

Friends of Old Bulbs Gazette

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

“Anyone who thinks gardening begins in the spring and ends in the fall is missing the best part of the whole year; for gardening begins in January with a dream.”

-Josephine Nuese, 1901-1974, American gardener and author of *The Country Garden*, 1970.

Happy 2023!

This year we'll be celebrating our 30th anniversary, and we are so grateful to all of you who have shared our passion for Saving the Bulbs! Whether you joined us during our founder Scott Kunst's tenure, or in the last seven years since Vanessa took the helm, you've helped to keep heirloom bulbs in cultivation and to bring beauty to homes and gardens across the country. As our thank-you gift, we'll be including an extra bulb/tuber/corm/rhizome of our choice to all spring orders received by March 1.

It's Still January, but Spring is On Its Way



[‘Amber Queen’](#) dahlia

[‘Bette Russell’](#) daylily

[‘pallida Dalmatica’](#) iris

A delight of the winter season is the time it gives gardeners to dream and plan what to grow when the weather warms. As seed catalogs flood your mailbox this month, don't forget to order your bulbs for spring planting, too! Enjoy a summer garden filled with:

Bouquet-Friendly Dahlias - Last month's newsletter told you about **6 heirlooms** we're offering for the first time, ranging from 1" pompons through giant dinner-plates. We weren't sure then if we'd have enough of some of our favorites to offer this year, but we do! Glowing '[Fatima](#)', Victorian '[Kaiser Wilhelm](#)', peachy '[Amber Queen](#)', bee favorite '[Mrs. H. Brown](#)', and cheerful '[Little Beeswing](#)' are now (while supplies last) available at our website.

Great Glads – Three varieties are small-flowered cuties: perky '[Elvira](#)', ruffled '[Green Lace](#)', and glorious '[Starface](#)'. Two are fragrant: '[Abyssinian](#)' and '[Lucky Star](#)'. And the rest are just as fabulous, including the rare '[Dauntless](#)', shimmering '[Nova Lux](#)', dramatic '[Plum Tart](#)', and charming '[Priscilla](#)'.

Always-Dependable Daylilies - We're offering 4 new to us this year: evening-blooming '[Bette Russell](#)', golden '[Gertrude Condon](#)', elegant '[Purple Waters](#)', and fetching '[Winsome Lady](#)', as well as bringing back past favorites '[August Pioneer](#)', '[Black Friar](#)', '[Challenger](#)', '[Evelyn Claar](#)', '[Marse Connell](#)', and '[Melonee](#)'. We rotate our daylily offerings each year, so if you've been waiting for one of these, here's your chance to add it to your collection!

Incredible Iris - We're so happy to bring back our '[Small is Beautiful](#)' sampler for those of you who like shorter iris that combine beautifully with perennials at the front of the border. If you'd rather choose your own selection, we have 13 varieties back this year, including 7 from the 19th century (and '[pallida Dalmatica](#)' from 1597!). These are tough survivors often found in old homesteads and graveyards generations after they were planted – if you're in zone 3-8a with some full sun, why not leave your own legacy of beauty?

And don't forget to check our **Diverse** offerings where you'll find fragrant tuberoses, elegant '[Ehemani](#)' canna (see more below!), starry [crocosmia](#), pixie [rain lilies](#), and our lilies that can't be shipped in the fall, including dazzling '[Uchida](#)' and 1804's lancifolium '[Splendens](#)'.

Assuming the weather cooperates, we hope to begin shipping spring orders the first week of April. But order soon: some varieties will sell out quickly - and if you order by March 1, we'll include an extra something-special of our choice!

If You're Longing for Fall-Planted Bulbs, there's Hope Ahead!



Though we won't start shipping daffodils, tulips, hyacinths and other fall-planted treasures till October, it's never too early to start making your plans and wish-lists. We've just [updated our website](#) with varieties we're confident we'll have and will be continually updating it as we receive more information from our growers, so check back over the coming months – and we'll highlight newly-added varieties often in our newsletter, as usual!

Don't Like Cannas? Give 'Ehemannii' a Look!

