

A POSY PICKER'S PAPER
New Meadows Garden Club
Topsfield, Massachusetts
March 15th through April 19, 2022



The objectives of the New Meadows Garden Club shall be to foster knowledge of home gardening, decorative arrangements and an interest in civic projects.

It's been a long winter, hasn't it? How are your houseplants doing? Hopefully they aren't complaining too much! For tips to keep them happy, check out this edition's Green Thumb Corner.

March 22



Our members have been invited to join the Topsfield Council On Aging at the Topsfield Town Hall at 10 am for a floral design workshop given by Tom Capano, owner of the neat little gift shop in Topsfield, Fresh Look Designs. The cost for those attending is \$15.00 and payment can be made at the workshop. If you plan to attend, please let Sandy Whelan know as soon as possible. Be sure to bring your clippers!

Since we will probably work up an appetite exercising our "creative abilities," we are planning to meet for lunch following the workshop at Ili's Café, 435 Newbury Street, Danvers at 11:15 am. Even if you can't make the workshop, why not join us for lunch?

April 19

Our next board meeting will be held at the Topsfield Town Hall COA Meeting Room at 10 am.

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April 29—May 1



Art In Bloom will be held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. As our members know after the many years of our club's participation, this is an event not to be missed! The beauty of the floral designs that grace the museum during this special time each year are unparalleled. It would be nice to visit the event as a group and we are hoping to enlist some members who would be willing to drive. We were thinking about April 29th as a possible date. Please let Sandy Whelan know as soon as possible whether you would be interested in attending and also whether you would be willing to be a driver! Hopefully, we can make this a nice opportunity to be together as a club. More details will follow soon.

...more news on the following page...

NOTES



There have been some very busy members since the last edition of our newsletter, and many thank yous are in order! So here it goes...many thanks to the Topsfield Fire Department for hanging our holiday window wreaths and some very brave members who decorated the outside of the Topsfield Town Library for the holidays on a very cold day. And many thanks to Mary Connor and her helpers, who guided the Topsfield Council On Aging members, as they created their Boxwood Trees for their holiday tables. Also, many thanks go to Jane, Joline, Shirley, Sandy, Mary and Donna, who provided arrangements for the Topsfield Library Circulation Desk during the months of January, February and March!

Thanks to all of you for your tireless garden club spirit!



Good news!

Remember how successful our Mother's Day Tea Cup Sale was last year? What a great morning we had selling our creations outside the Topsfield Post Office! With that in mind, we have decided to try it again this year. Mary Connor has offered her perfect garage space for the workshop again this year, which we are planning for May 5th. Depending on the weather, we hope to hold our sale outside the Post Office once again on either May 6th or May 7th. Your assignment??? Mark your calendar and start collecting those tea cups and other materials you will use to put together your masterpieces! Stay tuned for more details.

Please stay tuned for details about the annual Arbor Day Observance our club participates in at the Steward School at the end of April. When we know more, we'll let you know!

...more news on the following page...



...Bits and pieces...

*Topsfield Council On aging Boxwood Tree Workshop
with fearless leader, Mary Connor*



*Our Club's Holiday Decorations
at the Topsfield Town Library*



*Sandy Whelan and Nancy
Emmons brave the cold!
Jane is behind the camera!*

*Our Holiday Luncheon and Yankee Swap
Toscana's Restaurant, Peabody*



The festive gang!



*Janet Hansen checks out her swap gift!
Will she keep it or swap?*

...Green Thumb Corner follows...

Green Thumb Corner

Exciting news! The first day of Spring is upon us. Sunday, March 20th is the big day. We can already see that our daylight hours are increasing with each passing day, making our houseplants, if they have survived Winter, jump with joy! Winter is tough for them since providing good light and nice humid air is a challenge. Winter is tough on us as well, so we have something in common with our plants in that regard. So, assuming that your plants have survived, or if you've decided to bring new ones into your home, I thought it would be a good time to share some "houseplant parenthood" tips with you.




I guess, by now, most of us know what challenges we face when taking care of houseplants... providing cozy temperature, proper light and the right amount of water and feeding. Today, let's talk a bit about watering, since many times we haven't a clue what's too much or too little for a particular plant until something good happens to it, or something bad! Many plants want their soil moist during Spring, Summer and Fall, and a bit drier during Winter. With this in mind, it is generally good to water most plants once or twice a week except during Winter, when this can be cut back to once a week. There are resources on the Web that can give you some guidance for your particular plants. That said, there are environmental factors and also plant factors that influence how much water a plant uses and therefore what your watering intervals should be. Environmental factors include time of year, temperature levels, light levels and humidity levels. As we already mentioned, during Winter, when there is less light and warmth, a plant will probably not require as much water. As for temperature levels, if the environment is warm, your plant will most likely use more water, needing more in the way of watering. The same is true of light levels. The higher the light intensity is, the more thirsty your plant will be. The opposite is true of high humidity environments...plants in these locations will require less water.

