

Best Garden on the Web

Gardening in Iowa

Launching a Site Dedicated to the Midwestern Gardener

BGW Goals

Best Garden on the Web (BGW) originally began as a tool to help me in learning web design. Since its inception in May 2003, however, it has blossomed into a creative endeavor that has increased my own interest in gardening. Along the way, I have made many changes that have improved the site (such as adding a Plants Index) in addition to improving my own social interactions with other gardeners by joining a gardening club (the Iowa City Orchid Society).

My primary goal when I created BGW was to provide an accurate visual and informational guide to people buying plants in the Midwest. I have purchased plants at stores, nurseries, and catalogs based on faulty and misleading plant pictures and care instructions. A good example was when I bought iris bulbs at Wal-mart from Better Homes and Gardens. The picture showed a pure sky blue iris called 'Dover Blue'. When it

flowered, though, 'Dover Blue' turned out to be a dark purple iris that in no way resembled the purported color.

At other times, information on seed packets has been incorrect for soil conditions, light conditions, etc. Some of these differences might simply be due to Midwestern, and in particular Iowa climatic conditions, but other differences can only be explained by photo doctoring or inadequate understanding of a plant's specific needs.

Currently, the site is about two-thirds completed. My original goal is still the guiding principle of BGW. When finished, I hope it truly lives up to the name Best Garden on the Web.



Red Dahlia, Potted, Late July 2003

Indoor Plants and an Orchid Named Wiley

I attended the first fall meeting of the Iowa City Orchid Society (ICOS) on Thursday, September 4, 2003 at the First Presbyterian Church on 2701 Rochester Avenue. Before the meeting, ICOS had a social gathering. Since I arrived early, I spoke with several members, some of whom grow their orchids using semi-hydroponics. This method sounds intriguing, and I will discuss it in next month's issue.

The meeting began with a talk on beginning orchid growing, which focused on the proper way to water orchids. According to the speaker, the best method is to put them into a bucket or plastic tub with water rather than watering them from above. We were given bamboo sticks (simple bamboo skewers) that can be used to test the water level of the orchids so that we don't overwater them. *(continued on p. 3)*

September 15, 2003

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 - Butterflies like mud ([Building the Best Butterfly Garden](#), p. 2)
 - Plants blooming into October ([Late Summer's Blistering Beauties](#), p. 3)
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Building the Best Butterfly Garden



Monarch Butterfly on Red Weigela, Back Yard Post Area, Early September 2003

Butterflies enchant the garden with grace and color, providing beneficial pollination of many flowering species, so it is no wonder that the benign, beautiful, and beneficial creatures are

sought after by gardeners around the world. If you want butterflies in your garden, what can you do to build the best butterfly garden?

First of all, an online search for “butterfly garden” will yield many good results. One good discussion can be found at the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife site at www.wa.gov/wdfw/wlm/region1/buttflys.htm

According to this site, wind protection and a sunny location are the two most important factors for attracting many butterfly species. Additionally, since butterflies start out as caterpillars, plants that are food sources for caterpillars can assist in bringing butterflies to your garden where they will eventually mature into adults.

An especially interesting note concerns the preferred conditions of many male butterflies. They like to collect around areas of sand or mud near puddles of water. Due to this phenomena, the Eastern Washington website suggests

picking an open spot to dig a hole where you place a bucket filled with sand (to within an inch of the top), pour water into it, adding some sticks or pebbles. Another possibility would be to create a small pond, or even to have a birdbath with sand added to the water.

As for the most alluring butterfly flowers, I find that plants such as butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*), purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), bee balm (*Monarda didyma*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), and weigela have been especially successful at bringing butterflies into my garden. Since swamp milkweed is the Monarch butterfly host plant, growing it will encourage Monarchs to return to your garden year after year. Another good choice is the always useful butterfly bush. With its long flowering season (summer to frost), profuse flowers, and butterfly-attracting power, butterfly bush is indispensable in any butterfly garden design.

Butterfly gardening can be quite satisfying: Watching your butterflies play in the mud will bring back fond memories of your own childhood. Additionally, building the best butterfly garden will give you a deeper understanding of how to garden for the benefit of the natural world, beyond purely aesthetic considerations.

Watching your butterflies play in the mud will bring back fond memories of your own childhood.

Cats in the Garden



Shedd Spread, Front Rock Garden with Nicotiana in Foreground, August 2003

If you have cats, you certainly understand they are drawn to the outdoors. They love to roam amongst the flowers, chase small animals, and try to catch birds.

Since I have 5 cats, I know how chaotic the house becomes when I keep all of them inside. So, when the weather is nice, I let them outside, especially at night.



Bitsy, Back Yard Semi Circle with Hostas, April 2003



Precious, Front Yard Plant Circle, April 2003

Often, my cats will approach me outside and want their ears scratched, or they will follow me around the garden. I even have a cat named Precious (above) who likes her tummy rubbed.

