

Friends of Old Bulbs Gazette

[Old House Gardens](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, 734-995-1486

by Scott Kunst, OHG Founder, Expert Emeritus, and Ambassador for Heirlooms

“People are mostly layers of violence and tenderness – wrapped like bulbs, she thought soberly; I don’t know what makes them onions or hyacinths.”

– Eudora Welty, American author, 1909-2001, from *Delta Wedding* (1946)

Be Safe – Shop Now!



Spring is coming and the pandemic-fueled demand for seeds, plants, and bulbs is booming. Dozens of our treasures are already sold out, and many others are going fast – so please do yourself a favor and order NOW for April delivery.

Can’t decide what to order? Here are a few lists that may help:

[Fragrant bulbs](#) (tuberoses, lilies, and more),

Perennial [iris](#), [daylilies](#), and [lilies](#),

[Web-only bulbs](#) (mostly too rare for our print catalog),

[Bulbs from 1800-1900](#) (or earlier, or later),

[American-grown bulbs](#) (that’s most of them), and

[Our customers’ favorites](#) (aka best-sellers).

Shipping starts April 1 – and we can’t wait!

“Hotumn” – Dahlias and More for Today’s Longer, Warmer Fall



“Fall is lasting longer,” writes Martha Leb Molnar in the April 2020 issue of *Horticulture*. “The average length of the growing season in the Lower 48 has increased by nearly two weeks since the beginning of the 20th century, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, with a particularly large and steady increase over the past thirty years.

“For gardeners in temperate zones, this offers new opportunities. With careful planning, we can now enjoy a long-lasting fall garden as glorious as a spring or summer one. . . .

“The time to plan for ‘hotumn’ is now. By keeping fall in mind in the spring, we can go well beyond potted mums and ornamental kale.”

So what should we plant now to enjoy this fall?

“It’s hard to resist the allure” of [dahlias](#), Molnar writes, and if you’ve grown them you know what she’s talking about. Cool night temperatures spur them into profuse bloom, making fall their glory season.

In addition, Molnar recommends ornamental grasses (of course); shrubs such as hydrangeas, potentillas that “bloom from midsummer to frost,” and landscape roses; long-blooming perennials such as asters, sedum, artemisia, coreopsis, black-eyed

susan, gloriosa daisy, and yarrow; late-blooming perennials such as Joe Pye weed, Japanese anemone, turtlehead, bugbane, *Helenium*, Russian sage, and giant dill – and did we mention [dahlias](#)?



From Maud to Lady Darwin – The Woman Behind the Iris

To enjoy the lovely little iris known as ‘[Mrs. George Darwin](#)’ you don’t have to know anything about the woman it’s named for – but you might like it even more if you do.

“Martha ‘Maud’ du Puy was born in Pennsylvania on July 27, 1861,” writes Mike Unser in the Historic Iris Preservation Society’s fall 2018 *Roots*. “Although the family was not particularly wealthy, her father was descended from French aristocracy and became a well-known doctor....

“One of five daughters, Maud was said to be a bright child and grew to be a local socialite, well regarded by friends and family. She was always receptive to new experiences, and in 1883 she eagerly accepted an invitation from her Aunt Cara to visit her in England.”

There she met the astronomer George Darwin. “George was one of several sons of the famous English naturalist Charles Darwin and ... a professor at Cambridge. Though he was 15 years her senior, George was smitten by the witty and charming young American woman right from the start. Maud, however, was not so easily swayed by this small, nervous gentleman and initially rebuffed any ideas that she should consider him as a suitor.

“It was in the course of traveling England and Europe with her beloved aunt that she came to know George better, as he often joined them in various locales to show them around.... He was smart and witty, kind and generous, and as time went on she came to see all his good qualities. He was obviously very taken with her, so [even though she’d said no to other suitors] when he proposed, she accepted, much to the delight of her Aunt Cara.

“She and George went on to raise four children ... and they lived a happy life together. She later became Lady Darwin when her husband was knighted in 1905.

“It was during the years at Cambridge that she made the acquaintance of Sir Michael Foster and became the namesake of one of his beautiful irises, along with her sister-in-law, Ida, the wife of George’s brother Horace [see ‘[Mrs. Horace Darwin](#)’]. Maud lived a long life, passing away at the age of 85 in February 1947.”

‘[Mrs. George Darwin](#)’ is one of [a dozen heirloom iris](#) we’re offering this spring, but seven are already sold out (sorry!) so if you want any of them, please order soon!

