



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-four Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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President:
Suzanne Grefsheim
(301-946-5529)

Vice President:
Judy Termini

Co-Secretaries:
Carol Meyers
Judith Graef

Treasurer:
Regina Fitzgerald

Bulletin Editor:
Lois Brown
301-365-7419

Photographer:
Vickie Baily

Send news to:
dnleb@aol.com



Kasia Massie's charming arrangements graced the tables at the September meeting.

On October 25, 10:30am at St. Mark Presbyterian Church we'll hear from Barbara Faust, Smithsonian Garden Director, who will update us on the past, present and future of the Smithsonian gardens. Perhaps you remember some years ago we were encouraged to protest the removal of the gardens near the Castle to make way for construction projects. Ms. Faust will give us the true scoop on that situation and hopefully confirm that those oases of calm and tranquility are not on the endangered list. We'll be enjoying a sandwich lunch after Ms. Faust's talk. Please bring a sandwich, divided into quarters, if possible, to share. Also bring a plant from your garden or a houseplant you can part with to swap with a fellow member. Please know that if your offering is among the unchosen you must scoop it up in your arms and take it back home... it can't live at St. Mark, sadly.

See you all on Wednesday October 25th.

—Jane Malish

Welcome new member Carey Thorington

I am an artist with a specialty in printmaking. I am also an adult skater who started skating with her kids. Nina Stark-Slapnik, my skating coach, got me interested in the Bethesda Community Garden Club. I call my garden a Darwin's Garden because only the fittest plants survive. I like and encourage native plants, ferns and trees. My family consists of two daughters; Ellen and Katherine, a French son-in-law Nicolas (married to Ellen), and two grandsons, Étienne and Matthieu.

Adventures with Ground Covers

Barbara Collier

Since I became interested in using more native plants, I have found several low-growing native ground covers that seem immune to deer. They have now been established for more than five years, so I have a pretty good idea what they will do—that is, if the rule *sleep* (first year)—*creep* (second year)—*leap* (third year) is anything to go by.

Lyreleaf sage, *Salvia lyrata*, is available both as a straight species as well as a red-leaved cultivar, 'Purple Knockout'. Besides the leaf color, the main difference is that the flowers are taller and bluer in the species than in the cultivar, and the species seems to spread more vigorously. I started with one plant by a path, which seeded so enthusiastically into both bed and path that I was able to move the seedlings into several places and establish colonies. This plant is said to prefer sun, but my experience is that it does fine in filtered sun/partial shade.

Pussytoes, or *Antennaria*, prefers sun. I acquired *Antennaria plantaginifolia* (plantain-leafed pussytoes) at the same time as *Salvia lyrata*, and although both spread, it seemed to me that the pussytoes was more inclined to be happy in the sunny spots, although it seems to tick along nicely as a carpet under taller plants. The fuzzy flowers in spring are charming. This plant has spread nicely, but it is not so competitive that it can choke out aggressive competition (such as, for instance, the next example).

Anemone canadensis, or woodland anemone, prefers part sun but is basically up for anything. It's an aggressive spreader, and some report that it is a thug. If you want a neat and tidy garden, it may not be for you, since it does go everywhere and will clamber over very low growing things (like pussytoes). But if you have a confined space you want to fill in, or a woody or meadowy area where you want low-growing plants below the tall ones, this is a candidate.

One of my shady beds has a nice patch of Allegheny spurge, *Pachysandra procumbens*, a handsome, better-behaved alternative to the familiar, fast-growing Japanese type. It is semi-evergreen (the old leaves are quite battered by spring). This is a slow spreader, so it is a good idea to start with several plants if you hope to cover an area of any size. I began with one plant about 5 years ago, and after it seemed happy, I got a few more. But it is more of an accent rug than wall-to-wall carpeting. It has interesting flowers in spring, so put it where you can see them.

Another useful shade lover is barren strawberry, which (as another victim of the botany wars) has two Latin names: *Waldsteinia fragarioides* and *Geum fragarioides*. The crucial point is that both are *fragarioides*: strawberry-like in both leaves and flowers. They like partial to light shade, are semi-evergreen, and spread nicely. Having read that they will root in water, I rooted several cuttings this summer and potted them up. Having transplanted them outside about 10 days before leaving on vacation, I was pleasantly surprised on my return to find that despite a three-week drought, they seemed just fine. Here's hoping they come back next spring.

