

August E-Newsletter



Carolee's August E-Newsletter

The days since we closed for the season have been filled to the brim. A few days before our final day at the farm for this season, our grandchildren arrived from Germany. They are delightful and great help picking blackberries, watering, & helping in the kitchen. Once the farm closed, there were “Chutes & Ladder” afternoons in the gazebo with homemade lemonade, lots of “Tom & Jerry” cartoons, running the electric train, and rides on the golf cart. Of course, Wicca was in dog heaven with all the extra attention. While they played, I emptied the cold frame & made watering a faster process. We also did some weeding to prepare for a wedding in the gardens. Fortunately, the bride’s colors were brown and pink, so with lots of pink ribbons and some pink-flowering planters to go with the brown grass & shrubs, it was a great success!

Shortly after the kids left, we packed up the little cars and trekked to a MG car rally west of Chicago. I stopped for a brief visit with my internet friend, Brenda, the author of one of my favorite blogs, “Coffee, Tea, Books & Me.” If you’ve never read it, check out some of her entries. She’s an herb lover, a tea lover, and excels at stretching a dollar to make life more beautiful and a pantry well-stocked for any disaster. I find her blogs inspirational. See more about the gardens I visited below.

I’ve been collecting seeds and deadheading, but since I can’t water the gardens and I’m still concerned about lack of rainfall, I haven’t done any planting this month, which is quite unusual. I am going to start taking cuttings now that I’m done traveling for a bit.

Wabash Herb Fest

Look for my booth of plants & garden-related treasures at the Wabash Herb Fest on Saturday, Aug. 18th. I’ll be signing books and visiting with fellow herb-lovers in one of the small cabins. The event is held in historical Paradise Springs Park in Wabash, IN from 9-3. This year, you can take the free trolley ride from the Herb Fest to visit other sites, like Charley Gardens, with its formal & natural gardens, waterfall, labyrinth, maze and educational center or the Dr. James Ford Historic Home, or the Kunkel

Cruise-In Car show! There will be informative presentations in two locations throughout the day and more! For more information, contact the Wabash Co. Convention & Visitors Bureau (800)563-1169 or visit them on facebook.com/herbfestinwabash.

Garlic Harvested!

The garlic was ready to harvest early this year. No surprise there. Now it's curing in the shade inside the cold frame. That takes about six weeks, and then it's ready to store in mesh bags for the winter. I will have a few bags of our hardneck garlic to sell, so if you're interested, let me know, or see me at the Herb Fest (above.) I'll be planting mine the 2nd week of September.

A Quick Trip, but Packed With Fun!

My garden gadabouts were squeezed between events at David's GOF (Gathering of the Faithful) MG owners in St. Charles, IL. Despite all the road construction, which made travel frustrating, I was able to visit several interesting gardens and garden centers. The first day, I left right after breakfast to drive to Rockford, IL, choosing to use scenic back roads that lengthened the trip's time considerably, but made the drive more pleasant. It was a gorgeous "top down" day, although seeing some of the pitiful corn fields was saddening.



My first stop was the Klehm Botanic Garden, which began its life as a plant nursery in the 1920's and due to the love of exotic trees by the owners, grew into a 150 acre collection of amazing trees from around the world. Eventually, the property was donated to become the Klehm Arboretum and soon after that the Botanic Gardens were added. The planted garden areas are small, but well done and looked none the worse for the drought.



There's a butterfly garden, a rainbow garden, a maze with overview tower, amid miles of walking trails.



Next, I drove across town to the Midway Village Museum, a collection of 26 Victorian buildings that recreate small-town life in the early 1900's on 137 acres. Many of the visitors to this museum come just to see the original knitting machine from the Nelson Co., the creators of the long brown, white & red sock that became the famous "Sock Monkey." Tucked here and there among the restored buildings are the Heritage Gardens, filled with heirloom vegetables and flowers appropriate to the setting. I was delighted to see that a new planting of gooseberries and elders (the upcoming 2013 Herb of the Year) has been added to the village.

