

Vocabulary Test?

Have you noticed that words you hear today may not mean the same as they did decades ago? As well as the old familiar words that confuse us, we have strange new words that have slithered into use without our noticing. A neighbor gave me a bouquet with the fall blooming *Gladiolus callianthus* in it, a name new to me. I called it *Acidanthera*.? Actually it is both, as well as *Homoglossum*.

When we hear the word “*gladiola*” we picture the tall stems of the gloriously colored *grandiflorus* group with as many as twenty-eight buds opening into large flowers and displaying up to twelve at a time. Other groups may be smaller or have more loosely arranged flowers but the *Acidanthera* is distinctive in having one color, white with deep throat markings of a deep purple. The two-inch flowers are funnel shaped and nod gently on long slim stems. They may be called *S. murielae* as well but are worth finding for their beauty, late blooming, and fragrance.

Your garden may have summer perennials hanging on through the sunny days of November. *Verbena bonariensis* is one and although it is perennial it is short-lived, but as it self seeds, you will have it always. I don't remember where I first planted it but it appears here and there and a touch of purple waving on a four-foot stem is always welcome and is called vervain.

As plant genes are studied and their differences and similarities more deeply understood, some of them may be shifted into different families. Once upon a time a member of the *Asteraceae* family was usually an aster. Now according to a list in *Horticulture* magazine asters are *Almutaster*, *Doellingeria*, *Eucephalus*, *Eurybia*, *Ionactis*, *Oligonevron*, and *Symphotrichum*. Ignore all the confusion and call them New England asters or Michaelmas daisies. They are wonderful, blooming from summer until late autumn. The late ones are fine companions to the native grasses and tame goldenrods.

One pretty yellow member of the aster family is fall blooming sunflower *Helianthus* ‘Lemon Queen’. This is a smaller cultivar that does not grow ten feet tall but to a more practical back-of-the-border five to seven feet. Also yellow and confused with sunflowers is another member of the Aster family, *Heliopsis*, also called Ox-eye. The genus has about 13 species that are found in dry prairie and open woodland throughout the country.

One of the most fun-to-say words is *hypertufa*, the mix and mold product that results in great containers. The Master Gardener containers at the Coleman Bridge are *hypertufa*. Construction of them is a ‘more the merrier’ project as it doesn't make a lot of sense to collect all the materials and just make one pot. The recipe includes peat, Portland cement, and perlite. Cement would make a pot all by itself but it would take several people to move it about the garden. Now there is a new *hypertufa*: instead of using non-renewable peat in making planters, gardeners can craft troughs using shredded paper with the Portland cement and perlite. The precise recipe could be acquired from *Rock Garden Quarterly*, North American Rock Garden Society, Box 18604, Raleigh, NC 27619.

As if there were not a sufficient number of new words popping up every day, there is a new sub-science, *Rhizosphere* – the study of the factors in the soil where roots live. Even if we don't bother to add that word to our spelling lists, we are curious to learn that the study of the root zone suggests plants do better with less fertilizer. Seems we tend to kill them with kindness when we give them more food than they need.

The fertilizer disrupts a complicated process in fertile soil where scads of organisms are being well cared for. Tilling, fertilizing, and poisoning with pesticides is the monkey wrench in the works. Don't you love suggestions for less work and expense in the garden?

One point seems logical: fertilizing woody plants decreases their resistance to pests, diseases, and droughts. It is so easy to spoil our garden ‘children’. Even natural green manures and composts can be used to advantage in lesser amounts than we think effective. Indeed, it does sound as if less were really more?