

# Greg Freeman's Garden Chronicle



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**Not one to decorate for Christmas. However, I love nativity sets, especially those antique Italian ones that I never can seem to afford. That said, I always enjoy displaying our porcelain figures and a rustic little wooden stable that Dad built years ago. Never mind that the figures are cheap Chinese imports. It's the meaning that counts. Nonetheless, I took things a bit further this year and bought a potted rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) specimen that had been pruned into pyramidal form. Inexpensive ornaments and accessories from Walmart and Hobby Lobby, as well as a handmade ornament from friends at church, made this fragrant "Christmas tree" a lovely standout amid all of our poinsettias and Christmas cards on display. Best of all, I can plant it in the garden and enjoy it for years to come.**

"*Carpe diem!*" "Seize the day!" How often have we heard those words, which were supposedly declared by the great poet Horace, echo from the lips of those who are wiser, more experienced at living, and perhaps even more cognizant of their own wasted years? How often do we reflect on the previous year, then vow to make the next one better, only to repeat some of our same mistakes, take precious moments for granted and even dare to continue sweating the small stuff?

Such is life, I suppose. We are human, after all, and we simply don't always get it right, in spite of our best laid plans.

Our human frailty became evident many, many generations ago in a garden, oddly enough. While a serpent of Biblical proportions might not tempt us to err in our gardens today, our attempts to cultivate relationships, bring beauty into others' lives and grow among our fellow man can fail just as dismally as some of our own gardening endeavors. Still, it's worth the effort. When it works well, it is very rewarding. We must remember another day, another moment, is not promised. Seize the day! Seize the moment!

On November 29, 2019, I said "see you later" to my dad. More than my father, he was my best friend. I am not overcome with sadness, but I miss him terribly. I miss his humor, his

stubbornness, his tell-it-like-it-is nature and his willingness to embrace the good in life, always striving to see the best in circumstances...and people. He had lived a long life – nearly 83 years, in fact – even doing many of the things he enjoyed on up until the final few weeks of his earthly days. He seized each day, as long as he could physically do so. As people of faith, my family and I believe he has now seized an everlasting day in the presence of our Savior. And we will join him in due time.

In large part, I enjoy gardening because of his influence on my life. I've spent countless hours helping him work the soil, pick beans, gather tomatoes and look for "old-timey" daffodils along roadside ditches to bring bouquets home to Mom. Though I might have once complained about garden chores as a kid, I am now very grateful for those experiences we shared together.

I would love to be able to project for you an exciting year, void of loss or disappointment, but, just as I am unable to predict beautiful weather for your garden and an abundance of flowers and produce in exchange for your labor, I am helpless to forecast great health, financial prosperity and overall happiness. Still, I think that great Roman poet was onto something.

In 2020, I hope you will join me in facing each dawn with a "seize the day" attitude. Happy New Year and Happy Gardening!

*Greg Freeman*, Publisher

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## *Ledebouria socialis* Diminutive South African Bulb Source of Happy Returns

A relative of the hyacinth, *Ledebouria socialis* has been known by an array of common and botanical names. Frequently called silver squill in American garden centers, the plant is commonly known as silver leaf thicket onion in South Africa, the land of its origins.

Since its discovery, even botanists have not always agreed on its proper nomenclature. First described in 1870 by English botanist John Gilbert Baker FRS (1834-1920), the bulbous perennial, native to South Africa's Eastern Cape Province, would become known as *Scilla socialis*. However, a century later John Peter Jessop (b. 1939) reclassified *S. socialis* into the genus *Ledebouria*, a family of plants named after Carl Friedrich von Ledebour (1785-1851), a noted German-Estonian botanist.

Decades following its renaming by Jessop, *L. socialis* remains the most cultivated and available plant within the *Ledebouria* clan.