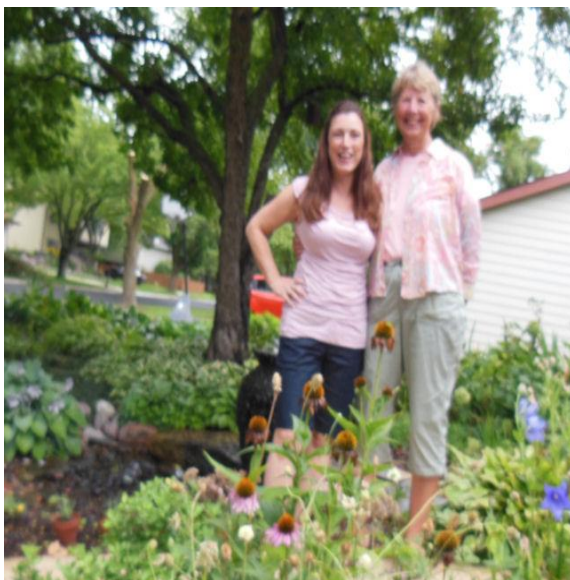
Returning to St. Charles, I stopped in the town of Geneva to visit several shops & garden centers. The Mossy Twig is a small shop packed with pots, shells, fairy garden items, a few succulents and bromeliads, and other gardening delights. Galena Garlic Company carries an array of gourmet items made with garlic, artisan sea salts, various oils and vinegars, salsas, tapenades, cookbooks and assorted décor items with a garlic theme. The Geneva Spice House grinds and blends spices from around the world.



I enjoyed the European feel of Sentimental Gardens, which disappointingly was much more store than garden. Large pots and statues abound, all artistically arranged and mixed with gardening books and other garden décor.



Just across the street, The PURE Garden more than made up for Sentimental Gardens' lack of plants with row after row of heirlooms, perennials, annuals and shrubs, all grown organically. A small shop offered fairy items, seeds from Baker Creek, soaps, candles, pots and other garden décor items.



The second day began with a wonderful visit with Shawna Coronado. Some of you may have attended her terrific presentation at our farm last year, or purchased her book, "The Naked Gardener." She's an advocate for gardening, organic food production, re-purposing, green living, natural products and healthy lifestyles. I was honored to have a personal tour of her garden, which entirely covers not only her front & back yards, but also a formerly neglected area along the street behind her house, which has fostered a running battle with town officials.



For beautifying an eyesore area, Shawna had to file ten-pages of forms, pay a fee, and battle lawyers. It's depressing that instead of applauding her efforts to encourage local food production & beautification, her town seems to be making both as difficult as possible. The produce mixed in with the flowers is all donated to the local food bank. Although her property is shaded by large trees, Shawna manages to grow an amazing variety of plants. This year, she partnered with Bonnie Plants to work on vegetables that grow in shade. As you can see, her unique gardening style provides eye-candy no matter where you look. Shawna regularly appears in gardening segments on Chicago TV, is a spokesperson for natural garden products, and has recently agreed to host web videos on gardening for Google! She's a busy, busy gal who's totally connected in the gardening world. Visit her website at www.shawnacoronado.com and check out her blog.



After touring her garden, we grabbed travel mugs of tea and headed off to the display/trial gardens at Ball Seed Corp. in West Chicago. Situated on 9 acres, it is a massive array of garden styles, containing thousands and thousands of the newest, hottest plant introductions in the country. We saw hundreds of hanging baskets and planters, planted walls, and lots more.



Ball Corp. is the owner of Burpee Seeds & Plants, and many other familiar plant/seed ventures and has opened their gardens to visitors for over 75 years.



Leaving Shawna, my next destination was Cantigny, the 500 acre estate of Robert McCormick (1880-1955), publisher & editor of the “Chicago Tribune”, WGN radio, and WWI hero. This property is just a delight, pushing its way into my “Top 5 Favorite Gardens All-Time”! It’s hard to explain the beauty of the plantings, the artistry in the design, the interplay of light, texture, and hardscape in words, and my photos don’t do it justice either. You just have to see it to believe it. I spent hours there, fearful that “the road not taken” as I made decisions to take the path right or the path left, would cause me to miss something magical. There are areas of brilliant color and serene, sheltered, subtle areas of soothing greens within the 29 acres of plantings. The Idea Garden is just that, a variety of small areas filled with ideas for planting combinations, container gardening, and more.



