



Prairie Originals

WILDFLOWERS
NATIVE GRASSES



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We are **Opening for the Season on Wednesday, May 12, MANITOBA DAY.**

See Map and Hours at the end of the newsletter. Please note that a new bridge is being constructed over the floodway at Lockport. If you come through Lockport the exit for Highway 204 has moved 2 km east on Hwy. 44 as shown on the new map. You can also get to us by going through Selkirk or by taking Hwy. 59 and 509.

My, what a difference a year makes! Last year at this time we were shivering in our toques. In contrast March & April in 2010 have been positively balmy. Our prairie areas and stock beds were all mowed before the end of March and flowerbeds around the house and shop were cleaned up in March too. We weren't wearing our toques either. In fact we were in our shirtsleeves. And then along came April showers to bring May flowers.

The flowers didn't even wait for May. The furry crocus buds were several inches above the ground on April 1st and began blooming around April 6th, a full 3 weeks earlier than 2009. I found a beautiful little poem about our prairie Crocus in a book called "*The History of Horticulture in Manitoba*".

MANITOBA'S FLORAL EMBLEM the "Prairie Anemone"

The snow is not yet gone
when on the roadside amidst prairie grass
so coyly smiling these harbingers of spring
"Prairie Anemones"
fair flowers of the prairie wind
that many call the crocus
proclaim the breaking of the bonds of icy winter.
"Prairie Anemones"
that Indians called "Ears of the Earth"
that the brown prairies had thrust up
to listen for the first faint rustle of the spring.
"Prairie Anemone"
a bit of golden sun
encased by petals of a mauvy hue
all wrapped securely with a silv'ry robe of finest fur.
"Prairie Anemone"
a fitting emblem of a province fair
pointing the way ahead
for better days for this our Manitoba.

By P.J. Peters



Note: The latin name for our prairie crocus used to be *Anemone patens*. It now has been reclassified and is called *Pulsatilla patens* ssp. *multifida*.

Gardening Saturday, May 8th

This is a gardening extravaganza that is becoming a tradition in Winnipeg. The day is packed full of informative workshops and 57 vendors will be there to inspire and tempt you with their gardening wares. I will be speaking at a 9 am workshop on Native Plants for Dry, Wet & Everything In Between as well as Native Plants the Deer Won't Eat. I will have a display there as well with frost hardy plants that can be planted immediately such as Three Flowered Avens & Crocus and dormant Swamp Milkweed plugs. If you don't know what plugs are, come and have a look. I will also have lots more seed available this year in small to larger packages. Seed is a lot cheaper than plants to cover the same area but you need to be patient because it takes longer before you are rewarded with flowers. Some varieties such as Black Eyed Susan, Coneflower, Goldenrod and Asters grow very easily from seed. You can start them indoors or scatter seed on bare soil at home or at the cottage.

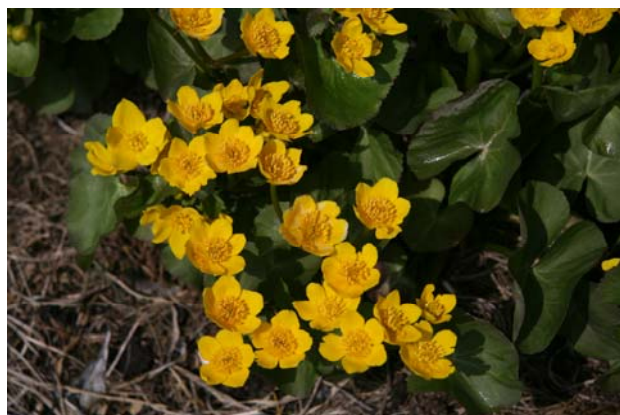


Gardening Saturday is put on by The Friends of Assiniboine Park Conservatory so for more information visit www.friendsconservatory.com.

What's Blooming Now?

Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* is a plant to lift your spirits in springtime. This year it began blooming around April 25th and will continue for 3-4 weeks. Its masses of brilliant yellow flowers are a feast for our winter weary eyes. The plants are usually only 20 cm high (8") when they begin blooming but by late May they often reach 50 cm (20"). This wildflower has a huge native range – North America, Europe and Asia. Because of this, it has lots of interesting common names. It is also known as Water Blobs, Bull's Eyes, Leopards Foot, and Water Dragon.

In the wild it is usually found in wet places such as steams, roadside ditches and the edge of lakes and ponds in the Parklands and Boreal forest region of the prairies. It grows very well in pots on a ledge in backyard ponds. A customer told me that for the winter he simply sets the pots on the bottom of the pond and the water in the pond freezes solid. Nothing can be simpler than that. Marsh Marigold doesn't have to grow in water though. I have several beds of it growing for landscaping and seed collection. These areas are a little wetter than normal. Our heavy clay soil holds moisture very well so if we happen to get a very long, dry spell the plants can be given a good soaking about every three weeks if you want. They are fairly forgiving of dry conditions later in the summer and will bounce back as nice as ever the following spring.



New This Year

Showy Mountain Ash *Sorbus decora* is a small native tree with attractive foliage that turns shades of rust and orange in the fall. It has flat clusters of white flowers in June and big bunches of red berries in summer. It grows 5 – 8 metres tall (15 – 25 ft.) in sun or shade. In the wild it generally grows as an under story tree amongst taller trees. It usually is in the form of a multi stem tree. It grows quite a bit in the Lac du Bonnet area as well as Whiteshell Provincial Park and Riding Mountain areas. A few years ago in Riding Mountain Park we saw a bear climbing one and reaching for the berries. We have lots of the Showy Mountain Ash in 4.5" pots now and will probably have some in 1 or 2 gallon pots later in the summer and fall.



Rhubarb – We have about 30 plants in 1 gallon pots at \$8.50 each. Our rhubarb always grew poorly in St. Andrews and with 4 or 5 plants I never got much to eat. Now I know that it was too wet. It just doesn't like wet feet. So when we moved to Selkirk 5 years ago I planted 11 plants in a higher, drier spot. Now they grow huge and produce a **lot** more than we need. Therefore I dug and divided two plants and offer them to home gardeners and Rhubarb aficionados. I know it isn't a native plant but it has a long history on the prairies. I think most settlers had rhubarb plants for sustenance and today many farms have them in their gardens. It deserves to be more widely planted in city gardens too. You only need one plant. Rhubarb is very easy to grow and lives a long time. It likes sun and dry conditions and thrives on neglect. It is a great way to eat local too. Just think of all the delicious things you can make with it – Rhubarb Crisp, Rhubarb Jam, Rhubarb Compote and our families favourite Rhubarb Pie with a canola oil piecrust. Mmmm, Good!

Bird & Butterfly News

The early season this year contributes to earlier sightings. A Milbert's Tortoiseshell butterfly was reported on March 31st. These butterflies actually over winter as adult butterflies so on the first warm days of spring they are out foraging for nectar. The Mourning Cloak butterfly (dark chocolate brown with creamy yellow edges on their wings) also over winters as an adult and starts flying early. I also saw lots of Junco's foraging on the ground for seeds the last week of March.

The last week of April the Goldfinches were back too.



Compost Tea

Many people already know the benefits of compost and now Winnipeg is being introduced to the benefits of Compost Tea. The article below by Dale Overton of ECO-TEA talks about the benefits of using organic fertilizers and compost tea. I will be using it on my container plants, stockbeds and gardens this year.

Exploring the Myths of Ecologically Sustainable Lawn and Garden Maintenance

There are many myths that an ecologically sustainable alternative to lawn and garden care is expensive, complicated and inefficient. I would like to take a moment to discount some of these myths.

