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# GARDEN GAZETTE

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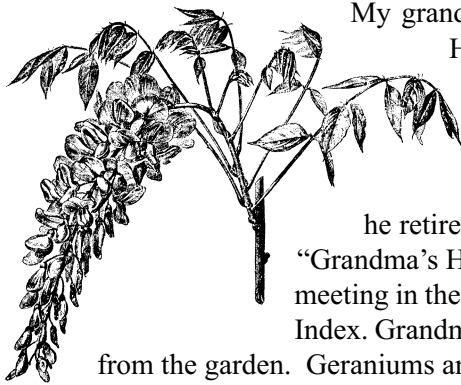
April - May 2011

John Christianson, *Editor*

## CHRISTIANSON'S Nursery & Greenhouse

An Enticing Selection of Common and Uncommon Plants . . . Friendly Service . . . Expert Advice

### *A Cautionary Tale*



My grandfather, Will Robertson, rode the rails to the Pacific Northwest when he was fourteen.

He worked here as a logger until returning to Michigan to visit his dying mother and later marry Nora Barnes, my grandmother. Many years and five children later they returned to Grandpa's much loved Pacific Northwest where they could spend their time camping, fishing and hunting in the forests of the Cascades. They bought an old farmhouse with acreage and he settled into life as a dairyman and a carpenter. When

he retired they moved into the small town of Sultan and Grandpa built what was lovingly called "Grandma's House"-- a house where Grandma's kitchen was designed with two large picture windows meeting in the corner with a corner sink. And, beyond was the Cascade Range with snowcapped Mount Index. Grandma filled the wide windowsill with her houseplants and, in the fall, with her favorite plants

from the garden. Geraniums and heliotrope would come inside for a winter respite up against the windows. Sometimes her plants would be trained up and around the windows so they framed the breathtaking view of Mount Index and the

Cascades, which were so close and so imposing it felt like they were right in their front garden. As grandchildren and cousins we all watched Grandma fix fried chicken with gravy and mashed potatoes in her spacious kitchen with the snow-covered mountains as the backdrop. She also made our favorite snack of toasted peanut butter and jam sandwiches with Constant Comment tea. On nice days in the spring and summer we would often take our meals out to a paved area just outside the kitchen door. This large space was covered with a lathe-type structure and Grandpa planted a purple wisteria on one corner. As a child, I was enchanted each year by the cascading panicles of fragrant purple flowers in the spring and it did not take long for the wisteria to cover the entire structure and also provide shade all summer long. Beyond the patio, as with the kitchen, was the constant reminder of what brought my mother's family to Washington State -- the Cascade Mountains. As Will and Nora aged and were no longer able to ride their horses into the lakes and isolated campgrounds of the Cascades, the incredible views kept them connected to their beloved Pacific Northwest. They both passed away having lived in their dream home until the end of their lives. And, in the end, it almost seemed their home was built more for the views than for shelter. When the house was to be sold, we wanted to transplant the wisteria to one of our homes as a continuation of all the memories made in my grandparents' home and garden. As many of us met out on the terrace to consider the possibilities we were stunned to see there was no longer a wooden structure over the patio. The wisteria had steadily and silently become the structure. Instead of squared off edges of lathe there were huge rounded limbs of the wisteria twisting and twining around the entire top of the patio. The expanding girth of the limbs had crushed the wood and taken over its function. Even the post the plant was trained upon was no longer there. The climbing vine had become a huge trunk and the trunk had become the post. We all knew it would kill the vine to try and move it. We also knew the vine would eventually bring down the house if it was ever allowed to grow unrestricted onto the house. So we left the wisteria there along with a note of caution to the future homeowners. I do not know if they cut it down, tiring of its upkeep. I can only hope they waited until seeing one spring with its fabulous flowers and fragrance set against the panorama of the Cascades before making that decision. If they purchased the house for the views, the wisteria is still there.

- Toni Christianson

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## *Northwest Flower and Garden Show 2011*

John and I are thankful to our dedicated staff of employees and volunteers who helped install our Flower and Garden Show display 'A Day Well Spent.' A garden is always challenging to design and then surprising to finally see the complete design that has only been in our heads and in some pictures and drawings up until it is finally finished. We are able to see the layout of our space and line out how the little buildings will fit within that space, but the overall effect with buildings, plants and garden elements is always a mystery until it is finished and we start placing plant labels at the base of each plant and then walk away to wait for the Preview Party in the evening. We are very pleased with the response from the judges and even more delighted with the 'Peoples' Choice Award' which is the one we feel to be the most important. If fellow gardeners like our show garden we feel we have accomplished our goal.

