



# Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

*"Ninety-four Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"*

[www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org](http://www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org)

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Sandwiches brought by members to share at the January meeting made an attractive buffet along with salads provided by the luncheon committee.

*All photos by Vickie Baily unless otherwise noted.*

## Return of the Flesh Eater Expert!

Mr. Michael Szesze, who is the proprietor of the Carnivorous Plant Nursery in Smithsburg, MD, was laid low by the flu and was unable to educate us about those exotica at our January 24 meeting. But he's now recovered and has agreed to speak at our **February 28** meeting. And he's also going to bring along some irresistible specimens for you to purchase. And, as the February 28<sup>th</sup> meeting is also the date for our silent auction of irresistible garden treasures, you might want to consider moving money around as you're likely to find innumerable delights without which you CANNOT live.

There's more information, if you're interested, about Mr. Szesze and his remarkable career in our January 24 newsletter.

Lunch on Feb. 28 will be soup, nourishing and warming. Come prepared to enjoy the delectables offered by the ladies of the luncheon committee!

The meeting will be held at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, and will begin promptly at 10:30.

*-Jane Malish*

## Get Rid of Stuff for a Good Cause – Feb. 28

*Candy Kessel*

The popularity of BCGC's silent auctions means the tradition will continue. Our February 28 meeting gives you the opportunity to clear out unwanted garden-related items from your garage/shed/basement/closet. Set aside and bring plant stands, attractive containers, nice unwanted tools, garden art and artifacts, gnomes etc. Please, no garden books, flimsy plastic pots, or terra cotta pots.

Last year club members donated more than 85 unwanted items that we auctioned to raise nearly \$600 for the 11th Street Bridge Project. This year's auction proceeds will go to one of the horticulture/environmental organizations the club supports.

Please participate and check all those spaces you're trying to empty before Feb. 28. The silent bidding will start as soon as set-up is completed so please arrive early so we can line up all the treasures. Be sure to bring your checkbook and/or extra cash so you can bid enthusiastically.

If you have any questions please contact [candykessel36@gmail.com](mailto:candykessel36@gmail.com); 202-415-7828.

**Garden Catalogs piling up?** Bring them to the meeting along with your auction donations.

## Making plans for your garden yet?

Judith Graef

Whenever you do start the overhaul, and spring is upon us, please consider inviting appreciative BCGC members to enjoy an Open Garden at your house. What this means is opening your garden for a couple of hours, between April and October, on whatever day and at whatever time work best for you. You do not need to have a perfectly manicured backyard, an arboretum, or park benches and waterfalls to please this group. Since we all have had the experience of hands-on-gardening, we can well appreciate the work that goes into a landscape. In return for your hospitality, you are guaranteed to delight your audience and receive compliments. (When was the last time you were told that you'd done a great job on anything?) If you are just getting a garden started or renovating an old one, it's your opportunity to ask for some advice, if you'd like to.

Please give the idea some thought and let me know if you'd like to participate and I'll give you the details. It's acceptable to nominate someone else, too. Also, keep in mind that if we've already seen your garden, we'd still enjoy a return visit. No garden remains the same for very long.

## A Crowd of Coneflowers

Barbara Collier

When we talk about coneflowers, we often mean *Echinacea purpurea*, a lovely native perennial that is also widely used for medicinal purposes (among other things, it has mildly antibiotic properties). It



*Echinacea purpurea*

likes sun, but it will cope with partial shade, and it does fine in our clay soils.

In my own garden, I have found purple coneflower to be a fairly prolific self-seeder, so that I am well supplied with it. However, other gardeners have told me that their newly planted specimens have

been utterly destroyed by deer. So claims that it is deer resistant should be treated skeptically; it is more accurate to say that it can withstand some browsing. Thus, if you can get your purple coneflower well established, you may find that its self-seeding is sufficient to counter any deer damage. As is typical for self-seeders, these plants are not individually long-lived, so plant them where they have room to spread if you want to keep them going. Allowing coneflower seedheads to stand also provides winter food for the birds; goldfinches love them.

Another coneflower that I have grown is *Echinacea pallida*, which shares many of the characteristics of *E. purpurea*. This plant, however, has much narrower leaves than *E. purpurea*, and its pale purple flowers with narrow petals provide a contrast to its darker cousin. I grew mine from winter-sown seed and, as usual, I tucked seedlings in wherever I could find a spot (I don't count on all seedlings surviving). When some turned out to be crowded, I dug them up and moved them elsewhere. As it turns out, *E. pallida* has a taproot, so it is drought tolerant (good!), but that also means that digging it up may not actually remove it. I observed the distinctive narrow leaves reemerging after I dug it out the first time.

*Echinacea tennesseensis*, Tennessee purple coneflower, is one I have not grown, but I am intrigued by a description that says the flowers tend to face east and follow the sun. It is described as very tough, withstanding drought, humidity, and heat. They are now rare in the wild, where they are found in limestone soils. However, in the garden they will apparently do well in soils that are well drained and not too rich. So if you have an east-facing spot that meets those conditions, you might consider seeking out this plant.