Late Summer's Blistering Beauties

Canna, Hibiscus, Dahlia. Three exotic and exquisite flowers that evoke tropical rainforests heavy with the perfumed scent of large and brightly colored blossoms. Late summer and early fall are the season for these flowers. Cannas and dahlias are both bulbs which can begin blooming at any time under the right conditions, but they both perform best in the shortening days, cooler nights, and warm days of a late Iowa summer.

A new member to Best Garden this year is the frost-hardy hibiscus. Even though it was first planted in early summer, it has already begun blooming this year. A hybrid large red plant, it is extremely healthy and attractive. This hibiscus needs shade, so my roommate, Kevin, planted it under the front yard rock garden's lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*).

Other plants also performing well in August and September



Giant Orange Canna, Right Drive, August 2003



Red Hibiscus, Front Rock Garden, September 2003



White Dahlia, Potted, August 2003

are morning glories (*Ipomoea tricolor*), zinnias, asters, sunflowers (*Helianthus annuus*) as well as the long-blooming Brazilian jasmine (*Mandevilla splendens*), flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana*), and butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*).

Since the muggy days of late summer still shimmer with the vivid colors of these blistering beauties, sadness can overtake you upon realizing the flowering season will soon be over. In reality, many of these flowers last into the first frost, which typically hits Iowa at the end of October. So, you can enjoy your exotic, tropical flowers until Halloween so long as you give them adequate moisture and care.

Sadness can overtake you since the flowering season will soon be over.

Indoor Plants and Orchids (continued from page 1)

After the talk, we had a short break with refreshments. At that point, I had to catch my bus, so I missed the orchid raffle and a video on orchid pollination. I did, however, purchase 6 raffle tickets for \$5 and asked ICOS President, Nile Dusdieker, if someone would be able to hold the orchid for me if I happened to win one.

On Sunday night, I received a call from Nile saying that I had indeed won an orchid. When he arrived, I not only received one plant, but two. He had separated one of his orchids and repotted the two parts, so he gave me one of them.

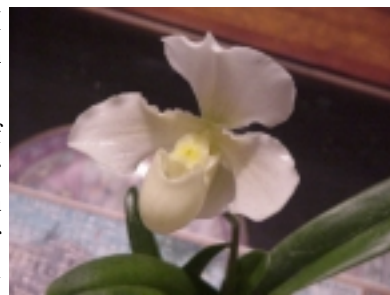
My new raffle-winning orchid is an unknown white Paphiopedilum orchid (the Lady Slipper family) with a tag on it that says "Wiley." The original owner of the plant likes to give his flowers names, so my new orchid will just be Wiley until I find out the exact species.

The other orchid is a hybrid of Phalaenopsis, the Moth Orchid. I decided to also name this one and picked Clarissa. Clarissa's roots are creeping over the sides of the pot, and she

should be mauve-colored once she blooms, assuming I manage to provide her with the necessary components to survive and thrive.

In future issues, I will detail additional ICOS meetings, the progress of my orchids, and what I am learning about growing them. Since a child, it has been my dream to successfully raise orchids. When I hear the stories of regular people who succeed at orchid cultivation, I know that someday I can do the same.

On a final note, if anyone has stories or anecdotes on growing a favorite flower or flower family, please submit an article to the Newsletter. You might be featured in a future issue.



White Orchid (Paphiopedilum hybrid), My Bedroom Indoors, Early September 2003

**Launching a Site Dedicated to the
Midwestern Gardener
Volume 1, Issue 1**

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Plant an Apple Tree

It is almost time. Time to make apple pie made from fresh, garden-raised apples. Time to eat apples picked straight from the tree. Time to enjoy the sweet flavor and crisp goodness of my Red Delicious apples.

Three years ago, I planted a sorry-looking tree bought from my local Wal-mart. It only cost \$5 at the end of August because of its poor shape, typical of plants remaining in the garden center for a long period. Last year, this tree had begun to tilt, so my roommate, Kevin, tried to straighten it and broke a large branch, creating an open wound on the tree. He repaired the wound with paint and tape, and despite these setbacks, both last year and this year the tree has produced many healthy and delicious apples.



Red Delicious Apple Tree, Front Yard
Rock Garden, Early September 2003

In contrast, I have another apple tree in the back yard at two years old. It is a Granny Smith apple tree, which has yet to produce apples.

For fruit trees, apples are attractive year round with a short, pleasant, and rounded appearance. They provide welcome shade, spring flowers, and are low maintenance. Although they are short-lived (typically 25-30 years), apple trees have so many other good points to offset this one drawback.

From apple cider to apple butter to applesauce and, of course, apple pie, apples are an integral part of the American identity. To do your part for the country, plant an apple tree today, and next year you might be enjoying your own homegrown, fresh apples.