

Flora & Fauna

EXTREME BULBS!

We're living in a super-sized, bigger-than-life world. Double the fries. Skateboarders sail over the Grand Canyon. Cars capable of transporting a small army and antibiotics able to KO super germs. Given the fact that we live large as a nation, it was only a matter of time before the horticultural world offered gardeners the ultimate pleasure: extreme bulbs.

These scientifically engineered hybrids are fast becoming spring and early summer favorites. If you've seen one, you know why: Their shocking, intense colors, mega-sizes and unique forms stop traffic during neighborhood strolls. Given the attention-getting nature of these blooms, it stands to reason that you wouldn't need to plant too many of these to grab the attention of plant gawkers as they pass your home. If you're looking to experiment and want an extra touch that can serve as the centerpiece of your 2008 garden, we've come up with a couple of varieties you might want to investigate.

Gardening experts point to the exotic Parrot Tulip as the best of the new breed of super flower. Typically, this hybrid doesn't bloom until May, but when it does, stand back. Averaging 20" in height, these spectacular blooms show brilliant color from one end of the petal to the other. In particular, the Rococo is a real show off, with hot red, purple and pale green colorations and fancy, scalloped edges. Another version of this lively species is the Apricot Parrot, a creamy swirl of apricot, white, yellow, pink and green. This bloom is like an Easter egg on a stem with its gorgeous palette and tall stems.

Another extreme bulb popping up in home gardens is the Allium. Though it's a member of the onion family, there's nothing about this flower that resembles its all-white cousin. This Allium can grow to be four-feet tall and is distinguished by enormous globes of blossoms. Deer and disease-resistant, these gentle giants may scare off unwanted visitors with their sheer size, so plant one and you get double the benefits. In particular, the Globemaster Allium produces a dramatic, 10" violet bloom while the White Giant produces snowy 8" spheres.

If tulips don't do it for you and Allium seems too overboard for your garden, consider the Peony Flowering Tulip. The name says it all; it resembles the Peony perennial but the blooms are more dramatic and the colors are breathtaking. The Double Late Tulip Lilac Perfection sets a new standard for purple and the Orange Princess Peony Tulip shows off its orange base color with striking azalea-pink highlights. Since these flowers all produce dark, blue-green foliage, the contrast between flower and stem are as flamboyant as anything you'll find growing today.

No new category of flower would be complete without a representative of the lily family and cross-breeders have perfected an early summer garden variety of huge, rocket-shaped blooms in brilliant yellows, whites, pinks and oranges. Called the Eremurus, these flowering spires come in vivid shades of oranges and reds. Since they can grow to a height of six to eight feet tall, nobody is going to mistake these for run-of-the-mill lilies.

Available from most garden web sites and nurseries, these new super-varieties must be seen to be believed, and they're no harder to plant and maintain than their smaller brothers and sisters. As a rule of thumb, limit them to a bunch of six to 12 when you get started so it doesn't look like an army of mutant flowers took over your yard! Follow instructions for planting, fertilizing and watering and get ready to experience plenty of attention from passers-by.

GUARANTEE@ SYSTEM.

851 West Fulton Street
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
Phone: 616-451-0787
www.guaranteesystem.com

Household Tips: Out, Out, Darn Stains!

If you usually wait for the last minute to get your good crystal in shape for holiday company, surprise yourself this year by doing it now – long before your list of "must-do's" includes shopping, wrapping, cookie-baking and a new bottle of aspirin to help you tackle it all. Here's a fun idea to turn the chore into an event: Get out all of your glassware and speed through it on one day with the help of friends. Order a pizza, let them help you do your glassware, then return the favor. You'll probably have such a good time, you might stop calling it your most tedious chore. While simple soap and water will perk up your ordinary glasses, tackling stained glassware can be tricky, so try this before you resort to strong commercial products or other caustic formulas. Pour brown or white vinegar into a vessel of your choice (we like a roomy pitcher with a secure lid that's deep enough to submerge your tallest piece of glass). Place badly stained glassware into the pitcher and let it stand for at least 30 minutes. Add either ½ tsp. of dry, uncooked rice or six to 10 dry beans to the pitcher or jar. Shake the container rapidly so the dry vegetables can scour the glass. Decant contents, rinse glass with water. Repeat the process if necessary on stains that seem impervious to the process. **Please note:** if your glasses have gold or silver trim, don't use this method or you could damage the finish.

