



# Annual Welcome Back Newsletter

Spring 2011, Edition 3

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## With a little help from our friends

Successful business are seldom built solely upon the hard work and cleverness of their owners (despite what we may tell you!). In that vein I will mention just a few of the many many people who have made this business a success.

The year we built I (Brian) got Mononucleosis about 75% of the way through our construction. I was incapacitated by it for a few weeks and as Ruth would gladly attest (you only have to ask) was not worth much for that time. At the same time we had an 18 year old high school student happen by looking for work. His name was Paul Green. It happened that Paul's Dad was a general contractor and he had taught Paul well. Despite his young age and the time constraints on a high school student he made a critical contribution to the establishment of our business.... Thank you Paul!

A larger group that helped us was a home-schooling support group that we met with periodically. One spring we had a health scare with our son and fell behind in our work. On a weekend in late April all of the sudden we had willing and able group pitching in to help us catch up with our transplanting. Not only was the work a God-send but the feeling of not being alone sustained us until we had news that our son was fine....

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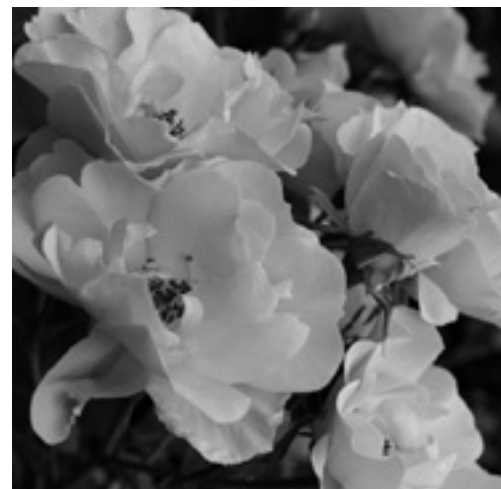
## Thirty years? Tell me it ain't so.

*"A man ninety years old was asked to what he attributed his longevity. I reckon, he said, with a twinkle in his eye, it because most nights I went to bed and slept when I should have sat up and worried." Garson Kanin*

So remarkably it has been 30 years since we started in the greenhouse business. It seems like only yesterday..... well no it actually seems like quite some time ago that we have had our nose to the grindstone.

Over the years we have made many friends in the greenhouse industry. One of the them was Bob Martin Senior of Martin Farms in Vineland. Their business was over 70 years old at the time that he suggested to me that the greenhouse business was like having a tiger by the tail.

I think Mr. Martin had the wisdom that only comes from doing something for a very long time. We now have the benefit of doing something for a very long



time (if not the wisdom!) and I think it has reinforced the lesson he gave us so many years ago. With time you see the patterns and one of the patterns is unpredictability. We continue to try and figure out the best way of executing the tasks we have to do each and every year

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## Thirty Years of Challenges

*"The secret to longevity is to keep breathing." Sophie Tucker*

Weather is one of the biggest challenges we face. Last year we had 4 frosts in a row with one of them being a very heavy frost just before Mothers Day. That made the first half of May dismal for sales. Justifiably people were scared to plant. What happened after that? We had the most perfect weather we have

ever had for the second half of May more than making up for the poor beginning? Predictable? No but it is an example of things seeming to work out.

As I write this we are in the middle of

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## Annual Talinum

One of my newest favourite annuals is Talinum. It is a member of the portulaca family so it shares portulacas tolerance to hot dry conditions. The variety we have has lime-green leaves that stay healthy all season long.

Talinum sends up a panicle style flower a bit reminiscent of coral bells. They are wispy delicate flowers that nevertheless stand up well to wind and rain.

Talinum will tend to seed itself producing seed very readily which you can easily save for the following year to start your own if you are so inclined.

The yellow leaves will be more intense if you give the plant a bit of shade but be sure to not give it to much shade or you will find them growing spindly and unhealthy.

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(help from our friends)**

Thank you to the group and organizer Janette.

It is hard to do the work if you don't feed the fires. Our friends caterers John Tomas and Patti Tomas were establishing a catering business in Toronto as we were getting established in our early years. We were the thankful recipients of literally van-loads of food arriving at the critical nearly starving stage for us in late April or Early May. Not only that but they would come for a visit in the long weekend in May usually with one of their staff tagging along.... not your standard visit....they rolled up their sleeves and pitched in in whatever way they could. Thank you John, Patti, Donald, Felix and Ali!

This list is only the tip of the iceberg and we have to say to one and all "we couldn't have done it without you!"

## Soil Mixes for container growing.

*"In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt." Margaret Atwood*

We often get asked soil questions. One of the common soil problems that gardeners have is with choices for container growing.

Growing plants in the restricted environment of a container has some challenges. Often people will use a mix heavy with topsoil in a container and this is a very bad idea. How could that be you might ask? Well temperatures and moisture levels in a container offer



vary quite widely, much more so then in the ground. These fluctuations create unique challenges for topsoil making it difficult to establish a proper environment for beneficial fungus and bacteria that help to establish soil structure.

