from wind and water into much smaller particles. Some of the lighter particles get wind blown (loess activity) and travel great distances. The Loess Hills in Eastern Iowa were blown in from across Nebraska and Colorado. The heavier particles stayed put, and formed formations like the Sandhills of Nebraska. Silt of all sizes and shapes flowed out from the Rockies across the neighboring areas into a huge alluvial, sloping plain. Another example is the North Slope in Northern Alaska, which slopes to the north, from Gateway to the Arctic National Park a constant 20 degrees for hundreds of miles.

The tops of the hills across Nebraska are all about the same height as their neighboring hills, as the water has carved out the valleys creating our rolling hills. In many areas the top of the alluvial plain is apparent as table land, such as between Columbus and Norfolk, the long flat stretch around Humphrey, or around Shelby, Osceola, and Stromsberg.

Base soil is formed and is barren til exposed. Once the soil is exposed, the plants and animals move in. As the plants and animals live and die, their bodies become part of the soil, enriching it with humus. Humus is the organic material that makes the soils black. It is composed of thousands of generations of plants and animals that lived and died in place. Their progeny could live better and die helping future generations. There is a definite sequence of plants and animals that appear on newly exposed base soil.

The type of soil depends on the kind of parent rock and the size of the particles. Clay is a collection of the finest of the particles. Sand is a collection of the coarsest of the particles. Loam is in between, and is associated with lots and lots of organic material, humus. The red soils of Oklahoma and South Dakota came from red, iron rich rocks.

Compost is plant (tops and roots) and animal bodies that have degenerated far beyond the smelly stage and merged with a little soil to form a rich, life supporting mixture. Also in the mix are special fungi and molds that are essential to life also. Adding organic material to base soil, either compost, or the accumulation of leaves, roots and twigs over time yields the rich, black soil we all love to have in our gardens. The rich soil of the Great Plains was generated by the roots and tops of the grasses and flowers that grew here.



Native Sunflowers for Fun

By Tom Surber , Madison County Master Gardener

Sure most of us have Blackeyed Susan's (Echinacea), cone flowers (Ratibida), Denver Daisies, blanket daisies, painted daisies, ox eye daisies etc. But there are a few other sun flowers that are more unusual and fun. I have just started with a couple of these: compass plant (Silphium laciniatum L.) and cup plant (Silphium perfoliatum L.). I have had Jerusalem Artichoke (Helianthus tuberosus L.) in the past.

Most of the sunflowers of the genus Helianthus are far too big and awkward for the average home garden. I experimented with the Jerusalem artichoke several years ago. Fortunately I put in an area that naturally contained it. The plant was advertised as 4 -5 feet tall. Mine grew to well over 6 feet. It spread rapidly, actually by rhizomatous roots. It did not wait for seeds to propagate, but just put out root stocks and spread across 10 feet square in less than two years. Jerusalem artichoke have mostly unbranched stems with the flower at the top. It is a rather ungainly plant. The leaves are large, very rough, alternate so the plant forms a rather dense colony. The root is a tuber which is actually delicious with a bit of a bite to the taste, fairly easily dug. I have seen them sold in grocery stores. Jerusalem artichoke is listed as native to Madison County, but I have not see it in the wild for some time. While it makes for a good show in a pasture, it spreads too rapidly and is too large for the average home garden.

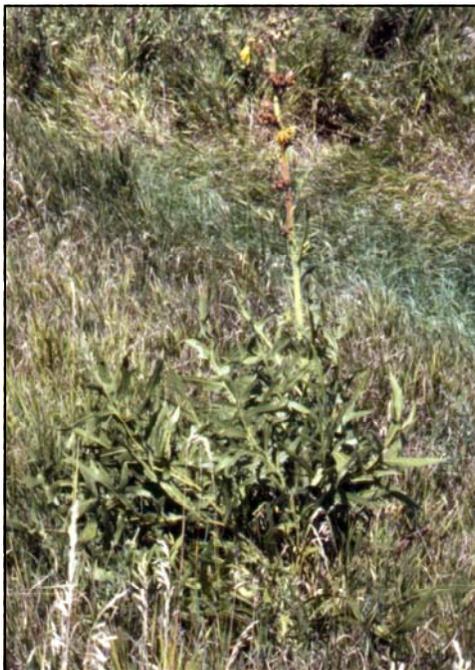


Even larger are the Silphiums. I bought my first ones from Bluebird Nursery last year. These are the compass plant. This year I added the cup plant, also from Bluebird.