The most asked questions at this show were about the Wisteria venusta growing on the "propagation house" at the side of the garden and about the Flowering Almond (*Prunus triloba*) in the raised beds. Our word of caution about the wisteria (see front page story) is an important one. Many people walked away wanting to grow this wisteria, which is magnificent when established but will need annual pruning to keep it from taking down whatever you use to support it. The word of caution about the flowering almond is about disease control. I have wanted one in our garden since seeing it years ago in just about every well-grown garden of my childhood. John would not carry it because of the disease problems. However, Michael French, our forever good friend and great plantsman who helped staff our display garden, told John that he cuts his down to about ten inches every year after it flowers. Because the disease problems are in the blossoms, this eliminates the potential for disease. And, since it blooms on year old growth, it will shoot up after pruning and those stems will be the flowering limbs for the next year. By religiously pruning it back it has stayed disease free. As a consequence of their discussion we will be carrying this shrub from now on and we are going to plant one in our garden. I love plants that take me back to my childhood. Other frequent questions were about the Corkscrew Willow, *Daphne odora*, *Akebia quinata* 'Shirobana' and the old Schwinn delivery bike. The whole affair was great fun for us and many thought this particular show of 2011 was the best show in years.

Special thanks to our local business supporters: Lefeber Turf, Skagit Gardens Wholesale, Agri-Turf Inc., Lovejoy Nursery, La Conner Flats, JP Automotive, and Jensen's Greenhouse.



### *Great Pumpkin Weigh-In with Grand Prize of \$500.00*

It's early to talk about pumpkins but now is the time to plant your pumpkins if you want to grow the Great Pumpkin of 2011. The Grand Prize will be \$500.00 and the weigh-in will be the first weekend in October during the Festival of Family Farms Celebration. Don't plant too early or your seeds will decay in the cold soil or your seedlings may sit, sulk and never regain the vigor they might have had. The best way to determine the time to plant is not the temperature on your outdoor thermometer but the temperature of your soil, which can be determined with a soil thermometer and should be around 60 degrees for pumpkins. As the years go by we will collect the legends and lore of the cultivation practices of the winning pumpkin growers: plant a seedling started indoors; plant a seed directly in the ground; plant as soon as the ground is warm; wait to plant until the ground is even warmer; plant in a compost pile; plant in straight manure (and then what kind: horse, cow, chicken, llama, sheep); feed with milk; feed with coffee grounds; or remove all developing pumpkins but one at the first set of fruit. The list goes on and on and there is nothing more fun than to listen to others passionately debate garden practices. And then there is always the grower who is a winner or close winner every year who just sits and smiles without revealing any of his or her secrets. Members of the Christianson family and our employees, including their families can join in the fun but are not eligible for the Grand Prize.

### *New Website in the Works*

We are in the process of creating a new website and plan to have it launched later this spring. Our goal for the new website is that it will be user-friendly and fun to explore, yet it will also provide you with helpful information and inspiring ideas. The address will remain the same ([www.christiansonnursery.com](http://www.christiansonnursery.com)) so please take a look and let us know what you think.

### *The Garden Gazette has a baby sister - the e-Newsletter!*

The 'Garden Gazette' is near and dear to our hearts and is not going away. However, for those who want to hear from us more often and/or save paper, we will soon be sending out shorter newsletters via email for those who are interested. These 'e-Newsletters' will contain important reminders and announcements, as well as updates about current happenings, sales events, and classes at the nursery. The e-Newsletter will also contain a link that will take you to the latest copy of the 'Garden Gazette', which you can read right there on your computer. You can sign-up for our e-Newsletter in our Garden Store or on our new website, coming this spring!

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## *Mother's Day*

Join us as we celebrate Mother's Day weekend May 7 - 8. With so many beautiful plants, there is no better place to bring Mom on her special day than to a Nursery. If the weather is grand you can pack a lunch and enjoy a picnic in the Schoolhouse garden. If it is raining or cold, the Conservatory with its blooming orchids and African violets is a great place to wander. The Propagation House filled with geraniums of many types and colors is a wonderful place to visit, as is our Annual House filled with all your favorite plants for summer hanging baskets and containers. Our gift shop, Primrose, is sure to delight Mom with antiques that stir warm memories and merchandise that is new and fashionable. The beauty, color and fragrance of a Nursery not only create fond recollections for Mothers, Grandmothers, Aunts, and Great Aunts but also for children and grandchildren alike.