The Children’s Garden gives kids lots of opportunities to explore, learn, and play. The restored native prairie leads to a monument to WWI, and there is also a museum dedicated to the 1st Infantry Division,

where McCormick served during the fighting near Cantigny, France. I'd love to return to the garden on Aug. 12 for "The French Connection," when a replica of the Eiffel Tower, vendors, wine-tasting in the gardens and much more occurs.



The next stop was Midwest Groundcovers. I've seen the Midwest display at various conferences and trade shows, but this was my first visit to their operation. It was massive, efficient, and extremely impressive. Here's a photo of some of the orders that had been pulled for wholesale customers to pick-up. Next-door I browsed through the retail arm of the business, Natural Garden Natives, where I purchased several new sedums and photographed some of the dozens of new introductions I'll be ordering next season. (There's only so much room in a Solstice! Next trip, I go in the truck!) I tried to get a good photo of their display to support cancer research, but after setting up the pots three times on this windy day, I settled for this!



My last stop was Wasco Nursery, where they were holding their 2nd annual Pink Night, Breast Cancer Resources Fundraiser. There were lots of great door prizes, raffles, refreshments, pink plant specials and more, and I wish I could have stayed but after all, I should at least to make an appearance at the MG banquet.



On the trip home, we stopped for lunch at a quaint bakery & restaurant, Klein Brot Haus in Brookston, IN. The shelves were filled with loaves of freshly baked breads, cookies, pies, cakes, donuts and more. The aroma of cinnamon rolls being pulled from the ovens floated across the room as I devoured a Reuben sandwich on still-warm rye bread. Stop in if you're in the area, or visit their booth at the Zionsville Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings.

If you'd be interested in a bus trip to visit these inspiring gardens, let me know. If we have enough people, I'll start working on dates, prices, and an itinerary!

China Movie at Floriade

Last month, I reported on my trip to the Floriade, the world's largest horticultural show that is held once every 10 years in Europe. Countries from around the world participate in the event, which lasts from April through October. Each week, a different country is featured. When we attended, it was China's turn, so the elegant stilt dancers (shown in the photo at the top of this newsletter!) performed in the entrance area and young women in elegant Chinese traditional dress greeted us and gave us our "passports" to the event. In addition, the monstrous outdoor theatre featured a movie produced by China.

Now, let me backtrack a bit and explain. Floriade was being held in Holland. Just a few days prior, we had just attended the Keukenhoff, which is the premiere bulb garden and flower growing area of Holland. As part of that event, we had visited a presentation that explained that bulb growing is a huge, major part of Holland's economy, nearly 80%! Once you've seen the fields, the many bulb companies, the flower markets, the giant shipping facilities and heard how it contributes to the tourism industry, you understand how vital it is to that country's very existence.

So, imagine how surprised we were to watch the Chinese movie that basically said, "We are going to bury you!" Those were not the words, but that was the message. The entire film depicted how China is spending millions of dollars to develop a bulb industry that will be the largest in the world. Photos taken of huge fields showed that they already have thousands of acres in production. Large laboratories have been built just for research connected to the program, staffed with their best scientists. Teams of horticulturalists work on plant breeding programs, backed by teams of lawyers charged with defending their new plant patents. (This is interesting, since China constantly ignores the plant patents of other countries!) They plan to put all other bulb growers out of business, and quickly! In addition, they bragged that they are going to put on a show much larger and better than Floriade. I found their tone and message offensive, especially in that special setting.

I don't know about you, but I'm getting really tired of China. I'll be examining the bulbs at stores this fall, and if any of the packages say "Product of China" they won't be coming home with me!



Report on the Herbal Liqueurs

The liqueurs I started last month are steeping beautifully, and I've added a few more jars to the collection. In addition, I've been making lots of herb butters, syrups, jellies, honeys, sugars and teas. The jelly shown in the photo is Pineapple Sage Jelly. I'm concentrating on these items because they'll be used in many of the recipes I'm developing for the next book, *Herbal Blessings*, which will feature desserts!