And, now the plant factors that affect watering intervals...first of all, the plant you have will dictate its water requirement. If you have a plant with thick and fleshy leaves, such as succulents and cacti, less water is the rule. However, if your plant has lots of thin leaves, like palms and ferns, it will need more frequent watering to stay happy. A large plant will need more water than a small plant. In addition, a large plant in a small container will need more water than a small plant in a large container. Speaking of containers, the material your container is made from affects the amount of water your plant will need. Clay pots are porous and so plants in these pots will dry out faster. Plants in plastic containers don't require water as often. Your potting medium also comes into play here. If you are using very light free draining potting mixes, these will not hold water as long as more dense and heavy mixtures. So watering intervals will need to be adjusted with this in mind.

Even though there is a lot to take into account here, don't forget that many plants will "tell you" when they need water, just in case you have gotten busy and distracted! You might notice that the leaves have become limp or wilted. Sometimes they even fade or become translucent. The edges of the leaves may become brown or dry, and the oldest leaves may start dropping off. If you have a flowering plant, the flowers may go by quickly or the plant may fail to bloom at all. Check the soil... when you push a finger down a bit into the potting mix, does it feel dry or moist? A moisture meter might help here. They are available at garden centers or online. Another test is to pick your plant up pot and all...is it heavy or light? If it feels heavy, chances are it doesn't need water at the moment. A pot that feels light will probably indicate that it's time to grab the watering can. If you have one plant that is telling you it needs water, be sure to check your others. They're all living in the same environment, after all!

So, you've decided that it's time to water your plant. Should you water it from the top or from the bottom? All things considered, in most cases, it doesn't matter. Just as it sounds, when you top water,

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you provide water to the top surface of the plant's soil. Ideally, the water seeps down through the growing medium to the bottom of the container and out the drainage holes. Bottom watering, on the other hand, is achieved by pouring water into some kind of drip tray or saucer underneath the plant's container. I use deep saucers for this purpose. With this method, the water is pulled up into the growing medium. If there is enough water in the saucer, the plants growing medium will become saturated and moist on the top surface. If each of these methods is used correctly, the end result is the same. Choose whichever method works for you. Your plant's roots will access the moisture in the soil as it is needed no matter whether it comes from the top or bottom! Be aware that all of this only works if there are drainage holes in your plant's container. If there aren't, I would strongly suggest investing in a moisture meter so you can tell what's going on throughout your plants growing medium to avoid over or under-watering. Also, if you are using a container with drainage holes inside an outer container that doesn't, make sure to peek inside the outer container to make sure your plant isn't sitting in water!

Before we complete our discussion about top watering versus bottom watering, there are times when one might be preferable: if your plant's potting mix is very dried out, bottom watering may be preferred since the potting mix will be forced to gradually absorb water. Since dried out potting mix shrinks and creates channels for water to flow through, and resists and repels water, water applied to the top surface of the plant very often just runs through these channels to the bottom very quickly without doing much good! Also, there are some plants that prefer bottom watering such as African Violets, whose leaves get disfigured if they get wet. There are also some houseplants like Umbrella Grass that must never dry out and bottom watering will give you a clear idea what the moisture status of the medium is. If your saucer is dry, just add more water. One warning though...be sure that you don't allow the plant to stand in water for more than an hour!

And finally, a few words about watering houseplants with ice cubes. I'll say right up front that this method of watering is not for me! However, I'll be fair and address what this is all about. So, is it okay to water houseplants with ice cubes? The short answer is that you can, but it could damage certain houseplants in the long term. Houseplant parents who use this method feel their plants will get water in a measured and controlled way, steadily delivering moisture directly to the roots. It is felt that this prevents over-watering. While in theory this is true, the reality is that plants will not do well if you give them a fixed amount of water, not taking into account what we have previously discovered about environmental and plant factors affecting watering intervals. In other words, it is not a good idea to for example put one ice cube a week on your plant's soil surface, without regard to changes in temperature, humidity, light or even the size of the plant as it grows. Your watering habits have to be flexible as your plant's condition changes.

That said, there are times when watering with ice cubes might be convenient: if your houseplant is in a hard-to-reach place, slipping a few ice cube into the pot may be easier than balancing a watering can. Another time ice cube watering might be convenient is for plants in very fast draining medium. The ice cubes will water the plant nice and slowly! And lastly, if you have someone tending your plants while you are away who is not too experienced with plant care, this may be an easy way for your buddy to keep your plants going during the interim!

When not to use ice cubes? Don't use them on plants that are sensitive to cold, as many tropical plants are. The ice could shock the plant with dire results! It's also not such a hot idea to use ice cubes on a plant that doesn't give you room to keep the cube away from the plant's roots and stems. You will be risking freeze damage.

So, there you have it. The houseplant tips for today. I am sorry this went on so long...I wonder how many of you actually got this far in your reading?????

Be safe and healthy!