## *A New Face in Primrose*

Customers who have already met Audrey, our new gift shop hostess from the Netherlands, are sometimes shocked but always surprised with her sublime face and enduring dance pose. This beautiful Dutch fashion diva will grace our shop with serenity and poise wearing the most fashionable classic clothing of the past. Many of her vintage garments will be for sale. You will know her seasonal wardrobe closet is bare when you see her in her Victorian nightie, a last resort. Not only does Audrey still take us by surprise, she reminds us of a Frederick and Nelson sort of shopping day - mannerly and elegant.

## *Spring Cleaning*

New products in Primrose include The Laundress, a new 100% biodegradable, non-toxic and allergen free line of fabric and home care products. All are scented with essential oil blends, not synthetic materials, and all are free of petro chemicals, chlorine bleach and beef fat (used in fabric conditioners). Packaging is 50% post consumer plastic bottles and all packaging is 100% recyclable. Because this product is highly concentrated with 30% more active ingredients, you buy less and therefore have less packaging. We love the name and love the product.

After you finish spring cleaning reward yourself with a delicious homemade treat made in Fat Daddios anodized professional bake ware. With your continued interest in our existing cooking and baking department, we decided to add a new line of bake ware with an environmentally friendly finish that is "guaranteed to never chip, flake, peel, rust or blister. Fat Daddios natural non-dye anodizing treatment hardens the bare surface of aluminum and seals the natural pores of the metal. Having considered glass to be the best and safest way to bake foods we now have a safe and unbreakable way to bake breads and desserts for our friends and family. Have a delicious Spring!

## *Winter Gardens Photography Contest a Great Success*

This past March 4 - 6, we celebrated our Fifth Annual Winter Festival. As part of the festivities, we hosted our 'Third Annual Winter Gardens Photography Contest'. In spite of all the snow that covered the roads at deadline time, the photographs poured in right up to the last second. In total, there were 45 entries, all of which were proudly displayed in our schoolhouse for the month of March. The photographs were professionally judged by Scott Terrell, Photography Editor for the Skagit Valley Herald, and though it was a difficult task, the following award winners were selected:



1st Place, Category 1 (in camera image):

"Hydrangea Skeletons" by John Holtman

1st Place, Category 2 (computer enhanced):

"Winter Blueberries & Snow Geese" by David Smith

2nd Place Overall:

"Frosted Leaves" by Anne Elkins

3rd Place Overall:

"Winter's Un-Relenting Assault" by Carol Worrell

Thank you to all who participated, and especially to Scott Terrell for volunteering his time. It was truly uplifting to see so many beautiful images of winter plants and gardens. The winning entries and many other great images submitted by local photographers will be displayed on our new website, coming later this spring!

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## *Dogwoods – A Classic Mother's Day Gift*

The dogwood, along with delicate pastel crocus, lemon-colored daffodils and jewel-toned tulips, has long been a harbinger of Spring. Admired for its form and multi-seasonal interest, the dogwood has long been a favorite of gardeners from coast to coast. This tree is recognized by its white or pink flowers which consist of four bracts that encircle as many as 20 yellow dogwood flowers nestled in the center. Its red fruit are attractive to birds and its strong wood is used to manufacture items that require durability. In the 1970's the beloved native varieties of dogwoods were beset with a disease (anthracnose), a non-native fungal disease that kills the tree. Fortunately for us Dr. Elwin Orton from Rutgers University took up the dogwood challenge and devoted over 40 years to overcome this disease and develop hybrids that are disease resistant. His strategy was to cross-breed the native American dogwood with the disease resistant Asian species, *Cornus kousa*, producing a new and unique hybrid series of dogwoods. Our favorites from the growing list of disease resistant dogwoods are 'Celestial', 'Aurora', 'Stellar Pink', 'Venus', and 'Starlight'. All grow to 20 feet tall with the exception of 'Starlight' which reaches 30 feet. We are proud to offer these disease resistant varieties which are rising stars in the home garden.



