

## Wild Bleeding Heart *Dicentra eximia*

Family: *Fumariaceae*

By Pat Cahalan

Wild Bleeding Heart's fragile and lacy appearance belies its robust nature, a combination that makes it a perennial woodland favorite. Resembling small Victorian bouquets tucked among the ferns and violets, the plants lend a note of grace and romance to any garden.

*Dicentra's* name comes from the Greek *di-* or two, and *kentos*, spurs, describing the two oddly curved outer petals that form the flower's heart shape. Two smaller inner petals extend downward, covering the pistil and stamen, emerging beneath the outer petals to complete the image of a drop of blood falling from the heart. The unusual flower shape has inspired other common names, including Lady's Locket and Lyre Flower. The upside-down flowers are favorites of bumblebees, one of the few insects with the long tongues needed to reach up between the petals to get at the nectar inside.

*Dicentra eximia* is native to the eastern United States, ranging from southern New York to the Appalachian region and is hardy throughout Rhode Island. The finely cut leaves form a gray-green mound beneath wands of dangling heart-shaped flowers that vary in color from pale pink to a deep rose-purple, or occasionally white. The lacy leaves inspired its other common name, Fringed Bleeding Heart. The plant ranges in height from 12 to 18 inches and is equally wide.

Unlike its ephemeral cousins, Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) and Squirrel Corn (*D. canadensis*), Bleeding Heart (*D. eximia*) blooms throughout spring and summer into fall. *D. formosa*, the Western Bleeding Heart, closely resembles *D. eximia* in appearance and is often crossed with it to create the named hybrids found in nurseries. (Note that *D. formosa* forms wandering rhizomes, and some of the resulting hybrids will spread aggressively in the garden.) *D. spectabilis*, the Asian Bleeding Heart, is considerably larger and makes a more spectacular display in bloom but goes dormant after flowering in early summer. It is also used in hybridization.

The Wild Bleeding Hearts are undemanding plants, requiring little more than an occasional light fertilization or top-dressing of compost or leaf mold. They prefer rich moist woodland soil and are content in light shade to full sun. In a location where they're happy, they will self-sow throughout the garden, often with the help of the ants, who are attracted to the seed's fleshy, fat-rich appendages called *elaiosomes*. As the ant carries away the seed, it leaves a scent trail for others from the nest, who soon arrive to take away the remaining seeds. Once the *elaiosome* is consumed, the seed is discarded within the nest, where it remains buried in a hospitable environment until it's time to sprout. Seeds missed by the ants will often sprout beneath the mother plant or very nearby, while the ant-dispersed seedlings can show up as far away as 30 feet. The plant can multiply rapidly in a location where it's happy, but the many seedlings are easily controlled.

### Propagation

Perhaps the easiest way to increase your supply of Bleeding Hearts is to keep an eye out for volunteers. Seedlings and even mature plants can easily be lifted, moved to a new location. Just water them well until they're established. This is best accomplished in spring or fall.

Division is also easily accomplished. Large plants form clumps that can be divided in spring or fall. Simply lift the plant and cut between the sec-

tions to form divisions. Work carefully; the brittle crowns break easily. Replant, again keeping the plants well watered until they're acclimated to their new surroundings.

Growing from seed is more of a challenge. Timing is not critical in collecting the seed, since the plant blooms off and on all summer. Seeds form in pods that split open along the seams and curl back like wings, exposing the seeds. Check for ripeness by opening a pod and examining the seeds. Ripe ones are black. Collect the seeds and sow immediately. Do not allow seed to dry out, since viability will drop rapidly. (This is typical of ant-dispersed seeds.)

For seeds to germinate, they need a period of moist warm stratification,\* followed by moist cold stratification, then moist warm stratification. To accomplish this, seeds can be planted in flats, barely covered with the potting medium and set outside through the warm summer, the cold winter and the following spring to allow nature to do the stratifying. Seedlings should appear the following spring or summer. Seed can also be sown in a garden bed, again leaving it to nature do the stratification.

Or nature's cycle can be simulated indoors, which does give greater control over the process and better protection from seed predators. Plant seed in 4-inch pots or small flats and keep at room temperature for three months or so, then move to a cold location (the refrigerator works well) for 6 to 12 weeks, then back to a warm spot. Seeds should start sprouting after moving back to warmth. As always when growing from seed, sterile pots and a sterile potting mix are strongly recommended. (Starting the seed calls for a little patience. It can take 30 or more days to germinate and even then germination can be sporadic.)

### Notes:

\*Stratification refers to placing seed in a moist environment that closely mimics the conditions it would experience in nature. The term is derived from the old practice of placing moist sand and seed in alternate layers (*strata*) to stimulate germination.

Stu Nelson, *Seed Stratification*,

[http://gardenline.usask.ca/seed\\_str.html](http://gardenline.usask.ca/seed_str.html)

### References:

Cullina, William. 2000. *The New England Wild Flower Society Guide to Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada*. Houghton Mifflin: Boston, New York.

Druse, Ken. 2000. *Making More Plants: The Science, Art and Joy of Propagation*. Clarkson Potter: New York.

Nelson, Stu, *Seed Stratification*.

[http://gardenline.usask.ca/misc/seed\\_str.html](http://gardenline.usask.ca/misc/seed_str.html)

Sanders, Jack. 1993. *Hedgemaids and Fairy Candles*. Ragged Mountain Press: Camden, ME. <http://plants.usda.gov>

### RIWPS Policy

*Never dig plants in the wild or without the written permission of the landowner. Take seeds sparingly.*

Artwork credit: USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions*. Vol. 2: 143.



