

PLANT OF THE WEEK

July 17, 2008

Queen-of-the-Prairie

Filipendula rubra

A brief hiatus, this time for strictly pleasurable pursuits, has ended and I am back once again at the word processor, pounding the keys in an effort to thwart the doldrums of the Dog Days of July. My recent perambulations took the lovely Linda and me first to Philadelphia. We drove through the night from there to Lakeside, MI, where we connected with a group of amiable and fun-loving friends, spending a few days on the sunny sandy beaches of lower Lake Michigan. Truly a blissful time was had by all. From there we drove to Kentucky where Peach Pie Band played at Berea College's Indian Fort Theater, which hosts the Summer Arts and Crafts Fair.

Speaking of musical events, on Friday July 25 (exactly five months till Christmas: get your shopping done now) we will host another Music in the Garden event. I apologize that our 'First Friday' format has been so ill used, but with vacation schedules, holidays and other exigencies, it really left us no choice. So join us on July 25, and then the next one will be August 8, to allow for more than a week to lapse before we revel again in the garden. At the beginning of the academic year, we will return to a first Friday format as best we can.

Our Queen-of-the-Prairie has been blooming for several weeks now. The pink puffy inflorescences are about six feet off the ground, waving gently in the mid-summer breezes. This is one reason why I love it, besides its name and its toughness. As well, the herbal and industrial uses of the genus are almost mind-boggling. The European native, Meadowsweet (*F. ulmaria*) has a long history of herbal uses, having been one of the 'sacred three' herbs of the Druids. It has qualities that include being an alterative, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, aromatic, astringent, diaphoretic, diuretic, stomachic and a tonic. The flower head contains salicylic acid, from which aspirin can be manufactured. A useful treatment for diarrhea, it is often specifically prescribed for that affliction in children. A splendid stomachic, this plant is used for hyperacidity, heartburn, gastritis and peptic ulcers. Also used in treatment of blood problems, it has shown activity against organisms that cause diphtheria, dysentery and pneumonia. In addition it has been used in the production of black dyes from the root, a yellow dye from the tops, and also in perfumes from the essential oils. For our specific plant, the American native, it has been used for heart-problems and as a love medicine by the Meskwaki Indians.

So with all that behind us, let's find out how to grow this lovely herbaceous perennial. Given good sun and excellent moisture (it grows in bogs and wet-lands), this

lovely plant will come back from year to year, providing mid-summer bloom. If it is grown in full sun and is allowed to dry out, the leaves tend to scorch and the plant loses its 'thriftness.' So light shade is not an entirely negative in hotter climates or on drier soils. It just doesn't tolerate drying out.

This is an American native, found from Georgia west to Missouri and Iowa. Its genus name is from the Latin, *filum* for thread and *pendulus* for hanging. This refers to the threads that connect the root tubers. The species name refers to the color of the buds, red or pink by nature. The family is Rosaceae, or the Rose family. Its leaves are finely cut, resembling Astilbe. However this plant will outgrow Astilbe almost doubling it in size. From 6 to 8 feet in height and forming large colonies by under-ground rhizomes and seed, this plant is not one to be taken lightly. Definitely best used in naturalized settings, large plantings, as an accent and in the back of a very large perennial border, I wouldn't promote this plant for the cottage garden.

Our native bog garden has several interesting plants included within its borders. Besides Filipendula, we have Chamaedaphne, native to the far northern bogs of the Bay of Fundy, and Illicium floridanum, a denizen of the Deep South and lower Atlantic regions. We try to extend the definitions of 'native' plants to include any plants that might have been pushed one way or another by glaciers, birds, First Peoples' trading practices or perhaps on the fur of some migrating New World yak. Come visit our naturalized flower, shrub and tree collection beds.

Until next week,
Eric



Yang Qiu, a visiting professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from China, is standing to the left of our Filipendula rubra. He has been our most loyal visitor over the summer months, studying the many plants here at the Gardens. We hope to work with him for some exchange possibilities.



The flower heads of our Filipendula show the feathery pink structures that make this a wonderful garden plant for the larger garden. Not seen in this photo are the many honeybees working the flowers.

Liquid Sunshine and Plant of the Week are written for e-mail readers on average of once a week. The opinions and views expressed therein are the sole responsibility of the author. Yale University and Marsh Botanical Garden are not responsible for the inane and sometimes off the chart craziness of this publication. Contact us at eric.larson@yale.edu or Marsh Botanical Garden, 165 Prospect Street, Room 114 OML, New Haven, CT 06511