

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 3-03-04) Wingate, Levine and Tyler (Winter and Early Spring Books and Plants) , ©2005

Even though some of these sparkly bright days hint at the warmth of late spring and summer days in the future, as soon as our spirits think it's time to get down to some serious gardening a windy blustery, cold, soggy, drippy deluging day (or days) come to snap us out of our dreams of glorious outdoor gardening pleasures.

The last great weather weekend we had, instead of going out to my garden, I stayed inside and did some massive spring cleaning and divided and potted up my colonies of orchids instead. I should have gone out to my garden because March brings windy, hostile climates early on. I've been consoling myself reading a few treasured gardening books both old and new, plus a wonderful magazine discovery called "Garden Gate."

"Garden Gate" is a creation of August Home Publishing and if you'd like a sneak peak, visit www.GardenGateMagazine.com. Each issue is three-hole punched to make it easy to store in a three-ring binder notebook. And, of course August Home will also send you a colorfully illustrated "Garden Gate Binder" to store six issues at a time. Each issue is advertisement free. What a concept! The April issue has articles on Dicentras (Bleeding Heart); a comparison of six design programs for computers; rose pruning; four plans for perennial borders; container gardening and a report from their test gardens on sweet peas. Subscription rates are \$24 per year for six issues.

My treasured "oldie" (actually only four years old) book is "Plant This!" by Ketsil Levine with illustrations by Rene Eisenbart. The books pages are edged with four colors designating the seasons. Gray is winter, yellow for spring, green for summer and gold for autumn. I have many of the plants Ketsil describes as her favorites and the best thing about her selections is they're no-fail for each and every gardener. The plants she's chosen are user-friendly and they actually thrive on a minimum of care. Each plant has interest for more than one season and in most cases all four seasons. Every plant is described by its botanical name and common name, along with easy ways to pronounce the botanical name. The botanical name of Arisaema "sounds like - Pasadena." Ketsil also tells readers the plant's basic needs, worst enemy and gives "best advice."

Marty Wingate, "Seattle PI and Times" garden columnist, England and Ireland garden tour host, and freelance writer, spoke at Barnes and Noble recently. Marty was also signing her newest creation and I had to have it, "Big Ideas for Northwest Small Gardens" by Sasquatch Books ISBN 1570612757. Her theme for the book is "Small is beautiful." The book itself is small, 6-3/4 inches by 8 inches, with 211 pages. Each chapter is succinct, enjoyable to read and crammed with helpful, useful and inspiring information. The last part of the book is an extremely complete resource section with plant lists and horticulture information for planting and growing success. This is one of the most user-friendly books I've seen and read in a while. Check it out at your favorite bookstore or borrow it from our Kitsap Regional Libraries.

WSU Master Gardener, M.J. Tyler, was co-speaker with Marty and M.J. told us all about the houseplant family of Gesneriaceae (known as Gesneriads). M.J. also gave us instruction about botanical nomenclature. Her information was easy to understand and most helpful. Botanical names are the universal language for plant-aholics, collectors, and gardeners who are trying to locate their favorite plant. If you know the botanical name of a plant you can find it in any country by speaking its botanical name to a plants person. Common names are fun to use and often times very cutesy and descriptive but a plant called “Blue Buttons” could be anything from a Pelargonium to a Ceanothus; or no plants by that name are found in that geographic region. If you’d like to know more about Gesneriads and also about plant nomenclature send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the Extension Office at 614 Division Street, MS-16, Port Orchard WA 98366-4676 and I’ll send you M.J.’s wonderful information sheets. Mark “Gesneriads” on edge of the envelope.

You might want to visit these two websites to learn more about Gesneriads and African Violets. The American Gloxinia and Gesneriad Society website is <http://www.aggs.org> and the African Violet Society of America, Inc. website is <http://www.avsa.org>. Remember you can always access these websites at the library if you don’t have access at home. Gesneriads, Gloxinia and African Violets are easy to grow houseplants. They’re also quite forgiving of gardener error and/or neglect. I hope you’ll explore the plant family of Gesneriaceae.

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