



**NATUREWORKS**

**Dear Mother Nature...**

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Greetings!

I love to write. Lately I've had lots of time to write because I have been cooped up at home during GIANT SNOWSTORMS! So I decided to write this letter...

Dear Mother Nature,

We are NOT amused. It's March, and I know that March is a tease, March can be a bit crazy, but this is RIDICULOUS! Three Nor'Easters in a row! Haven't you noticed the snowdrops, the Hellebores, the witch hazels? What about all the broken branches on the shrubs and trees. Why, some of my

shrubs are headed to the great compost pile in the sky because of your antics.



Okay, I will get to the point. The first day of spring is less than a week away. We have peas to plant. Pansies to buy. We need to get outside, every day, and work in our gardens.

Please get with the program, *stop* this nonsense, and bring on the spring the way it's supposed to be. We will reward you with a world filled with blossoms and beauty. You will love it.

Sincerely yours,  
Nancy

There. I feel better now. And just to be sure we are on the same page, I am NOT going to put a single picture in this email showing you how beautiful the world looks covered with snow, nor am I going to break your heart with pictures of my demolished shrubs. That's not what we are doing here. We are going to talk about SPRING!



First of all, Natureworks opens this Tuesday, March 20th, the first day of spring. No matter what it looks like outside, it will be spring inside our shop and greenhouse. There will be pansies, there will be flowering plants, there will be pretty pottery and wonderful new books to explore. Our seed racks will finally be home for good, after traveling from conference to

conference all winter. They will be stocked and ready. Yes, we will have peas, and you WILL be planting peas (and perhaps even sweet peas), as soon as the ground is visible. We will have all kinds of poppy seeds, and the snowy weeks will assure that the ground will stay nice and cold for sowing (as soon as it reveals itself). We will be making Easter basket gardens- BOY will we be making them, and they will melt your heart. We will have organic seed starting supplies galore including the VERY necessary soil thermometer to keep you on track.



While you patiently await that day, I invite you to check out our newly hatched **April Calendar of Events**, [click here](#). In it you will find a lot of wonderful workshops that will be held at Natureworks, including **Lettuce and Alyssum Bowls**, **Get a Head Start on Dahlias**, and **Grow Food!** You can register on-line but don't wait. Our two seed starting workshops on March 24th are FULL. Our classes are small and they fill up fast. The April Calendar also announces our very first garden walk of the season, our Earth Day celebration, and a workshop to teach you how to **Get Ready for the Hummingbirds** who will be heading our way in early May. And yes, we will be starting up our Thursday afternoon **Facebook Live** videos again.



If you can't wait until Tuesday to get your spring juices flowing, you can join us this Saturday at the **Master Gardeners Symposium**. This is going to be an AWESOME



event and walk-ins are welcome. Thomas Rainer, the co-author of *Planting in a Post Wild World* AND Rick Darke, co-author of *The Living Landscape*, are going to be the keynotes. Yours truly will be speaking on *The Butterfly Connection*, a brand new workshop I have created. There will be vendor booths (including Natureworks, of course), and lots of folks selling Hellebores and other gorgeous plants. The silent auction is always wonderful and there will be all sorts of gardening information to soak up. It's at

CT College, a wonderful place to visit, home of a truly great arboretum with some fabulous plant collections. I can't believe that the sessions on which native cultivars offer the most to our native pollinators aren't filled up yet! Neither is Ellen Ecker Ogden's workshop on *The Art of Growing Food*. It would be WAY better to attend this all-day conference than to sit home and mope about the snow.



We've been getting all sorts of questions about sowing poppy seeds so I wrote an informational article all about it (see below). Speaking of seeds, late March is the ideal time to start your warm season crops such as tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants. Yes, we have lots of very cool varieties of all of those plants. Don't forget my motto: Every year, try one new thing! Actually, I usually experiment with many new plants from seed and I have discovered many treasured plants that way.



Iceland poppies are growing through a ground covering sea of Veronica 'Georgia Blue'.