September

- 1666 The Great London Fire began on Pudding Lane; 80% of the city was destroyed
- 1865 Dr. Joseph Lister performed the world's first antiseptic surgery
- 1918 Due to the start of WWI, the U.S. baseball season was cancelled
- 1922 New York City passed a law requiring all pool halls to change their names to billiard halls
- 1945 Japan surrendered to allied troops ending WWII
- 1962 The United Nations announced that the world population had reached three billion
- 1978 England's Jacqueline Smith scored 10 straight dead-center landings on a 4" disk at the World Parachute Championships
- 1985 A joint U.S./French expedition finally located wreckage of the Titanic off Newfoundland
- 1995 The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame opened in Cleveland

Health Tips: Can You Hear Me Now?

Anyone who has a close relationship with someone growing older knows that seniors can get very defensive when the subject of diminishing physical alertness arises. Trying to take the car keys away from Grandma because she can't pass her vision test or insisting that Uncle Louis have his ears checked because you're sick of repeating (make that screaming) the same question six times before he responds, can be problematic for everyone. If your senior tends to be cantankerous to begin with, you certainly don't want to exacerbate the problem by getting into a hassle over their reluctance to acknowledge their diminishing senses.

Oftentimes, all it takes is a serious one-on-one with the person you love to remind them that you want them around for many years to come, but if they insist on endangering their lives and the lives of others, that may not happen. And while talking to mature adults about their eyes can often bring a faster, more positive response (likely because simple tasks like reading a menu or book become impaired), hearing issues that aren't resolved because seniors refuse won't admit to a loss have become so serious nationally, members of the medical community have declared it "the silent epidemic."

If you've observed someone close to you having more and more difficulty hearing the spoken word, do them a favor and intercede. In particular, take action and arrange for an exam yourself if you notice these problems repeatedly:

- Does your favorite senior have problems hearing others when they talk on the phone?
- When two people talk at the same time, does Nana have trouble following the conversation?
- Does Grandpa insist that he hears just fine, yet he turns up the TV or radio volume so high, neighbors complain?
- Have you noticed Aunt Lilly physically extending and contorting her body to try and catch words being said?
- Does Cousin Harry misunderstand what people say to him, then make inappropriate responses?

Comedians have had a field day writing stand-up comedy routines in which someone asks, "Do you want a honey bun?" only to receive the response, "Yes, I really am having a lot of fun!" Truth is, the reality isn't so funny if you have to watch your loved one flirt with danger. Without our sense of hearing in tact, the simple act of crossing the street can be hazardous. Advise your senior friend or family member that an estimated 28 million Americans suffer from partial or full hearing loss, and one in three is over the age of 65. Likely due to our propensity for donning headphones and blasting music into our ears, folks ages 45 to 64 are showing more and more hearing loss across the nation.

As always, having a doctor rule out the obvious – ear wax, infections, side effects from meds, circulatory disorders, hyperthyroidism, Paget's disease of the bone and rheumatoid arthritis – is a great start. Given today's streamlined hearing aids, it's no longer a stigma to wear one of the tiny, state-of-the-art models on the market. Use this information as your ammunition. When your loved one sees your concern and realizes what he or she is missing in life, you'll be their hero.

