

The Water Garden

Colorado Water Garden Society

Volume 26 Number 3

May 2009

Our May Plant Swap

I'll give you mine...

...if you'll give me yours!

By Vicki Aber, CWGS President

Be sure to come to the CWGS plant swap on Monday, May 18th. We will be at our temporary meeting place in Arvada where we held the March meeting. See the map and address at the lower right of this page.

The potluck at our March meeting turned out so well we've decided to continue it. The food was great and varied. You have to eat anyway. Why not share dinner with old friends and new?

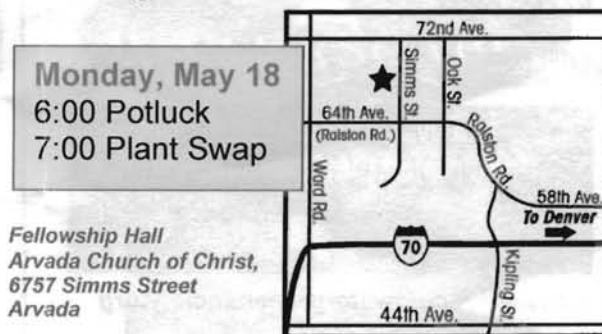
It's amazing how much information is thrown around in an informal setting. Last time at our table we talked about herons, pumps, fish, and travel plans. Make your own discussions, ask questions; the potluck is a fun way to share and learn while you enjoy a bite to eat.

Bring whatever you want to contribute to the potluck. We aren't going to assign categories. Surprise us! Dinner will begin at 6:00 pm. We provide utensils and drinks.

After dinner at about 7:00 pm, the main event will start. Anyone who has participated in the swap before will tell you this is fun! I always

say, "I'm just going to bring plants to share; I don't need any new plants." Well, I always end up walking away with something new I'm excited about.

This is how it works: Bring divisions from a plant that you have a lot of. All the "brought" plants go on a table. You're asked to speak about the plants you're contributing. We don't expect a detailed report. You can just say why you like the plant (or don't), what it looks like when it blooms (if it does), what kind of care it has been given – really, anything you think the new owner would like to know. Once everyone has a chance to talk about their contributions, then the free-for-all begins.



Fellowship Hall
Arvada Church of Christ,
6757 Simms Street
Arvada

For every one item you brought, you are allowed to pick one item. (You might want to bring something to cart your new plants home.)

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Visit us online at www.colowatergardensociety.org

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GET WET! whets appetites for upcoming season.

By Jim Arneill

On Monday, April 20 about 60 water gardeners (all anxious to start the ponding season) convened at Gates Hall in Denver Botanic Gardens to enjoy a program on container water gardens and planting lotuses. The program also included updates from DBG Water Garden Curator Joe Tomocik and the latest information about 2009 CWGS events and activities.

With door prizes and the opportunity to purchase lotuses thrown in, those in attendance seemed to feel the evening was very worthwhile. Thanks to everyone who made time for the event, and welcome to all you newcomers who also signed up to become new CWGS members!

Cyndie Thomas deserves special thanks for her wonderful presentation on container water gardens. Cyndie's powerpoint was very detailed, covering subjects that ranged from recommended plants to making your own container garden from basic parts and materials. It was fun to see the many beautiful pond plants that will be growing in our ponds soon. And Cyndie explored some clever ideas by which we can all add new water features, even in limited space.

Thanks, also, to Joe Tomocik and Bob Hoffman for sharing their time, effort, and expertise. Joe had helpful insights on water gardening, and he updated us on

current construction at the Gardens, while Bob gave a practical demonstration on planting and taking care of lotuses.



Club President Vicki Aber welcomes a full house to Get Wet 2009 - Gates Hall

Thanks to:

Arapahoe Acres
Highlands Garden Center
Jared's Garden Center
Nick's Garden Center and Farm Market
Rocky Mountain Koi Club
Rocky Mountain Waterscape
True Pump and Equipment

Many in the audience decided that it was a great time to grow a new lotus, and nearly every lotus ordered for the sale was purchased following the program! Besides developing large, stately, plate-sized leaves, with luck these plants will also produce large, beautiful blossoms throughout the summer. We still have a few lotuses. Interested in purchasing one? Contact Vicki Aber at 303 423-9216.

