

BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE

from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal



DIGGIN' IT

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

Bloom or bust

Spring has arrived in flower shops and greenhouses across the region, even if the weather outside is still negotiating with itself. That means many of us have brought home pots of blooming tulips, daffodils or hyacinths to add a little color to brighten the tail end of winter. They look great for a week or two, and then the petals fall, the leaves slump and you're left staring at a pot of tired foliage, wondering what you're supposed to do with it.

To understand the answer, it helps to know how those bulbs got here in the first place. Forcing bulbs is the greenhouse grower's version of time travel. Tulips, daffodils and hyacinths all need a long, cold winter before they can bloom, so growers mimic that cycle indoors. Bulbs are planted in trays or pots and tucked into chilled rooms just above freezing, where they quietly grow roots in the dark. After weeks of this artificial "winter," they're moved into warm, bright greenhouse bays. That sudden shift convinces them spring has arrived, and within a few weeks they're blooming right on schedule for Easter displays and early season sales.

Bulbs themselves are little botanical survival kits. Inside that papery wrapper is a complete plant in storage mode: a tiny stem, embryonic leaves and next year's flower bud, all packed in layers of starchy scales. Think of them as pre-loaded batteries. During the growing season, leaves act like solar panels, turning sunlight into sugars and stuffing that energy back into the bulb. Winter comes, the top growth dies, and the bulb sits underground like a buried pantry, waiting for the right combination of cold and day length to say, "OK, it's safe to come out now."

That cold period isn't just about temperature: it's chemistry. Many spring bulbs need weeks of chill to trigger internal hormones that allow the flower stem to elongate and the bud to develop properly. Skip the cold, and you get short, stubby plants or no flowers at all. Greenhouse growers know this, which is why they treat bulbs like fussy houseguests: just the right temperature, just the right darkness, just the right timing. By the time those bulbs arrive on your table, they've already lived through a carefully staged fake winter and a fastforward spring. No wonder they look tired.

Once those blooms fade, the bulbs are spent. They've used nearly all their stored energy to produce that early show, and they won't bounce back overnight. But that doesn't mean they're destined for the trash. Most forced bulbs can be saved and replanted outdoors in Zone 4, it just requires patience. Start by snipping off the dead flowers so the plant doesn't waste energy making seeds. Keep the pot in bright light and water lightly. Resist the urge to cut the leaves. As ragged as they look, those fading blades are the plant's only chance to recharge the bulb

for next year. A light dose of fertilizer once or twice won't hurt, but it isn't essential.

While the foliage is still green, photosynthesis is happening. Chlorophyll in the leaves is capturing light and turning it into sugars, which are then moved down into the bulb and stored as starch. When the leaves yellow and finally brown, that's the plant's way of saying, "I've packed what I can, I'm done." Cutting the foliage too early is like unplugging your phone at 12 percent and then complaining it doesn't last all day. This is true for bulbs in the ground as well.

When the foliage finally turns brown, let the pot dry out completely. Lift the bulbs, brush off the soil and store them in a paper or mesh bag somewhere cool and dry until fall. Then plant them outdoors at the normal bulb depth (2-2.5 times the bulb's "height") in well-drained soil and mulch them for winter. Some bulbs handle this transition better than others. Tulips are notoriously unreliable after forcing, many varieties simply don't have the stamina to rebloom well in cold climates. Years of breeding for big, showy flowers and specific colors has not exactly improved their work ethic. Daffodils, hyacinths, crocus and muscari, on the other hand, often settle in and return after a year or two of recovery.

If you lost the tag and you're not sure whether your bulb is hardy in Zone 4, plant it anyway. Paperwhites and amaryllis, for example, are not hardy here, but if you feel like giving them a ceremonial burial in the flower bed, I won't stop you. The worst that happens is nothing. The best is a surprise bloom a year or two down the road from something that actually can handle our winters. Either way, you've given the plant a chance, and you've kept one more thing out of the trash.

It's worth remembering that forced bulbs are not obligated to perform on our schedule forever. They've already done extra duty, blooming months earlier than they would have outdoors. Expecting them to march right into the garden and behave like a fresh, neverforced bulb is a bit like running a marathon and then being asked to sprint up a hill. Can some of them do it? Sure. Will all of them? No. And that's OK.

Saving forced bulbs isn't instant gratification. If even a few of them return, you've turned a oneseason decoration into a small, quiet victory in the garden. And if they don't, you still got a few weeks of color ain't late winter, which, around here, is nothing to sneeze at.

Have plant questions? I've got answers. Email your questions or photos to digginit@nordaknorth.com, or stop by The Leader-News office with a photo or sample. Phaidra Yunker is a Master Gardener and a certified horticulturist with over a decade of experience in the horticultural industry. She serves as Vice President of the City of Washburn Forestry Board.

20 years ago, April 2006

Dry conditions and wind combined to make fighting an April 4 blaze in the Downstream Campground area near Riverdale difficult.

The Underwood Fire Department was called to the fire at about 11:40 a.m., Tuesday morning. Oliver Repnow said the blaze started in a burn pit at the Ken Wilson residence about three miles south of Riverdale.

