

S l o a t



GARDEN CENTER

Gardener's Notebook

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News, Advice & Special Offers for Bay Area Gardeners

April 2003

Spring Gardening Issue



YOUR SPRING GUIDE TO GARDENING IN THE BAY AREA

Germination Station offers professional results

If you haven't experimented with germinating seeds you should consider one of our handy **Heated Germination Stations**. As you may know, many uncommon ornamental and vegetable plant varieties are only available from seed, so learning to use this product will expand your garden fun. Also note that many common plant varieties can be grown from seed too, making a greenhouse a very economical way to fill your garden with plants.

Using the Germination Station is simple. Just fill cells in the tray with **E.B. Stone Organic Seed Starter Mix** and moisten the mixture thoroughly. Plant two or three seeds per cell and cover with

a thin layer of mix. Next, water in your seeds, but do not soak.

Place the clear plastic dome on top of the tray and slip the **Heat Mat** under the tray and plug it in. The heat mat raises the rooting area temperature about 10 to 20 degrees and maintains an ideal temperature for seed germination and plant

growth. After germination, remove the dome and place the tray in a sunny window. When the seeds are well rooted (two - four weeks), remove the cell insert from the tray and place it in a shady area outdoors for two days to "harden off" the young plants. You are then ready to transplant into larger pots or directly into your garden.

It's just that easy, and a lot of fun for adults and children!



Gardening Guide

APRIL

PLANT

🌱 Load your garden with the season's most colorful plants. Just about everything we offer is budding or blooming!

🌱 Vegetable starts and seeds are in great supply now. Pick

up a mini greenhouse and start your seeds today.

🌱 Plan ahead and plant perennials and other specimens to fill your garden with summer color.

FERTILIZE

🌱 Use Sure Start with all new plantings to help them get established quickly.

🌱 Fertilize with **E. B. Stone Organics All - Purpose Plant Food** and **Citrus and Fruit**

Tree Food. See our staff for more plant-specific fertilizer recommendations. Use **Agricultural Lime** to improve vegetable crops, especially tomatoes.

🌱 Lawns are ready for some attention. Feed them with **GreenAll Pro Formula Lawn Food**.

PRUNE / MAINTAIN

🌱 Improving the quality of your soil should top your list of spring activities.

An optimal loamy soil balance promotes drainage, air and water penetration. Use **Sloat Loam Builder**, **Sloat Forest Mulch Plus** or **Sloat Planting Mix**, which are custom blended for Bay Area gardens.

🌱 Control pests before they gain control of your garden using the latest environmentally smart techniques and products. Release ladybugs, green lacewings and other beneficial insects to prevent pest damage to your plants.

🌱 Continue the war on destructive snails that ravage gardens by night and hide during the day. **Sluggo Snail Bait** works great and is the perfect non-toxic alternative to products containing Metaldehyde.

🌱 Prune azaleas and camellias after they bloom.

🌱 Spray fruit eliminator on ornamental olive, crab apple and other trees where you'd like to prevent the formation of unwanted fruit.



Great "green" pest defense for flowers and more

When you look to stock your garden shed or shelf with the essential fertilizers, pest controls and tools for another season of gardening, you'll most certainly want to add a powerful and organic pest remedy that will protect just about every flower, shrub and tree in your garden.

Whether you are growing roses or not, **Greenlight Rose Defense**, is one of the best products we've ever offered to help Bay Area gardeners control aphids, white flies, scale and other common pests.

Perhaps someday Greenlight will consider changing the name of its product to "Flower Defense" or "Garden Defense" to more accurately describe the benefits of this excellent product. In the meantime, we hope you'll think of it as a multi-purpose pest control.

Greenlight uses neem oil, which is an extract from the neem seed. It acts as a natural insecticide, fungicide and miticide. It can be applied with a hose-end sprayer or with the handy spray bottle shown above. Apply it every seven days once a problem has occurred, then just twice a month to keep pests from returning.



Grower's tips for a bounty of basil

There is nothing quite like a big basil patch in the garden! The fragrance, the beautiful foliage, and, of course, the pleasure of harvesting this flavorful herb for pesto dishes, salads, and to season tomatoes, fish, poultry and other foods.

Most gardeners are assured of a reasonable (and tasty) measure of success when planting basil, but as our grower Jason Wildman of Wildman Farms in Santa Rosa points out, there are ways to maximize your harvest and avoid common problems.