Bulbs for Pollinators



One of the highlights of my gardening year is watching the bees buzzing madly about my [winter aconites](#) and [snow crocus](#), happier than even I am that spring has finally begun.

Of course the populations of bees and other pollinators are in steep decline these days. But “as gardeners we can help reverse this,”

writes Adam Hunt in the October 2020 *Gardens Illustrated*. The trick, he says, is “providing a diverse offering of flowering plants across as long a season as possible,” and he adds that “bulbs, such as crocuses, snowdrops, and nerines, that flower outside of the usual temperate growing season, are a vital food source.”

Hunt lists 26 bulbs for pollinators, ten of which we currently offer. “All are favorites,” he writes, “chosen for their beauty, reliability, and for their value to our wonderful and so important foraging insects in all their many forms.”

[Winter aconite](#) – “One of the first blooms to appear ... and much loved by bees..... Best planted in humus-rich, alkaline soil that does not dry out in summer. It will establish and naturalise under deciduous trees in light grass.” RHS Award of Garden merit

Crocus ‘[Mammoth Yellow](#)’ – “Crocuses are one of the earliest nectar-rich flowers in spring, sought out by emerging queen bumblebees. The rich yellow of this cultivar works well against the low light levels of March....” RHS AGM

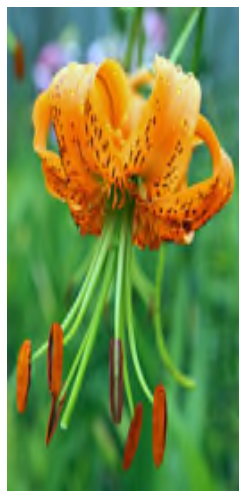
[Siberian squill](#) – “This scilla is the best performer for naturalizing in light lawns and part-shade. The blue nodding bell flower begins before other scillas have started and has a long blooming period. A rewarding bulb, producing more than one stem from each bulb. We love to plant it under magnolias and deciduous shrubs such as *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* ‘*Mariesii*’.” RHS AGM

Tulipa chusiana – “Tulips are not renowned as plants for pollinators, but they are such an essential element of a spring garden, and if you include just one, then the lady tulip is possibly the best. Its flowers have attractive dark-pink stripes on its outer petals that widen in the sunshine to produce a star, and the stunning purple markings on its basal stem are sheer beauty.” RHS AGM

Other pollinator-friendly heirlooms that Hunt recommends are [snowdrops](#), [Elwes snowdrops](#), *Anemone blanda* ‘[White Splendor](#)’, [snake’s-head fritillary](#), *Narcissus poeticus recurvus*, and [English bluebells](#).

To help keep the pollinators in your yard buzzing happily, why not order some of these nourishing beauties NOW for delivery this fall!

If You Give a Friend a Lily . . . (or “Look What You’ve Done to Me!”)



We gardeners love to share our love of gardening, don’t we? Whether it’s a fresh-picked bouquet, a start of a favorite plant, or simply a helpful tip, many of us have learned that sharing can make gardening even more fun – as it has for our good customer Randy Merrill of Colton, New York.

“I gifted one of your lilies to a friend,” Randy emailed us last month. “With that one lily, his first, he has turned into an expert on lilies and has taken on the science of the little red lily beetle which eats lilies. He has a garden full of hybrids and whenever I visit he takes me on a tour to give me updates on each of them, then ends the tour saying ‘Look what you’ve done to me!’ I have spent many hours assisting him with his experiments, and he has even published papers on this little red bug in science journals.

“Last spring, I found a red lily beetle in my garden. My friend didn’t believe me, said it was too early. Thirty minutes later he showed up in my garden and had to give me credit for adding evidence that these critters appear earlier in the year than anyone realized.

“I also told him where some lilies are growing in the wild near here [in the six-million-acre Adirondack Park]. He thinks it might be a variety that has never been discovered, and if so he says he will name it after me.”

So if you ever read about a newly discovered lily named *Lilium merrillii* – or maybe *L. randyi*? – remember that it all started with Randy giving her friend one of our amazing lilies.

(P.S. You can order [all of our lilies](#) right now, and five of them are [spring-shipped!](#))

Did You Miss Our Last Newsletter? Read It at Our Website or Blog

Our January newsletter included:

Canna ‘[Ehemanii](#)’ stars in museum garden,
Chuck’s [best-loved lily](#),
virtual (and cheap) [daffodil convention](#),
[9 favorite articles](#) from 2020, and more.

You can read all of our back-issues at oldhousegardens.com/NewsletterArchives – and most of them at [our blog](#)!

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