

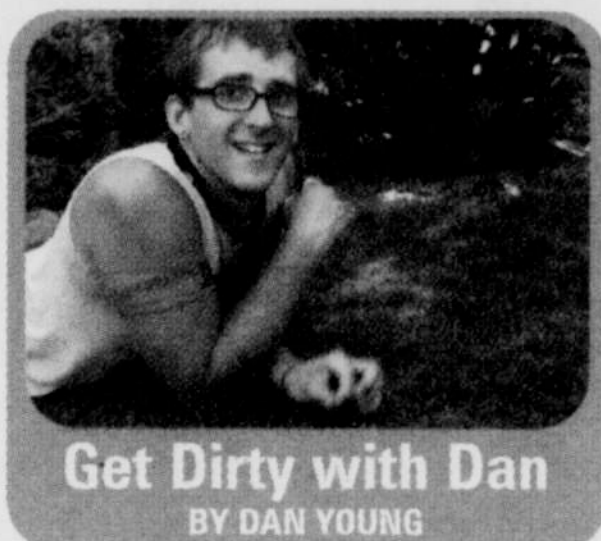
Shapes and Sizes, Colors and Textures

Dan gets visceral

I don't know how this happens, but every year May really sneaks up on me. All of a sudden the threat of frosty weather is gone, there are leaves on the trees, and my farmer tan shows up again. I also scramble to figure out which annuals I'm going to plant to fill out the spaces in my garden where the shrubs haven't quite grown up yet. This year annuals seem even more important to me because there is so much open space in my newly planted or not-even-yet-planted garden. I use the term "annual" loosely, too, because many of the plants I like to use as annuals really just aren't hardy here so they fill the spaces for one season, sometimes two.

I don't know the roots of these masochistic tendencies, but as far as my favorite plants, if I can touch it and it will make me bleed, I love it. I found this the first time I saw the amazing fiery orange spines on the sage green leaves and stems of *Solanum pyracanthum*. When planted at this time of the year, the porcupine tomato gets about 3 or 4 feet tall by August and starts covering itself with lavender flowers. It is as happy in containers as it is in the ground and is very easy to grow. Full sun and a weekly drink of water are all it really seems to want; of course, you'll have to water it more if it's grown in a pot. This is not a plant for every gardener or for lining a path, but it has made its way into my garden every year since I first met it.

There are two plant shapes that I am always a sucker for: rosettes and fastigiates. One resembles a nice, round ball. The other is a tall, slender pillar. These shapes must trigger my pleasure sensors or something. A very pleasing plant that has both these shapes and I feel everyone should have is the slightly tender *Echium wildpreti*. This *Echium* spends its first year of life as a gray, fuzzy-leaved plant about the size of a beach ball. *E. wildpreti* will freeze out if temps drop down much below 20 degrees, so keep a blanket handy for the cold spells in the winter. If we have a milder winter or you took the time to cover up your plant, the spring will bring you something amazing. From the yucca-like clump of leaves rises a 6-foot-tall spike of



Get Dirty with Dan
BY DAN YOUNG

thousands of pinkish red flowers. Every year I track them down in people's yards and stalk them doing weekly drive-bys to watch them thrust toward the sky. Fortunately for me, two of my best gardening pals, Loree and Bonnie, had one in their garden last year, so I wasn't the creepy guy peering over some stranger's fence to look at this incredible flower. It's nearly impossible to truly describe how rad this plant is. I highly recommend tracking one or 10 of them down to try for yourself.

On a separate note, I have had a few men contact me asking if there are any garden clubs in the Portland area for gay men. I myself can't say that I know of one, but I know there are many men out there who love to play around in the dirt. I have been speaking with Roger Mosser of Windermere/Cronin & Caplan Realty Group, who has most generously offered to sponsor and help start up such a club. In its infant stages, we were thinking that perhaps this new group could meet the first Sunday of every month. Some things on the to-do list might include touring members' gardens, arranging for speakers, visiting nurseries, trading advice and just meeting the other gay gardeners in the area. If all goes well and there is interest in doing this, we could meet for the first time in early June. If you would be interested in joining a gay men's gardening group, contact me via e-mail and I will keep you posted on it. Until then, stay dirty. 10

To reach DIRTY DAN, who will answer any and all of your gardening questions, simply e-mail dirtythegardener@yahoo.com.



Echium wildpreti dons spikes and petals, providing the gardener with naughty and nice.



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