## RIWPS 2008 "GoWILD!" Garden Tour, a blooming success

On a perfect New England summer Saturday, over 200 people toured the 11 spectacular gardens on the RIWPS garden tour. The event was a sellout and yielded the Society about \$7200 in profit, an all-time record for RIWPS garden tours.

"The tour surpassed my wildest expectations," commented tour co-chair Sandra Thompson, who has worked on the past three garden tours. She credited much of the success to co-chair and former RIWPS President Karen Asher who headed up publicity for the event. The week prior to the "GoWILD!" tour, every local paper, including the South County edition of *The Providence Journal*, featured lead articles with color photos of the gardens. This was in addition to an appearance by Judy Ireland on Marion Gold's "Plant Pro" segment of Channel 10's news and an appearance by Thompson on the Sunday morning "Garden Guys Talk Show."

Gardeners were present at each garden on tour day to share their passion and expertise with the public. Attendees were treated to a tour of the amazing gardens of Louis Raymond and Judy Ireland. Although, all the gardeners were pretty exhausted by the end of the day, they expressed how much they enjoyed the opportunity to display their years of creating special landscapes that give them great joy.

A special thank you to the committee who put in many hours to make it happen: **Susan Brouillette, Diane Donilan, Suzanne Lussier, Paula Morrissey, Dede Cohen, Marcia Herron, Martha MacBurnie, Isabel**

**Pollack, Pat Cahalan, Mary Lou Upham and Kate Rakosky** and to all who supported the garden tour, especially our media and garden sponsors: **Southern Rhode Island Newspapers, American Deer Proofing, Inc., Clark Farms, J&M Construction Services, Wildwood Garden Center & Nursery, The Secret Garden Florist and Garden Center, Morningstar Wholesale Nurseries, Inc. and North Kingstown Wal Mart.**

Twenty five RIWPS members volunteered to serve as garden docents the day of the tour: **Madeline Perreault, Paula Morrissey, Isabel Pollack, Ann & Roger Avery, Dede Cohen, Sarah Keisling, Diane Donilan, Barbara Zarchen, Gayle Berry, Lou Cadwell, Nancy Weiss-Fried, Maggie Downes, Jackie Dawley, Debbie St. Pierre, Jules Cohen, Judi Scott, Martha MacBurnie, Jack Carney, Angela von Seckendorff, Phyllis Hunt, Ray Blais, Paul Thompson, Sylvia Hampton, Joan Pilson and Connie Fitzelle.** And there would be no tour without the gardeners who opened their lovely gardens to the public, **Judy and George Ireland, Suzanne Lambert, Marty and Steve Cavanagh, Cornelia Mueller and Wayne Munns, Pam King and Chris Pike, Dan LaLiberte and Steve Jorgensen, Kay and Bill Johnson, Beth and Dick Casagrande, Karen and Ira Asher, Kate and Dan Rakosky and Louis Raymond.** We hope the success of this tour will inspire you to use the next two years to get your gardens ready for the RIWPS 2010 "GoWILD!" Garden Tour.

## Gleaner Gardens Shines as fund raiser

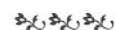
Cindy Gianfrancesco and Chuck Horbert once again opened their beautiful gardens as a fundraiser for RIWPS. Gleaner Gardens is a fifty-year old rhododendron garden which Cindy and Chuck nurtured back to life. The stars of the show, the Rhododendrons, are at their best in late May and early June, so the event is held on Memorial Day weekend. This year the weather was lovely and the Rhododendrons were stunning.

While the weekend started off a little slow, every day more and more people came, until well over 500 visitors toured the grounds. RIWPS society wants to thank Cindy and Chuck for their generous hospitality.

They want to thank RIWPS members for their help in making the program so successful. Special thanks to Susan Schuster for coordinating the docents and to Sue Ahnrud, Karen Beck, Cheryl and Lou Cadwell, Rosemary Hobson, Marcia Pena, Dee Scamacca, and Nancy Weiss-Fried, amiable docents who made the event pleasant for everyone.

Finally a special thank you to Marcia Pena, Tysh McGrail, and Lou Cadwell for helping to get the garden ready.

This is a great way to kick off the season, so put this event on your 2009 calendar.



## Welcome to our New Members

Samuel Beale  
Becky Bradley  
Carole B. Brown  
Judy Brunelle  
Richard & Beth Casagrande  
Louise Celidonio  
Robert Chapman  
George Christie  
Mary Clark  
Richard Clark  
Mary & Thomas Dunne  
Timothy Dwyer  
Robert Fain  
Lynn Feiner  
Gail Fisher  
John Garbarino  
Newport Garden Club  
Sandra Gardner  
Michael Geuyna

Deborah House  
Christopher & Judith Howell  
Chris Johnson, J & M Services  
William & Catherine Johnson  
Sally Kent  
Chizu Kraska  
Steve Jorgenson & Dan LaLiberte  
Laura Landon  
Elise Maggiacomo  
Theresa Malloy  
Carolyn Moulthrop  
Jennifer Norris  
Bob Aube, Morningstar Nurseries Inc.  
Sandy Pascualano  
Linda T. Peduzzi  
Pam King & Chris Pike  
Richard & Theresa R. Prescott  
Louis Raymond  
Margaret Ogert

Jennifer Ross  
Dr. Ted Smayda  
Linda Sollitto  
T. Sonderman  
Rebecca Sperling  
Dorothy S. Strang  
Martha & James Sullivan  
Sandy Sullivan  
Gail J. Tatangelo  
David J. Urban, The Secret Garden  
Margo Waite  
Diana Wharton  
David Basco, Wildwood Nursery  
Helen A. Wilmot  
James Yess