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Autor: Hebler, Marlies
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Nature nook | Natur Ecke

Hardy hydrangeas

Spring is always such a busy time for the gardener. The lawns and hedges seem to grow at twice the rate, the veg garden (once planted) enjoys the warmer temperatures and spring showers, and colour bursts out in the flower garden. The summer months are looming so watering is the top job on the list. Pots and baskets need water every day preferably in the early morning and will also respond well to a little liquid feed.

Hydrangeas are a woody shrub that will remind many of us of Granny's garden. It is an old shrub originating from China and Japan and in recent years has enjoyed a come-back with flowers in shades of blues, purples, pinks and deep reds. As well, beautiful miniature hydrangeas are available for pots so anyone can grow them. They make a wonderful garden shrub, good shelter hedging, prefer a shady environment, are fully frost hardy and are easily propagated from softwood cuttings taken in the summer. They do like regular watering and being acid loving, they will respond well to a cup of vinegar to 4-5 litres of water. Blue flowering hydrangeas tend to like a more acid soil than pink.

If you pick them for the house drop them immediately into a bucket of cold water up to their necks. Once inside re-cut them and dip the ends into an inch or so of alum powder before arranging them in your vase. They can also be dried for display by leaving them in the vase to mature.

It is hard to believe Christmas is so close again. This year has been a strange one to say the least. Christmas is a special time so hopefully you will enjoy family and friends as well as the pleasure the garden brings. Best wishes to you all.

Margie Bishop



History of the alphorn | Geschichte des Alphorns

Alphorns still delight

Archaeological records date the Alphorn or Alpine Horn back close to 2000 years. Wooden horns were not only used in the Swiss Alps, but as far as the Carpathian, Pyrenees, and even in Scandinavia.

Earlier on, the alpine horns were used in mountainous regions for signalling and announcing daily activities, in short, for communication. Since the early days it has been part of shepherds and cowherds in the mountain. It was also blown to calm the cows while milking, or to settle the sheep flock for the night and sometimes in place of missing church bells. The sounds of the horn were used to call for gatherings or even calls for war.

The alphorn is carved or bored from a spruce or pine and wound with birch bark or willow cane. Some are straight or up curved and can reach up to four metres in length – there are even S shaped ones (called Büchel). The modern ones are made with lighter composite materials and can be dissembled.

On the alphorn you can play only natural tones as there are no openings or valves and is now solely used for playing music. It's warm sound has become more and more popular. The mellow and reverberant sounds can be carried for long distances, therefore ideal up in the mountains.

Here in New Zealand people are delighted with the amazing sound and many young children like to have a blow on that big horn that makes very big and lovely sounds.

Maries Hebler



Büchel.