

# Hardy hibiscus will thrive in Michigan

Have you longed for a beautiful shrub to add to your garden? If so, take time this month to see where a bushy plant that grows four-five feet tall will fit. A hardy hibiscus may be the perfect choice; the blooms come in many colors, from white to deep red.



Garden Spot

Marty Figley

They can be used as a hedge and should be planted 18 inches apart so they'll grow upright and spread out less. This will give a beautiful show, as the flowers will be massed for optimum impact.

If you want bushier plants for a specimen or massed planting, increase spacing three-five feet on center and pinch back growing tips when the plant is eight inches tall and again when it is 12 inches tall.

Hardy hibiscus varieties are tolerant of many soils and average moisture. They do even better with ample organic matter and moisture.

They will tolerate wet soils and are extremely drought-resistant once they are established.

So, they may be a great choice if our drought continues — and we feel pretty sure that it will.

Hardy hibiscus will survive temperatures to -25 degrees Fahrenheit and withstand -55 degrees wind chill.

Another plus for these hardies is that won't stop blooming when nights are hot, as other plants do. They like the high night heat!

They will grow in full sun to partial shade and will thrive in heat up to well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, with no loss of colorful flowers.

Their zone range is from 10 to 3, which makes them quite suitable for our zone 5-6.

These plants bear more flowers during a long season that lasts from midsummer to hard frost.



Hardy hibiscus will thrive beautifully in our Michigan weather.

They are also resistant to many diseases and scidam have pest problems.

What more could anyone want?

Hardy hibiscus combine well with many perennial plants, including daylilies and ornamental grasses.

Gilberg Farms suggests cutting the plants back to four-five inches after a hard frost in the fall. New spring growth will rise from the roots.

For more information, visit [www.hibiscuscentral.com](http://www.hibiscuscentral.com).

### BOOKS

At times we find books relating to gardening that are more introspective and make us think outside the realm of physical gardening.

*Sermon From the Compost Pile: Seven Steps Toward Creating an Inner Garden*, Edward F. Sylvia (Staircase Press, \$19.95), is just such a book.

The author instructs us not only to create a garden on Earth, but how to find and nourish our inner garden, our soul.

This book would be great for group discussion.

*The Lost Language of Plants*, Stephen Hartz and Barbara (Chelsea Green, \$18.95), is another book that makes us think and reflect.

The historical significance of plants, their uses, and their impact on the environment is the focus in the book.

Although Western medicine heals us, it also is polluting the environment in many ways. This revelation is shocking. Perhaps the Earth's plants do tell us what they can heal as we listen to their language. Interesting stuff.

*Praise of Plants*, Francis (Halle

(Timber Press, \$24.95), was translated from the original French into English by David Lee, a professor of biological sciences at Florida International University in Miami. Halle is a professor of botany at the University of Montpellier in France.

Lee says it best: "This is a controversial book. Francis uses strong language and even stronger graphics to make us confront the differences between plants and animals; I suppose that some readers may be offended. Much of it is also very humorous. (This scientist could well have ended up writing comics!) Every reader will find some point of disagreement; I did. "More importantly, readers will have their understanding of plants fundamentally altered, and their appreciation immeasurably enhanced."

Graham Stuart Thomas, the ultimate gardener, has again written a winning book. *The Garden Through the Years* (Sagapress, \$49.95) is, as he says, "a survey of many good garden plants arranged month by month."

It is more than this in that we are privileged to accompany Thomas on a journey through his garden through every season.

He has intimate knowledge about all kinds of plants and, in a conversational manner, shares many of his personal experiences with them.

*Michigan Gardener's Guide*, Tim Boland, Laura Coit and Marty Hair (Cool Springs Press, \$29.99, soft), is a revised edition of the book published in 1997.

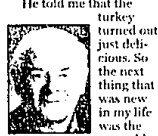
It contains information about the how, when and where of more than 180 plants, including natives. Each plant is photographed in color.

*Portraits of Himalayan Flowers*, Joshi Yoshida (Timber Press, \$39.95), is an exceptional book in that the photographs are outstanding, the technical information will be of interest to gardeners, and the stories of plants and travelers surviving in these mountains is fascinating.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone. Her fax number is (248) 644-3134.

# Cooker has ingredients for tragedy

My brother Larry called me during the holidays and told me he received a new cooker as a present and he cooked a turkey in it.



Appliance Doctor

Joe Gagnon

He told me that the turkey turned out just delicious. So the next thing that was new in my life was the vegetable oil cooker that my darling, Valorie bought for me.

Now, I have always said that my cooking ability is nil and I'm one of the few people who can ruin boiling water.

But now, I would consider the two chickens and the two turkeys that I prepared in the past two weeks to be worthy of a five-star rating.

These new cookers are selling like wildfire and they really do the job, but they hold a secret that most homeowners don't have a clue about. It's called spontaneous combustion. Ask many young people today what that means and they don't have any idea.

I created this one time as a youngster when I mixed two different cleaners to wipe down a hardwood floor.

When I was done, I crumpled up the rag and threw it into a wastebasket. Several hours later it ignited and because of luck alone, the house didn't burn down.

The Whitpool Corporation did a test not so long ago and I wrote about it in this column.

They wiped up a vegetable oil spill with a cloth, ran it through the normal wash and dry

cycle with the regular laundry, and folded the clothes and cloth and placed them into a laundry basket.

Even though the cloth had been washed, it wasn't enough to remove all traces of vegetable oil, and the cloth ignited in the laundry basket.

The fire was a direct result of spontaneous combustion.

This new cooker needs a lot of attention when it is being used.

It needs to be used outside, not in the garage or in the house. Using it in the garage will leave a cooking odor for several days as proven by yours truly.

You have to look up a propane tank to it, making sure that the cooker itself is placed downwind of the tank.

You have to put the food item inside the cooker and fill it with water to just an inch above the food, to give you a measurement of how much vegetable oil is needed.

Before you fill it with oil you need to make sure you wiped dry all the water that was in there. You've heard the old saying that oil and water don't mix.

Before you put the food product inside you have to heat the vegetable oil to 325 degrees, and do I need to explain how hot that is? The oil must never heat higher than 350 degrees when using this thing or it will pop up and land on you.

Remember now, you've got a tank of propane just a few feet away, a high burning flame underneath the pot and the potential for a serious accident just waiting to happen.

Along with the cooker comes a thermometer that should be treated with care.

Don't ever use this

cooker without having that thermometer always submerged in the boiling vegetable oil.

A big pair of fireproof gloves is another requirement.

It comes with a hunger that is used to hook up to the inside cooking pot to remove the item from the cooking pot, and extreme care is needed to prevent the pot from tipping over onto your feet.

Cooking oil boiling at 325 degrees is hot enough to cook your shoes.

It's imperative that you read the instructions with this product.

Yes, you will have some fine tasting food, and at four minutes per pound, a pretty quick preparation time.

You probably think that Valorie and I are eating a lot of chicken and turkey but that's not so. I practiced them a few and gave them away to the neighbors.

**Sad note:** Nowhere on the box does it tell you that if you clean the inside of the pots (and you will), you should use care with the cloth you use to clean it. Wash that rag separate in hot hot water and hang it in the garage to dry.

I am sure that you will hear and see stories in the near future about house fires created by spontaneous combustion.

During the holiday buying season there were stores that ran out of stock on this new cooker.

It's a great product but I would like to meet the idiot who didn't know that vegetable oil can cause a tragedy in the American home.

Stay tuned.

Joe Gagnon can now be heard on WWJ-950 and WXP1-1270. He is a member and past president of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals. His phone number is (248) 455-7281.

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