

## A Volunteer's View of Plant Sale Week

The past two SEWMG newsletters have discussed aspects of the Plant Sale: Pot-A-Thons, types of plants you'll find at the sale, and the activities held during sale week. Hopefully, you are persuaded that there is a place to contribute your talents. Here is one more perspective to consider: the volunteer's view of the week leading up to for Sale day (Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup>).

The week before the Plant Sale is a busy one for SEWMG volunteers. Plants that were dug and potted in April and early May have GROWN and are hardly recognizable from the day they were potted. Some iris have cooperated nicely and are actually blooming during sale week. I never thought about buying a black iris ..... until I saw the "Devil May Care" iris blooming at the 2013 Plant Sale. Beginning on Monday (5/11) we will be transporting all of the plants to State Fair Park. If you are at State Fair Park early Monday, you may be asked to ride along with our trailer crew to collect plants from Pot-A-Thon locations. Our trailer interior is "re-configured" with shelving to hold plant trays. Helpers load the trays – and they get to see the beautiful yards with spring plants in full bloom.

Plants arrive and are unloaded onto our trusty snow sleds, examined by Quality Control experts and then hauled to the appropriate sale location (alphabetical by Latin name or grouped by type – natives, ground-covers, etc.). Quality Control folks make sure the plants look healthy and are labeled properly. Sometimes the plants get a bit of a trim so they look their best for the sale. Picture 15,000 plants arriving in trays of 12 plants (that's 1,250 trays!). We can fit two or three trays per sled (that's up to 625 sleds to transport!). Larger plants and shrubs may be potted in gallon pots – only 6 pots to a tray (more sleds!). We need many hands to help.

By Tuesday and Wednesday, after more deliveries, we may be adjusting sale locations so sleds are used to make more room. By Wednesday, we make sure that trays are "facing forward" and the front row of pots are tipped up for an appealing display. Flowering bulbs and canna roots are bagged and price-marked.

Some years, Thursday finds us tying up loose ends: specialty plants are bundled for group sales (butterfly gardens, sun gardens). If pricing is not complete, pots are color-coded according to their price. The majority of plants will be \$3. More desirable, hard-to-find and larger plants will be priced higher. If you like to use spray paint, this is the job for you! Did I mention that a wonderful **LUNCH** is provided to workers each day? This year, Thursday features "Gardening with Ease", an educational program provided by SEWMG's Lifelong Gardening Committee at 10:30AM – see our Website for details.

Friday is the Master Gardener preview sale. The final signs are placed to display photos of many plant varieties. Display tables are set up for demonstration/education events. Please wear your name tag at the sale – you are welcome to shop for your home gardens, but please **DO NOT** shop for friends or relatives. They will have their chance to shop on Saturday. If you have been helping set up the plants for the sale, you will know right where to head for those plants you can't live without. I was thrilled to come home with Bear's Breeches (*Acanthus hungaricus*) last year – there weren't many plants available, so the "A" section of the sale yard was my first stop on Friday night in 2014. This year should be its first bloom in my garden.

A Silent Auction is held during the preview sale – you will find interesting items related to gardening (the “pot” lady from a previous year, art work, gardening tools, etc.) as well as show-stopper plants. I became the proud owner of a “Komodo Dragon” hosta, donated by Master Gardener, Irwin Johnson, and I can report that it did well last year. If you have a new gardening item or stunning plant specimen to donate to the Silent Auction, please contact Mary and Fred Redlinger – they graciously collect items each year, set up the auction tables and conduct the auction. Did you know they make the coffee for most of our MG events? Thanks, Mary and Fred!

You will find more than perennials at the Plant Sale. Similar to previous years, we will provide a selection of flowering trees and shrubs purchased from Klehm's Song Sparrow (thank you to Klehm's!). Some volunteers contribute tomato or herb plants. Ed Kraus (thanks, Ed!) has rounded up tree peony seedings for us in 2015! There's something for everyone!

Plant Sale day arrives. Rain or shine, volunteers gather early to receive work assignments and help with last minute displays. Sleds need to be arranged at the gate, bagged plants are placed outdoors, instructions are given for specialty areas. Work assignments can include:

Being a plant specialist and staffing areas like the native plants or day lilies;

Helping with plant checkout;

Gathering empty trays, consolidating plants;

Helping shoppers select appropriate plants;

And many more.....

You will also get a break from time to time to rest or walk through the sale grounds to see how the sale is going. I usually work in the checkout area, so I appreciate the chance to see shoppers in action and answer any questions that come my way. It's especially rewarding to see customers purchase plants that I donated or helped pot.

Monday after the Plant Sale, we clean up the sale grounds. Final sales to the public are completed. SEWMG-supported garden chairpersons can select plants for their gardens. And Habitat for Humanity provides good homes to any remaining plants.

So this is what Sale week looks like – we need so many volunteers to make our Perennial Sale a success. The proceeds from the sale fund most of our SEWMG activities and help us achieve our community education mission. I'll say it again: We couldn't do it without you!

Patricia Adrian, SEWMG President