

Elizabeth Ludlow Bowman: Tips for the Compleat Gardener

The enigma of indigo

The color of the clear evening sky as day fades, the eternal presence of stars revealed, is the essence of indigo. Mystics associate this color with the Third Eye located between and just above the eyebrows, an energy center known of as the Brow Chakra.

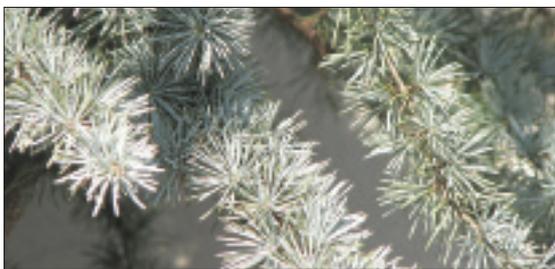
People familiar with anatomy know this is the site of the pituitary gland, a small, oval gland that secretes hormones that regulate every biological system in us.

Energetically the pituitary gland is said to appear blue but to actually contain elements of all the colors of the spectrum as the evening sky contains the light of both day and night and really isn't a color at all but the infinite being of the universe as far as one can see. Appropriate color designation for the third eye also known as "The Third Eye of the Mysteries" by the mystics.

The color indigo is described as the color of new blue jeans (before the trend of beating the pants to rags before putting them on the racks) and the closest natural color I could find is that of the Blue Atlas Cedar (pictured here in close up) and the Blue Spruce.

In a way Lavender would fill the bill and the essence of lavender along with new-mown hay and balsam, are beneficial to the Brow Chakra energy and the pituitary gland.

Lavender is used for calming the overactive mind and this third eye is a focal point for meditation and connection with the spiritual. Indigo expresses itself musically as the note A and harmonizes with the fifth tone E. Play music in these keys while sitting quietly, in a lavender-scented space focusing on the spot between your brows and you may experience enlightenment about something.



Blue Atlas Cedar.

A person whose job is spiritual counseling might consider using the blue-foliaged plants in the landscaping around the office. In the sunny beds a mass planting of lavender would give the effect as would slate-colored stoncrop (sedum) some varieties are very denim colored.

For midsummer in the sun Eryngium and Echinops [EX-in-ops](Globe thistle) have blue foliage and dusty-blue flowers. Deer will leave these and lavender alone and usually do not browse on low-growing sedums.

In shadier areas several of the large Hostas have slate-blue leaves. There are new varieties every year so put this on the list for early nursery visits. Hostas are tasty to deer so they will need to be diligently dosed with repellent.

To achieve the aura of indigo with shrubbery the spectacular blue bird's nest spruce keeps a compact growth habit while growing slowly to 3-5 feet. To keep this at its best take the time to remove leaves and tree debris from the branches during fall cleanup.

For larger indigo beauty consider planting a Colorado Spruce (Picea pungens), which grows 30-40 feet high and takes up 10-20 feet sideways. Commonly known as the Blue Spruce this plant will tolerate a wide variety of soils except the wettest and really looks great during the winter months. Take note as you drive around how this tree stands out.

A recent cultivar of the above is "Fat Albert" which has a shorter, wider nature and nice blue needles. One of my favorites is the Blue Atlas Cedar (Cedrus atlantica), which unfortunately gets planted too close to structures more often than not.

A variety called 'glauca' is a spectacular plant that grows 40-60 feet tall and 30-40 feet wide. Glauca pendula is a weeping tree that has amazing personality in any landscape given appropriate room to grow. The cones are equally beautiful.

Add mystery to your experience with indigo.

compleatgardener@comcast.net

Peggy Baker: Navigating Higher Education Vagaries of the SAT

The ACT and SAT are college entrance exams that intend to measure a student's critical thinking skills. It seems that those tests are the dominant topic of conversation for two years or so in high school, and then by graduation they slide into oblivion, never to be discussed again.

For more than 20 years I have listened to parents complain about those tests. The complaining is most often vocalized by families whose children have not performed as well as expected.

The script goes something like this: "My student gets all As in high school. He is involved in activities. He completes his homework, but he is a poor test taker. The colleges shouldn't depend on these tests for entrance."

I commiserate. The results can be a source of stress and they can throw wrenches into the family dynamics.

To be sure, the SAT and ACT only test verbal and mathematics aptitudes. Some students do not work optimally under timed conditions. But if a selective college wants the best and brightest population, it will ask for high school grades and standardized test scores.

Over the years, I have noticed that students from rigorous private high schools have grades that are comparable to their performance on the SAT tests. The surprises seem to occur more often in families in which students do not have four hours of homework a night and where a lot of students in the class get As. Since grade inflation has become the norm, how is a college to compare a student from a school with a demanding curriculum to one from a school that awards inflated grades to much of the class?

Fortunately, all colleges don't have the same requirements. Should a student undergo immense stress just so he can earn a passing grade in a college that is academically too rigorous? Probably not. Finding the appropriate fit is not a problem, and there are reputable, experienced educational consultants that can make the more productive and successful.

In the past decade more colleges have become "SAT optional." That means that an SAT or ACT scores need not be submitted in order to gain acceptance. However, don't breathe a sigh of relief just yet. There are plenty of students who do submit their scores to SAT optional colleges, and if those students have competitive grades and suitable standardized test scores, the colleges will most likely accept those applicants.

Colleges that announce SAT optional acceptance often do so because they will receive more applications than colleges that require standardized scores, and therefore have the opportunity to reject more students. The result: a contrived low acceptance rate, which tends to make them appear more selective.

So what can be one to enhance a student's chances for college acceptance? Standardized test scores can be improved with a comprehensive course that has at least 30 hours of instruction. Simply taking tests repeatedly does not raise scores, but a thorough review of the test subject content followed by a practice test will likely increase a score, thereby making a student more attractive to more colleges.

Think of an SAT course as a review of the accumulated knowledge taught in the school system. The knowledge learned must be applied, often creatively, in the standardized test. Although a student's scores will eventually plateau, the student will have at least maximized his potential.

Finally, the majority of colleges, even those that claim to be test optional, award their merit scholarships based on the SAT score. There is nothing to lose by studying for the SAT or ACT and everything to gain.

Sierra Club film talk examines gas drilling

The Pennsylvania Sierra Club will host a video discussion about Marcellus gas extraction at 7 p.m. Jan. 14 in Warrington.

"GasLand," the Sundance Award-winning documentary by Josh Fox, examines the issues of natural gas extraction through the eyes of the people where the drilling is taking place.

The event will feature a keynote address by Dennis Winters, chair of the Pennsylvania Sierra Club and Sierra Club Conservation Chair at the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. Nancy Janyszeski, chair of the Nockamixon Township Board of Supervisors, will join Winters. The township recently won a half-decade battle with Arbor Resources, which wanted to set up drilling.

The screening and discussion will take place at the BuxMont Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 2040 Street Road. Admission is by donation. Call 215-343-0406.

Pickering Manor hosts free seminar

Pickering Manor in Newtown will host a free informational seminar, "Medicare - Overview and Changes in 2011," at 2 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 27.

Pickering Manor is at 226 N. Lincoln Ave. The seminar, presented by attorney Susan Piette, will cover topics such as the basics of Medicare A, B, C and D, MediGaps and private drug plans, what is and isn't covered by Medicare, and new Medicare premiums, deductibles and co-pay changes in 2011. The seminar will include time for questions and answers. Call 215-968-3878 x1101 to reserve a seat for this free seminar.

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