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Focus On:



Article by
Bill Powell

Photo courtesy of
the Missouri
Botanical Garden

Pickerel Weed (*Pontederia cordata*)

Pickerel Weed placed first in the hardy marginal category of our "Plant Election" last year.

An emergent aquatic perennial that's indigenous to waterways and bogs in zones 3 through 10 of eastern North America, Pickerel Weed is a vigorous grower. The plant typically reaches heights between 2 and 4 feet, and it tends to colonize in clumps that can be up to 2 ft. in diameter. Its common name is believed to have derived from the favorable environment the clumps provide wild fish fry, including Pickerel.

Pickerel Weed is sometimes confused with *Sagittaria* because of a similarity of habit and leaf shape. Pickerel's foliage is green and is heart/lance-shaped with a distinctive swirling habit. A leaf can be five inches wide and seven or more inches in length.

Although grown for its handsome, clumped foliage, pickerel also provides prolonged color in summer. Tiny tubular flowers pack densely along erect spikes that extend 1 to 2 feet above the water. The flowers are usually a soft blue. More rarely in the wild the bloom may also be white.

The bloom period can extend from June until October. "Flowers give way to starchy seeds with distinctive toothed ridges. Flower spikes droop after bloom, releasing the distinctive seeds into the water. Seeds are edible off the plant or can be dried and added to granola cereals. Very young leaves can be used as salad greens."¹ There are, however, reports that some people are allergic to parts of the plant, particularly the pollen.

Pickerel Weed is a favorite of water gardeners and is customarily sold at the CWGS Plant Sale in June. The Water Plants Division will be offering a white-blooming cultivar 'Alba' at the DBG May Sale. (The sale will be underway just about the time you're reading this – May 8 and 9.)

PROPAGATION AT A GLANCE:

- Emergent aquatic perennial
- Prefers full sun
- 2 to 4 feet tall, up to 2 ft. wide
- Primarily grown for large green foliage
- Purple bloom stalks
- Edible seeds and young leaves
- Habitat for damselflies and dragonflies

So we "Got Wet" Now What?

...Some thoughts from
Vicki Aber, CWGS President:

Our spring storms have really greened up the lawns and got perennials going. All the rain and snow topped-off the ponds, and then the warm spells got the pond plants reaching for the sun and the fish begging for food.

It's time to get busy cleaning debris out, getting filters running, and dividing over crowded plants. ...But wait! Don't compost those extra plant sections. Bring them to the plant swap on May 18th. (See the article on the front page of this newsletter for details.)

Our annual kick off event "Get Wet" was great as usual. We enjoyed interesting speakers. Representatives from local

garden centers and vendors joined us. The Rocky Mountain Koi Club hosted an informational table, and we held a very successful lotus sale. Read Jim Arneill's article on page 3 for more about the event.

Thank you to everyone who helped to make Get Wet 2009 happen. Special thanks to the tireless Jim Arneill for pulling it all together!

The lotuses went like hot cakes. We sold out of many of the small varieties early. My apologies to anyone who didn't get their first choice.

We do have a few of the larger lotus varieties left - namely Red Scarf and Lavender Lady. If anyone would like to purchase one of the remaining lotus plants, give me a call at 303 423-9216. Or, look for them at the Club's June plant sale.

Now get outside and get to work!

Link to Events:

A calendar of non-club water garden related activities

May 8/9	Denver Botanic Gardens Plant Sale	www.botanicgardens.org
May 16	Rocky Mountain Koi Club Auction	www.rmkc.net
July 18/19	Rocky Mountain Koi Club Tour	
July 25/26	Pikes Peak Pond Tour	www.ppwgs.org
Aug 8/9	RMW Water Garden Tour	www.rmwaterscape.com
Aug 22/23	Colorado Parade of Ponds	www.brdlandscape.com

CWGS-sponsored activities are listed in the club calendar on the outside of this newsletter.

Focus On:



Article by Bill
Powell

Canna 'Cleopatra'
Photo courtesy of San
Marcos Growers

The family Cannaceae

Canna 'Cleopatra' and 'Canna Australis' were co-winners in the Plant Election's tropical marginal category.

