



# Living Walls

Here it is, late February, and just between us girlfriends, I am digging paths through the snow in my terrace garden because I am going mad with the cabin fever. I need exercise. I need fresh air. I need to get off this couch and out of this house! I need to buy 50 packets of seed and 20 gallons of potting soil! I NEED SPRING. NOW!

Ok, deep breath.

In the spring of 1994, when we moved into this house, I was between consulting gigs. I had a garden to design and install and I could either go earn some money and buy my plants (but have no time to create the gardens) or take one of my "retirement installments," leaving me with no money but lots of time. It was a no-brainer: I started 1200 plants from seed and sharpened my



Pont Max Juvenal, Aix en Provence - Aug. 2008

forks and spades. I could never have imagined just how delightful it is to have 24 Pacific Hybrid Delphiniums for \$2.49. You can see why, 15 years later, I have too many plants in the garden (yes, Sun Committee) but I still cannot get over wanting to grab the Thompson and Morgan catalog and go berserk again every spring.

This winter, in a magazine, I saw Patrick Blanc's **Living Wall**, known in his native France as *Le Mur Végétal*. I redefined "berserk." I really had to have one of these. If you have not run across them in the

*(Continued on page 2)*

## March 5 Frugal Flowers at Home

Marisa McCoy of Wellesley is an accredited Flower Show judge and well-known floral arranger. Tonight she brings her great expertise to bear as she shares her recommendations and techniques for getting the greatest impact from your flower arranging effort and dollar. This means using what you have and buying sensibly. It's also about knowing the mechanics, rules that help, myths that hinder, and developing self-confidence.



Hospitality will be provided by chairs **Frances Poirier** and **Tracy Peter**, ably assisted by Barbara Berkenbush, Karen Doliber, Virginia Hallman, and Alison Scher

### Inside this issue:

Horticulture	<b>Living Walls</b>	2
Club News	<b>Plant Sale &amp; Officers</b>	3
Events	<b>Hostas and Ikebana</b>	3
Ask Peony	<b>Spring Fever</b>	4

My garden will never make me famous,  
I'm a horticultural ignoramus.

Ogden Nash

# Horticulture Living Walls

(Continued from page 1)

garden magazines, you must go to his website <http://www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com/>

to view these amazing, lightweight, lush, air- and water-purifying hydroponic eco-systems which cover entire walls, inside and out, on city buildings all over Europe and Asia. M. Blanc's walls are constructed of piping mounted over a water-proof PVC sheet with a felt layer in between. They are soil-less, therefore light weight, and support the plants by recirculating nutrient-rich water via the piping.

They are beautiful to look at, clean the air, and insulate the buildings from heat / cooling losses. There's quite a lot of lively discussion about energy gains, gray-water cleansing, solar-powered pumps, water catchment systems, runoff, maintainability, and wind power on the various blogs, and everyone is having a wonderful time expressing themselves. Check out the chatter on Inhabitat at <http://www.inhabitat.com/2007/01/15/vertical-gardens-by-patrick-blanc/>

The two ideas, living walls and seed catalogs, collided in my sun-deprived brain today, and I knew what I had to do. OK, I decided against rebuilding the exterior walls of our house, covering them with hydroponic piping, and installing a windmill on the roof. My husband helped me with this decision. The cabin fever is bad, but I am not totally deranged, though I can see it



coming if this snow outside my window does not turn to rain in the next 30 minutes. So today I ordered the dirt version of the living wall times three (Smith and Hawken, \$79 per 20x20 inch panel.) I plan to create a 5 foot long, 20" high culinary herb garden mounted horizontally on the wall of the sauna on the back deck.

Each of the three panels has 45 planting cells, which means I need 135 herb plants. Knowing I will have only about 75% germination, and of these only 75% will make strong plants, I need to start about 250 plants. So gratifying. Now, I need to decide what to plant. There are some considerations. The cells are about 4" x 2", so they cannot require a large root system to survive. I'll need to put the parsley and cilantro elsewhere. The panels have a watering trough at the top, and a catchment trough at the bottom, I think, and while that makes



Histoire Naturelle- Toulouse - June 2008

watering easier, even if I add Soil-Moist, they'll need to be tolerant of drying out in the heat of an August afternoon.

What do you think, design-wise?

Aromatics, Mediterranean herbs, maybe some succulents for texture, and chamomile for punctuation? Ten each of 13 varieties in diagonal color bands? Plant herbs in the middle and border the sides and bottom with trailing alyssum to attract the bees? Spell out "WNGC Rocks" in shades of green? Anything could happen. It all depends on the accelerating pace of my cabin fever.

Watch this space.

And pray for rain, *not* snow.



# Events & Links

## Newburyport Horticultural Society

Tues Nov 13 7pm (6:30: bus. mtg) \$5

Newburyport Library, State Street

Info: Floreen Maroncelli 978 463-9923

## Tower Hill Botanic Gardens

March 29, 10am - 5pm

Spring Open House

FREE ADMISSION ALL DAY

11 French Drive, Boylston MA

Info: 508 869-6111

Also at Tower Hill:

**Ikebana:** Ikebana International - Boston Chapter

March 13 to 15  
from 10am to 4 pm



## Merrimac Garden Club

Ikebana Demonstration and Raffle

Antoinette Drouart

Tuesday March 3 at 7:00 pm \$5 guest

Merrimac Senior Center, 100 East Main St, Rte 110, Merrimac, MA

Info: Nancy Sinton, 978-346-8607

## For Hosta Lovers

Check out this site for all the goodies:  
<http://www.americanhostasociety.org/>