The compass plant I learned after I planted it, takes at least four years from seed to flower. The leaves are huge, nearly 4 feet long and deeply lobed. The plant is called compass plant as the leaves tend to orient north south on the mature plant. The compass plant grows a thick root rapidly down to over 6 to 8 feet. The top of the root in a mature plant is over 2 feet wide. It forms a huge rosette in the pastures and ditches, probably much bigger than most of us want in our yards. The flower stalk is round, and grows to 8 feet. This plant is one of the reasons for the rich soil across the great plains. I planted three. One was not doing well, so I attempted to move it. I dug over 8 inches, and replanted the top. Now, the following year, the original location has over 8 leaves, just starting to get big and deeply lobed. The top that I moved is only three small leaves, just barely getting their lobes. One of the others is rather hidden underneath day lilies, but seems to be

holding its own. The other grew 6 leaves all 3 – 4 feet. Two leaves were lost to wind and rabbits. But about 6 inches away from the first leaves are three more leaves popping out and just sitting there.

The cup plant is similar to the compass plant. The species' name "perfoliatum" gives the clue to why it is called cup plant. The



leaves are opposite on a square stem. On the mature plant the leaves grow together so the stem seems to go through (perforate) the pair of leaves. This makes a cup that will actually hold water. Smaller birds like to take baths here. I planted two this spring. The books say it tolerates shade when very young. One I planted where my redbud tree spouts are shadowing it. It is growing fast and seems very happy. The other is in full sun most of the day. It has been slower to take off, but is finally starting to grow new leaves and settling in.

These are not plants for the usual home garden, but are fun to experiment with. I have admired both the compass plant and the cup plant in the wild for years. Kaul (Flora of Nebraska 2006) lists the compass plant as native to Madison County and Stanton and Wayne, but not Pierce. Kaul does not place the cup plant as native to Madison County or Pierce County, but places it in Stanton and Wayne Counties.

Pictures taken by Tom

<http://www.americangardenaward.org/>

After a summer of active voting, it's time to announce the 2014 American Garden Award Winners! The 2014 American Garden Award, now in its sixth year, featured four new flower varieties chosen by their breeders for their excellent garden performance. Once these new varieties were planted and put on display at the thirty-two participating gardens across the U.S. and Canada, the public was invited to vote for their favorite using one of several voting methods. The votes have been tallied and the three winners are:



Most Popular...Grand Prize Winner

Foxglove Digiplexis™ Illumination® Flame

With a mother from the Spanish Canary Islands, this incredible new foxglove hybrid produces a stunning summer-long display. Incredible Red-Pink flowers with flaming orange throats are produced in classic foxglove style from May to October. Great in pots or borders, it is long-lasting as a cut flower too!



Second Place Winner

Petunia Sanguna® Radiant Blue

This stunning new hybrid petunia packs a punch! With a bicolor flower pattern, Sanguna® Radiant Blue gracefully adds beauty to any container. While creating standout pots for porches & decks, it also performs well in garden beds. The possibilities of this flower will provide many options to decorate garden spaces.



Third Place Winner

Celosia Arrabona Red

Masses of striking red plumes that will last all summer long! Easy care, drought tolerant and loves the heat, Arrabona's fiery beauty looks gorgeous in both borders and containers.



Articles and information for the January issue of *The Green Patch* are due to Pam Greunke (pam.greunke@unl.edu) by December 1, 2014.

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Master Gardeners are people who love plants, gardening, landscaping, and teaching others.

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What is It?? By Wayne Ohnesorg, Extension Educator

There were no guesses as to what the April *What is it?* was. The insect in question was the "painted hickory borer" (*Megacyllene caryae*). Adults lay eggs on dying and recently dead hickory trees and other hardwoods. The larvae bore through the wood.



I took this picture this past August with a leaf I collected from a hawthorn tree just outside the Lifelong Learning Center. This is a larva and the species will feed readily on hawthorn, pear, cherry, cotoneaster, plum, apricot, and mountain ash.

If you think you know, you can give me a call at (402) 370-4044 or shoot me an email (wohnesorg2@unl.edu). The first person to contact me with the correct answer will be awarded one (1) training hour. Everyone that submits an answer will be entered into an end of the year drawing for a free Extension Circular such as the *Landscape Diagnostic Guide for Problems Affecting Woody Ornamentals and Herbaceous Perennials*. For every *What is it?* column you provide an answer for you will receive one entry. This offer is available for both the Platte County and Northeast Nebraska Master Gardener groups.