The family Cannaceae contains only one genus – Canna. Although sometimes informally called canna lilies, cannas are not related to lilies of any description. Cannas' nearest relatives are gingers, bananas, and heliconias that are in the order Zingiberales to which Cannaceae also belongs.

Cannas are natives of the new world. Wild Cannas are indigenous to the tropics, but the plant has been so successfully hybridized for temperate zones that it's now more associated with North American summer borders and patio containers than with the tropical savannas where it originated. About twenty flowering species of Cannas exist from which countless

hybrids and cultivars have been developed. However, at least one species has agricultural importance as a food source.

If you see the term "water canna," you might naturally think that certain species of cannas are aquatic, whereas others are terrestrial. That's not strictly true. As Cyndie Thomas pointed out in her presentation at "Get Wet" this past month, all cannas are pretty much biologically identical. Some hybrids, it's true, are the result of crosses with *C. glauca* and *C. flaccida*, two naturally-occurring species that have adapted to near-aquatic conditions in the wild.

Propagation at a glance:

- Tropical – hardy to zones 7-10
- Full sun best for bloom
- Generally 2 to 6 ft. tall and 2 to 3 feet wide
- Immerse under no more than a few inches of water or grow as bog plant

Author Sue Speichert writes that "in the early 1970's, Dr. Robert Armstrong crossed *Canna glauca* with terrestrial canna hybrids."² The offspring became the basis of the famed "Longwood hybrids," a collection of cannas that are as well adapted to water as their parent *C. glauca*. Nevertheless they, like *C. glauca* and more dry-land-loving cannas, are all capable of growth in water or on soil. Some thrive more than others in immersion, but apparently any of the terrestrial cannas may adapt to water given the right conditions.

To adapt an ordinary canna to water, Cyndie Thomas recommends that the introduction be incremental and that the plant be growing vigorously before attempting immersion. Some plants will make it; others will rot.

Or...you could just stick with hybrids that are known to be more water tolerant. First place winners 'Cleopatra' and 'Australis' are good choices.

Canna "Cleopatra" grows to about 4 feet in height and has showy, and unpredictable, blooms. It's often described as having predominantly yellow blossoms with red blotches and streaks, but sometimes a quarter of the bloom may be red with reverse yellow mottling. The leaves are large and mostly apple green.

C 'Australis,' (sometimes called Australia) on the other hand, is grown in great part for its unusual foliage. Slightly shorter than 'Cleopatra,' 'Australis' is nevertheless eye catching because of its dark burgundy/bronze leaves. And...it has very attractive red flowers.

Historically Cannas have been among the showiest and easiest of flowering plants. Their popularity as terrestrial borders and pot plants diminished during the middle half of the 20th century because of over-planting.

However, Robert Armstrong's success at Longwood with the so-called water cannas has revived interest in the genus. Recently, though, a virus (Canna yellow mottle

Disease) has begun to cause problems within certain commercially grown hybrids and collections. There is no current treatment for the disease, except to avoid and destroy infected stock.

Both of these Cannas – and many others – are likely to be marketed by DBG and CWGS. This year the Water Plants Division is selling C. 'Australia' at the DBG May 8/9 plant sale.

References:

for both articles on pickerel weed and canna:

- 1 Quote from Kemper Center for Home Gardening, Missouri Botanical Garden.
- 2 Quote from Sue Speichert, 1998

BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2009:

May 17, 1:00 PM – Weber residence
June 28 – location and time TBD
July 19, 1:00 PM – Lange residence
Aug. 16 – Denver Botanic Gardens, time TBD
Sept. 20, 1:00 PM – Oleson residence
Oct. 18, 1:00 PM – Weber residence

Club members are welcome to attend

TREASURER'S REPORT

Balance as of April 1
\$16,213.67

Chinampas

"Floating" Gardens of Meso - America

by Bill Powell



Left: a tourist boat plies the waters of Xochimilco's "floating" garden of flowers.

Right: the corner of a working Chinampa. Note the boundary trees.