– Joanne Romann

## *Sun-loving Rhododendrons*



One's first inclination is to relegate the "King of Shrubs" to the shaded area of the yard but there are rhododendrons that prefer the sun and perform best in this setting. We can all appreciate the wide color range that rhododendrons offer and the extensive variety of plants which, when chosen carefully, will provide color from late Winter to early Summer. A few sun-loving varieties proven to be excellent performers in the Pacific Northwest are: 'Anna Kruschke', 'Blue Diamond', 'Jean Marie', 'Anna Rose Whitney', and 'Dora Amateis'. These five are possibly the most recognized sun-lovers of the group but with so many other varieties from which to choose, be sure and ask for help at our Nursery if you are coming in to inquire about rhododendrons for the sunny garden.

– Joanne Romann

## *Powerhouses in the Garden*

Bedding plants, otherwise known as annuals, are true powerhouses for the gardener. Improved vegetatively grown varieties offer ease of growth and exciting new selections. Whether used in mass to fill in around shrubs or trees, used to serve as companions to perennials or used to provide a non-stop blooming border, annuals are like a trusted friend-one you can rely on to be there when you need color. Using annuals keeps the perennial border alive long after the perennials have peaked. Annuals are multi-taskers performing well in the garden but also making showy displays in hanging baskets and containers which is where today's gardener uses them to their great advantage. They offer a kaleidoscope of color and there are mixtures of annuals to fit any gardener's color scheme. These versatile plants have a very wide color range and are appreciated for their tidy habit of being self-cleaning-no need to deadhead these hyperactive performers.

– Joanne Romann

## *Art in the Schoolhouse*

The daffodils and tulips in Skagit Valley offer a seasonal display attracting people from far and wide. Paired with this annual event occurring each April is Art in the Schoolhouse at our Nursery. Now in its fourth year, this show features many talented artists from the Stanwood Camano Art Guild and is a tribute to the vibrant color display nature provides right outside our door. Many new as well as returning artists will transform our 1888 Schoolhouse into a multi-media art gallery. Please join these artists in making this a special year in which we all support the arts. Attracting visitors from all over the country, this venue has grown over the past three years and will offer once again not only varied but quality renderings that reflect the growing involvement in the arts in our picturesque Valley.

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# Christianson's Spring Calendar

## Skagit County Historical Museum's Second Annual Historic Home Tour

Saturday, April 2 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

This year's home tour features Historic Homes of West Mount Vernon, including our 1888 Schoolhouse. Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$20 on the day of the event, and are available at the Historical Museum in La Conner, at Gretchens in Mount Vernon, the Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce, La Conner Flats, and at our Garden Store.

## Art in the Schoolhouse

April 2 - April 30 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
see article on previous page for more details

## American Rhododendron Society Flower Show

Saturday, April 30 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
complimentary

The Komo Kulshan Chapter of the ARS will be holding a Flower Show in our Propagation House. Don't miss this chance to speak with the experts and enjoy this colorful floral display!

## Friday Night Workshops in April & May

### Create Your Own Sun- or Shade-Loving Hanging Basket

Friday, April 22 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.  
materials fee and reservations required class limit: 10

It is spring and time to plant your hanging baskets! Join **Elisa Kamans** in this fun class where you will learn all you need to know to design and care for your baskets. Free soil and fertilizer will be provided for participants in this first in a series of container gardening programs. You can buy a basket at the nursery or bring your own.

### Create a Hanging Vegetable Garden

Friday, April 29 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.  
materials fee and reservations required class limit: 10

**Elisa Kamans**, our hanging basket designer, will offer for the first time this class on hanging vegetable gardens. Last year her creations were in such demand we decided to offer this program so Elisa can share her secrets on how to grow varieties of vegetables coupled with showy nasturtiums and other annuals. Don't miss this fun and unique class!

## You'll Love Peonies, The Deer Won't

Friday, May 6 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.  
reservations required class fee: \$5

If you are looking for a rewarding, long living, draught and deer tolerant perennial that comes in a dazzling array of colors and sizes, consider the magnificent peony! **Richard Tamura**, Master Gardener and a member of the NW and National Peony Society, will review plant types, selection and planting tips, propagation, and peony care. Peonies are a symbol of spring and female beauty; what could be more perfect as we celebrate Mother's Day!

## Summer Containers

Friday, May 13 6:00 - 7:30 p.m.  
materials fee and reservations required class limit: 10

Container gardening is a wonderful way to enjoy both traditional plants as well as some of the new varieties of annuals and perennials. **Elisa Kamans** will offer formulas for success with containers to grace your doorway, terrace, driveway and even your vegetable garden with months of interest. With Elisa's help you will plant your own container based on your color preferences and light requirements.

