

## New Look In The Shop

The Shop at Hornbaker Gardens will have a new look this year. Although we will still have some "vintage" items in the shop, there will be more of an emphasis on useful items for your yard and garden. Here is a sampling of some of the new items that we will have on hand:

**Rain Barrels.** Anyone who ever waters some plants outside should have a rain barrel. It's absurd that we use (and pay for) chlorinated tap water to water our plants while, at the same time, we let hundreds of gallons of water flow off our roofs and out into the ground or off into the storm sewer system every time it rains. All we have to do is catch some of that water and use it on the plants when needed. The problem with the old, traditional type of rain barrel was that it quickly filled up and overflowed right next to your house, preventing the water from being taken away from the foundation. Plus, you had to dip water out of the rain barrel and carry it to the plants to be watered.

At a garden center show in Chicago last summer, we saw these new rain barrels, made out of converted plastic food grade barrels, previously used to store pickles, olives and syrups. This is a great way to reuse these 50-60 gallon containers, which might otherwise end up in landfills. These rain barrels have a spigot near the bottom, so that you can attach a hose and apply the water where needed.

This is important: You need a rain barrel with a wide overflow tube to take excess water away from your foundation. It is incredible how fast a rain will fill up a rain barrel, so when the barrel is full, you want an overflow tube that will take the excess away as fast as the rain water is coming in. Otherwise, you have a puddle right next to your foundation, which was what your downspout was designed to prevent.



The rain barrels which we will carry will have a wide overflow tube attached to a piece of flexible tubing that will take any excess water a few feet away from your foundation. In addition, once you find out how much water you can catch to use later, you may want to set a second or third rain barrel next to the first one, and connect them to the extra spigot provided for that purpose. As the main rain barrel fills up, excess water will flow into the next barrel rather than run out of the overflow tube.

As we all become more attuned to the idea of recycling and reusing, it only makes sense to save some of the water that Mother Nature provides to us, and use it later when our plants need a drink.

**Composters.** Composting at home provides a low-cost and environmentally friendly way for us, as a society, to divert bio wastes from the landfill. Is there any reason for us not to be doing it? You may have noticed the large pile of compost that we produce north of

the daylily field. It is made up primarily of weeds that we pull and other yard waste. We turn it with a loader occasionally, and eventually, we have compost.

The home gardener who is composting organic kitchen waste along with yard waste probably wants some sort of bin or container in which to make the compost, both for aesthetic reasons, and to keep critters from rummaging through the pile.

### **New Look**

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## Open House And Hosta Walk

Our twenty-second annual Open House and Hosta Walk will be held on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, June 11, 12 and 13. The hostas should be looking great at that time. Refreshments will be served, and drawings for prizes will be held each day. We will also have a selection of specially priced plants, including a good selection of hostas.

**Peak bloom seasons:** The peak of **iris** bloom is usually the last two weeks of May, although the weather can affect bloom season significantly. The shorter, early bloomers generally start blooming by the first of May. **Daylilies** have an extended bloom season, but the peak season for us generally starts around July 1 and runs for the next three weeks. Some ornamental **grasses** plume out as early as July or August but most, including the spectacular *Miscanthus* varieties, plume out in September and early October.

# What's New at Hornbaker Gardens

To get a complete list of all of the new plants that we will have on hand this year, click on "New Plants" on our website. Here are some that sound especially good to us:

**Hostas.** When we were looking for a source for 'Kiwi Full Monty', one of our favorite hostas, we turned to Barry Sligh of New Zealand. He is the originator of that plant. He said that he could ship us a nice supply, timing the shipment so that the hostas would go through enough dormancy before coming from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere. As long as we were going through the trouble of getting an import permit and the expense of shipping from New Zealand, we added in several

more of Barry's 'Kiwi' varieties. They seem to have acclimated to the north half of the world, so we will be selling a limited number of a few of these hostas.