Before the arrival of Europeans, even before the rise of Aztec culture, the Xochimilco people of Mexico's great central valley developed a unique strategy for food production. Exploiting the large shallow lake that surrounded and extended southeast from today's Mexico City, the indigenous people created fertile agricultural land out of almost nothing using sticks, weeds, and pond muck. In the process they generated an infrastructure that eventually supported the agricultural and food delivery needs of the Americas' first truly metropolitan civilization.

Remnants of these agricultural "floating islands" are still in use today. Their modern name "Chinampa" is derived from Nahuatl, the native tongue of the Xochimilco. "Chinamitl," as "Chinampa" are called in Nahuatl, means a weaving of reed and sticks. The reference is to wattles (woven panels) the Xochimilco people fashioned from reeds and native willow branches.

The Chinamitl wattle panels were installed vertically in the shallow lake water as a submersed fence, staking an area to be developed. "The fenced-off area was then layered with mud, lake sediment, and decaying vegetation, eventually bringing it above the level of the lake"¹

The fences served several purposes. They identified the area being developed by a particular group, they formed the bulkhead to contain infill, and they defined the canals that were formed between islands. The canals, in turn, provided access for transporting materials and crops; they served as the hydraulic sluice for irrigation; and they buffered temperatures in the fields.

Over time the name for the wattle fences was broadened to include the islands themselves. By the pre-Columbian Middle Postclassic period (1150 to 1350 AD), Chinampas were widespread and productive. Impressed by the high levels of food production, the Aztec empire quickly expanded to seize the Chinampa. It's speculated that the high level of agricultural production that the Chinampa made

possible was a major contributor to the sophisticated social structure and scale of the Aztec city-state. By the time of the Spanish conquest, more than 20,000 acres of Chinampa were in production, feeding a population of more than 200,000.²

Although Chinampa are often called "floating islands," it seems unlikely that they ever really floated. The infill of vegetation may have floated initially, but water-logging and the overburden of soil and lake sediments must have produced a bog at best. Consolidation of the infill to the point that it could have supported agriculture would have forced the materials to the lakebed, producing a solid, if wet, column - not a floating mat.

A characteristic of Chinampa is a tree boundary of native willow (ahujotes). Trees dot the edge of the islands at regular intervals. Many histories report the willows were planted to "root" the floating island mats to the bottom of the lake. But recent forensic investigations by Philip Crossley, Ph.D. suggest that the trees served other purposes.

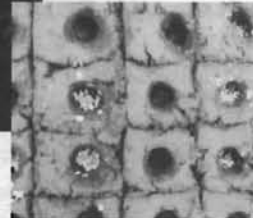
Crossley found that tree roots rarely penetrate to the lake floor so could not provide much anchoring if that were the intended purpose. The roots do, however, spread laterally, often crossing the roots of the next willow. The result is a kind of living perimeter basket that strengthens and prolongs the service of the original wattle bulkhead.³

The willow boundary trees offer another benefit: They are naturally somewhat fastigiated in form. Pruned to reinforce this habit and to eliminate overhanging canopy that could over-shade crops, the trees form natural windbreaks, further assisting temperature amelioration.



Left: overgrown Chinampa threaten the canal. Note the thick cover of floating plants.

Below: scored muck pots receiving seed.



Photos by Philip Crossley

Chinampa are tremendously productive even by modern standards. A field is capable of producing two or three crops per year. Certainly, enhanced fertility plays a role. The soil is regularly replenished through the application of muck from the lake floor and decaying vegetation gathered from the fields and the canals. (Lemna Gibba, a native duckweed, is a prolific water plant found in the lakes. It's traditionally harvested for application on the fields.)

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...continued from page 9

And of course the plants of the Chinampa have ample water. Indeed, natural sub-irrigation was long assumed to be one of the primary advantages of Chinampa, but Dr. Crossley's investigations suggest enhanced water infiltration is less important than the ameliorating effect of the water on temperatures in the fields.

A truly unique aspect of traditional Chinampa gardening is the use of muck planting pots to sprout seedlings. Muck scraped from the canal floor is placed in shallow earthwork forms and scored to produce individual blocks similar in size and concept to the biodegradable pots we buy today. Seed is placed in the center of each block. When the blocks solidify and dry and the seeds sprout, the blocks are pried up, separated, and moved to the garden for planting. (For those of us who are always wondering what to do with the muck we pull from our ponds in the spring cleanup, this recycling technique offers interesting possibilities.)

