

Easy Care Posies: The Perfect Easter Gift

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OLEY (Berks Co.) — There is no better way to cure a case of rainy day blues than by visiting Spayd's Greenhouses and Floral Shop. Long tables of pink and red geraniums stretch in one direction while benches of begonias and impatiens reach in another. Exotic hanging baskets of gold coin and delicate pink begonias partially obscure the grey sky. Other greenhouses are bursting with pink and purple azaleas and hyacinths preparing to flower.

There's nothing like taking home a piece of paradise but a summer schedule filled with farm chores and fairs pushes flower care into the background and often results in wilted plants. It doesn't need to happen that way according to greenhouse owner, Mary Spayd of Fleetwood. "There are lots of beautiful plants that require very little care. Many of these plants are really inexpensive."

Spayd's is a family operation that began 15 years ago. "We started with a hobby greenhouse. I was growing starter plants for the garden. Now we have the greenhouses and we are full fledge florists. We also do some landscaping."

Among the family helpers are Mary's daughter, Melissa. Missy, a former FFA state president, manages the flower shop while going to school full time. "I work 40 to 60 hours a week here and go to school," she explained.

Brother Mike was also a member of the Oley Valley FFA and at present is the chapter's only American Farmer. Missy is applying for her degree this year.

Missy's sister, Betsy, also works in the greenhouses, often doing transplanting. Russ, the head of the Spayd clan, has a full-

time job at Carpenter Technology in Reading. He helps with maintenance greenhouse duties whenever necessary. Max is the youngest Spayd.

Working together, Mary and Missy picked out some lovely examples of easy care plants that would make great presents for farm wives.

"For Easter, bulbs make a fine gift. They don't live long in the house, approximately a week. Pick hyacinths and lilies for smell or take tulips. Most people let these plants die back then they let the bulbs sit in the pots until they plant them in the fall," Mary explained.

While both Missy and Mary like mums they don't recommend Easter as the best time to purchase them. "You can buy mums at Easter but they aren't a hardy variety," Missy said.

"They're designed to bloom in November which is just too late around here. When I think mums I think fall. We plant 25,000 fall mums," Mary added.

Hardy varieties of azaleas are another good choice for carefree gardeners. "Azaleas are very available and they come in many colors including white, pinks, red, and several shades of purple."

Whether choosing a gift or taking something home to spruce up the farmstead, buyers can hardly go wrong with bedding plants. "Most bedding plants aren't expensive many don't even have to be picked off," Mary explained.

Most bedding plants can't be planted until mid-May in Berks County but pansies are an exception.

"Pansies can go out now. Often they will survive the winter."

Geraniums aren't hard to care for and they come in lots of colors. Marigolds are great border plants



For much of the season the Spayds display their flowers and shrub in front of their establishment on the Pricetown Road near Oley. The pansies in the picture are ready to be planted.

and if you are on a budget they can even be grown from seeds," Mary said.

"Nicotiana, flowering tobacco, is another lovely plant," she added.

While you can't smoke it, flowering tobacco has another advantage.

"It's great for attracting humming birds," Missy said.

Knowing the conditions of the area is just as important for a flower bed as an alfalfa field. "Begonias are good in sun or shade while impatiens prefer the shade. Vinca is great in hot, dry poor soil. It looks a lot like an impatient and comes in pink or white. It also stays nice and low," Mary said.

Perennials can satisfy a farm wife's need for flowers year after year with virtually no work at all.

them in your attic," Mary said.

Old time favorites remain popular. "We sell lots of poenies and bleeding hearts," Missy said.