As the species "socialis" more or less implies, the plant grows in colonies, which hardly proves to be an issue for most plant lovers, especially when the plant is confined to containers, greenhouses and sun rooms. Always choosing to grow it in pots and hanging baskets that are easily moved indoors before the threat of autumn chills, I have never attempted to plant *Ledebouria* in the ground or otherwise leave it outside year-round. I am doubtful that it would survive even the mildest of winters in my South Carolina garden. However, there is no doubt it can thrive and spread readily where conditions closely resemble those of its South African homeland. Ernst van Jaarsveld writes, "Silver leaf thicket onion...is an egregious species with a habit of rapidly branching from sideshoots growing above ground, a characteristic it shares with Thicket ledebouria (*Ledebouria concolor*)" (181).

Desirous of high light, *L. socialis* boasts green-spotted, silver lanceolate leaves, which possess a purplish cast to the undersides when the plants are provided very high light. Light and some humidity are key to succeeding with this plant, but do not overwater. Allow the potting mix surface to dry out between waterings. As for propagation, the plants are easily started from bulb offsets. Attractive flower clusters appear every spring.

*L. socialis* is not necessarily available at your average big box store, but it can be purchased from specialty sources. Better yet, ask around. As a pass-along plant, it might even be calling your name from the kitchen window of your neighbor down the street, or it could be growing in the office next door! I remember attending a Georgia Daffodil Society meeting a few years ago at



Be sure to check out [www.GregFreeman.garden](http://www.GregFreeman.garden) for original video content and other helpful information.



Sara Van Beck's office in Atlanta's Cabbagetown neighborhood, just blocks from the downtown business district. Sitting on her desk was a shallow dish containing some happy little bulbs of *L. socialis*. Because of its colonizing nature, anyone who grows the plant generally has some to spare.

Right off hand, I do not recall where my original specimens of *L. socialis* came from decades ago. They might have been a gift from a friend. Perhaps I bought them at a flea market or nursery center. Nonetheless, I grew the plant for years, giving away some all along the way. Sadly, I wound up losing my only remaining plants, perhaps due to outright neglect or, equally shameful, overzealous care. At this point, I fail to recall. At any rate, in 2009 I was visiting Glenda Martin, a life-long family friend, whose vast hosta collection grows along stone paths amid hardwoods and azaleas behind her house. As we admired her beautiful



Greg Freeman

***Ledebouria socialis* overwintering indoors**

shade garden, I happened to glance at a nearby hanging basket overflowing with *L. socialis*. “You have silver squills!” I announced. She looked to the source of my excitement and said, “Oh! Those came from Brenda Jenkins.” I replied, “I gave Brenda her start of these a few years ago!” As Glenda began gathering me some to take home, I explained how I had lost mine. Now it has been ten years since Glenda shared the bulbs with me. Noted for its happy returns – abundant blooms and multiplying effect – the plant is once again overflowing its terra cotta home. A happy return, indeed.

Van Jaarsveld, Ernst. *Waterwise Gardening in South Africa and Namibia*. Cape Town: Random House Struik, 2010.

## South Carolina Art Exhibition Containing Vincent van Gogh's First Garden Painting Ending Soon

Art lovers within reasonable driving distance have just days to visit the Palmetto State's [Columbia Museum of Art](#) before *Van Gogh and His Inspirations* ends on January 12, 2020. Among the works contained in the exhibition is *Bulb Fields* (1883), the first garden painting by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890). On loan from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, the painting, an oil on canvas on panel, was



National Gallery of Art, Washington, District of Columbia, USA

**Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), *Bulb Fields (or Flower Fields in Holland)*, c. 1883, oil on canvas on board**

executed during van Gogh's second year in The Hague.

The Columbia Museum of Art, located in Columbia, South Carolina, is closed on Mondays, but opens from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. However, some extended hours (10 a.m. to 10 p.m.) are arranged for Thursday through Saturday, January 9-11. Be sure to take advantage of this great opportunity to view these works by Vincent van Gogh.

**Author's Note:** If *Bulb Fields* (1883) by van Gogh seems oddly familiar, you might recall the image being used for illustrative purposes for "Van Gogh Paintings Spring to Life in New Film," a brief article included in the inaugural edition of *Greg Freeman's Garden Chronicle* (April 15, 2016). At the time, I had no clue the painting would eventually be coming to a museum less than three hours from my residence.