Contemporary Chinampa are still going ventures. Many of the older Chinampa in Xochimilco, now a suburb of Mexico City, have transitioned to raising flowers and entertaining tourists, but to the east, the agricultural community of San Gregorio raises produce – lettuce, cilantro, amaranth, radish, and squash - still feeding

the inhabitants of the Americas' largest metropolis.

Note:

The photographs of Chinampas were taken (with permission) from www.western.edu/faculty/pcrossley/chinampasofmexico/index.htm
Dr. Crossley's website offers many more shots of this fascinating agricultural "water" garden.

References:

1. Wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinampa
2. Transitions Abroad.com
3. "The Chinampas of Mexico" by Phillip Crossley, Ph.D., Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1999.

GET WET....Continued from page 3

For the first time at "Get Wet", we were joined by our sister organization the "Rocky Mountain Koi Club." The Club staffed an information booth at which CWGS members were able to read about Koi and ask questions of an expert in fish husbandry. Thanks so much!

Also, we're grateful for the support of local garden centers and pond businesses that attended the program. Since one of the purposes of "Get Wet" is to highlight the many resources available for the upcoming pond season, it was rewarding that so many knowledgeable staff people came and set up display tables showing the great products they carry at their sites. We hope you will visit these local vendors for your pond needs.

A final thank you to the CWGS board who came early to set up and manage the event throughout its process!

NOW SHOWING!

ON A COMPUTER NEAR YOU

*You may have noticed that after an absence, the CWGS website is back online.
It's reborn and still growing. Check it out!*

WATCH...our new web site as it progresses. New updates and improvements are being added on an almost daily basis!

BE AMAZED...at the new graphics!

BE INFORMED...by the email announcements that will keep you up on the club's events and locations!

SHOW OFF! Post pictures of your ponds. Tell us about your garden and introduce yourselves.

SHARE...items that you want to trade or share with other members!

LEARN! Pose your questions to a forum where we can all learn from the experiences of others.

READ ALL ABOUT IT! Peruse past and present newsletters posted for you to read and download.

MEET...and learn about other CWGS members!

SEE...many, many pictures of ponds and flowers and people!

ENJOY...the new CWGS web site unfolding now at:

<<http://www.colowatergardensociety.org>

*For more information on the new CWGS website now under development,
or to make suggestions, contact Bill Bathurst 303 421-1144.*

CWGS ANNUAL POND TOUR

...by Michael Weber, Pond Tour Chairperson

Saturday, July 11th will be here sooner than we think, and you know you would love to show off your pond to other club members. Now is your chance. We are trying to concentrate the tour to a limited geographical area to allow more time to view ponds and less time driving. This year we are doing the east side of the metropolitan area.

I would love to hear from pond owners on the east side who are willing to have their ponds on tour from 11 AM to 4 PM on Saturday July 11. Be aware that no one comes into your home. Access is only through your yard. The club will host a picnic after the tour has ended.

Participating in the Tour is fun and encourages you to spend some time sprucing your water feature up for your own enjoyment as well as the Tour. You can attend the Club plant sale on June 7th, buy some new plants, fix up your pond, show it off, and then have the rest of the summer to enjoy it! After all, isn't the Pond Tour a wonderful opportunity to stop procrastinating and make sure your pond has reached its potential?

We are looking for all sizes and type. No pond or water garden is too small to be on the Tour. Call Michael Weber at 303 758-8533 for a no-obligation discussion. ■

...May Plant Swap

...continued from front page

What if you don't really have any plants that are in need of dividing, and you have nothing to bring? Come anyway. Many people bring more than they take away, and there are usually plants left after everyone has had their pick. Left-over plants are available to anyone who wants them. Then you can grow those plants up and bring the excess to a future swap!

Your plants don't have to be potted. Bare root is fine, but do bring them in leak-proof grocery bags or buckets. Weather-permitting we'll be holding the swap outside on a balcony, but to access the balcony, the plants have to be carried through the building and across interior floors that we don't want to spoil.