"Basils are warm weather plants and are even more frost and cold sensitive than tomatoes," says Wildman. "While the plants are getting established, pay attention to the weather, especially if you plant in early spring. If it looks to turn cool, consider trimming up milk cartons so they can be placed over and around your young plants to protect them on frosty nights."

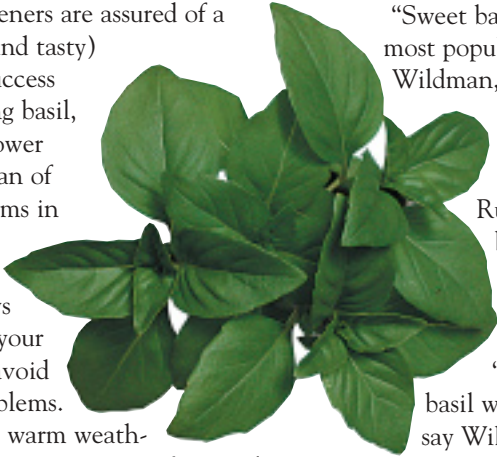
Wildman also recommends mulching your beds in the early going to protect plant roots and to help retain heat and moisture.

"Basils love full sun," says Wildman "and the more they get, the better they grow. The important key to success is to water them deeply as opposed to giving them regular light waterings. Deep watering will give you big leaves and plants, while overwatering will encourage a common disease called Fusarium Wilt, which causes stems to brown, leaves to wilt and the plant will often topple over and die."

Like other herbs and plants, a loamy, well draining soil is the optimal growing environment and can head off overwatering and other potential problems. Wildman suggests considering a raised bed for your basil as the ultimate home for your plants.

Finally, you'll want to prevent your basil from flowering or bolting, which

Sloat tip: When first planting, use E.B. Stone Sure Start to get your basil established quickly, then fertilize your basil patch at least once during the growing season with a complete fertilizer such as E.B. Stone All-Purpose Fertilizer.



means that the plant is going to seed. This is accomplished by pinching back any flowers and offering the plant consistent watering. (A mini drought often triggers a plant's internal clock and begins the flowering/seed cycle.)

"Sweet basil is far and away our most popular variety," says Wildman, "but there are plenty of other varieties that you should consider. "At a minimum, try our Red Rubin, which is a purple basil that tastes just like our sweet basil. It can add a little color interest to your meals.

"Genovese is a smaller leaved basil with a more intense flavor," say Wildman, "It's a favorite of restaurants and chefs. Thai basil is great for cooking and has a spicy flavor that is extremely popular."

Perhaps Wildman's best advice is that "you can never have too much basil growing."

While four plants is a nice start, 20 plants or more will insure a bounty of basil that will keep you, your family and friends in culinary heaven!

Hands down, West County are the best gardening gloves around!

Take a look at what kind of gloves our nursery staff is using these days... especially our most experienced nursery professionals. Many, if not all are now donning West County Gloves, the new glove line we introduced just six months ago.

No one dictates which brand of glove our staff must use and you can bet the daily work at Sloat demands a superior set of gloves. The fact that so many of our professionals have made the West County choice is strong testament to their value.

Here's why these gloves are so hot:

1. Washable. When they get dirty, just



Soils Products to Super Charge Your Spring Garden

If you'd like to enjoy the most successful (and easiest) year of gardening ever, make a commitment to getting and keeping your soil in tip-top shape with Sloat Planting Mix, Sloat Loam Builder and Sloat Forest Mulch Plus.

Each of these soil products has been custom blended to amend and improve the dominant soil types found in the San Francisco Bay Area. By using these products, you'll increase plant

performance and improve soil structure, moisture retention, aeration and water penetration. These soil products are especially effective in taming heavy clay soils and holding nutrients in your soil.

Only at Sloat Garden Centers



throw them in the washing machine. Starting your gardening (or nursery) tasks with a clean pair of gloves is nice!

2. Lightweight and soft. The increased dexterity of these gloves compared to a stiffer leather or pigskin glove is dramatic. It makes it easier to do a variety of garden (or nursery) tasks.

3. Strong. While soft and nimble, these gloves have reinforced fingertips (front and back) and a padded palm.

4. Functional. The gloves feature an adjustable cuff to keep dirt out and a terrycloth brow wipe. Two smart (not gimmicky) ideas that our staff appreciates.