Finally, we are starting a new campaign to make your yard more sustainable. It's called MORE PLANTS, LESS MULCH! Last Saturday at our Grow a Healthy Yard workshop, I got a room full of people so excited as I explained this new way of layering your plants and reducing weeds and mulching chores. Each week this spring we will feature a new ground cover. This week I will explain how it works (see the second article below). And yes, we will have a well-stocked ground cover department in our nursery, and we're NOT

talking about pachysandra and myrtle!



Keep the faith, sit in front of a warm fire with a cup of tea, and study up on the many ways you can create a better garden in 2018. We will be there by your side every step of the way. Whether you are a total beginner or an old hand at this, there is always something new to learn and explore. **Natureworks is celebrating 35 years of**

Nancy

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## Growing Annual Poppies from Seed



Annual poppies are one of the most satisfying flowers that you can grow from seed. There are many kinds, but they all have one thing in common- the seed is VERY tiny and it really hates to be transplanted. Therefore, the best way to grow annual poppies is to seed them directly on the ground where you want them.

The first (and perhaps the most popular) poppies that we sell at Natureworks are breadseed poppies. These are so named because the seed harvested from the dried seedpods is used in making breads, pastries, and other baked goods. Breadseed poppies need a chilling process called stratification.

Don't let the technical term STRATIFICATION scare you. All that it means is that the seed has to go through freezing and thawing cycles in order to break dormancy. That is why we always tell our customers "sow your breadseed poppies on cold soil in late February and March!" It sounds ridiculous, but it really works.



**Breadseed poppy 'Lauren's Grape' .  
What a color!**

The seed is tiny and hard to see so pick a day when it isn't windy, scratch the surface of the soil a bit to rough it up, and sprinkle it as thinly as you can. Some people mix the poppy seeds with coarse

builder's sand to get a better distribution. Don't bury the seed at all. It needs light to germinate. Tamp down where the seed was sprinkled with a brick or the back of a hoe. Voila! So simple.



**Look for the blue ruffled leaves**

Sow the seeds in a well-marked spot so you know where to look for the first emerging leaves. If you are new at this, don't weed ANYTHING that you don't recognize! We often refer to breadseed poppies as "lettuce leaf poppies" as their leaves are blue-green and a bit ruffled, kind of like leaf lettuce.



**Leaf closeup**

Don't expect to see your first set of leaves until April. No matter how hard you try, when the seedlings emerge, you will have to thin them in order to have nice sized flowers. Try thinning them to 6-8" apart. You can cut the unwanted seedlings down with a pointed scissors or very carefully tease them out. They won't transplant, they are all taproot, so just toss them in the compost.

If sown in March, you will have flowers in May and June, possibly into July. To assure you will have flowers again next year, leave some of the seedpods on the plants as they begin to fade. The seeds will drop and overwinter in your soil and your poppies will return year after year. Often the self-sown poppies, over the years, revert to a plain lavender color. If you have varieties with colors that you adore, mark them with a ribbon and as the pods dry, cover them with a small paper bag and tie twine around the stems. Cut them off and hang them in a cool, dry place. Then sow them again the following March. Keep them in an unheated garage or outbuilding over the winter. If you don't have that cold place, keep them in the freezer.

There are other forms of these beautiful poppies that are double (*Papaver paeoniflorum*, as in peony flowered) and fringed (*Papaver lancinatum*). They are treated exactly the same.





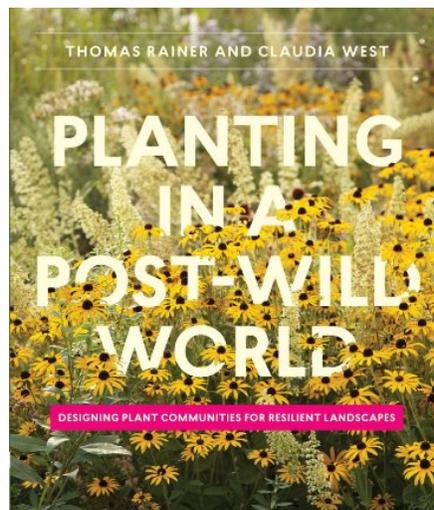
**Fringed poppy 'Black Swan' in a sea of Eryngium.**

Other types of annual poppies that should be sown now or in April include Icelandic (*P. nudicaule*), corn and Shirley poppies (*Papaver rhoeas*). The red ones with white blotches at the base of each petal are sometimes called 'Flander's Field' poppies. Shirley poppies are a selection of *P. rhoeas* chosen for their soft pastel colors. They both want well drained soil. Ladybird poppies (*P. commutatum*) are red with black blotches at the base of each petal. They are very popular in English gardens.

