



## DIGGIN' IT

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

### Frankenflowers

If you've been out shopping for flowers this spring, you may have noticed something that feels a little uncanny: two plants that look more or less alike can have price tags that seem to come from entirely different realities. A geranium in a cell pack might be \$2.50, while the single geranium in the fancy pot is \$8. Same color, same general shape, same job in your planter—so why the gulf? People assume it's just greenhouse markup or "big box store versus local," but the truth is more interesting. Annuals cost what they cost because of how they come into the world, and many of them have origin stories that would make Mary Shelley raise an eyebrow.

Some annuals begin life as seeds. These are the classic cellpack flowers—petunias, marigolds, salvia, portulaca and most vegetables. Seeds are cheap, easy to ship and easy to sow by the thousands. A greenhouse can fill entire benches with seedlings for pennies per plant. It's the horticultural equivalent of massproduced paperbacks: efficient, predictable and affordable.

Other annuals, though, are grown through vegetative propagation, which is a fancy way of saying "grown from cuttings." A plant-broker greenhouse developed a "mother plant," took cuttings from it, rooted those cuttings and grew them into the plants you buy. It's more labor, more time, more greenhouse space and more science. If seed-grown annuals are the paperbacks, vegetatively propagated ones are the hard-cover special editions—handled more carefully, monitored more closely and priced accordingly.

If you want to know which is which, check the plant tag. Many vegetatively propagated varieties are copyrighted or patented, and the tag will say "Propagation prohibited." Those little tags aren't just decoration—they're legal documents. Greenhouses can't simply take a cutting from a patented plant and grow more. If they do, they risk massive fines or even losing their license.

And yes, they get inspected. Plant brokers—think Proven Winners, Ball, Syngenta—send representatives who show up unannounced, much like a health inspector walking into a restaurant kitchen. They move through the greenhouse benches with the air of someone inspecting a laboratory, making sure no one is running an unauthorized experiment in the back corner. If you propagate a patented plant at home, no one is coming for you. But if a greenhouse does it? That's a different story entirely.

This is where the price difference becomes obvious. A seed-grown geranium might cost you \$2.50. It's a perfectly fine plant—just a little spindly,

with smaller blooms and a shorter flowering window. A zonal geranium, which is vegetatively propagated, will run closer to \$8. But you're paying for a better plant: bigger blooms, sturdier stems and flowers that keep coming all season. Once you know what you're looking at, the price difference makes sense. One is the standard issue model; the other has been assembled and refined through generations of selective tinkering, stitched together from its strongest traits.

This pattern repeats across many species. You'll find both seed and vegetative versions of petunias, salvia, geraniums, portulaca, celosia, argyranthemum, lobelia, coleus, begonias, and impatiens. The vegetative versions almost always have the bigger blooms, the stronger growth habit and the longer season of color. They also come with the licensing, the inspections and the higher production costs. In other words, they've had more "research and development" behind them.

Another sneaky factor in annual pricing has nothing to do with the plant at all—it's the pot. Some plant brokers legally require their varieties to be sold only in branded containers. Proven Winners is the most famous example. Their white pots cost almost twice as much as a plain black nursery pot, and that cost gets passed directly to you. You're not just buying a Supertunia. You're buying the Supertunia in its official containment vessel, as mandated by the people who engineered it.

There's also a practical difference you'll notice once the plants are in your yard. Vegetatively propagated annuals are often sterile by design. They don't produce viable seed, which means they don't waste energy trying. That's why Supertunias, for example, bloom nonstop without deadheading. Seed-grown annuals, on the other hand, are doing exactly what nature designed them to do: make seed. Once they succeed, they stop flowering. If you want them to keep blooming, you have to remove the spent blossoms before they set seed. So yes—your nippers matter. If you've ever wondered why your bargain petunias peter out in July while the expensive ones keep going, this is the reason. It's the botanical version of redirecting all available energy from "reproduction" to "showmanship."

Some of the wild coleus varieties you see—chartreuse splashes, neon veins, leaves that look like they escaped from a coral reef—didn't happen by accident. Breeders sometimes irradiate seeds to scramble their DNA. Most of the seedlings look like duds, but every once in a while, something spectacular appears—one of those true 'it's alive' moments in horticulture. That plant is then propagated vegetatively and ends

## BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE

from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal

### 20 years ago, June 2006

Loreta Gilbert, the librarian at the Underwood Public Library, is starting a local chapter of the Friends of the Library group and is hoping to generate some excitement and interest within the community.