First, it is a myth that organic fertilizers and amendments are more expensive than any other types of fertilizer on the market. Organic fertilizers will last much longer in the soil, becoming available to plants as they require them, providing the soil contains adequate organic matter. It may be that up front costs are higher, but over time you will require less input and maintenance.

Secondly, transforming to an ecologically sustainable program is not complicated. The program is simple: add organic matter to fuel aerobic soil microbes. Many chemically oriented management programs create poor soil conditions by killing beneficial soil microbes. Organic programs help to alleviate some of the nutrient related problems by increasing the amount of soil organic matter, creating a more suitable habitat for soil microbes. Further, there are many organic chelating agents, such as humic acid and fulvic acid which help to stop nutrients from leeching out of the soil. A healthy soil microbe population results in vigorous, healthy plants.

Finally, ecologically sustainable programs create a balanced ecosystem within the soil and this concept is simple. In a balanced ecosystem there are very few plant pathogens causing plant diseases and disease outbreaks are rare or of no great consequence. Furthermore, soil organisms help to improve soil structure and increase water holding capacity. This means you have to water plants less often, conserving time and money, while increasing yields and overall plant health.

How does this process work?

In order to understand how ecologically sustainable programs work we have to look at the soil food web, which is comprised of bacteria, algae, fungi, protozoa, nematodes to larger earthworms, insects and mammals. When chemical fertilizers or pesticides are added to your soil, many of these organisms will either die or migrate to more suitable habitats. In contrast, an organic program will stimulate microbial activity by introducing beneficial microbes and feeding them. In turn, these organisms make available to the plants the nutrients tied up within the soil organic matter. Further, many aerobic microbes will feed on plant pathogens keeping populations at bay. This results in fewer diseases like powdery mildew on your plants. The soil ecosystem is dynamic and robust and if we work with it we can save time and money on our lawns and gardens.

How can you enjoy the benefits of an ecologically sustainable lawn and garden?

- a) Add organic matter – worm castings and compost as a top-dress twice per season
- b) Add more nutrients – Kelp, emulsified fish fertilizer and other organic fertilizers
- c) Inoculate with beneficial soil microbes – ECO-TEA (or other aerated compost teas)
- d) Add all purpose organic amendments such as Humic Acid and Fulvic Acid

For more information go to www.eco-tea.ca

New Provincial Grass for Manitoba

After an educational and voting campaign last year the winner has been declared. The Provincial Grass of Manitoba is **BIG BLUESTEM**. This 120 – 180 cm tall grass (4-6 ft.) once covered a big part of the Red River Valley. It also grows in the southern Interlake and somewhat in western Manitoba where soil moisture is good. Manitoba is the northern limit for this prairie grass that also grows throughout the Midwestern U. S. all the way to Texas. It was an important food for the vast bison herds that once roamed the prairies.

It is a warm season grass, which means that it waits for the heat before it starts to green up and start growing. It greens up later than Kentucky Bluegrass lawn in spring (a cool season grass), however Big Bluestem stays lush and green during hot dry spells in summer without watering. It loves the heat. In late July the tall "Turkey Foot" seed heads reach for the sky and wave in the breeze for the rest of the season. It turns a beautiful bronze colour in the fall. Big Bluestem is a great plant to accent the garden giving it a prairie flair. It is also beautiful in masses if you have the space.



In addition to seeing it at Prairie Originals it can also be seen at The Forks by the Scotia Bank Stage and by the Old Spaghetti Factory, Bird's Hill Provincial Park, Living Prairie Museum on Ness in Winnipeg, Spruce Woods Provincial Park, Beaudry Park, Assiniboine Forest and the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve near Tolstoi.