California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) grow really well at Natureworks in our hot, sunny rock garden by the road where they have been re-seeding for decades. You don't have to seed these on frozen soil, although it won't hurt them if you do. I sprinkle the seeds in April and May onto sunny, well drained soil and wait for the brilliant, colorful display later in the summer. California poppies are usually orange, but soft pinks, salmons, and whites are available.



## **More Plants Less Mulch A new way of managing your landscape**



I have been studying lots of books this winter. Nothing has made more of an

impact on me than **Planting in a Post Wild World** by Claudia West and Thomas Rainer. I saw Claudia West in February and am thrilled that Thomas Rainer is speaking at the Master Gardeners Symposium this Saturday. My head is filled with so many new possibilities for my yard and...yours!

The concept of more plants and less mulch basically comes down to a simple fact: if you place plants far apart and thickly mulch in between, eventually the mulch decomposes and becomes a very rich compost. This is the PERFECT place for weeds to grow. Instead, the new thinking is to replace the mulch with a ground cover layer which will out-compete the weeds. I have been doing this for a while and last year, instead of my original 10-12 yards of mulch, I spread 7 bags! Besides saving money on mulch and labor to spread it, I also have a much prettier yard, with lots and lots of interesting plants that weave together like a tapestry. It's good for the bees, it's good for our planet (think of all that oxygen the ground cover plants are releasing), and it's good for me- I actually find mulching to be my least favorite chore.



**One of the best groundcovers for shade is Epimedium**

All during 2018, we will be teaching you how to do this in your own yard. We will be talking about wonderful, ground covering plants for every situation. It's not that we won't be selling mulch. No, we will still have our Fragrant Forest and cedar mulch. But we hope to convince you to try this new approach. We would MUCH rather sell you plants than mulch!



**Great Gardening Events  
Happening this Winter**



Below is a list of some of the fantastic garden related events happening over the next few months. Please check the specific garden club or host of each event for details and to be sure the public is invited.

**Thursday, March 15th**

Thames River Garden Club

lecture by Nancy DuBrule-Clemente

Topic: The Bookends of the Gardening Year: Planting for early and late season pollinators.

**Saturday, March 17th**

[CT Master Gardeners Symposium](#)

Theme: "Gardening Gone Native"

**Tuesday, March 20th**

Natureworks opens for the year on the first day of spring!

**Saturday, March 24th Seed Starting Workshops\***

in the Natureworks greenhouse. See [class brochure](#) for information.

*\*Both sessions are full.*

**Monday, March 26th**

**Long Hill Garden Club**

lecture by Nancy DuBrule-Clemente

Topic: Blended Gardens

**Tuesday, March 27th**

**Garden Club of Newtown** (the public is invited)

lecture by Nancy DuBrule-Clemente

Topic: Blended Gardens

**Saturday April 7th Pruning Classes**

held at Zion Episcopal Church. See [class brochure](#) for information

- Overcoming your Fear of Pruning - Basic Principles and Practices ([Click Here](#) for online registration.)
- Pruning Hydrangeas with Lorraine Ballato ([Click Here](#) for online registration.)

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<a href="#">The DuBrule Diaries Blog</a>	<a href="#">Veggies-Incredible Edibles</a>

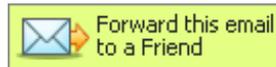
*Closed for the winter, then we reopen on the first day of Spring.*

**Retail Shop Hours beginning**

**Tuesday, March 20, 2018**

Monday - Saturday 8:30 am - 6:00 pm

Sunday 9:00 am - 5:00 pm



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