## *Mediterranea* Project Off to Good Start



Greg Freeman

**This view of *Mediterranea* is a mere vignette, a view of one little corner inside a large aquarium tank that will eventually be filled with botanical treasures. The plants above are becoming well-established. Determining which other ones will adapt to the environment so far has proven to be a classic case of trial and error.**

*Mediterranea*, my ambitious terrarium project, was alluded to a year ago in the December 2018 issue of the *Garden Chronicle*, at which time I discussed the initial planning stages. As 2019 marched on, I eventually set up the large aquarium tank given me by my brother and sister-in-law. Creating terraces using some limestone given me by Dr. Michael and Lisa Kuduk on my trip to

the Kentucky Daffodil and Bulb Society Show in April, as well as incorporating a broken vintage rustic planter, I began filling the gaps with a mix of perlite, pebbles, potting mix and cactus soil. Humidity is generally key to maintaining most terrariums, mainly because most terrariums house tropical plants. However, I wanted to create a well-drained atmosphere that would accommodate plants from the Mediterranean region, an area stretching from the Iberian Peninsula to the Levant, northern Africa to the Italian Riviera. Thus far, the drainage effect is working, and humidity is kept at a minimum.

Determining which plants might prove adaptable to a terrarium environment has largely been a process of trial and error.

Kitchen herbs such as mint and basil have not fared very well, in spite of the high light provided. On the other hand, a few plants have settled in.

*Sedum acre*, a species of stoneweed naturalized throughout Europe, is proving quite contented in its glass-enclosed home. Known as biting stoneweed due to its ability to cause skin rashes when contact is made with its fluid, the plant was an inexpensive, impulsive purchase at my local Home Depot. So far, it has been an attractive addition. It remains to be seen if it will flower later this summer.

A transplant from the garden, *Ajuga reptans*, another European native that has naturalized widely throughout the Continent and elsewhere, is a wonderful little groundcover. Commonly known as bugleweed, I predict a bright future for this plant in the terrarium. It is virtually impossible to get rid of *Ajuga* in the garden. I can't imagine the terrarium will be any different.

Another plant introduced from the garden is a well-rooted sprig of *Thymus praecox* 'Coccineus', the low-growing creeping red thyme. *Thymus praecox* grows like a weed throughout southern, central and western Europe, and is particularly liked by Alpine garden aficionados. I figured I could not go wrong with this plant. To date, it has adapted to terrarium life, but it might be later into the summer before it begins to spread and drape over the terraced stones.

The last plant to go into the terrarium, to date, was a transplanted bulb of *Narcissus jonquilla* var. *henriquesii*, a miniature daffodil that has added much interest to the garden outside and has proven useful for me on the show bench. The jonquil tribe of daffodils originate mostly from the



Iberian Peninsula, and *N. jonquilla* var. *henriquesii* is no exception. Native to central Portugal, the plant, like my other jonquils, emerges with foliage during the late fall and early winter when other daffodils are still anticipating better days. This variety is also noted for blooming a few weeks earlier than *N. jonquilla* or its various cousins. Very fragrant and quite useful for hybridizing, *N. jonquilla* var. *henriquesii* is expected to bloom within a few more weeks, but it remains to be seen whether it will adapt to the terrarium in the long-term.

Efforts to mimic the Mediterranean region include controlling the light, allowing plenty of drainage and experiencing seasonal highs and lows (due to the room having no heat or air conditioning), but my *Mediterranea* project is one big experiment, nonetheless. Is it expected to become a virtual snippet of Andalusia's Alhambra or Rome's expansive Giardino di Villa Borghese? Hardly. I *am* a realist, after all. Still, its progress, or lack thereof, will, no doubt, be the subject of further articles. Be sure to stay tuned!

