

July 1, 2010



# The Ivy

Volume 2, Issue 10



## Analyzing Alliums



Allium albopilosum

One of the more exciting and interesting blooms of late Spring and early Summer is the Allium.

Alliums, also known as flowering onions, are a varied group of perennial bulbs. They are generally planted in the late Fall along with other Spring blooming bulbs. Some varieties begin to bloom in mid to late May and some as late as July.

Planting Alliums takes a great deal of planning. With some of the Allium bulbs averaging six to ten dollars each, many gardeners are unwilling to experiment. However, bulb suppliers like John Scheepers, in Bantam CT, are beginning to make more interesting and affordable Allium collections available.

Last fall I decided to begin a several year study of Alliums. I chose an initial assortment of new and unusual ones varying in color and height. I planted them in several different garden locations and have begun to track their progress.

I will share with you in this newsletter some of my results. However, as I said, I expect it will take several years of planting, observing and documenting for me to have a thorough understanding of such a varied group of bulbs. I planted six different varieties. These were in addition to three varieties already in my gardens. All of the varieties had a few things in common. One was the challenge of anticipating the

growth of the other plant material in the beds with the Alliums.

Fall bulbs are generally planted after the foliage of herbaceous perennials and deciduous shrubs has died back. Most bulbs, like daffodils, tulips, etc, reach maturity and bloom prior to the time when surrounding perennials and shrubs have fully leafed out. However, Alliums are at their peak amidst the summer foliage of shrubs and perennials. Therefore, placement can be a little tricky. One needs to not only anticipate the amount of space necessary for shrubs and perennials to leaf out but also the height of any foliage in the bed. (see Allium albopilosum below - a beautiful star flowering globe



planted in Rudbeckia—not a great pairing for the 24” Allium since it looked like it was drowning by the time it was in full bloom.)

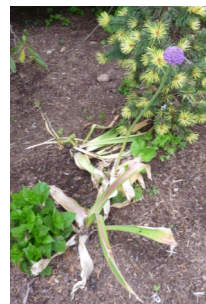
Considering the scale of the flower bulb and foliage of the Allium is also part of the planning process. Large purple flower heads on heavy stems, like those of ‘Globe Master,(see right)’ are best featured as sculptural elements near other strong architectural



shapes like tall ornamental grasses or pruned boxwood hedges. Meanwhile, small drumstick alliums like ‘Sphaerocephalon,(see right)’ can get lost in large mixed perennial gardens. Their chive like foliage and tiny deep purple bloom is best featured in small gardens and viewed up close. (see right ‘Gladiator’ Allium in Daylily bed—perfect scale and foliage pairing)



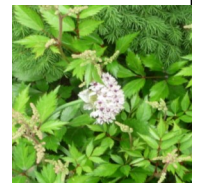
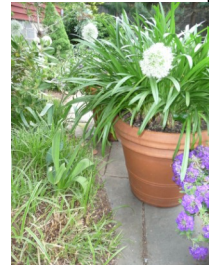
Another challenge with many of the Alliums is the fact that their foliage often turns brown and may even completely die back before bloom. For those varieties like ‘Ambassador’ ( see below) with heavy browning foliage, it can be difficult to site them properly. I would recommend placing them towards the back of a bed with either low growing shrubs or perennials filling in early in front of them. The structure of the 48” stem and the size of the 7” globe bloom of ‘Ambassador’ is wonderful. However the foliage must be hidden. (Should have done these in the Rudbeckia bed!)



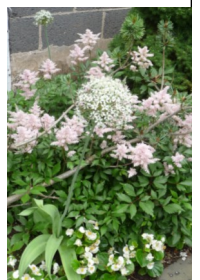
White blooming Alliums are generally not as well known. However, I found them to be my fa-

vorites. I tried two. One was Mount Everest(see below right). It blooms early, holds it’s foliage color well and has a tall 48”

bloom. It looked wonderful planted in variegated Carex grass. The other white was a new variety called ‘Silver Spring’ (see below early and in full bloom). It opens with a dark eye which eventually turns green. It blooms after Mount Everest and is a bit smaller. However, combining the two in one planting would be a good way to extend the bloom of a white Globe Allium planting.



Gardeners are turning to Alliums because they are attractive blooms and are generally rodent and deer resistant. They multiply over time and can be divided after bloom. You can visit the website [johnscheepers.com](http://johnscheepers.com) for more information on lots of Alliums. I will keep you up to date on my Allium study both in future newsletters and on Facebook. Have a great summer and a Happy Fourth of July!



Donna Christensen

Owner/ Landscape Designer

# Christensen Landscape Services LLC



## DESIGN BUILD CORNER

### BEFORE:

THIS BRANFORD SHORE RESIDENCE HAD A CRAMPED AND UNWELCOMING BACK TERRACE WITH AN AGING TILE PATIO AND NO ENTERTAINMENT VALUE.

**AFTER: EXPANDED BLUESTONE TERRACE, OVERHEAD PERGOLA, AND SEE THROUGH GAS FIREPLACE CREATE A CHIC YET COMFORTABLE SUMMER**

**OUTDOOR ROOM FROM WHICH TO ENJOY THE VIEWS OF LONG ISLAND SOUND.**



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## DEALING WITH SUMMER STRESS

Summer stress is a condition which may strike annuals, perennials and some deciduous shrubs at this time of year. Plants exhibit dull foliage, limp flower petals, and sometimes premature bolting or going to seed. Continued stress can result in poor flowering, shortened bloom period and increased susceptibility to insect damage or disease.



Gerry Verrillo, Maintenance Manager for Christensen Landscape Services, suggests the following remedies:

Proper watering – water deeply and consistently

Light foliar feeding with balanced soluble fertilizer plus seaweed emulsion.

Thorough clean up of spent blooms.

Avoid allowing container plants to dry out and then trying to catch up with water schedule.

Bedding plants – freshen up with compost or mulch.



## THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY

### Open Days



This past Saturday David and I spent the day visiting several gardens in Litchfield County Connecticut. We visited gardens owned by Bunny Williams (see left), Nancy McCabe, Michael Trapp( see right) and several other fine gardeners. These gardens are open for visiting on select days through the Garden Conservancy Open Days Program. Since its founding, the Garden Conservancy has done more than any other national institution to save and preserve America's exceptional gardens for the education and enjoyment of the public.

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The Garden Conservancy was established in 1989 by Frank Cabot, the distinguished American gardener. In partnership with individual garden



owners as well as public and private organizations, the Conservancy provides the horticultural, technical, management, and financial expertise needed to sustain these fragile environments and ensure long-term stewardship of natural assets so essential to the aesthetic and cultural life of our communities.

Visit their website at [opendaysprogram.org](http://opendaysprogram.org) to see the gardens open this summer for you to visit .