For those of you who didn't make the March meeting, the Fellowship Hall of the Arvada Church of Christ is easy to find. It's just north of the intersection of 64th Ave. and Simms at 6757 Simms Street. From the parking lot of the ACC, enter the glass doors, cross the lobby, and walk up the stairs to the second floor. Turn right. The dining room is directly ahead at the end of the hall. We'll have signs pointing the way.

See you on the 18th for some good food and great plants! ■

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Water Plants Booth operating at the DBG Plant Sale

On May 8 and 9 at just about the time this newsletter arrives at your door, volunteers from CWGS will be operating the Water Plants booth at Denver Botanic Garden's 60th Annual Plant Sale.

Drop by for a wide range of hardy waterlilies, hardy and tropical marginals, submersed and floating plants, carnivorous plants, lotus, and water gardening supplies. This is your first chance, early in the season, to find such a complete selection in one location.

The Water Plants Booth offers both vendor-grown plants and some garden-grown selections that have the advantage of being acclimated to the locale.

We'll even have some modern floating islands in case after reading about Chinampas (page 8) you're tempted to try your hand at real floating gardens!

The Water Plant Division's list of sale plants can be found online at www.botanicgardens.org. And, of course, if you MUST buy some of those dry, ole' terrestrial plants, DBG's weblis lists them as well!

Bill Powell and Marge Oleson

How to access the DBG Plant Sale list:

Once on DBG's website, select "plan your visit" from the green interactive selection bar just under the banner. A menu will drop-down. Select "events & exhibits." Under "events & exhibits, select "Spring Plant Sale" from the interactive list of links in blue. That takes you to the website's section on the sale from which you can select "List of plants available at the Plant Sale."

Clicking on the list downloads a file in pdf. (Be patient, it may take a bit.) Once in the list, scroll down to page 28. Water Plants begin near the bottom of the page.

New and Returning Members:

William Bittman
Arvada, CO

Chris & Sue Blakeslee
Centennial, CO

Gary and Joyce Blubaugh
Lakewood, CO

Mary Brengosz & David Fifield
Aurora, CO *NEW*

Damon Ginnow
Lafayette, CO *NEW-ish*

Bill & Brinda Henley
Louisville, CO

Cathy Manley
Littleton, CO

Lois and Jeff Meinerz
Denver, CO

Jan & Dave O'Dell
Highlands Ranch, CO

Gary & Judy Reid
Boulder, CO

Dave & Theresa Rounds
Louisville, CO

Melissa & Joseph Shopnitz
Loveland, CO

Bill Swalling
Centennial, CO *NEW*

Chauncey Walden
Parker, CO

Jim Wohlenhaus
Westminster, CO

Vicki Aber
Arvada, CO

Mike and Vickie Pervich
Centennial, CO

Mary Purdy
Lafayette, CO

AZ Ponds & Supplies
Birdsboro, PA

Colorado Water Garden Society
1210 Clayton Street
Denver, CO 80206-3214

FIRST CLASS MAIL

This Year:

May 8/9: CWGS staffs the Water Plants Division, DBG Spring Sale

Monday, May 18:

**Plant Swap
& Pot Luck**

*6:00 to 8:30 PM, Fellowship Hall,
Arvada Church of Christ (ACC),
6757 Simms Street, Arvada –
North of Simms and 64th.*

Potluck dinner 6:00 – 7:00

Plant Swap begins at 7:00

June 7: CWGS Annual Plant Sale
9AM to 3PM, Hudson Gardens

June 28: Waterside Program
*2PM at the home of Terry and Keith
Grisham*

July 11: Pond Tour/Picnic
11 AM to 4PM, Picnic at 5:00

**Aug. 16: Water Blossom Festival /
Featured Speaker TBA**
*10AM to 3PM - program at 1PM
Denver Botanic Gardens.*

Aug. 30: Waterside Program
*2PM at the home of Doris and
Len Freestone*

**Sep. 21: Annual Meeting,
Elections, & Pot Luck**
6 to 8:30 PM, ACC, Arvada

Oct. 19: Program & Pot Luck
6 to 8:30 PM, ACC, Arvada

Dec. 7: Holiday Banquet
6 to 8:30 PM, ACC, Arvada