



# The Bloomin' News

Sandhills Community College

Vol. 06, No. 4

Winter 2011

*The Sandhills Horticultural Society - dedicated to the support of the Sandhills Horticultural Gardens since 1987. Please help the Gardens grow by becoming a Society member.*

## Dividing Hosta & Ornamental Grasses

*Jim Westmen*

The choice to divide your plants should be determined to some degree by their condition, whether the plant is dormant or actively growing. The best time to divide most plants is when they're dormant or going into dormancy. Therefore, the season is a big factor on timing your decision. Hostas work well when they're fully dormant and without foliage. For most of us, of course, that would mean the height of the winter months: December, January or February.

Digging up the plants and shaking off as much soil as possible lets you identify the growing points and separate the individual plants and roots more carefully. If you still can't see where to separate the plants, wash away the soil with a garden hose.

Many hostas do not make additional plants or offsets rapidly on their own and may benefit from some encouragement. A trick I learned from a propagation workshop at Plant Delights Nursery years ago was to dig the hosta up, clean it off, turn it upside down, and score the fleshy part underneath like a "number" symbol (#) about an eighth of an inch deep.

This encourages the plant's ability to provide more divisions by stimulating more offsets, or more plantlets. After separating these plantlets, you can pot each one into a new container with the appropriate potting mixture. Or you can increase the numbers you have in in your garden.



Dividing ornamental grasses can be a decision made based upon plant size or the desire to accumulate more of the same plants in your garden. Over time, grasses can begin to die in the center and become weak and unattractive. Dividing and transplanting these grasses can rejuvenate them and make them more attractive.

When dividing your grasses, remember that the stronger, healthier material can be found from the outside of the clump, not from the dead center. To make your job easier, before

you begin dividing, I would recommend cutting back the foliage on the grass to one-fourth or one-third of their length.

Your next job is to lift your grass out of the ground. Depending on the size of your plant, this can be accomplished with a shovel, spade or trowel. If

a grass clump is so big that it's hard to lift it totally out of the ground, just section the grass before you attempt to move it. These small sections can either be transplanted directly into another area of the garden or potted into a properly-sized container with a potting mixture suitable for your particular type of grass. One thing to

remember: warm-season grasses are best divided in late winter, and early-spring and cool-season grasses are best divided in the fall, winter, and early spring. To know for sure, check for signs of active growth, as the best time to divide is usually right before new growth begins.

Finally, whether you're planning to pot them or transplant them, make sure to water all newly divided or transplanted plants. This simple step is vital to the success of your hard work.



# Horticultural Society Member

*Dolores Muller  
Vice President, Sandhills Horticultural Society*

In 2010, the Sandhills Horticultural Society board voted to expand opportunities for society members—and for the public to enjoy the gardens—by offering workshops and classes.

The first year we offered six events, the highlight being the Fall Harvest Dinner, a magical evening of music, food, and art held in the gardens. We also had two lectures, one on ornamental grasses and another on orchids. Members of the Sandhills Photography Club taught a flower photography workshop, and a holiday flower-arranging workshop was taught by Maggie Smith.



Our goal all along was to host a broad range of classes, all horticultural-related. One of the many benefits of being a Horticultural Society member

is having the first opportunity to sign up for events, many of which are free or discounted for members.

Our second goal was to attract new members. Membership fees provide the essential funds required for the development of the Horticultural Gardens. They also, of course, sustain its

growth and beauty. The gardens wouldn't be what they are today without all of you!

This year, we had lectures on hostas and daylilies. Classes included the creation of take-home container flower gardens, and a workshop on pen and watercolor painting (30 participants created beautiful iris paintings). We also had Tai Chi classes in the garden, which were so successful (59 attendees), that we hope to offer it again in 2012. In our November workshop, participants made magnolia wreaths, and in final 2011 event, our inspired students made holiday mailbox arrangements.

Needless to say, we're excited about the response to our classes and workshops—and we're planning for the new year. Please let us know what you're interested in, and check out the list of upcoming events (these are in addition to the student and the Society's spring and fall plants sales, and the "Art in the Gardens" exhibit). A membership to the Sandhills Horticultural Society makes a great holiday gift and, as they say, is one that keeps on giving. We hope to see you at many of these activities.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season!



## The Wonder of Grafting

*Lee Ivy*

The more I learn about plants and their cultivation, the more I am amazed. There is science behind the functions of the plant and there is art in the architecture and perceived randomness of plant aesthetics. One process that combines science and art is grafting. Many plants in our landscapes are a result of combining a rootstock from one plant and scion (budwood) from another.

The goal of grafting is often to create unique plants that will survive a variety of conditions like variances in soil, the presence of pathogens, and climate extremes.

