

# Liquid Sunshine

## The Marsh Gardens Newsletter

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- Our summer crew started on Monday, June 2. Leslie Kuo and Ginger Stevens are both graduated seniors, Leslie from Yale and Ginger from Haverford College. They will be working full time, for twelve weeks, providing much needed labor, much appreciated spirit and we hope a good deal of laughter, not at our expense.
- We are hosting Friday Teas, starting this Friday, June 6. The first one will be scheduled at nine o'clock, but we will 'tweak' the time a bit from week to week. We are hosting the Urban Foresters this week, the folks who are planting trees in the New Haven community. But all are welcome to stop by. Each week, we will be inviting a specific lab, or crew or other group to join us for a half hour or so of conversation, tea and light refreshments. We will keep you posted.
- Iain Dawson came by for a quick visit to confer about the identification of some of the Orchidaceae in the Greenhouse #2. We will be working with him in the next week or so to identify those plants that are not tagged, and possibly 'de-accession' some of the plants that are more or less just taking up space.
- We planted the first of several annual flower borders near the office, and are working on the design of the second. We hope that by summer's end, both will be providing color and interest for visitors and us as well.
- Orioles were sighted moving through the garden last week. We haven't seen any nesting pairs, but hopefully with time this will happen.
- During the recent alumni weekend, School of Forestry alumni contributed to the Marsh Botanic Garden by donating an Eastern White Pine, **Pinus strobus**. We would like to thank them for their generosity and welcome their interest in continuing a healthy relationship.

A reader gave us some valuable feed back as regards our last article, part of which concerned the application of mulch. As with many landscape practices, mulching can be carried to an extreme that is neither aesthetically pleasing nor healthy for the plant. Creating mulch 'volcanoes' by mounding mulching up around the root flares of trees is as unhealthy for the tree as is it ugly and wasteful of mulch. A layer of two inches is recommended for mulch application, with great care given to 'feathering' it away from the sensitive root flare of trees.

I also want to apologize for not doing a better job of proof-reading the last article; the correct use of the language and proper punctuation are two of my pinchiest hair shirts!

This week's Plant of the Week is the Double-file Viburnum, or **Viburnum plicatum** variety **tomentosum**. The generic name is from the classical name for a species of the genera, **V. lantana**. The species name is Latin for 'pleated,' referring to the texture of the leaves. The varietal name refers to the hairy nature of the underside of the leaves. The family genesis is the Caprifoliaceae, or Honeysuckle family. There are about fifteen genera therein, including about 400 species.

The reason for choosing this plant is because it is in its third week of bloom here at the Garden. Its white clusters (more accurately referred to as flat-topped cymes) of

flowers arranged on horizontal branches are the height of this plant's contribution to our landscape. The blooms are not fragrant, and the showy parts are not fertile: like the Poinsettia and the Dogwood, the 'working part' of the plant's drive to procreate are smaller and held at the center of the non-fertile flowers.

The Double-file Viburnum is considered by some to be the most elegant of the Viburnums, partly because of its flower, both in duration and showiness, but also because of the horizontal branching habit mentioned earlier. The horizontal lines are hard to find in the woody plant world, and therefore help to break up the up-right and sometimes stiff nature of the shrub border. Planted near the foundation of a home, it helps to soften vertical lines, and if planted near the corner, will actually help to make the house seem larger. I don't engage in such tomfoolery in the landscape without great misgivings, but I do appreciate the contrast that this wonderful Viburnum provides for the landscape.

The Double-file Viburnum is easily transplanted, having a fibrous (not tap-rooted) root mass. It is available as a balled-and-burlapped plant, or often in large pots. When transplanting this or any other woody plant, care must be taken to ensure that the roots are not winding around the root ball, like a ball of string. As they grow, they will tend to encircle the cambium layer and choke the shrub or tree. If you can check for this condition at the nursery or garden center, it is wise to do so. If you get the plant home and its roots are curling around the outside of the root ball inside the pot, take a knife and make longitudinal cuts through the outside layers of the root mass, and try to spread the roots with your hands.

Viburnums like a good garden soil, but it should be well-drained. Full sun will encourage more blooming, but Double-file Viburnum much prefers the high shade of a nearby Oak or Black Locust. The full summer sun and droughty conditions will sometimes induce the plant to wilt.

Double-file Viburnums are readily available in the garden center and nursery trade. I highly recommend them as a medium-sized (to 15 or 18 feet high, with an equal spread) shrub for the shrub border, en masse, as a screen or as a single specimen.



Close up of the sterile flowers surrounding the smaller fertile flowers.



Photo illustrating the horizontal branching habit that makes the Double-file Viburnum a knock-out in the landscape.