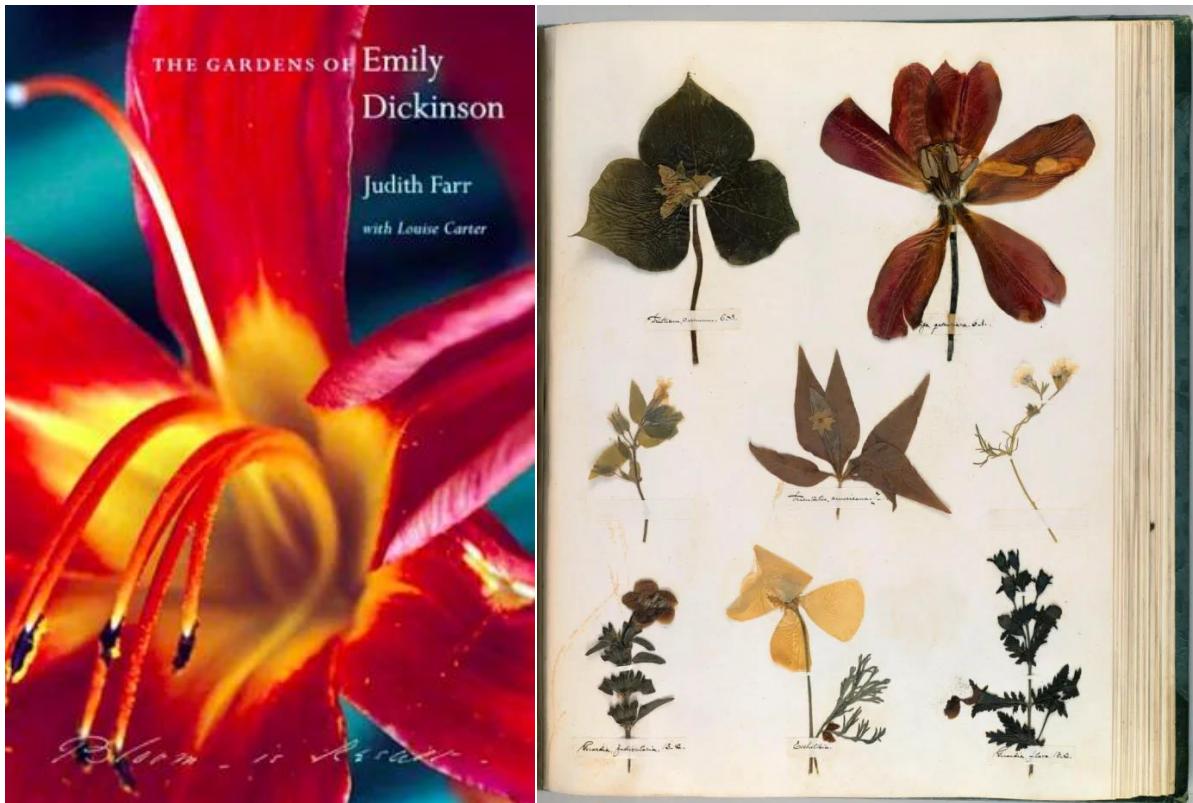




So unusual and beautiful that even canna-haters love it, ‘Ehemanii’ is one of the most exciting plants we’ve ever offered. But don’t take our word for it. Our friend Greg Grant (*Heirloom Gardening in the South*) has spent a lifetime growing and promoting exceptional plants, and he’s a big fan, too:

“Cannas happen to be coarse and gaudy (i.e. striking and bold) so the weak of heart are often afraid to stand up and be seen with them. But there’s no reason to be afraid of ‘smash mouth’ plants. To me, cannas are like living garden sculpture. My FAVORITE of all is *Canna x iridiflora* ‘[Ehemanii](#)’, an old, French, iris-flowered hybrid. It’s like a cross between a banana and a fuchsia. And for gardeners who won’t grow cannas because of leaf rollers, remember that they’re the larva of the Brazilian skipper butterfly (butterfly haters!) and easy to control with organic Bt, if you want.”

Emily Dickinson, Poet and Botanist



For us, winter's also a great time to explore books and articles we set aside in our desire to be in the garden the rest of the year. We were thrilled to learn from [one of Maria Popova's elegant online essays](#), "The Marginalian", that poet Emily Dickinson was an ardent botanist from an early age. Popova writes, "Long before she began writing poems, Dickinson undertook a rather different yet unexpectedly parallel art of contemplation and composition — the gathering, growing, classification, and pressing of flowers, which she saw as manifestations of the Muse not that dissimilar to poems...Dickinson started studying botany at the age of nine and assisting her mother at the garden at twelve, but it wasn't until she began attending Mount Holyoke in her late teens", where with the encouragement of the college's founder, botanist Mary Lyon, "she began approaching her botanical zeal with scientific rigor."

Popova describes Dickinson's herbarium as "a masterpiece of uncommon punctiliousness and poetic beauty: 424 flowers from the Amherst region, which Dickinson celebrated as 'beautiful children of spring,' arranged with a remarkable sensitivity to scale and visual cadence across sixty-six pages in a large leather-bound album. Slim paper labels punctuate the specimens like enormous dashes inscribed with the names of the plants — sometimes colloquial, sometimes Linnaean — in Dickinson's elegant handwriting. What emerges is an elegy for time, composed with passionate patience, emanating the same wakefulness to sensuality and mortality that marks Dickinson's poetry."

Dickinson's original collection of pressed specimens is now preserved at Harvard's Houghton Rare Book Library, though its fragility means that very few can

examine it. But as Popova reports, Harvard has [digitized](#) the entire “miraculous masterpiece at the intersection of poetry and science” and made it available to all!

For further explorations of Dickinson’s work at the intersection of art and science, see Judith Farr’s book *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson*, Popova’s book *Figuring*, and her [follow-up essay](#) about the evolution of flowers and an amazing animation combining images from the herbarium with a musical composition based on Dickinson’s poem “Bloom”.

Reminder: It's Time to Check Your Stored Dahlias



If (like us) you carefully tucked your dahlias into storage last fall and then got busy with Thanksgiving and family holidays, now's the time to take a look and see how they're doing. We recommend that you keep them in a cool, dry, dark place, ideally between 40-45 F. Look for condensation, letting some moisture escape if you see it, or shriveling of tubers, in which case sprinkle or mist them with a little water. Make a note of any varieties looking iffy so you can check them again in a few weeks in case you want to reorder them before they sell out. (And, for those of you new to dahlias, you don't *need* to store your dahlias – you can treat them as annuals or frost-tender perennials that you just replace in the spring.)

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