Kids: Get 'Em Ready for School The Night Before

Fess up: Does your home faintly resemble the Indianapolis Freeway each morning during the school year? We feel your pain. Trying to get everyone out of bed, showered, dressed and fed while making sure the kids don't leave home without lunch, books, school supplies and more makes most moms feel as though they could use some time with David Copperfield to learn to make morning magic. We're here to help, sharing valuable tips from moms just like you, so check these out and see if they don't look like ideas that guarantee you'll be having fewer last-minute catastrophes.

- **Set up a staging area by the back door and post a list of everything that must go out each day (coats, backpacks, boots, etc). Teach kids to check the list daily for last-minute prompts.**
- To make that first tip easier to carry out, put a big basket on the floor for each family member. Color-code them so you know into which basket to put Junior's gym shoes.
- **Post the calendar of family-related activities near the back door. That way, if you're supposed to send three dozen cupcakes to class, you can buzz by a convenience store if you forget.**
- While you're hanging that calendar, install a square of corkboard by the door. You'll be surprised how often you use it to post signed report cards, permission slips, doctor's notes and other out-of-the-ordinary items that need to go out the door with your child.
- **Savvy moms say that packing lunches while they're making dinner makes the task effortless. Since you're already wielding the knife for your dinner salad, cutting and bagging extra carrots for the next day's lunches won't take much extra effort.**
- Put one child in charge of checking the weather channel each morning. Not only do kids love to be helpful, but you can feel like the smartest mom in the school by tossing collapsible umbrellas into those baskets even if the morning sky is perfectly blue.
- **Put each child in charge of picking out the outfit they'll wear the following day.**
- Load the dishwasher before you go to bed (yes, we know you're exhausted), but if finding a sink-full of dishes depresses you each morning, take a few minutes to do the job.
- **Have one of the children set the breakfast table as soon as dinner dishes have disappeared.**
- Know before you go to bed what you'll be serving for breakfast and make sure the rest of the family knows, too. Mornings aren't the time to argue about foods your pickiest eaters won't touch. Save the battles for the weekend when making an alternative breakfast won't put everyone's time schedule (and mood) off!

Serves 8

Ingredients:

Oil for baking pan
1-1/4 cup apricot jam
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
3 cups breadcrumbs
1-pound thin chicken tenders (about 16 pieces)
16-8" bamboo skewers soaked in water for 30 minutes
8 oz. thinly sliced deli ham, halved crosswise
3 celery ribs, cut into 5" thick matchsticks
1/2 seedless cucumber, sliced into 6" long matchsticks

- 1) Preheat oven to 450 degrees and coat with oil
- 2) Mix 3/4 cup of jam with mustard to create dipping sauce
- 3) Spread bread crumbs on a plate
- 4) Thread chicken onto skewers lengthwise
- 5) Work with one skewer at a time; wrap chicken with ham; brush on remaining jam
- 6) Immediately roll coated meat sticks in breadcrumbs using your fingers to adhere
- 7) Arrange skewers on greased pan
- 8) Bake, turning once, about 15 minutes (make sure chicken is cooked thoroughly)
- 9) Transfer to a platter. Serve with dipping sauce, celery and cucumber sticks on the side

When the kids head back to school, moms breathe a sign of relief, but most kids aren't quite as thrilled about returning to the books. Show your kids that you appreciate the fact that they're "getting with the program" by serving dinner-on-a-stick (And, just between us, they won't realize this fun meal is also healthy!)

The Blessings of Blankets

As winter approaches, take a good look at your linens and decide what needs a good cleaning before temperatures plunge. One of the great joys of winter is tucking freshly cleaned, sweet-smelling blankets onto family member's beds. But did you know that all blankets aren't equal when it comes to cleaning them? Because today's blanket can be made of wool, cotton or synthetics blends, each needs a different type of care.

What's your blanket preference? Lightweight covers? Fluffy quilts? Do you like to pair your coverings with sheets or not? Some folks prefer just a bottom sheet and a blanket on top. If that's you, it's particularly important to buy blankets that can be washed with your sheets.

