

YARD & GARDEN NEWSLETTER- MARCH 2016

Down the Primrose Path

Barb Maher, MN River Valley Master Gardener

My journey seeking Minnesota hardy primroses began about 24 years ago. I always thought of primroses as a nursery plant sold in local stores in late January or early February in full bloom. I tried to keep them alive after I purchased them and often got them to re-bloom in May if kept in a sunny window until April and then planted outside. They would stay vigorous and green during the growing season, but except for a few exceptionally mild winters they died...until I got "Mrs. Wolkerstorfer."

She is a red primrose with a small yellow eye and clusters of flower atop a short stalk. The plant came from the garden of a friend's mothers in St. Paul. The mother had died and my friend sold the house but was told to take any plants she wanted. When I saw a large patch of primrose foliage there I asked for a piece. We cut out a wedge of plants which when taken apart made seven small plants. I put them in my Mankato woodland gardens in four different locations hoping at least one would suit them, come next spring every one survived! Twenty three years later they are scattered around my yard and I have passed on many to other gardeners.

Having found a totally hardy primrose I began a search for others and I got "Father Tonquay" from a church garden a few years later. It is another red primrose with a large yellow eye and multi-flowered head call a polyanthus primrose.

Next I ordered plants from the mail since none of our local nurseries carried anything but varieties sold in January. I'm sure over the past 23 years I have purchased 50 plants but 45 of them died, either the first winter or within about 3 years. The remaining five are a spring delight and worth searching for. In addition to the two reds I named there is an earlier blooming plant called "Wanda" which has magenta flowers, only one to stalk which is offered in several catalogues and two Asian Woodland species that survive our warm summers by going dormant.

They also bloom later in May but have many varieties of pink, white and violet plants with some having a snowflake form of flower.



P. "Sieboldei" and P. "Father Tonquay" by Barb Maher

If you are like me and are fascinated by the early blooming perennials you can grow primroses. They need summer shade, moisture and a rich soil. I've only seen my friends "Mrs. Wolkerstorfer" and "Father Tonquay" sold at nurseries in Canada but they are an old polyanthus type that was popular in Southern Minnesota gardens in the 1940-50's according to the comments from older gardeners.

Here are the survivors in order of blooming time:

>**Primula "Wanda"**: A juliae primrose in bright magenta with single flowers.

>**Primula- Red polyanthus-** "Mrs. Wolkerstorfer", and "Father Tonquay"

>**Primula kisoana-** A maple-leaved primrose in deep pink or white; Multi-flowered stalks with no eye color.

>**Primula sieboldei-** Pink, lavender and white clusters of flowers with no eye. Some have cut-edged petals called snowflakes.

An old but good reference book is "*Primrose and Spring*" by Deretta Klaba.

To get the same joy from a Minnesota native with very early blooming clusters of pink or white flowers get "Mayflowers", *Hepatica acutiloba*, which blooms in April in our woods.

Extension Corner

Crane Flies, and We're Not Talking About Birds!

Jeff Hahn, UM Extension Entomologist

People have been finding "large mosquitoes" in their homes this month. Fortunately, they aren't actually mosquitoes but a related insect known as a crane fly. Crane flies are common insects in Minnesota. You can recognize them from their slender brown or gray bodies and long, slender legs. Most crane flies range in size from 3/8 to 1 1/2 inches long. Entomologists look for a 'V' shaped suture on the thorax to help identify crane flies.

Crane flies are common throughout the spring and summer. Outdoors, they are usually associated with moist, damp environments with a lot of vegetation.

Larvae commonly develop in streams or in moist soil, often feeding on organic matter (some aquatic larvae are predaceous). Despite looking like mosquitoes, crane flies do not bite. They usually live for only a few days and typically don't even feed.

However, they do startle people when they appear indoors in the middle of winter. Where do they come from?

In most cases, it is likely that the source of crane flies found indoors can be traced back to houseplants that were outside at some point during the summer. Female crane flies laid eggs in the soil and the larvae finished their development indoors and emerged as adults. There is not any special action that needs to be taken when these harmless insects are found indoors; physical removal is the only necessary control.

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Mark Your Calendars!

Spring Alive! Horticulture Day

Saturday, March 19th

South Central College, North Mankato
8:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

(Park on North side of building, in the Blue lot by door 15)

Registration fee: \$15 before 3/11/16
After March 11: Fee is \$20

Annual Plant Sale

Saturday, May 14 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.
Mankato Curling Club



Crane fly photo submitted by Jeff Hahn

...and Botany I rank with the most valuable sciences, whether we consider its subjects as furnishing the principal subsistence of life to man & beast, delicious varieties for our tables, refreshments from our orchards, the adornments of our flower-borders, shade and perfume of our groves,...
~Thomas Jefferson, 1814