## NE Hosta Society – First Look

An opportunity to see and evaluate the newest hosta introductions and tour hosta gardens in the area

June 12-14, 2009 More info:

[www.hostalibrary.org/firstlook/FirstLookHomePage.htm](http://www.hostalibrary.org/firstlook/FirstLookHomePage.htm)

## Tower Hill Plant Sale

Featuring NE Hosta Society and many other plant societies May 30 10am-5 pm

## Club News and Member News

# Officers to Serve 3rd Term

In an unprecedented show of joie de vivre, dedication, and early dementia, all three of our elected officers have volunteered to serve for a third year, the maximum term allowed by our bylaws. President **Linda Schaeffer**, First Vice President **Kathy Krajeski**, and Second Vice President **Joan Tranfaglia** will all ask for your votes at our May Annual Meeting. Vote these wonder women in for another great year!

## Plant Sale Sprouts Anew!

This year's world famous WNGC Plant Sale will be held on Saturday May 30, the Saturday after Memorial Day. This later date will give us more plants in bloom (always a big booster for sales) and hopefully a better chance for warmer weather. **Joan Tranfaglia** and **Kathy Krajeski** have volunteered to co-chair the Sale, and are busy rounding up the Committee Chairs for our usual collection of Tables: Sun, Shade, Knapp's, Donated, Children's, Bake, Choice Plants. Did I miss any?

This is the Garden Club's major fund raiser, typically generating 80% of our annual operating budget, and really needs the participation of all our members. Pick your table early!



## Ask Peony Spring Fever

(Continued from page 4)

Never mind Provence. The South of France may be someone else's cup of tea... Wait a moment. Let me rethink that one.

Slowly, that balmy afternoon, under the heady influence of tropical desire, I meandered across the land. "¡Olé! ¡Cha cha cha!" The jalapeño peppers obviously needed more encouragement, and they would have received it, had I not been rudely interrupted at the third "cha".

"Who are you talking to, Mom?"

"Don't bother your mother. She has...that spring thing. The fever."

"Oh yeah. Sorry, I forgot. Can get her something? Mom? **Mom!**"

"Hmmm?"

"Would you like some, uh, ice water?"

"No thanks. I'll be in soon. Just let me pinch off this little runner in the strawberries...and that one. Could you please.... Oh my! I hadn't noticed, child. Your roots are getting awfully long! I have some pruning shears here someplace... Wait! Wait! Where are you going? Hey, I was just kidding! " Take away city clothes and sidewalk shoes. Look beneath civilized airs and apartment attitudes. Never mind fancy magazines littering the coffee table. In early spring, any gardener worth her weight in dirt is asking herself, "Who am I, really?"

I'm a person going back to her roots. A child of the earth, born to till rich, black soil and reap the bounties of Mother Nature. Yes! I'm a gardener-watch me dig!

Back inside, there is work to be done, dinner to be made. Yet, all I can do is long for the next warm day when I can wander out there and plant my wishes into crops. Mother was telling the truth after all, years ago, when I asked her *the* question; little gardeners really are born in a cabbage patch.



**WNGC**



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*Gardens for beauty,  
learning, and sharing*

*The West Newbury Garden Club was founded in 1936 to encourage and cultivate an interest in gardening, to aid in protecting and conserving our natural resources, to further the study of horticulture and flower arranging, and to promote civic beauty. For more information, please contact President Linda Schaeffer at 978 363-5251 or at linda-schaeffer@verizon.net*

**Board Meeting at Town Offices**

**March 12, 2009 at 7:00pm**



## Ask Peony March Garden Fever?

*My head is hot and my limbs no longer belong to me. I can't sit still. I gaze out of the window with a moony, slightly stupid smile Mona Lisa would envy. There's an unearthly glow in my eyes and I bump into walls a lot.*

*My family has become terribly concerned, but the symptoms are clear. It happens every year after a few warm days. Garden fever...*

I'm not a complete fool. Honest. Cold days and nights will return. But I was so excited by sunshine that I took my seedlings out for a walk. In this wistful, heat induced frame of mind we strolled down the primrose path, into the winter-shocked space we hope to call "garden" in the burgeoning spring. I talked to my wee pots the whole time. "This hill will be your future home," I promised the cantaloupes. "It is the warmest place in the garden. You will have marigolds scattered around to cheer you." Stoic, the jutting leaves of the melon vines never budged. They demanded the real, sultry dog days of summer. It would take more than mere words to thrill those guys.

We paused by the garden gate. "Here," I explained to the St. Pierre tomatoes, "is where you will mature.

Very appropriate, don't you think?" I thought I saw their four little leaves shiver in eager anticipation.

That's all it takes. A tiny wave of acknowledgement, a flutter of understanding, a glimmer of appreciation for my noble intentions and I'm ready to go. The garden beckons and I'm all set to play in the dirt.

I don't like to play alone. That's why I always call upon my favorite, albeit reluctant playmate, my husband.

"Please don't make me go out there. You know I can't tell the weeds from the flowers. I hate gardening."

"Tut tut, mon chou. Remember how much fun it was last year? You're always so happy when we pick the first beans! You love to eat. A bit to the left, Dear. You missed that small nettle right there."

"Grumble, grumble..."

I am not dismayed by my family's lack of enthusiasm. Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without sweat and tears. My tears. Their sweat.

This year, I'm bargaining for my very own compost heap. Keep the diamonds. Take the yachts. I'm not tempted.

*(Continued on page 3)*