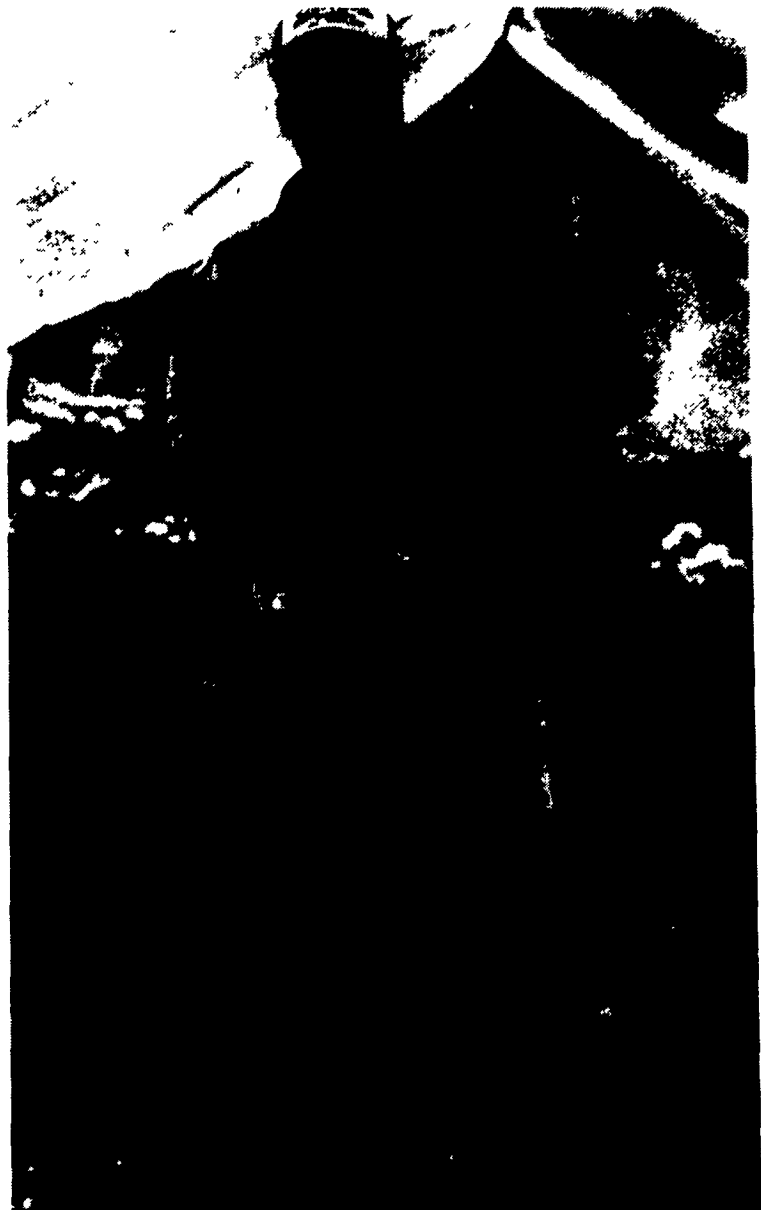
Clematis is a favorite of Mary's for growing on a trellis. "I had some white Clematis left over so I planted them next to a fence. They had huge white flowers. They must have been eight-inches across. And they are beautiful, the kind of flowers you would expect to wear in your hair if you were in Hawaii," Mary said.

Hanging baskets are big sellers around Mother's day and they can also be worry free. "Baskets with geraniums are one of our most popular items on Mother's day. Begonias trailing in a basket are easy to be cared for and can be hung on a porch as can impatiens," Mary said.

These searching for something exotic can pick out a couple of brand new, easy care plants. Holding up a basket of bright yellow flowers Mary explained that this was the first year they had been grown at Spayd's. "They are called gold coins although the proper name is odontospermum maritimum. They are comfortable in hot dry sunny areas and will even survive a light frost," she explained.

Another new show stopper this year is called strawberry fields, oracalypha pendula. The plant with trailing vines which faintly resemble a strawberry, has flowers that look like a plump, pink cat tail. "These also like the hot, dry conditions. We had a nursery

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Mike Spayd was a member of the Oley Valley FFA and earned his chapter's only American Farmer Degree. These days Mike is busy in the greenhouse raising plants like these beautiful azaleas.



Mary Spayd and her daughter, Melissa, hold up two of the newest flowers available at their greenhouse. The hanging baskets of gold coin and strawberry fields would be perfect for hanging out with a farm sign.

"Make absolutely sure you put these plants where you will want them to come up again!" Mary emphasized.

Walking along the flats of young plants not yet ready for sale, Missy and Mary point out some smart choices for busy gardeners. "Daisies such as the shasta and the Rudbeckia (black eyed Susan) would look wonderful in mass say along a fence. Yarrow is beautiful fresh, or you can dry it. I have hung flowers upside down beside my dryer or you could put

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