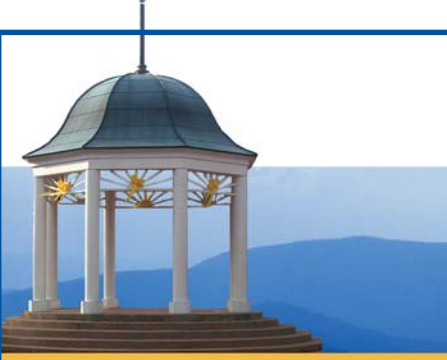




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Front Royal Blooms

by Marie McLaughlin

True garden centers are places of discovery. They have a wondrous variety of familiar and unusual plants in a rainbow of colors. Front Royal is blessed with two garden centers: Springtime Garden Center and Sunflower Cottage. Like most garden centers, these two local vendors carry evergreen trees, deciduous trees, annuals, perennials, vegetable plants, bushes and potted plants. They also carry mulch. They offer landscaping services from design to installation. But when you visit them, you'll find a little something special about each one.

In the heart of Front Royal off Commerce Avenue is Springtime Garden Center, owned by Ann and Lamont Orndorff. Now going into its 10th year with Ann and Lamont at the helm, Springtime is the local hot spot for gorgeous trees of all kinds, including flowering, evergreen, fruit and other deciduous trees.

The vegetable plants arrive around April 15th, which is still too early to plant, according to Ann. It could frost in this region up through May 13th or so. The most amazing time to visit is near May 1st, when they get in roughly 600-700 roses, all of them in full bloom. You can't help but feel more at peace as you drink in the array of colors and the scent of roses; it's just heavenly.



Billie in the greenhouse at Sunflower Cottage



about Ann and Lamont is that they are anxious to make sure your purchases are right for you. One of the first things they'll ask is where you live, so they can figure out what types of plants would be best suited to your area, and whether deer are a concern. Springtime Garden Center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday during the winter, and later during the spring and summer. Their phone number is (540) 635-8765.

Off of Reliance Road in the northern part of the county is Sunflower Cottage, owned by Billie and Arnold Clifton. (Take 522 North, turn left onto Reliance Road, and stay on it for about three miles. It's a right turn near an old red truck. Stay to the right on your way down the drive). Just over a year old, it has a full greenhouse and a cute little cottage full of fun gifts, art, and food. (cont. page 8)

Over the years, Springtime has added a few extra features. They now carry genuine (and gorgeous) Amish furniture, which is sold at a price that, Ann believes, is the lowest in the Shenandoah Valley. They also sell good quality statuary, the perfect complement to your gardens. Fresh produce from Pennsylvania Amish country is another specialty of Springtime's. It is picked fresh the morning it's picked up, iced, and put in coolers, so it's guaranteed to be fresh.

One of the things you'll find



Front Royal Blooms (cont.)



Billie and Arnold's specialty is herbs. They used to grow them wholesale without a retail business before opening Sunflower Cottage last year. Their variety is incredible, with about 20 different species of basil alone! Other popular herbs include parsley, rosemary, thyme, lavender, oregano and mint, but they grow many more.

Sunflower also features a gift shop/gardener's shop, where you can purchase seeds, bulbs and gardening supplies. Billie also offers artwork for sale that somehow fits right in. There are stained glass stepping stones, wire words, small clay faces

with chubby smiles and Haitian oil drum art. Sunflower also carries unique foods, such as sun-dried tomato and olive bread topping, key lime ginger wasabi jam, mango and key lime chutney and chocolate-covered sunflower seeds.

Sunflower Cottage is already known for its teas. Billie keeps about 30 different varieties of teas and provides a sniffer bar that allows you to sample the different teas by your sense of smell. One thing you may want to check out is her Cabin Fever Tea Party on March 25th. For \$15.00, you get a tea plate (two cups of tea, finger sandwiches and sweets) and a workshop on how to make a rosemary topiary. At the end of the party, you get to take your topiary home! Space is limited and RSVPs are required at (540) 869-8482. Sunflower Cottage is open only on Saturdays until mid-March. Call to find out their exact hours.

Garden centers like Springtime and Sunflower have an advantage over the big "box store" garden centers, one you may not expect: variety.

"The big box stores, by nature of what they are, have to buy from growers who can handle the volume," Billie explained. "They can't carry the variety. Instead of 42 varieties of herbs, they'll carry two or three varieties and have thousands and thousands of them. Someone like us, we can buy from local growers, are playing around and coming up with interesting plants. We have a better selection."

Ann gave an example of why Springtime's selection is so varied. "My husband picks up a lot of unusual plants in Tennessee. He gets dogwood and redbud that have been grafted into weeping tree varieties, pom-poms, topiaries, and lace-leaf maples. He personally picks them out, they're not shipped to us. I think that's why we do so well; we don't have anything that looks bad."



Front Royal/Warren County Tree Stewards

Dear Stewart:

What happened to the trees at the KFC? They look really strange!

I'm glad you asked. These trees were victims of a practice called "topping" which is pretty much hacking the tree back to nothing but stubs. With all the information available on this poor pruning practice, I'm really surprised this keeps happening. I've asked many people over the years why they have their trees topped, and many reply that they feel their trees are growing too tall. Well, here's an interesting tip for anybody that feels this way: A tree's normal growth is usually eight inches per year; a topped tree's "sucker" growth is eight FEET per year! So, let's see - you want to make a tree shorter by topping, but then

create growth that is 12 times its normal growth by topping. People may also want to consider the fact that repeated topping actually is more expensive than hiring a professional that will do the right job.

To avoid trees that look this way, try to plant the right tree in the right spot, like a shorter tree under power lines. Then, hire a certified arborist who knows how to train the growth of the tree without topping. You'll be very happy!

The Front Royal/Warren County Tree Steward program has been in



Stewart the Tree Steward Squirrel

existence since 1997. It is made up of volunteers dedicated to improving the health of trees by providing educational programs, tree planting and care demonstrations, and tree maintenance assistance throughout the community. Tree Stewards make a commitment to improving and protecting their community forest. Each month we hope to answer a question from our readers. If you have a question regarding tree planting, care or maintenance, please forward it to stewart@aboutfrontroyal.com and we may publish it in a future issue.