I suspect that everyone already has golden ragwort, *Packera aurea* (formerly *Senecio aureus*), but if not, you might consider it for large-scale ground cover. It spreads very effectively; it prefers moist, shady



Pussytoes photo by Barbara Collier

areas, but it is also fine with sun; it even copes with drought, although it looks rather sad. But it makes a fine yellow display in spring. Large perennials like amsonia and boneset are unfazed by it, but you might want to pull out ragwort seedlings crowding around the base of things that lack deep tough roots. If you decide you want it, you can just ask around: almost anyone who has it has plenty to spare.

Barbara Collier is the co-chair of the BCGC Environmental Concerns Committee

Comments from The September Program

Carol Meyers and Judith Graef

A wealth of ideas and advice was shared by members at the September meeting. Unfortunately this list is not complete and we apologize for omissions.

Equipment:

Mary Ann Wren displayed her Dollar Store Ginza Knife that cuts through most anything in the garden. Janet Fernandez has found that a lithium battery-operated garden blower proved to be helpful. Debbie Shakelton has a bulb planter that can be used standing up! Caroline Turner recommended a Spearhead (brand) spade that comes in various lengths.



Mary Ann Wren's Ginza knife is perfect for dividing hosta.



Caroline Turner brought a shovel called the Spear Head Spade. It was invented by an 85-year-old inventor who had two artificial hips and two artificial knees, who was determined not to give up gardening.

Living Things:

Recommendations:

The Goldenrod cultivar 'Firecracker'; a startling 7' Tall Coreopsis; growing Elephant Ears for a stunning garden. Carolyn Kulik purchased a mystery plant at the Plant Sale and would love to know who supplied the unusual *Pollia condensata* with very distinctive, glossy blue, berry-like fruit. Looking for lawn care suggestions, talk to Dee Lertora about her heavy fertilization schedule in the fall.

Be careful:

Karin Kelleher has done battle with Snake Root, pulling most of it out but, since it's a native plant, leaving some for the bunnies. Re bunnies: Karin lets them eat the natives, which do come back but in a foreshortened state. Judith Graef determined that high-potassium fertilizer would prevent the Passion Flower Vine from dropping its buds. However, on second thought, from those with experience, do not plant one as it is a true garden thug

Killing Things:

Jeanne Weiss touted Nina Stark-Slapnik's use of cardboard for weed killing. To keep wind from blowing it off, Nina suggested placing wet leaves and grass on top, in the recycle bag or not. Jeanne eventually planted through the cardboard.

Plant Storage:

Irene Sinclair suggested storing elephant ears in the basement, and Candy Kessel recommended storing dahlia bulbs in kitty litter in bags.

Excursions:

As follow-up to our spring visit to the Maymont Mansion in Richmond, Lou Olin recommends a visit to the Dooley family "summer home" Swannanoa, in Waynesboro, VA.

Black Creek Greenhouse Nursery, E. Earl, PA is worth the trip. www.reallancastercounty.com/markets-2/flowers-gardens/black-creek-greenhouses/ Check

with Candy Kessel on this.



Blackberry lily seed pods were a popular give-away at this meeting. Behind Nina Stark-Slapnik is her guest, new member Carey Thorington.

Miscellaneous:

Who knew that if you want to deport rabbits from your garden, find a far away destination. They have been known to return from more than 5 miles away!

For something unusual in garden design, Caroline Turner described painting trees/trunks blue, and even rainbow colors, using products that don't hurt

the tree. Check out A.M. Leonard "Tree Marking Paint" and www.gardenseeds.swarthmore.edu/gardenseeds/2010/07/shadow-of-abracadabra/ and www.lushome.com/bright-painting-ideas-for-decorating-trees-creative-backyard-ideas/72970

Information Sources:

Caryk Designs; lawnsience.com; *Who's Been Eating My Plants*; *The Humane Gardener* by Nancy Lawson (also possible speaker)

**SAVE THE DATE:
NEWPORT FLOWER SHOW JUNE 21-24, 2018**

This trip is offered by the National Capital Area Garden Clubs. Held at the Rosecliff Mansion in Newport, RI, the show is a "must see" event. Enjoy judged horticultural specimens and floral designs, special garden exhibitions, lectures and demonstrations. For more information, contact Ronnie Levay, NCAGC Trip Chairman, lslusship@aol.com, or 703-754-9422.



