



DIGGIN' IT

BY PHAIDRA YUNKER

Frankenflowers

Editor's Note: This column is appearing for a second time in the Central McLean News-Journal due to an error that did not publish the column in its entirety in the June 2 edition.

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 spindlier, 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

BACK IN THE DAY

Underwood

COMPILED BY SHELLY WALLACE
from the Files of the Central McLean News Journal

20 years ago, June 2006

The tiny community of Falkirk will be bustling on June 10 as the cooperative celebrates its 90th birthday. Falkirk Elevator employees Carol Maurer and Wanda Schneider have been busy planning festivities to commemorate the special event. "We are planning for about 500 people," said Schneider.

The results of the survey that 146 residents were asked to complete are in and show those residents are overwhelmingly in favor of a city sales tax.

The Underwood Area Economic Development Corporation has accepted the recent resignation of Director Brian Ash.

With paving to begin soon in the Repnow-Mees Addition, the Underwood City Commission is now focusing on the development of the Westridge Addition.

Melissa Klocke, Renee Sayler and Tanya Zenker all of Underwood, were named to the dean's list at Bismarck State College for the spring semester.

There will be a farewell open house for Pastor Doug and Arlyce Sathren June 11 at Faith Evangelical Church.

Underwood resident, Arthur Gullickson, died June 2.

Underwood voters will decide whether the city will have a Home Rule Charter and implement a 2.5 percent city sales tax when they go to the polls on June 13. Three candidates are running for two city commission seats. Incumbent Roger Britton is seeking a second term, along with challengers Jason Gregoryk and Leon Weisenburger Jr. Commissioner Paul Johannes' term is also up and he had elected not to run again.

Members of the community came together on June 4 to put on a benefit for Steven Pansegrouw. Pasnsegrouw, from South Africa, worked for Marlyn and Kristie Seidler of Underwood as a farm laborer and was burned in an accident.

30 years ago, June 1996

As of midnight Tuesday, Underwood City ballots were still being counted at the county courthouse.

Earl Cottingham had garnered 185 votes for city commission. Publication of the minutes in the legal paper was approved 153 to 37.

Numerous write-in votes were being counted for Underwood City Commission president, another city commission seat, three park board seats and municipal judge.

For the Underwood School Board, both incumbents were re-elected. Rick Olson and Dave Bicknese will continue to serve on the board.

Despite the lack of a quorum, the McLean County Job Development Commission approved a motion on

May 23 to concur with county officials and hire Darlene Boehm of Washburn as interim temporary coordinator to assist the JDC.

Lori and Dan Gefroh were featured in an article about the eight emu that were making their home on their "Flywheel Ranch" near Underwood. Four of the big birds belonged to Dan's brother from Watford City.

40 years ago, June 1986

Construction workers from Nelson Lumber in Washburn were hurrying to get the new office/ restroom building at the McLean County Fairgrounds finished before fair time.

A farewell potluck dinner was set for June 29 for Father Joseph Pire who was leaving St. Bonaventure Parish.

Earl and Amy Landgren were guests of honor at an open house at Alexander Presbyterian Church. The couple got married on June 25, 1941, at the church.

50 years ago, June 1976

Craft Builders, a Minot contractor, is making steady progress on an eight-plex apartment they are constructing in Underwood. A limited partnership of four Underwood residents owns the low-income apartments.

State Representative Layton Freborg announced today that he will join District 8 Republicans Senator Shirley Lee and Representative Gordon Matheny in seeking re-election to the state legislature.

In an extremely light voter turnout for school board election, Harley Hasler is the winner in Longfellow with 41 of the 42 ballots cast. Clayton Boots is the winner by vote in Victoria with 11 of the 42 votes cast.

Plans for the Underwood Bicentennial Parade are well in progress according to parade coordinator Lester Zietz.

Plans for sewer and water improvements on 26 acres west of town is closer this week. Dirt crews have begun scraping street locations in preparation for installation of sewer and water.

The proposed Underwood swimming pool will be located on the north edge of the property.

60 years ago, June 1966

Funeral services were held from the Underwood Methodist Church on June 4 for Heddor Johnson, 72, who passed away on Thursday.

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Cleveland of Coleharbor celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary on May 29 with an open house at the school.

Mr. and Mrs. Karl Sayler will celebrate their golden wedding anniversary on June 19 with an open house

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Deadlines

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