For that reason it is important to provide a fairly high percentage of organic matter with a high fibre content like peat moss. Peat moss has the best water holding capacity combined with good porosity. This gives you the best chance of achieving a good balance of moisture

levels both for plants and for the establishment of a healthy soil environment.

Peat moss has a low pH. This can be an advantage if you are using well water that has a high alkalinity which is most of the water in the Kingston area. Your water will tend to raise the pH and the peat moss will tend to resist that. This is especially beneficial for plants like petunia that can start to suffer iron deficiencies when pH levels go to high.

On the other hand if you are using city water the alkalinity tends to be quite low and it does not have the same tendency to change the pH of the growing media. In that case you would have to add a bit of ground limestone to buffer the pH of the peat moss.

In order to provide nutrients you should include some compost in the mix. You should not overdo the compost since if it is well composted it will generally decrease the drainage of you mix. Something like 10 to 20 percent depending on how heavy feeders the plants are will be good. The compost provides a further benefit in the form of inoculation of the mix with beneficial fungus and bacteria.

If you don't want to go to the trouble of mixing your own mix then purchasing a "soiless" mix is a very good idea. They should have all the adjustments made with respect to pH and in the case of the mix we sell it has compost added as well.

*"The first day of spring is one thing, and the first spring day is another. The difference between them is sometimes as great as a month." Henry Van Dyke*

## Pesticide Ban

Many people are frustrated with the pesticide ban in Ontario. We aren't in that group. I have heard too many stories of careless application by home-owners, from wearing shorts and no respirator with toxic chemicals to adopting the philosophy of if a little is good more is better.

Of course many people would use pesticides responsibly. It is often impossible to know exactly what that means. One of the problems with applying any general insecticide is that you will kill the beneficial insects as well.....and there are many of them.

The true responsible use of any pesticide (organic or otherwise) is to assess exactly what is happening. Often times close observation will reveal that parasites or predators are working diligently in a population of pests in which case the better option might be to wait and let them catch up to the pest population and make your job easier.

If you can learn to enjoy the diverse ecosystem that your garden will become if allowed to then your gardening pleasure will be doubled. Not only do you get to enjoy the shapes, textures, colours and fragrances of the plants but you also get to enjoy the dynamic interaction of the insect populations that in many cases with just a bit of help can come into a balance to keep everyone happy.



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could have done something better.

Hindsight is 20-20 but another way of looking at this phenomena is that of culturing hope. That is one of the most important qualities to develop in order to succeed in the long term. Each year has to be approached in a hopeful and optimistic way and the feedback from the past is partly what allows you to do

that whether based on success or failure. The failures feed the changes that need to be made and the successes allow you to believe it is all worthwhile.



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one of the most dismal springs I can remember. It has been dark and rainy. The good thing is that everything is getting off to a nice slow start with no sudden starts and stops. We have often had a week or two of summer weather in March or April causing plants to think the season is farther

along than it is and then getting hit with cold temperatures to set them back. This year survival should be better than average and the bulbs will bloom at a more normal time. Maybe we will have tulips for Victoria Day weekend!

Anyone who is in retail hates the rain but for gardeners rain is seldom a bad thing. This year we will be going into May with excellent water reserves. I believe that if gardeners are successful in their efforts they are more likely to stay gardening and in the long run it is best for our business. That is why we try to give them as much assistance as possible and why unlike other retailers we happen to like the rain!

## .....One of the best parts!

*"I have found the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it." Harry S Truman*

One of the best parts for us having our own business and especially a farm business is that we have been able to be close to our children. In some cases that meant a playpen in a greenhouse, in others it meant plenty of car seats in a truck to make a deliv-

ery or pick-up. It always seemed like a gift to me to have them that close while we did our work. They saw what it was like for us to run a business .....hmm maybe that's the reason none of them want the business!



*"Advice on dandelions: If you can't beat them, eat them." Dr James Duke*

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for 10 dollars!~~

Available at our Odessa location only Bring  
in this newsletter to redeem your 20 dollars  
of plant purchases.

Limit of 1 per customer. Good until May 31



## SIX LOCATIONS FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE

Our plants are available at the greenhouse in  
Odessa, plus our five other convenient locations.

**1** *Burt's Greenhouses*  
539 Maples Road, Odessa  
613-386-3426

**2** *Grant's No Frills*  
1192 Division Street  
Kingston

**3** *Metro Bayridge*  
775 Bayridge Drive  
Kingston

**4** *Food Basics*  
1225 Princess Street  
Kingston

**5** *Marc's No Frills*  
211 Bell Boulevard  
Belleville

**6** *Hibert's No Frills*  
450 Centre Street North  
Napanee

member of