'Kiwi Acid Yellow' a medium sized clump that is incredibly bright yellow in the spring, turning apple green later in the season. 'Kiwi Canoe' is a fast-growing, medium-small clump with blue, canoe-shaped leaves. 'Kiwi Red Heron' is a good blue with spotted red stems. 'Kiwi Classic' is a sport of 'June', with creamy to white centers and blue margins. It comes up early and continues to look good late in the season. Just to pique your interest—there are a few more, in very short supply, which we are holding back for

increase.

'Blue Ivory' looks as if it will be a great one. It is a sport of 'Halcyon' with the same excellent blue color and very wide, white margins. Here are three wonderful gold hostas that we like a lot: 'French Quarter' (medium), 'Harriette Ward' (large), and 'Sutter's Mill' (extra large).

**Daylilies.** When hybridizer Fred Smith needed to cut down the size of his daylily trial garden several years ago, we moved many of his seedlings to our field. We sold off many of them as "name your own" daylilies. But we held back several varieties that we

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## What's New

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## Wedding Report

We mentioned in last spring's newsletter that both of our daughters were getting married out here last summer and fall. Molly married Russ Blogg on June 28, and Sara married Mike Tracey on October 11. The weather was fantastic in both cases. In fact, the weather for the June wedding was pleasantly cool, and for the October wedding was wonderfully warm. We will try to get some wedding pictures posted on our website by the time that you get this newsletter.

## Perennial Of The Year

*Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' (golden hakone grass) is the Perennial Plant Association's 2009 Perennial Plant of the Year. The species is native to Honshu Island, Japan, and has become a popular plant among hosta enthusiasts, in particular, because it appreciates some shade. It grows 12 to 18 inches tall and 12 inches wide, with an arching form resembling miniature bamboo. The grass is bright yellow with very thin green stripes.

Golden hakone grass grows well in humus rich, well-drained soils. It does not do well in poorly drained soil, heavy clay, or very dry soil. It is a slow grower, so it is not a threat to plants growing near it.

*Hakonechloa* goes great with hostas and contrasts nicely with the dark foliage of *Cimicifuga* and some of the purple leaved *Heucheras*. It can be used as a single specimen, in masses or as a border in partially shaded areas.

## Food On Saturdays

We are pleased to let you know that Kramer's Chuck Wagon will again be serving food here on Saturdays during May and the first two Saturdays in June, as well as on Memorial Day, May 25. They will be providing grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken and pork chops. Sometimes they have my personal favorite, ribeye sandwiches. We have some picnic tables in the grassy area near the parking lot available for you to use for a leisurely lunch in the gardens. If you have a large group coming on a Saturday and know that you will be eating here, we suggest that you call us and let us know, so that we can let the Kramers know that they need to bring extra.

The Kramers have been providing grilled catering for years, and they operate Kramer's Kitchen, a fine sandwich shop in the south business district of Princeton, in case you are looking for lunch in town while you are in the area.

## Need A Place To Stay?

We know that quite a few of our customers come to Princeton to shop not only at Hornbaker Gardens, but to check out the antique stores in town, along with some of the unique shops that Princeton has to offer, such as Hoffman's and Annie's Little Pots.

Princeton is fortunate to have a brand new hotel in town. A new American was just finished last May (in time for Molly's wedding). It is very nice, and is run by Bige and Martha Sherwood, who also run the Sherwood Antique Mall. The Sherwoods have used some antiques in the lobby and in a few of the rooms. We know that they will keep this hotel well maintained. It is located at the north end of Princeton, next to I-80, and the phone is (815) 872-5000.

Although Princeton does not have any B&Bs at this time, there are two very good places fairly nearby. The Chestnut Street Inn is located in Sheffield, IL, about 11 miles west of Princeton. Run by Monika and Jeff Sudakov, this inn offers gracious accommodations and fine dining in a colonial style inn built in 1854. Their website is [www.chestnut-inn.com](http://www.chestnut-inn.com), and their phone is 800-537-1304.

Mission Oak Inn is a beautiful country getaway located about 12 miles south of Hornbaker Gardens, a couple of miles outside of Henry, IL. The inn is located on 120 acres and is nestled next to a private 7-acre lake with abundant wildlife, including deer, foxes, turkeys, geese and other water fowl. A gourmet breakfast is served in the dining room with large windows overlooking the lake, fields and woods. Denny and Jan Reed run the inn, and Denny is the accomplished woodworker who did the Mission style woodwork. There are only two suites, so get this one booked as soon as possible. Their website is [www.missionoakinn.com](http://www.missionoakinn.com) and their phone is (309) 364-4083.