If someone in your home suffers from allergies, doctors agree that choosing a blanket that can withstand frequent washings will go a long way to cutting back on attacks. Perhaps that's why colorfast cotton blankets are so popular. They're a snap to wash and are easy to find – particularly in white, which is an ideal color for someone with an additional sensitivity to fabric dyes.

We recommend avoiding blankets that require dry cleaning for a number of reasons. The most obvious is expense. You probably already have enough clothing going to the cleaners and in many cases, the larger the item you bring in, the higher the tab will be. Expense aside, dry cleaning can leave lingering odors that may prove difficult to remove. If you must dry clean your blankets, experiment with a dryer-friendly product. The chemicals aren't as strong and the expense will be minimal.

These days, you're probably finding a variety of synthetic blankets when you shop your favorite linen store. These are great for lightweight warmth, but when winter comes, static and pilling resulting from frequent washings can make synthetics problematic, so beware.

Regardless of the type of blanket you choose for your beds, always follow label-washing directions and be certain your washtub is large enough to accommodate your biggest blankets. Laundry professionals recommend testing one blanket in your washer and dryer before you commit your entire linen closet to a fall bath.

By the way, not every blanket manufacturer recommends the use of fabric softeners, so make sure yours does by checking the wash label sewn to the blanket's hem. Additionally, throwing a few towels into the dryer with your blankets helps them dry faster and distribute the load's weight more evenly. Finally, before you store your blankets, be sure they're completely dry to avoid any mildew problems during their summer hibernation.

Carpet Talk: Here's Mud in Your Rug!

Moms are clairvoyant. Even if we never peek outside, we would be able to tell when the season changes by the amount of junk that comes into our homes courtesy of our family member's shoes. Spring and fall are prime candid-ates for what some like to call "mud slinging time," when heavy rains make thick soup of soil and enthusiastic family members don't always remember to wipe their feet when they cross the threshold.

If you prefer the mud that comes in cosmetics jars, but understand that real life is all about the kids, their friends and the dog tracking in their share of the glop, become a mud-savvy woman and banish the dirt as fast as it arrived using our simple, eight-step formula:

1. Apply a small spot of mild liquid detergent to the mud
2. Blot stain with a dry, white cloth
3. Flood the area with white vinegar
4. Blot again with the cloth
5. Repeat step #1
6. Repeat step #2
7. Flood the area with water
8. Blot one last time

While this technique works equally well on both dried and wet mud, it's no substitute for having a professional tackle the job if the mud you're facing is more than a small spot. You will be able to remove 90% of the soils on your carpet through vacuuming and spot cleaning. When that inevitable buildup of the other 10% occurs, be sure to use Guarantee System for a thorough carpet cleaning. By the way, you might also try this little trick if you're on the fly: Liberally sprinkle cornstarch over the mud, wait up to 30 minutes and vacuum.

GUARANT@@ SYSTEM.

851 West Fulton Street
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

PRSRT STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
GRAND RAPIDS, MI
PERMIT #1254

This issue of Neighborhood News brought to you by:

GUARANT@@ SYSTEM.

Phone: 616-451-0787

Fax: 616-451-8303

www.guaranteesystem.com

Inside this issue you'll find:

- Extreme Bulbs
- Household Tips: Out, Out, Darn Stains
- Can You Hear Me Now?
- Get Kids School-Ready Nightly
- Chicken, Apricot and Ham Lollipops
- The Blessings of Blankets
- Carpet Talk: Here's Mud on Your Rug
- September Money-Saving Special

Money Saving Coupon

Are you breathing clean air?

SAVE \$25
when you have your
air-ducts cleaned

If you can't use this coupon, give it to a friend!

**As always, you have my Personal Satisfaction
Guarantee. If it's not cleaned to your standards,
we'll clean it again for FREE.**

This coupon expires September 30, 2007

Guarantee System