

## Something for Nothing

Not exactly nothing as there is effort involved. Nature is so generous: tiny acorns into stately oaks, a scatter of seeds into a belt of blue larkspur. Not instant gratification of course but patience does not have a price tag. For quicker multiplication of riches rooting stems is the way to go and one of the easiest plants to reproduce is Coleus (*Solenostemon scutellarioides*). Put into water, the thick angular stems burst with roots within a week. They will be hard to pot up if you let them swim too long.

Coleus is treated as an annual but it is not, strictly speaking, as it can be brought in for the winter, as a cold-sensitive perennial. Although it has spikes of tiny flowers, it is grown for the foliage that has been bred to dazzling op-art shades and designs. It is a mainstay of container gardening but also useful as a colorful houseplant. By the time spring rolls around it can be clipped, propagated, and returned to those containers outside.

Perilla is a close relative to coleus and it must be invasive as it appears in the cracks in the driveway and as far as I know no one buys it? The foliage is extremely dark and depending on where you stand it can appear to be dark green, dark purple or dark red. It would look better in pots with petunias than in the drive so I will see if it is as easily rooted as coleus.

Most shrubs may root if attention is paid to the season when they are most amenable. Some are not fussy. Aucuba, called gold dust tree, will tolerate about every difficult situation except a permanent swamp. The variegated foliage is useful year around for bouquets and if your plant is female, it will have plump red berries.

As well as easy to root in soil or water, the stems tend to root where they rest along the ground. And like azaleas, that often do that, it is wise to cut the stem from the mother plant if you wish, but to wait until fall to move the offspring. In a hurry, I don't always want to wait and the results can be disastrous, as in 'dead'.

### Environmental update

The Bay – yes it is that important that we must continue to monitor its condition. Over the past decades we have tried, failed, hoped, persevered, tried again and still not succeeded. It is not that people do not know how to clean the Bay so that it is again teeming with oysters and fish providing good food and good livelihoods.

The problem is our reluctance to say 'no' to unrestrained development and the massive overuse of fertilizers. Fertilizers (and we all use them to make our flowers bloom and our corn grow) and animal waste are the largest sources of those nutrients that spur massive foul algae blooms.

In an article in the "Bay Journal" Karl Blankenship connects our own propensity to obesity to the ills in the Bay. Over time we have greatly changed the way we eat! In the US over

half the grain raised is fed to animals. [And in the case of cows that get sick on that diet, the cows are fed more antibiotics than are used by people to keep cattle alive until slaughter.]

All this grain has meant increased production of animals and animal products. From the mid 60s until today meat consumption in the US has increased nearly a third which explains the amounts of high-nitrogen animal waste among other factors. Of course it is not just that each of us is eating more, it is also that there are so many more of us eating.

We do not need to press for Lenten rations but if we merely adopt a Swedish-type diet that has half the meat consumption of our diet, fertilizer use would decrease by 37%. For even greater effect, adopting a Mediterranean diet that has about 20% of the meat we eat, the use of fertilizer would decrease to the level it was in the 60s when the Bay was relatively healthy.

Next time we need to shed a few pounds by shrinking our portions we can claim it is not mere vanity, but a project for the health of the Bay as well as our own.