Welcome

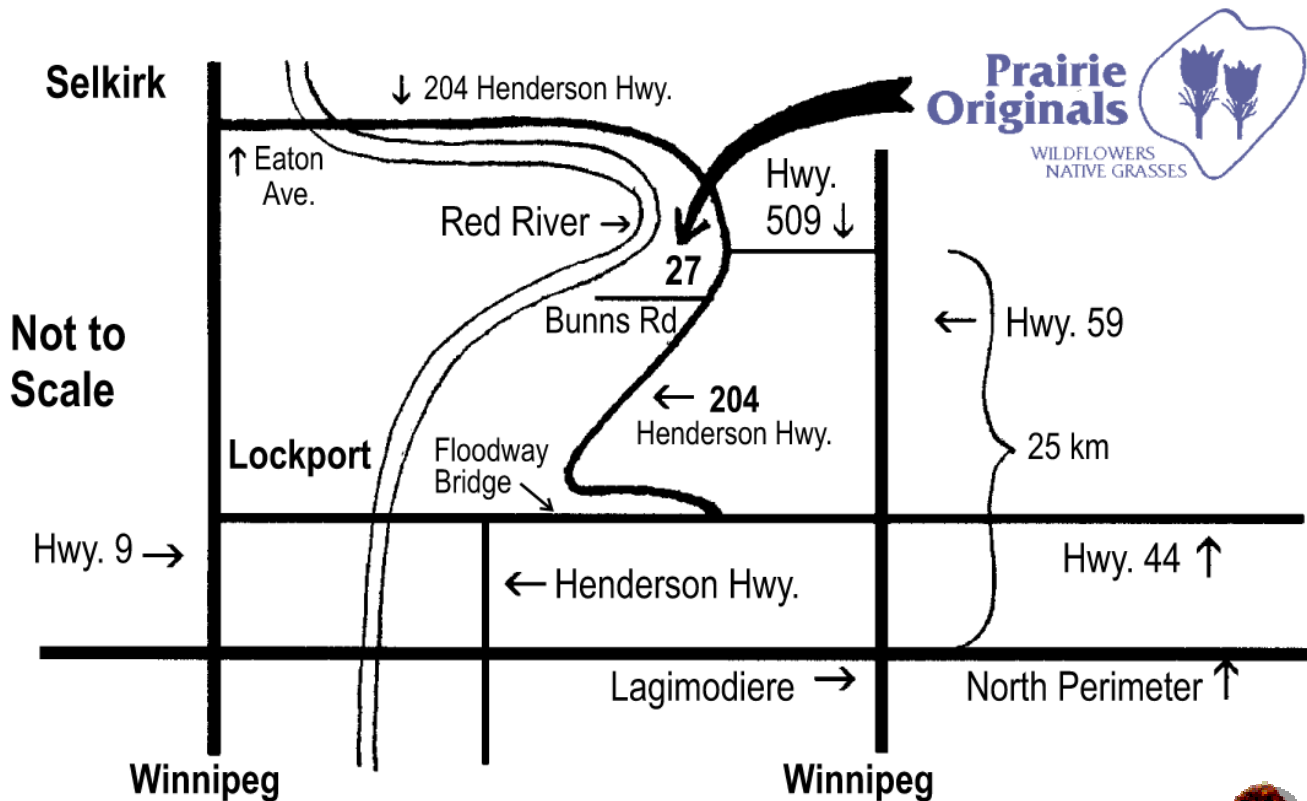
We offer a warm welcome back to Stefania Johnson, returning to Prairie Originals for the 3rd season. She returns from her Horticulture studies at Old's College in Alberta.

Also joining our team this year is Amy Jordan, a student of Envirotechnology – Land and Water Management in Brandon.



Until next time,

*Shirley Froehlich, Stefania Johnson
& Amy Jordan*



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HOURS

May 12 - June 25	Monday to Friday	10 am - 6 pm
	Saturdays	9 am - 5 pm
Evenings by Appointment	Sundays - until June 20	11am - 5 pm
July, August, September - Usually open Monday to Saturday but phone to confirm		

ST. NORBERT FARMERS MARKET

June 5 - late Aug.	Saturdays	8 am - 3 pm
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Located on Pembina Highway, about 1/2 km south of the perimeter.