## A Promise to Lady Banks

Several years ago, I visited some friends whose property abutted the ascension of the first ridge of mountains in the northern part of the county in which I live. While I often tell folks that I live at the foot of the mountains since I technically live among the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, it could be said that my friends literally lived at the base of a mountain. Their property, bordered by a babbling stream that had carved its way down from a nearby mountainside waterfall, was covered in native flora such as



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***Rosa banksiae* 'Lutea' at the Real Jardín Botánico de Madrid  
(Royal Botanical Garden of Madrid, Spain)**

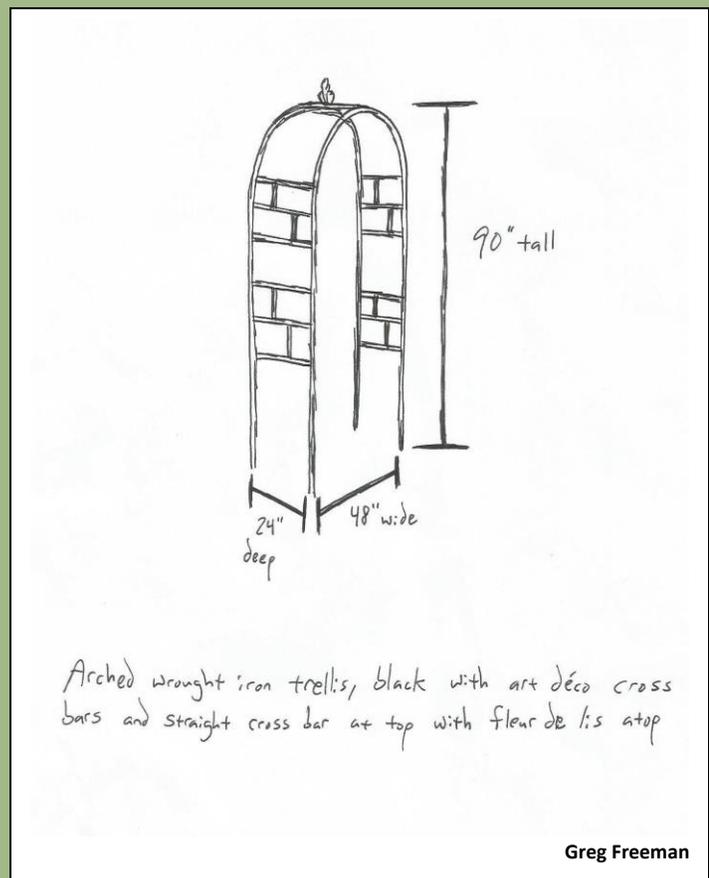
*Kalmia* (mountain laurel) and various *Rhododendron* species, as well as an array of wildflowers, including *Asclepias variegata* (white milkweed) and the native lily, *Lilium michauxii*. I was always impressed that they could grow sun-loving annuals and maintain a variety of plants in their deep, isolated “holler,” in spite of summertime’s dappled shade and winter’s bitter cold. On the visit in question, I was particularly awed by a happy specimen of *Rosa banksiae* covering an arbor and blooming its heart out. Not the biggest fan of roses, I was, however, so moved by their rose’s display that I vowed within myself to buy one someday.

On September 30, 2017, I was finally afforded the opportunity to purchase my own *R. banksiae* when I attended the fall plant sale at the South Carolina Botanical Garden on the campus of Clemson University. The rose, commonly called Lady Banks’ rose in honor of Lady Dorothea Banks, wife of English naturalist and botanist, Sir Joseph Banks, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet (1743-1820), is widely cultivated, and various selections are available. To be more specific, I purchased *R. banksiae* ‘Lutea’, the yellow Lady Banks’ rose, which was first introduced to Europeans in 1824 by J. D. Parks. *R. banksiae* var. *banksiae* had been acquired at China’s Fa Te nursery in 1807 by William Kerr (d. 1814) on behalf of Sir Joseph. The yellow Lady Banks’ rose, also distinguished by its double flowers, would be discovered some time later. The plant was a recipient of the Royal Horticultural Society’s coveted Award of Garden Merit in 1993.