# New Look

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We have looked at and considered several different composters. Although tumblers seemed to be touted as the quickest makers of compost, we think that they have some drawbacks. For starters, they tend to be expensive if they are well made, or flimsy and quick to fall apart if not well made. Second, the compost has no contact with the ground as it is being made, thus preventing earthworms from working their way into the compost and helping to digest it. And third, at some point, you have to quit adding fresh waste to the bin in order to let the composting process finish, meaning that there is no place to put the fresh stuff, unless you want to accumulate it in a stinky bucket for a couple of weeks.

We have opted for a simple composter, made in Germany. It sits on the ground and looks like a cube that is somewhat fatter at the bottom than it is at the top. It comes in two sizes—110 gal. and 160 gal., selling for \$99.99 and \$149.99, respectively. The top raises up and you toss in your kitchen waste, lawn clippings, leaves, etc. Slots along the sides allow air in, providing for optimal composting conditions. The composter is bottomless, so earthworms can work their way into the pile and help turn the organic matter to compost. A door at the bottom of each side allows you to remove the compost at the bottom while continuing to add new material to the top. Tuck the composter away in a corner of the yard or garden and let it start working for you.

We will also have a three-stage model from New Zealand, called the Earthmaker. This baby is the “Cadillac” of composters, and sells for \$249.99. Waste goes in the top of three chambers. When that fills up, you slide out a plate, allowing the waste to fall into the second chamber, where it digests while you start filling the top chamber again. When the top chamber is full again, you push the waste in the second chamber down a slope into the bottom chamber, using a simple tool that comes with the composter, where it will mature into compost. The waste from the top chamber is then dropped into the second chamber, and you start putting fresh waste into the top chamber again. A door at the bottom allows for the removal of compost when it is ready. As the waste moves from chamber to

chamber, it is aerated, providing for faster composting action.

**Radius Garden Tools.** You’ll just have to put one of these tools in your hands to appreciate how comfortable and well-made they are. Designed and produced by an outfit called Radius Garden, these unusual looking tools use the latest research into human factors and tool usage to maximize your power while minimizing hand and wrist stress. Pick up one of their small hand tools—trowel, cultivator or weeder—and you will be ready to throw your old hand tools away. The curved grip is ergonomically designed to reduce stress on your wrist, and the aluminum-magnesium blades are lightweight and strong.

The larger tools, such as spades and forks, have an O-shaped handle, which, at first sight, seems very odd. However, once you start using them, you realize how often you use two hands on the handle. The O-grip provides four times the gripping surface that the typical D-grip does. The tools have an unbreakable steel shaft, encased in resin, and the blades are stainless steel. And they are priced at a very reasonable \$39.99. O-grip tools include spades, forks, weeder, edger, and bulb auger.

There are also two garden rakes. Both have curved heads instead of the traditional T-shaped heads. Again, your first impression will be that they look odd, but when you try them out, you won’t believe how much they make sense. The rake with the smaller head, known as the GroundHog, is touted as the best cleanup rake ever—great for wet leaves and small spaces. The GardenShark has a larger head, and is great in the garden for smoothing a seed bed or spreading mulch evenly. The rakes are \$27.99.

**Mad Mats.** We had these last year, but haven’t mentioned them in the newsletter. Those who tried them out tended to come back and get more for themselves or as gifts for friends. Mad Mats are outdoor mats, made from high grade recycled plastic with U.V. inhibitors. The flat weave and soft tubular threads don’t absorb dirt or stains of any kind. They are easily cleaned with a garden hose. The mats breathe, so they don’t hold water, so they won’t mildew and they won’t rot wooden decks. There is a wide variety of patterns and colors, so you are sure to find something perfect for your porch, deck or patio. Mad Mats come in 4’x6’ and 5’x8’ sizes.