5. Style. The gloves are good enough that style isn't critical, but West County Gloves come in some eye-catching colors.

Pick up a pair today, we love them and think you will, too.

Herbaceous peonies: Knock-out flowers for your garden and vases

It's no wonder peonies have captured the hearts of gardeners, florists, and entire cultures. With large, beautiful and often fragrant flowers atop long elegant stems, peonies are not only standouts in the garden but make gorgeous bouquets!

Peonies were first coveted and cultivated by the Chinese some 2,500 years ago. The easy-to-grow plant reigned in China as "the queen of flowers."

Peonies, like many other exceptionally beautiful and interesting plants, have a rich history of pleasing all who come in contact with them, influencing art, and even providing medicinal benefits.

If what they say is true about peonies,



Festiva Maxima

Paeonia x 'Red Charm'. This early bloomer keeps on flowering late into spring. Big, bushy and versatile, Red Charm will reward you with its fast growth and plenty of huge double red blooms.

Paeonia x 'Sarah Bernhardt'. Heady fragrance and a wonderful color combine to reward the gardener. The huge, apple-blossom-pink blooms and big bushy structure make it an ideal specimen plant to be brought into focus in any garden.

Photo: MONROVIA



Sarah Bernhardt

Photo: MONROVIA

rich, loamy soil. If you need help getting your soil in shape, please check with Sloat's staff for guidance on soil products and amendments which are specifically formulated for conditioning Bay Area soils.

Plant peonies about 3 to 4 feet apart. They make excellent border plants and combine well with roses. After flowering, the foliage stays glossy green, then turns purple or gold in fall.

Here are a few varieties to look for at Sloat this spring:

Paeonia x 'Festiva Maxima'.

This peony with flowers that are pure white with exotic red flecks, has a rich fragrance

making it an ideal cut flower or a plant to locate near well-travelled areas. The

beautiful double flowers bloom in late spring over a long period.

You'll find that Festiva is a rapid grower with attractive dark green foliage.



Shirley Temple

Photo: MONROVIA

Paeonia x 'Shirley Temple'.

Outstanding, double white blooms that are blushed with a hint of rose pink are the attraction of this hardy perennial. Shirley Temple is ideal in a perennial or shrub border, or as background for spring bulbs.

Paeonia x 'Felix Crousse'. Huge, double carmine-red blooms are displayed on the bold, erect stems of this clumping perennial. A stunning cut flower and an excellent candidate for borders.

Peony Plant Profile

General: Member of the Ranunculaceae family.

Flowers: Early spring to late spring depending on variety.

Size: Fast growing to 1 1/2 to 3 feet with similar width.

Sun: Full sun, minimum of 4 to 5 hours sun each day.

Soil: Well-draining soil with some rich compost material. Plant 3 - 4 feet apart.

Water: Regular watering - when top 3 inches of soil is dry.

Fertilize: Fertilize with E.B Stone Rose and Flower Food but do not over fertilize as it can weaken stems and reduce flowering.

planting them in your spring garden will not only raise your passion for gardening a few notches, but if you believe their medicinal history, they'll help you ward off bad dreams, cool your blood and relieve your pain.

To grow peonies successfully in the Bay Area you'll need to place them in full sun. They will also require a

Wisteria and lilac: plants that really make scents

For many gardeners choosing plants is as much about following their noses as it is about following their eyes. With wisteria and lilac, you're clearly following both. Wisteria and lilac are magnificent plants whose attributes and growing characteristics have resulted in rich horticultural

histories. When you learn more about these two plants, chances are you'll be ready to start a history of wisteria and lilac in your garden, too.

Wisteria sinensis (Chinese

wisteria) and **Wisteria floribunda** (Japanese wisteria) are the most common wisteria varieties. You've no doubt seen



Japanese Wisteria

Photo: MONROVIA

Wisteria Plant Profile

General: Member of the *Fabaceae* family (pea family.)

Flowers: April - May.

Size: To 25 feet.

Sun: Full sun or partial shade.

Soil: Prefers moderately fertile soil with a neutral to slightly acid pH of 6.0 - 7.0.* Tolerate other soil conditions, but soil should not dry out completely.