Seventeen graduating seniors received their diplomas on Sunday, May 21, with Valedictorian Brittany Hendrickson and Salutatorian Eric Trautman finishing at the top of their class.

Layton and Mavis Freborg announce their marriage, which was conducted May 6, at the Community Presbyterian Church in Lombard, Ill.

Melissa Klocke, Underwood, was named to the Phi Theta Kapp, at Bismarck State College.

Those graduating from Minot State University in spring 2006 are Kayla Gefroh, criminal justice; Heather Larson, elementary education; Lori Opdahl, accounting; and Mary Hefta, special education.

Amanda Cottingham, Tiffany Fischer, Melissa Johannes, Dawn Malnourie and Megan Dockter were named to the dean's list at the U of Mary for the spring semester.

Voters will go to the polls June 13 to decide whether or not the county officials should proceed with plans to build a new law enforcement center in Washburn.

A farewell open house for Pastor Doug and Arlyce Sathren is set for June 11 at Faith Evangelical Church.

Three candidates vie to represent First Commission District. They are Julie Hudson Schenfisch, Washburn, Ray Hager, Washburn, and Alan Ness, Underwood.

Cassie Rink has been nominated and invited to apply for the National Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. She will be a junior at UHS in the fall. She has been accepted to attend the Law and Advocacy Conference at American University in Washington, D.C., in July.

Rhett Nostdahl captured eighth place in the mile run at the state track meet. Others competing at the state meet were Jennifer Binstock, Brittany Dockter, Marshall Johnson, Eric Trautman, Torin Kolke, Nick Werre, Lisa Nostdahl, Lyndi Anderson, Rhea James and Ed Cullum.

### 30 years ago, June 1996

Lifeguards Cheri Ash and Tony Johnson were busy getting the swimming pool ready for summer use. Cory Ash will be manager of the pool.

Earl Cottingham was the sole candidate of the ballot for one of two open commission seats. Denny Portra, who has served on the commission since a special election in November has indicated he would serve as a write-in candidate. Outgoing commission

president Claudia Tauer-Stromberg is not interested in another term, nor is outgoing commissioner Dave Binkley.

Incumbent school board members Rick Olson and Dave Bicknese are running unopposed. In Riverdale, voters will elect two city commissioners from a slate of three—Edith Ehenes, Carol Christianson and Richard Gordon. Frank Boutilier is running unopposed for municipal judge. There are no candidates on the ballot for three park board seats.

Diana Lang is the new site manager for the Meals on Wheels program that serves senior citizens in Underwood, Washburn and Garrison. Lang replaced Vivian Erhardt as manager.

### 40 years ago, June 1986

Charles Kranz fired rounds of 31, 20 and a record-setting 29 for a three-round total of 90, running away with the championship flight honor in the annual tournament at the Underwood Golf Course. Kranz, who earlier this year won his second straight state high school sand greens medalist honor, was the tournament's medalist, while also claiming the longest drive. Curt Radke finished second and Graydon Ash third.

Collin Wiesz and David LeRoy won election to the Underwood School Board in a June 3 election. Wiesz won a three-way race over Ellen Berg and Rick Anderson.

The Underwood School staff honored Shirley Wohl on her retirement with dinner and a special cake. A plaque was given in recognition of her years of service.

Brook Paulson is one of several North Dakota 4-Hers selected to attend the Citizenship Washington Focus program at the National 4-H Center in Washington, D.C.

### 50 years ago, May 1976

After more than a year of delay, the property known as West Underwood and Park West Addition will be developed. Representatives from Interstate Development, Bismarck, petitioned the city to call for sewer and water bids.

Nineteen seniors will be graduated from Underwood High School Thursday. The special address for the evening will be given by valedictorians, Nancy Busch and Kathy Lenzen. Lenzen is also class president, and Busch is class treasurer. Other class officers are Mike Milkey, vice president, and secretary, Denise Flath.

Four boys from the Underwood Track Team qualified for the state meet in Minot—Mike Milkey, Lee Scheer, Wes Lutz and Nathan Galarneau. Other team members are Jim Bartz, Russ Scheer, Dana Anderson, Paul Johannes, Mark Milkey and Larry Olson.

# Central McLean News-Journal

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### Deadlines

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