Bring your Easter baskets and fill it with candy-filled eggs. The Easter egg hunt is sponsored by the Underwood Civic Club and will take place at Prairieview Nursing Home at 1 p.m., April 15.

Members of the Underwood Civic Club met April 5 and made final plans for the annual Customer Appreciation Supper to be held May 3.

Renee Fransen was announced as the winner of the banner design contest. The civic club agreed to order 25 banners from BHG.

Melanie Landenberger, daughter of Doug and Alice Landenberger, will be this year's delegate to Girls State in Grand Forks in June. Nick Werre, son of Dave and Suzanne Werre, along with Jarrod Kastrow, son of Jerome and Shawn Kastrow, will be the delegates attending Boys State in Wahpeton in June.

McLean County States Attorney Ladd Erickson was at the April 4 meeting of the McLean County Commission to present a copy of the ballot question for the June election regarding building a new county jail.

Ione Heger, Underwood, was nominated by her neighbor, Ida Van Beek, for the Good Neighbor Award, in recognition of Ione's contributions and volunteer work done at the Happy Trails Resort in Surprise, Ariz., where she lives during the winter months.

Underwood's Marlyn Seidler recently returned from Arizona and a successful stretch of car racing finishes. Seidler made the trip with Jaco Van Rooyen from South Africa, who works for Seidler in the summer months.

Courtney Richter, representing Underwood Public School, has been selected to attend the North Dakota Leadership Seminar set for June 2-4 at the University of Mary in Bismarck. She is the daughter of Mark and Michelle Driessen.

Local Scouts gathered during their Blue and Gold Banquet March 12. Tigers included Tyger Ricker; Wolves, Lucas Bichler, Nicholas Dammen, Tony Hawkins, Michael Meier; Bears, Wyatt Wilson, Beaudon Hanna, Braydon Olson, Noah Wertz; Webelos, Jeremy Wirtz; Boy Scouts, Matthew Landenberger, Collyn Blotske, Nick Lee and Sumner Boschert, Jake Hultberg, Sam Hultberg and Michael

Landenberger.

30 years ago, April 1996

Lu Burrowes was selected Employee of the Third Quarter of the Underwood School. Employees are selected on several factors including going above and beyond the call of duty. Lu has been the school cook for many years and plans to retire at the end of the school year.

First Baptist Church will celebrate its 50th anniversary on April 21. Two "sons of the church" will be speakers at Sunday school. James Schacher of Elyria, Ohio, and Rev. Reuben Gruenich, of Lansing, Mich, both grew up in First Baptist Church and will be sharing at the Sunday school meeting. Rev. Wesley Gerber, who served the church from 1975 to 1990, will be returning to bring the message at the worship service.

40 years ago, April 1986

An old storage room was remodeled in Evander's Drug to provide pharmacy services that had not been available in Underwood since Percy Evander closed the old pharmacy in the 1960s. Mike Chase re-opened the pharmacy. Chase said the startup of physician service from Q & R Clinic provided a good opportunity to renew a drug store business.

Chuck Finneman resigned as head boys' basketball coach after 12 years.

Two Underwood students earned awards at the state science and engineering fair in Jamestown. Megan Gazdik received a first-place blue ribbon. Brook Paulson, in the senior division, received a cash award and certificate from the N.D. Dietetic Association.

Marlys Anderson, Mrs. Don Stadick and Mr. and Mrs. Leo Leidholm were among the delegates attending the state GOP convention in Grand Forks.

Dawn Leidholm was the top fund raiser in the Underwood school for the 1986 Read-a-thon for multiple sclerosis. April Grimsley read the most books, 40.

50 years ago, April 1976

Nineteen youngsters got their first exposure to school this week in Underwood. They are Brook Paulson, Jonathan Smith, Chandra Johannes, Teresa Ash, Christian Anderson, Kristina Rime, Sarah Johannes, Steven Schauer, Michele Saylor, Troy Cottingham, Candy Grimsley, Bradley Olson, Steven Cottingham, Laurie Jessor, Holli Auck, Jeannette Landseidel, Rodney Saylor, Toni Saylor and Troy Portra. Mrs. Rueben Broneske is their teacher.

The Underwood Community Concert Choir was organized about 20 years ago by its director, David LeRoy, beginning with about 30 members. Since that time, they have performed

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 email centralmclean@nordaknorth.com • website nordaknorth.com
 Ethyn Williams-Calvert Editor
 Shelly Wallace Sales Representative
 Jackie Kohler Production

Published every Thursday by Nordak North Publishing., P.O. Box 309, 59 North Main, Garrison, ND 58540-0309. Periodical postage paid at Garrison, ND. For more information or for a subscription, write Central McLean News-Journal, P.O. Box 573, Underwood, ND 58576.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Central McLean News-Journal, P.O. Box 573, Underwood, ND 58576.

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3 p.m. Monday – classifieds
 10 a.m. Tuesday – advertisements, public notices, news and area announcements