## In the Garden with Graham Kerr

Friday, May 20 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.  
reservations required complimentary

Join us for an evening with **Graham Kerr**, award-winning chef, author and fellow Skagitonian, as he shares insights from his newest book '**Growing at the Speed of Life**', which chronicles his transformation as a new kitchen gardener. In his inspiring, informative, and highly engaging style, Graham will pass along his lessons learned - from putting together a greenhouse, planting his first seeds and harvesting, to the joys of eating homegrown food, sharing his first crop with others and building community all along the way.

## In the Kitchen with Suzanne Butler

Friday, May 27 6:00 to 7:30 p.m.  
reservations required class fee: \$5

Graham Kerr will inspire you to grow a kitchen garden, but what will you do with all those veggies when they actually arrive in your kitchen? Picking up where Graham left off will be **Suzanne Butler**, *Graham Kerr's Cooking Assistant since 1993, Manager of the Mount Vernon Farmer's Market, and a Chef Instructor*. In this 90-minute session, Suzanne will focus on preparing and cooking early spring vegetables, such as spinach, asparagus, peas, chard, and kale. Learn new and wonderful ways to transform your spring harvest into meals that are as nutritious as they are delicious.

# Spring Specials

April 1 – 14

## Magnolias

hundreds of beautiful blooming trees with white, pink, purple, and yellow flowers, including evergreen varieties

20% off

May 2 – 8

## Basket Stuffers

dozens of different premium annuals for planters, baskets or flower beds growing in 2" pots

20% off

May 2 – 8

## Geraniums

thousands of blooming zonal, ivy, scented and fancy leaf geraniums growing in 4" pots

20% off

May 20 – 31

## Fuchsias

hardy, upright and trailing fuchsias that bloom all summer

2, 4 and 6-inch sizes & baskets

20% off

April 15 – May 1

## Rhododendrons and Azaleas

thousands to choose from in bud and bloom, including evergreen and deciduous azaleas

20% off

May 7 – 8

## Mother's Day Weekend Special

**Dogwood Trees**  
eastern and asiatic dogwoods in bloom (approximately 6' to 8' tall)

20% off

May 9 – 19

## Shady Days

shade-loving tuberous begonias, fancy double impatiens and New Guinea impatiens in 4" pots

20% off

June 1 – 12

## Vines

vigorous growing clematis, honeysuckle, jasmine, wisteria, akebia, kiwi, and more

1 gallon to 5 gallon sizes

20% off

# CLASSES & EVENTS

## Historic Home Tour

Saturday, April 2, 10 am – 4 pm

## Art in the Schoolhouse

April 2 - April 30, 10:00 am - 5:00 pm

## Create Your Own Sun- or

**Shade-Loving Hanging Basket**

Friday, April 22, 6 – 7:30 pm

## Create a Hanging Vegetable Garden

Friday, April 29, 6 – 7:30 pm

## Rhododendron Show

Saturday, April 30, 10 am – 4 pm

## You'll Love Peonies, The Deer Won't

Friday, May 6, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

## Summer Containers

Friday, May 13, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

## In the Garden with Graham Kerr

Friday, May 20, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

## In the Kitchen with Suzanne Butler

Friday, May 27, 6:00 – 7:30 pm

## Weekly Radio Broadcast

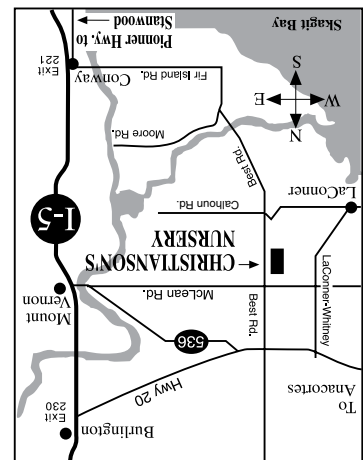
### The Garden Show

### Sunday Mornings

With John & Mike

AM 660 KAPS • 9:30 am

**Spring Hours**  
Open 9:00 to 6:00 pm daily  
Open Fridays until 8:00 pm  
April 22 - May 31



360-466-3821 • 1-800-585-8200

From Bellingham: Take exit #230, 5 miles West on Hwy 20 to Best Road, 2 miles South on Best Road. From Everett: Take exit #221, 8.5 miles West on Fir Island Road to Best Road, 1 mile North on Best Road past Chilberg/Cathoun Road.

**CHRISTIANSON'S**  
Nursery & Greenhouse  
15806 Best Road • Mount Vernon, WA 98273  
www.christiansonnursery.com

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