Another coneflower I have grown is not an *Echinacea* but one of a related genus, *Ratibida*, known as prairie coneflowers. *Ratibida pinnata*, pinnate prairie coneflower or grey-headed coneflower, turned out to be one of my winter-sowing successes. (Another popular species is *Ratibida columnifera*, upright prairie coneflower or Mexican hat.) *R. pinnata* has handsome pinnate foliage and yellow flowers with downward hanging petals and centers that become somewhat cylindrical (like a tall sombrero). I was not sure that *R. pinnata* would be a success at



first: although I got lots of seedlings, the young plants were attractive to deer (and possibly rabbits). However, after the first season of protecting them somewhat, I found that not only could they cope on their own, I had squirreled away so many seedlings



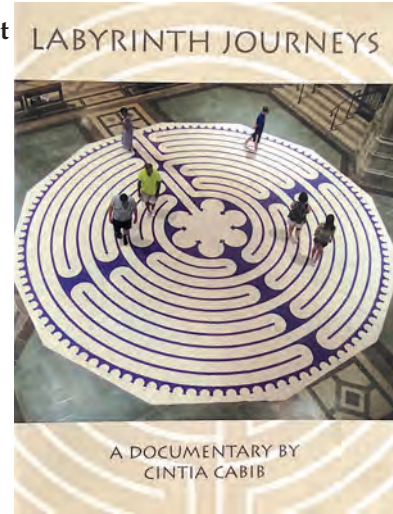
*Ratibida pinnata*

in places inaccessible that I had more than enough. Not only that, but where they had managed to bloom the first year, they had also seeded themselves. (Lesson learned: if you get lots of seedlings by winter sowing, the plants will probably be enthusiastic self-seeders.) I now have to edit them down and rationalize their placement, as they can get to be up to 5 feet tall. I have seen advice to help control them with competition: that I can do!

*Photos by Barbara Collier*

### Labyrinth Featured in Documentary

Filmmaker Cintia Cabib conducted interviews for the documentary "Labyrinth Journeys" on Vickie Baily's labyrinth. The interview Cintia was conducting in the photo below wasn't used in the final cut of the film, but her children playing on it (bottom) did appear!



Vickie Baily's "head shot"

*Photo by Martin Baily*



## HORTICULTURAL NOTES

*Forcing*

Carole Ottesen

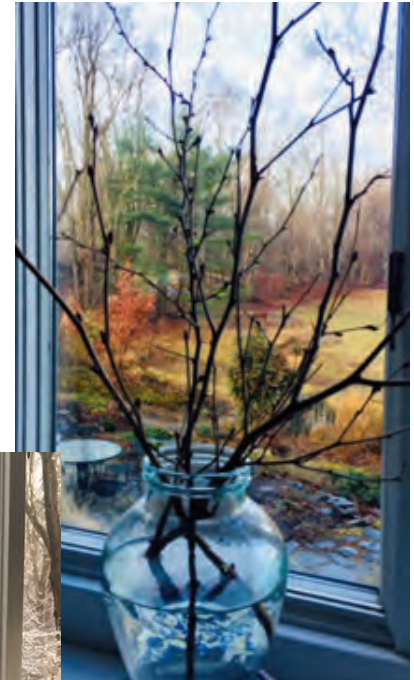
For those of you who can't stand to wait to get out into the garden, use these last inclement days to do a little judicious pruning. Though not necessarily by the book, pruning some shrubs now has two advantages. One, it jumpstarts spring chores before the mad explosion of growth begins. Two, it can provide a little early spring bloom to brighten the inside during these last interminable gray days of winter.

Trim early blooming shrubs and bring the budded cuttings inside to force. Forsythia is the poster child for forcing, but far from the only one. Some other shrubs with branches that flower reliably inside include pussy willow (*Salix*), winter hazel (*Corylopsis*), Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*), quince (*Cydonia*), and *Edgeworthia*.

Sweet box (*Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis*) doesn't come to mind immediately as a subject for forcing, but it has its charms. Although the flowers of *Sarcococca* are tiny and dwarfed by evergreen leaves, they make up in perfume for what they lack in size. Nicer than Glade!

There are a few general rules for forcing and none is hard and fast:

1. Cut pencil-thin branches on an angle and plunge immediately into water—or recut inside.
2. Purists emulate the progression of spring's damp days by soaking cut branches in a bathtub or other container for several hours or wrapping them in damp newspaper for a day or so to provide increased humidity (making the branches experience April's showers).
3. Place the vase of branches in a cool place. No wimps, early bloomers will be accustomed to low temperatures.
4. Naked branches with swelling buds have an awkward, colt-like appearance that is endearing and almost as pleasant to behold as the flowers.



Shrubs suitable for forcing include budding branches (above), forsythia (left), and *Corylopsis pauciflora* (below).

*Photos by Carole Ottesen*



5. The closer the shrub is to blooming outside, the faster its branches will flower inside.
6. Recut stems and change the water as necessary.