Bebe McMeekin, Lou Olin, and Eleanor Hickey look over the new yearbook, produced by Barbara Shaw.



Judy Termini announces the *Euonymus 6*. All six are either current or former members of the Glen Echo chorale of *Encore Creativity*. The group sang "Plant a Radish" from the *Fantasticks* and a crowd-pleasing rendition of "Tiptoe Through the Tulips."



Janet Fernandez was especially welcome at this meeting after her recovery from an accident.

Vickie Baily is adding to the collection of member photos printed in the 2017-2018 Yearbook. Please clip out and add the following photos to your Yearbook:



Maggie Banuls



Meme Lincoln



Carey Thorington

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Garden Diaries

Carole Ottesen

What follows is not at all what I intended to write. This was supposed to be about plants with outstanding fall color. When I couldn't remember the names of a couple of them, I dug out my garden diaries—all three of them.

While seeking and eventually finding the names of the plants—the fall-flaming Oriental spice bush (*Lindera angustifolia*) and *Ilex verticillata* 'Winter Gold,' a winterberry with pinky orange fruits—I lost myself in the diaries and spent a day reading over plant acquisitions and events of the last twenty-eight years.

The first diary begins with a tongue in cheek and apocryphal dedication: "Feb '89, A Garden History, in which important plant names are recorded even if we can't find the plants outside."

Hard upon that statement is the first recorded acquisition: "I ordered 20 'Heritage' (*Betula nigra*) white birches from Bracken Tree Growers @ \$6 plus trucking." As if that were not enough, the next item is a greedy intention: "The next big purchase will be native azaleas from Transplant Nursery, Lavonia, GA."

The skinny birch saplings quickly grew into a lovely grove, under-planted with grasses. They grew and grew and grew until they were enormous. Then, two summers ago at age 26, the river birches began to die. Their big limbs came crashing down. I didn't realize that they were so short-lived.

In the over a hundred pages of plants added to the garden along with maps of what would go where, each spring are lists usually numbering twenty or more of newly acquired plants: "Shrubs added to the garden" or "New bulbs" or "Perennials from Babikow." It's pretty clear that more money was spent on plants than on clothing.

In the calm aftermath of the growing season, there are addendums to those lists of new plants indicating placement: "next to fence front," "against patio wall," and their success or lack of it: "died after transplant," "died," "deer ate it," "love it," "nice,"

"Ferns—a great muddle," "I.v.'Red Sprite' again no berries."

The diary also documents the passage of time. An entry in 1989 states: "The new walk is composed of stepping stones gathered from around the yard and woods." In 2001: "In the process of making steps up the front path I came upon buried rocks from the first path, built years ago. It is astonishing how deeply they were buried. It reminded me of the catacombs in Paris and how far below the present city are the Roman ruins."

The early diary entries were filled with inspiration for new gardens. "On a wet winter day I was struck by the marvelous winter colors: pine green, wheat colored grasses, black tree trunks, and, now and then, the orange of broomsedge. Seeing the clean line of a hill in front of evergreens was a special pleasure and something to think about in planning and planting."

As time passed, entries became pragmatic to do lists: "'94. Create better circulation. Widen paths for more gracious passage." "1996. This year will be dedicated to putting the finishing touches on the beds." "'01. Plant for easier maintenance." "2011. Simplified the border to two peonies, cut down the Viburnum, added pachysandra." "2014. Get rid of roses."

The diaries document easily more failures than successes. Even so, a leitmotiv of optimism prevails throughout. There are always plans for the subsequent growing season: "2011. Written in deepest January when all things are possible and it is impossible to do much work outside. Air layer more *Stewartia* as soon as it warms up."