Water: Give water regularly when young to help plant get established, less for older plants. One inch per week is recommended.*

Fertilize: Keep new plants well fed to stimulate growth - not flowering. Try E.B. Stone All Purpose Fertilizer. Established plants do not need fertilizing unless they look poor as this may prevent flowering.

them growing in the Bay Area and an easy way to tell them apart is by their spectacular flowers. Chinese wisteria have 6 to 12 - inch flowers that bloom all at once for a spectacular display. Japanese varieties have 12 to 18 inch flowers that open gradually from the base of the flower cluster.

Wisterias are powerful growing plants and a "firm hand" is recommended when growing them. Wisterias are vigorous climbers with twining vines which can easily overwhelm a garden, dislodge shingles, and even pull down weak support structures. But it is this growth habit and ability to cover arbors, trellises, and pergolas with attractive foliage and flowers that make wisterias so wonderful.



Sensation

Photo: MONROVIA

Lilac Plant Profile

General: Common lilac, *Syringa vulgaris*, is a member of the *Oleaceae* family (Olive family).

Flowers: Most May.

Size: Varies with species. Up to 20 feet tall and wide.

Sun: Full to partial sun.

Soil: Alkaline soil (add lime to acid soils).

Water: Regular watering to establish deep root system in first year. Increase water before spring bloom.

Fertilize: Feed with an all purpose fertilizer such as E.B. Stone All-Purpose before spring bloom.

In a great little article about wisteria in *Horticulture Magazine* back in 1991, the author noted that in the early 1900's Berkeley architect Bernard Maybeck designed structures specifically to support wisteria. Today his idea is repeated all over Berkeley, which is a strong testament to both the plant's potential in the landscape and its longevity.

Wisteria vines can grow to 25 feet and be trained to follow the lines of a trellis, arbor, or fence, or can be allowed to climb trees as they do in the wild. Wisterias can also be grown as trees with proper pruning. When sited correctly (see plant profile), wisterias will provide years of beauty as they bloom each spring.

The common **lilac**, with its legendary fragrance, was so popular when introduced to Britain and the rest of Europe in the 1500's that the plant was easily found in all of the plant connoisseurs' gardens within a very short time. Its proliferation was so rapid that apparently no one could identify exactly where the plant originated. In 1828, naturalist Anton Rocher answered the question by discovering the first wild plants growing in the Balkan Peninsula, an area in southeast Europe bound by the Black Sea, the Sea of Marara, the Aegean, Mediterranean, Ionian, and Adriatic seas. Other lilac varieties were also discovered growing in China and Korea.

Today, lilacs are as popular as ever. They bring on the fragrance and color typically in the month of May when 10-inch clusters of flowers appear. While most lilacs require a full chill during winter in order to bloom, hybrids such as 'Lavender Lady' and 'Blue Skies,' 'Sensation,' and 'Angel White' were bred in Southern California to accept mild winters and perform beautifully in the Bay Area.

Both wisteria and lilac create atmosphere in your garden. Our staff is ready to help guide you on selecting varieties for your landscape and to help you start a successful history of beauty in your garden with these plants.

* Ohio State University, Horticulture and Crop Science



Liquid Fence: a breakthrough solution for gardeners struggling with deer

There is some very exciting news for anyone who has been plagued by garden munching deer. A new product called

Liquid Fence has burst onto the scene and the stuff really works.

Customers who have tried it rave about its effectiveness. When you discover the desire, dedication, and intelligence that went into developing this easy-to-use product, it won't surprise you that this new product works so well.

Clarke Kaskie, the inventor of Liquid Fence, moved to the Poconos to retire back in 1980 and took up gardening. In a very short time this 78-year-old over-achiever who had

worked on everything from the Manhattan Project to nuclear medicine, had grown a magnificent display of plants to surround his house, including a beautiful vegetable garden.

Each morning Clark would notice more and more of his plants had been ravaged by deer and rabbits. Like most gardeners he turned to his local garden center and others for ideas and suggestions. Unfortunately, everything he applied had little or no effect on his problem.

Clark was not the kind of guy to shy away from a problem. He never gave up on anything in his life, and at the age of 78 wasn't about to start. Clark set up shop in his garage and began to experiment with different things. Clark knew he wanted to develop an animal repellent

that not only worked, but also was environmentally safe and free of any harsh chemicals.

Clark spent hours in his garage mixing different concoctions and testing them on his plants in his yard, although he had limited success. It wasn't until his third year that he had developed a product that he proclaimed to be fool-proof. For his final test he sprayed one pile of apples with his new invention and another pile was not sprayed.