The process begins with a desirable rootstock that can thrive in local conditions. Scion is collected from plants that may exhibit exfoliating bark, bloom color, bloom season, enhanced fruit characteristics, or special habits of growth. Much grafting occurs in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. The climate and soil lend themselves to greater success. Additionally, there are skilled laborers that specialize in the process of grafting. In



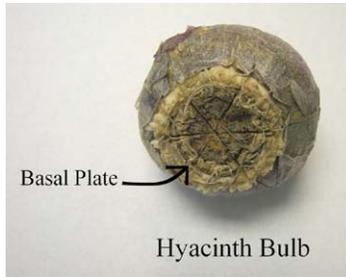
this region of the country, most grafting is done during the winter months on field grown stock or in a greenhouse or climate-controlled structure.

Several techniques can be used. Commonly practiced are the side-veneer graft, the whip-and-tongue, and the cleft graft. Each of these techniques is theoretically simple, but it is often difficult to achieve success without much practice. The students in our Landscape Gardening program graft English holly scion on "Nellie R. Stevens" holly. English hollies struggle in our sandy soils but are unique enough to warrant effort in grafting. Of course the "NRS" rootstock thrives in this area.

Examples of other plants that are grafted include: apples, peaches, grapes, ornamental and fruiting cherries, roses, ornamental plants on standard, and pines for lumber production. Look around your landscape to see where science and art come together.

# Propagating Bulbs

Dee Johnson



The term “bulb” is used to describe any plant that grows underground. The primary function of a bulb is to serve as a storage unit for nutrients. Bulbs are perennials (plants that usually last more than one season), and like most perennials, you can propagate

them by various methods.

Scoring is one way to propagate them, commonly used on hyacinths and narcissus. Make three cuts through the basal plate (the basal plate is the bottom of the bulb from which roots grow -- see photo). Once you’ve made the cuts, dust the bulb with a fungicide and place it in a warm, dark, highly-humid place for a few months. Bulblets (small bulbs) will form on the bottom of the original bulb. Once this happens, plant the mother bulb upside down in your garden. The bulblets will sprout in the spring. This will produce several more bulbs from the original.

Scaling is another way of propagating bulbs. Lilies respond well to this method. Break or cut the scales from the original bulb, cutting near the basal plate. Dust the scales with a fungicide

and a rooting hormone, then seal the scales in a plastic bag with damp vermiculite. Keep the bag at room temperature until bulblets form (this will take about two months). To overcome their dormancy before planting, the new bulblets should be refrigerated for about two months, making sure NOT to store them alongside fruit in the refrigerator. Fruits emit ethylene gas that is harmful to the bulbs.

You can also propagate bulbs by utilizing bulb cuttings. Narcissus may be propagated by this method. Cut a mature bulb into eight sections vertically, then slip a knife between the scales and cut the basal plate so there are four scale segments on each piece of basal plate. Plant these cuttings in vermiculite with the tips of the bulb just above the surface of the media. Put a plastic bag over the pot and secure it with a rubber band, placing the pot in a warm, bright spot, but not under direct sunlight. New bulblets should form between the scales in a few weeks.

These are fun ways to increase the number of bulbs in your garden. You may even try starting some bulbs from seed. This is a much longer process, but the results are the same: more color in your garden.

More information on bulbs can be found at: <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/bulbs/bulbbasics.cfm>

# Air Layering Interior Plants

Johanna Westmen

One of my most interesting experiences in my Advanced Propagation class with Mr. Fred Garrett was the art of air layering. I call it an “art” because as I found out, this method is believed to be an ancient form of plant propagation first developed by the Chinese. As a matter of fact, it’s also known as Chinese layering.

Air layering is a method used to induce roots to form on a plant stem while it’s still attached to the mother plant. Since some tropical plants are difficult to root from stem cuttings, this practice can be a successful way to propagate certain plants like rubber tree, fiddle leaf fig, or dumbcane.

Here’s what you’ll need to perform this procedure:

- Sharp Knife
- Toothpick or matchstick
- Twist ties
- 8” x 20” sheet of clear plastic
- 3-4 handfuls of sphagnum moss
- Water



First, choose a healthy, sizeable stem near the top of the plant. Next, you’ll need to make an upward-slanting cut about one-third to one-half of the way through the stem (be careful not to cut entirely through the stem). Then insert either a matchstick or toothpick in the cut to hold it open, holding on to the top of the plant above the cut if necessary to make it does not fall over and

break during the procedure.

Next, dust the open cut with a rooting-hormone powder and wrap it tightly with a bundle of moistened sphagnum peat moss, usually a little bit larger than the size of a baseball. Then, bind the



moss ball with the clear piece of plastic to retain its moisture and tie it off at the ends with twist ties. After a few months, roots should form and you should be able to see them through the clear plastic. During this rooting time, you should periodically check the moisture in the moss ball, adding water if needed.

Next, once the roots are clearly evident through the clear plastic covering, cut off the stem below the moss ball, remove the plastic (but not the moss), and pot your new plant into an appropriately-sized container size in the type of potting mixture recommended for your particular plant. Be sure to water (generously) your newly propagated plant when you place it into its new container.

Once you have mastered this ancient art of air layering, perhaps you can share it with a friend, or as my past teacher once told us, you can give them away as awesome Christmas presents.



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