# What's New

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thought were special, and which we might register. Although we haven't registered them yet, at least we have named some. Fred has produced some great peach colored varieties. 'Always a Bridesmaid' is peach mauve with a raspberry eye and gold throat, and tightly gathered orange ruffling. 'Mony Mony' has large flowers of peach with a striking, huge purple eye and heavily ruffled purple edges. 'Orange Ya Glad' has large pastel flowers with a purple watermark, ruffled edges with purple and yellow rims and an orange throat. In shorter supply are 'Pastel Punch', 'Peach Flirtini', 'Peach Salsa', and 'Peach Sorbet'. There are pictures of all of these on our website.

If you are interested in **spiders**, we now have quite a collection available. We acquired starts of several spiders a few years ago from a spider enthusiast, and let them multiply, so that we can now offer them for sale. Many are listed on our "New Plants" list, and all of the spiders that we offer are listed on our website, grouped together. Go to the daylily catalog, and click on "List Only Spiders and Unusual Forms".

**Perennials.** We have around 90 new varieties of perennials. *Boltonia* 'Jim Crockett' is a compact variety with violet-blue aster-like flowers in late summer, growing 18-24 inches tall. New heat tolerant *Heuchera villosa* hybrids include 'Encore', a deep rose with heavy silver overlay, and 'Christa', with leaves that start out rose-purple

## 'Earth Angel' Is Hosta Of The Year

The American Hosta Growers Association has named 'Earth Angel' as the Hosta of the Year for 2009. 'Earth Angel' is a creamy margined sport of 'Blue Angel', easily one of the best large blue hostas on the market. Both of these varieties get very large with leaves as big as dinner plates. Mature clumps can grow to 5 or 6 feet in diameter. The leaves layer very nicely over one another, forming a beautiful mound.

The margins on 'Earth Angel' start out yellow and turn to a creamy color as the season matures. The foliage is thick and very resistant to slug damage. If you can find a spot for a large hosta, this one is a show stopper.

and turn to peach.

*Rudbeckia fulgida* 'Goldsturm' has long been the standard Black-Eyed Susan for hardiness and reliability. So a couple of new *fulgida* relatives should be very good, as well. 'City Garden' is just like 'Goldsturm', with half the height, at only 12 inches—perfect for smaller gardens or wherever a shorter variety is needed. 'Early Bird Gold' is touted as a longer bloomer, starting earlier and continuing to bloom later than other varieties.

**Trees and shrubs.** We have the cutest little *Carpinus japonica* (Japanese Hornbeam) growing in our display beds. It's a small tree, growing 15 to 20 feet tall, and is decorated with pods that look like hops the whole last half of the summer. We finally got our hands on a few for this year, so those of you who have been eyeing that tree may want to check these out.

Beech trees have been difficult to locate the last few years, but we will have a good selection this year, including *Fagus sylvatica* 'Dawyck Purple', a narrow growing, purple leaved variety that stands as a tall, purple sentinel in the landscape; 'Riversii', another purple leaved variety that grows into a gorgeous shade tree; and 'Pendula', a green, weeping form with outstanding character.

Check out *Acer palmatum* 'Shirazz', a beautiful, variegated form of Japanese Maple, with green, cream and pink



'Dawyck Purple' Beech in winter leaves, giving an overall pink effect. We will also have some *Magnolia x* 'Elizabeth', a yellow magnolia with fragrant, clear, primrose yellow flowers on a neat, pyramidal tree. New evergreens include a Bristlecone Pine and a Korean Pine.

We will have some 'Twisty Baby' Locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*), a cute, contorted form with white flowers, in single stem and clump form. An interesting, larger Locust is 'Purple Robe', with purple tinted new foliage and purple flowers, yielding to seedless pods. Both varieties have yellow fall color.



## Pruning Spirea

In one of our recent newsletters, I advised cutting back most flowering shrubs right after they are done blooming. I cut back some Spirea 'Tor' last summer after they were done blooming, and they just didn't flush back out the way I expected them to. Our head gardener, Jane Morris, says that she doesn't recommend cutting Spirea back every year. Rather, she likes to let them go for several years, and then cut them back hard, after they are done flowering.