The next morning Clark came out and witnessed what he called the "true test." The pile of apples that was not sprayed with his new repellent was gone, while the other pile that was sprayed with his repellent was not touched and remained untouched for many weeks.

At the age of 81, Clark wasn't too sure if he wanted to get involved in another business, but after several months of contemplation decided he would give it a shot. For anyone who has dealt unsuccessfully with deer, let's be glad he did.

The new product comes in various sizes and is sprayed directly on the plants when they are dry. In most situations a second application is done one week later and then once per month. For areas where the deer are very intensively working on your garden, he recommends applying his product once a week for three weeks, then monthly.

The product has a strong odor that you will be aware of when applying, however once the product dries it won't be noticeable to you. The product is also rain resistant and the application cycle assumes an inch of rain (or sprinkling) between applications.

This new deer remedy is sure to please many gardeners who have longed to grow plants that deer love. Try some soon!



Save your floors, decks and more with these new plant stands!

A quality plant stand can sure take the effort out of protecting your carpets, decks and other surfaces from moisture and dirt. Our garden accessory expert Bob Shelly has brought us what we think are the easiest-to-use and most durable plant stands you'll find anywhere.

The **Down Under Plant Stand** can be



adjusted for pots between 4" and 20" in diameter by simply trimming the modular sections of the stand. The hard plastic stands, which come in terra cotta or white, can accommodate containers weighing up to 500 pounds.

They also lift high enough that cleaning around a stand is possible without moving your plant container.

Check them out at all Sloat locations.

Fresh salad greens from your garden

If a wonderfully fresh salad ranks high on your favorite menu, you'll want to plan a salad garden this spring. It's so easy, and the great varieties of lettuce and other greens available are sure to keep your

pallet entertained! Salad and other greens can actually be grown year 'round in the Bay



Area. In general, they don't do well during the heat of summer, so many gardeners will take a break when things get hot, then start up again in late summer or early fall.

You'll be quite surprised at how fast lettuce and other greens grow. From the time you put them in the ground, you're just 25 to 45 days from an ultra fresh salad. (You will also enjoy how beautiful they look as their leaves unfold in your garden beds.)

A popular technique for growing greens is to stagger-plant the seeds every three weeks, especially if you intend to harvest an entire plant for a salad. Another popular home farming technique many people prefer is to plant many seeds at once and simply clip and snip the outer leaves of the greens as they mature while allowing the plants to continue to grow. This works very well and allows you to add a new plant every so often as needed

to keep your salad "factory" running at peak output.

The latest rage in the culinary world is **Micro Greens** which are essentially varieties of plants like Red Acre

Cabbage, Peppergrass Cress, China Rose Radish and Sawtooth Mustard which are grown only 1 - 2" in height before harvesting. You'll find the use of these micro greens

demonstrated on the top Food Network programs these days. They are used in salads, as garnishes on soups and entrees, in sandwiches, on crackers, in stir-fry, and in plenty of other creative ways.

Finding great seeds is the place to start and we'd like you to consider seeds from **Botanical Interests**. This company offers top quality seeds and mixes for vegetables and flowers and some great seed mixes selected by chefs and others. You'll want to consider **Lettuce Mesclun**, Q's Special Medley, which features a combination of Lolla Rossa, Oakleaf, Arugula, Mizuna and other varieties. There are two new **Micro Green** mixes introduced in October by Botanical Interests, **Spicy Mix** and **Mild Mix**, which you'll want to try as well.

Sloat's collection of seeds is extensive and you'll find plenty of tips from our staff in choosing and planting a successful garden.

Bon Appétit!



Sloat "Gardener's Reward" Membership is Growing and... Saving

If you haven't joined our free Gardener's Reward program, it's easy and the benefits are considerable.

For active gardeners who appreciate Sloat quality plants and gardening products, joining our free program will not only allow you to

earn Saving Certificates, but to enjoy free seminars and samples of selected plants and products.

There is nothing to lose and plenty to gain. For sign up information visit our stores or online at sloatgardens.com. Just follow the "Reward Program" link. **Sign up and use your card each time you visit Sloat!**



SLOAT SEMINARS

Attendance is limited. Please call ahead to the seminar location to reserve a seat. Seminar fee is \$5. (Gardener's Reward Program members are free.)

Deer Resistant Plants

Here are the priceless tips on how to foil those cute garden-munching deer so you can enjoy a beautiful and colorful garden. Presented by local horticulturist Leslie Patten.