Inspired by my friends’ arbor, I immediately put pen to paper, sketching my own arbor design. I envisioned a simple art déco-style wrought iron arbor that would require the skills of a blacksmith or metal artist for its construction. As I reached out to specialists near and far, I found one in northeast Georgia who grasped my concept and found my idea feasible. Speaking with an endearing Georgia mountain drawl, he returned my call one

afternoon upon viewing my e-mailed drawing and gave me a more than reasonable estimate for the work. However, every time I have seemed to have just that amount of money on hand, something more practical or urgently needed has beckoned for my cash.

Sadly, my *R. banksiae* ‘Lutea’ is still in the black nursery pot it occupied upon its arrival in my garden. All this time later, it has yet to be planted. I plan to change that in 2020, with or without an arbor. Lady Banks’ roses are not the sort of fussy roses that require constant pampering or having poetry whispered in their ear. In fact, they are attractively evergreen, fragrant and virtually thornless, all admirable qualities, indeed. A rose of such refinement and comportment deserves



more than empty promises. In 2020, a promise to my Lady Banks' rose is that she will be able to put down roots, grow and prosper.



**Spartanburg, here we go again!**

On Tuesday, February 4, 2020 at 10:00 a.m., Greg Freeman is scheduled to address the [Spartanburg Garden Club Council](#), a member of the Garden Club of South Carolina, Inc. and National Garden Club, Inc. The event will be held downtown at the beautiful [Chapman Cultural Center](#) at 202 East Saint John Street. On June 17, 2019, Greg addressed the Spartanburg Men's Garden Club with a presentation titled, "Seven Plants No Upstate South Carolina Garden Should Be Without," at which time he was approached about speaking to SGCC. Remember, Greg is available to provide garden talks about an array of subjects to garden clubs, plant societies, civic groups, churches and educational institutions. To schedule Greg for your group's event, send an e-mail to [gardenchronicle@outlook.com](mailto:gardenchronicle@outlook.com).

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## Photograph: *Colors of the Season*



**Greg Freeman (b. 1974), *Colors of the Season*, 2019, Digital Photograph.**

The Christmas season is a time for family, celebration and generosity. Why everyday isn't viewed as such is another thing altogether. December also prompts us to reflect on the past year, and it gives us renewed hope as we anticipate the year to come. Christmas brings out a bit of decorating flair in most of us. Some go all-out with lights and lawn displays. Some are more simplistic. I happen to enjoy what I call the colors of the season – varying shades of red and green – and the photograph featured here contains those colors via cuttings from my garden, the most impressive of which is *Narcissus* 'Verdant Sparks', the all-green miniature daffodil bred by my friend, Dr. Harold Koopowitz of Santa Ana, California, USA. Sprigs of thyme, sage, lavender and the red tips of *Nandina* round out this display.

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In addition to being an avid gardener and daffodil hybridist, judge and exhibitor, Greg Freeman is an author, editor, recording artist, songwriter, amateur visual artist and life-long horse lover. His nonfiction writing on a number of subjects has appeared in magazines, encyclopedias and books of academic and scholarly interest, as well as [Southern Edition](#), Freeman's digital publication devoted to the American South. Recently published academic/encyclopedic contributions by Freeman include a chapter in Nadine Farghaly's edited volume, *Gender and the Modern Sherlock Holmes: Essays on Film and Television Adaptations Since 2009* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2015), as well as multiple entries in the 2017 release, *Race in American Film: Voices and Visions That Shaped a Nation* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO/Greenwood, 2017), edited by Dr. Daniel Bernardi and Michael Green. Most recently, Freeman contributed to *The British Empire: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO/Greenwood, 2018), edited by Dr. Mark Doyle. In 2015, Freeman released a country music radio single, "Sunlight and Shadows," garnering international airplay, and his gospel music has received national exposure through television, radio and commercial recordings. His gospel EP, *Blessing and Blessing*, featuring guest vocalists Babbie Mason, a Grammy-nominated artist, and Gospel Music Hall of Famer Calvin Newton, released in December 2018.

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