During this time of drought, it is beneficial to the plants to harvest, so they don't have as much plant material to support. Harvest early in the morn, if possible, before the harsh heat of the sun evaporates much of the flavorful essential oil from the leaves.

It's a great time to dry herbs for blends, make mustards, vinegars, rubs and marinades, too, or to infuse herbs in oils. Maybe I'll do that later in the season!



Miss Tilly

One of my favorite fairy garden plants is "Miss Tilly" Balloonflower. She was blooming in pots when we opened on April 1st, and she's still blooming today, despite the excessive heat we've experienced this season. Generally, Miss Tilly remains 6-8" tall, which is much shorter than most balloonflowers, which often reach 2' or more and flop over if not staked. Although petite, Miss Tilly's rich purplish-blue flowers are full-sized, a good 2" across, and show well above tidy deep-green foliage. Children are fascinated by the balloons, which start out small, growing larger and puffier each day until they pop open to form the star-shaped bloom. Miss Tilly is a hardy perennial, preferring light shade, or at least protection from the harshest afternoon sun. It likes well-drained soil and is excellent in containers. Keep plants deadheaded for months of bloom!

The scientific name, *platycodon* comes from the Greek words *platys* and *kodon*, translating to "broad"

and “bell” which describes the flower. The common name describes the buds. The plant is native to China. Balloonflowers have a long tradition as a medicinal, especially in Chinese medicine, where the roots were used as a substitute for ginseng. It is also a common potherb there.



This month’s recipe—it’s easy, super-quick, inexpensive, and delicious!

Its summer, it’s hot and the last thing I want to do is stand over a stove. I developed this Oriental Soup recipe using leftover roast pork, but you can also use chicken, or keep it vegetarian! It’s one of those dishes that I can have on the table in less than 15 min. after I come into the house! If you don’t have a microwave, you’ll have to do it on the stove and it will take a bit longer! It’s one of our new favorite frugal recipes, and highly adaptable to whatever leftovers you might have!

In a microwavable pan or dish with lid place the following: 1 T. butter or margarine, 1 stalk celery, sliced; 2 carrots peeled & sliced. (If I don’t have fresh carrots, I use a can of sliced carrots and add them with the squash, see below.) Microwave, covered, for 2 min.

While the microwave runs, slice 1 green pepper into 1” strips and slice 1 ½ c. summer squash (I prefer Sunburst patty pan, but you can use zucchini or any other variety.)

Add the squash & green pepper to the dish, along with 2 T. snipped parsley and 4 T. snipped garlic chives. (If you don’t have fresh parsley, use 1 tsp. dried. You can also substitute 1 clove garlic, minced for the garlic chives, but they really add a lot to the dish.) Add approximately (give or take, it’s not crucial!) 1 c. diced cooked pork (or chicken or beef, or leave it out entirely!) and 4 c. broth. (I put water in the roasting pan to release all the drippings, and add water if needed. If I use canned carrots, I use the liquid from that as part of the 4 c. If you have no leftover meat & roast drippings, you can use all vegetable stock or just water, but you’ll have less flavor.) Sprinkle in 2-3 T. soy sauce, two dashes of ground red pepper; and a few grinds of black pepper. This is our favorite as is, but if I have leftover cooked rice, or unexpected guests, I sometimes add a cup of cooked rice to stretch it.

Cover and microwave for 8 min. Stir and check seasonings. If it’s not hot, microwave another minute or two, but its best if the squash is still a bit crunchy. If you prefer, add a squeeze of lemon juice or a dash of rice wine vinegar. Serve with a sprinkle of Chinese noodles. Serves 4.

It’s been fun to have the farm to myself the last few days, listening to songbirds and cicadas, watching butterflies land on my shoulders, and spending a bit more time with my husband! I hope you’re getting some rain and enjoying the summer garden season. I’ll be back next month, after more herbal adventures!

Herbal blessings, Carolee