April 3 - Mill Valley (Blithedale), Thurs. 6:30 p.m.

Maples, Rhododendrons & Azaleas

Join Sloat's Richard Avery when he discusses the many benefits of adding Maples, "rhodies" and azaleas to your East Bay Garden.

April 5 - Danville, Saturday, 9 a.m.

Hanging Basket Workshop

Learn to create lovely, hanging baskets to beautify your home and garden in this hands-on workshop given by horticulturist Elizabeth Finely. A \$25 materials fee (\$20 for Reward Members) is required. Limit 30 people.

April 5 - San Rafael, Saturday, 10 a.m.

Great Herb Gardens

Join Sloat's Joshua Muscat for secrets of growing a successful herb garden. Both aesthetically pleasing and tasty, an herb garden is a wonderful addition to any landscape.

April 6 - Larkspur, Sunday, 10 a.m.

Japanese Maple Pruning

Learn the basics of selective pruning for an elegant, natural look with local horticulturist Julie Gates. You'll discover how to maximize the health and aesthetics of these lovely trees.

April 10 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Color Bowl Workshop

Beautiful spring color bowls are always one of our most popular items. Learn to make them yourself in this hands-on workshop given by horticulturist Elizabeth Finely. A \$25 materials fee (\$20 for Reward Members) is required. Limit 30 people.

April 13 - Kentfield, Sunday, 10 a.m.

Organic Gardening

Learn the five basic rules of organic gardening along with the techniques that will have you growing wholesome food for your dinner table. Given by local expert Lisa VanCleaf.

April 24 - S.F. (Sloat Blvd.) Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Integrated Pest Management

Learn to effectively solve pest problems without harming yourself, your pets or the environment in this essential seminar given by local expert Annie Joseph.

April 27 - San Rafael, Sunday, 10 a.m.

Successful Container Gardening

Learn all the tips and tricks for creating and maintaining a container garden with Sloat's Linda Solinsky.

May 4 - Mill Valley, (Miller Ave.) Sunday, 10 a.m.

Nine Locations in San Francisco, Marin & Contra Costa

Richmond District
3rd Avenue between
Geary & Clement
752-1614
Sunset District
2700 Sloat Blvd.
46th & Sloat Blvd.
566-4415

Novato
2000 Novato Blvd. at
Wilson
897-2169
San Rafael
1580 Lincoln Ave.
just off Hwy. 101
453-3977

Larkspur
279 Doherty Drive between
Redwood High &
Downtown
924-7390
Kentfield
700 Sir Francis Drake at
Wolfe Grade
454-0262

Mill Valley
657 E. Blithedale at Lomita
388-0102
401 Miller at La Goma
388-0365
Danville
828 Diablo Road
(925) 743-0288

Open 7 days a week
8:30 am to 6:30 pm

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Department**
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Cut Flower Gardening Made Easy!

Every home needs a cut flower garden in order to bring the beauty of the season indoors where it can be further enjoyed!

Fact is, a cut flower garden is nothing more than a dedicated area in the garden where flowers that are particularly suited for bouquets are grown and harvested.

One of your only considerations is where to locate your cut flower garden.

Because you will be harvesting flowers, you'll be creating unattractive gaps or swaths in your garden beds. It is best,

therefore, to place your cut flower garden out of sight. No room for dedicated cut flower garden? Elizabeth Messick of **Blooms Nursery**, our grower of cut

successfully and serve your cut flower needs.)

Blooms has simplified selecting flowers for your cut flower garden this year.

You'll find special Blooms displays at all Sloat locations where special 4-packs of seasonal cut flowers are easily found and combined.

For April, you'll find varieties of the following cut flowers:

Ageratum, Celosia, Dianthus, Godetia, Larkspur, Helianthus and Snapdragons.

All cut flower varieties share similar characteristics including long stems, better than average vase life, and of course, remarkable beauty.



flowers, suggests simply tucking your cut flowers behind shrubs and other plantings in your garden where they may or may not be visible. (They will still grow

About this Newsletter: The Gardener's Notebook is published bimonthly by Sloat Garden Center for the education and enjoyment of Bay Area gardeners. Information is collected from Sloat's expert staff, current horticultural publications and Sunset's Western Garden Book. Send address corrections to: 420 Coloma Street, Sausalito, CA 94965.