

Poor Richard's Almanac

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A heart of gold. April 22, 2008

Posted by ourfriendben in [gardening](#).

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Today is the presidential primary in our friend Ben's state, Pennsylvania. If you follow politics at all, you'll know that the pundits claim that the outcome of today's primary may change the course of the Democratic race. So it seemed like a good day for a post on bleeding hearts.

Our friend Ben loves garden-variety bleeding hearts, plants of the genus *Dicentra*. And from the wild species like Dutchman's breeches (*D. cucullaria*) through the foamy foliage of wild bleeding heart (*D. eximia*) to the Victorian abandon of old-fashioned bleeding heart (*D. spectabilis*), the bleeding hearts are preparing to steal the floral show here at Hawk's Haven. With their blue-green, fernlike foliage and heart-shaped pink, rose, white, or pink-and-white flowers borne in upright or pendant sprays, it's easy to see why.

Admittedly, our friend Ben has never met a bleeding heart I didn't like. And they (usually—I have a funny story for you in a moment) behave well for me, resisting the temptation to go dormant in summer as they tend to do in hotter, drier areas. But even among the multitude at Hawk's Haven, one bleeding heart stands out. It's *Dicentra spectabilis* 'Gold Heart', another brainchild of the *infant terrible* of Terra Nova Nurseries, Dan Heims. You may know Dan, or at least his plant introductions, from the numerous heucheras and heucherellas he's introduced to the trade, many with extraordinary foliage form and color. We grow many of them here at Hawk's Haven, and they never fail to bring pleasure. 'Gold Heart' is another triumph.

What sets 'Gold Heart' apart is its extraordinary foliage, which opens gold, then turns chartreuse as the season progresses. You may have gathered that our friend Ben is partial to the foliage of bleeding hearts anyway; it is graceful and beautiful. But oh, to see that cascade of ferny gold foliage in a shady spot. It not only lights up the garden but the gardener's own heart as well. And it's not just the gold of the foliage that gives 'Gold Heart' a warm glow. The plant's stems are a dusky red. I've seen them described as "peach," but that's not quite it, unless it's a flush of red over a yellow peach, a sort of rose-apricot blush. Whatever the case, they add a show of their own to the display and make a gorgeous color combination with the foliage. And of course, there are the flowers, a clear rose-pink that makes a finger-in-the-electric-outlet effect paired with the gold foliage.

As you'd expect, 'Gold Heart' looks fabulous with other shade plants like heucheras, hellebores, and hostas. (Our friend Ben thinks of these backbones of shady spots as "the three Hs of shade gardening.") In the bed beside the

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deck, our friend Ben has paired 'Gold Heart' with chartreuse-leaved hostas and apricot-, flame-, and peach-leaved heucheras, as well as other gold- and chartreuse-leaved beauties like *Hakonechloa macra* 'All Gold' (golden hakone grass) and, if I'm lucky enough to get some, the annual *Talinum paniculatum* 'Kingwood Gold', which I met courtesy of wonderful Pennsylvania "plant geek" Nancy Ondra. (Check out her fun and informative blog, Hayefield, via the link on this blog; she's also a regular on another great gardening blog, Gardening Gone Wild, linked here, too.) I've tucked in gold-variegated calamint and agastache (anise hyssop), too. Of course, I've filled in around and among all this with plenty of green-leaved plants as a visual counterpoint—the eye must rest!—but often add a little trick in the form of flower echoes, as with primrose-yellow tulips or 'Butter and Sugar' Siberian iris.

Got shade? Get some 'Gold Heart' bleeding hearts! Fortunately, they're widely available. White Flower Farm is one well-known source, but I'd be willing to bet that your local nursery has them, too, especially this time of year.

Okay, it's time for the funny story. You might think a cottage-garden classic like old-fashioned bleeding heart would be something of a straightlaced Victorian. But here at Hawk's Haven, she's been engaged in playing a long-running joke on our friend Ben. When I first bought the property, there was a huge, fabulous bleeding heart on one side of the front door garden. Our friend Ben wished to create some symmetry, adding shepherd's crooks with pots of cascading variegated ivy on either side of the stoop. It seemed like a no-brainer to put a second bleeding heart on the other side as well. The new plant prospered. And then the old plant disappeared. The front door display was lopsided once more. Our friend Ben did what any gardener would do: cursed a blue streak, then went and bought another bleeding heart for that side. The new bleeding heart prospered. The one on the other side disappeared.

This little game of hide and shriek has been going on for over a decade now. To see the huge plants in bloom, you'd think they'd endured for eons. But no. As this spring advances, our friend Ben notes with outrage that, yet again, only one bleeding heart is making a show (but what a show!) at the front door. (Perhaps to compensate, bleeding hearts have self-sown at surprisingly regular intervals down the length of the bed.) I suppose that a sensible person would simply stop playing, stop being Charlie Brown forever trying, and failing, to kick the football. But of course our friend Ben will be at the garden center, probably this very weekend, buying another bleeding heart for the other side.

Happy Earth Day to all!

Comments»

1. Benjamin – April 22, 2008

Good grief it pisses me off when plants do what your stoop bleeding hearts are doing every year. What is with that? I've had many go through that similar act. I think it has somethign to with karma. OR is it will? That particular plant's will to live that particular year or moment? Don't plants have souls? At least in some way? Aren't their suicides (blooming orgies) beautiful? I am not crazy. I am not.

Ha!!! Well, maybe they're trying to tell me something about symmetry or



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its irrelevance. But sheesh, would it kill them to at least try it for a couple of years?!!

2. Joy – April 22, 2008



Getting in bed with the Bleeding Hearts ! .. I love this post to death "ben" !! Ellen ... I am such a fan of them .. I have several kinds but not yet the Gold Heart which you have made me totally in love with all over again for this season's HUNT ! .. and yes .. I am a die hard Heuchera, Tiarella, Heucherella FAN and love that man for all of the divine choices we have now !

I'm sitting here with a BIG sappy grin on my face because I have enjoyed this post so much !

Thank you !

Joy :)

Why, Joy, you're so welcome! I was just over at your blog looking at photos of the little Emma being bad and in lockdown, doubtless with that same sappy grin on my own face!

3. deb – April 22, 2008



I keep killing bleeding heart plants. Think it's the heat or maybe they just don't like me. My shasta daisies do that thrive where I didn't put them thing. This year they moved down under one rose bush instead of staying centered between that rose and the next like I intended. GRRR!!!

Sigh, we all know what you mean, Deb!!! Plants!!! Can't live with them, can't live without them. "GRRR!!!" is right.

4. Barbee' – April 23, 2008



Thanks for the chuckles! I think I better go check on mine and see if they are still there. I've never heard of peek-a-boo plants, but someone somewhere has a sense of humor.

Ha! Better keep a close eye on them, Barbee'! You never know what they're plotting...

message

name