

Garden Highlights – June



Gunnera manicata

Syn. *Gunnera brasiliensis*

giant gunnera; dinosaur food

Gunneraceae

Native to Brazil and Colombia

What an amazing plant! Anyone who has walked up the path north of Garrard to Broadway has noticed this giant perennial. In the right conditions, the leaves of *Gunnera manicata* can grow up to 6' across on stalks up to 8' tall. However, more often they get to be *only* 3' across and 4' high in our region. All top growth dies to the ground every year.

The leaves are deeply lobed and covered in little spines (you can see the spines in the photo below). While the leaves are certainly the reason most people are interested in this plant, they are not the only interesting feature. The reddish flowers are borne on densely packed small branches on 1-2' tall conical spikes (resembling an ear of corn).

Giant gunnera require constant moisture, and grow best in a wet or boggy location in full sun. The plant pictured here grows in a part of the lawn that is always soggy due to drainage from the patio. *Gunnera manicata* is hardy here, but only barely. To shield the crown from frost, cut the old leaves in November and place them over the buds at base of the plant. Remember to remove these again in spring once the leaves start growing, as the new leaves may tear trying to push through the old leaves.

