



# Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

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

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

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Member of  
The National Capital Area  
Garden Clubs and  
The National Council of State  
Garden Clubs, Inc.

President:  
Susan Lass  
(301-656-1893)

Vice President:  
Judy Termini

Co-Secretaries:  
Judith Graef  
Carol Meyers

Treasurer:  
Lise Ringland

Bulletin Editor:  
Lois Brown  
301-365-7419

Photographer:  
Vickie Baily

Send news to:  
dnleb@aol.com



Sylvia Diss created the  
table arrangements for  
the March meeting.

*All photos by Vickie Baily  
unless otherwise noted.*

Ferns are the oldest plants on earth, having survived catastrophe after catastrophe, including fern bars of the '60s, and '70s. Ferns are having a moment. Check out the *New York Times*' "T" magazine's March 24, 2019 issue and its stunning photos of assorted ferns:  
[www.nytimes.com/2019/03/14/t-magazine/ferns-oldest-plants.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/14/t-magazine/ferns-oldest-plants.html)

Our club is also having a fern moment. At our **April 24 meeting**, **Dr. Paulette Royt** will inform us about the basic structure of ferns and the properties that identify them, properties such as blade dissection and shape, rhizome type and other features of their structure. And she will discuss the major genera of ferns found in our area. Dr. Royt has a PhD in Microbiology from the University of Maryland, and was on the Biology faculty at George Mason University from where she retired. After retirement she became a Master Gardener and is affiliated with Green Spring Gardens as a docent and lecturer. Don't miss this opportunity to hear Dr. Royt explain these versatile plants and to enjoy one of the Lunch Committee's hot lunches.

Other learning opportunities abound. We're trying something new at this meeting. There will be various luncheon tables hosted by members/committee chairs who will share information about, for example, how the Plant Sale works, what the Membership Committee does, how the Davis and Connie Morella libraries groups function, what the holiday greens committee does, and how the luncheon flowers group works. Each table with its topic will be identified with a placard. Have a look around and see if there's a table where the discussion will be about something you always wanted to know or wondered about. Hope to see you all at this our last "formal" meeting of the club year. Remember: there's a free lunch!

The meeting will be at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Road, North Bethesda, and will begin at 10:30 a.m.

*—Jane Malish*

**The nominating committee for 2020 is pleased to present the following slate to the board and membership for our 2019-2020 year:**

President—Susan Lass (1 year left of present term)

Vice-president—Judy Termini (1 year left of present term)

Co-Secretaries—Carol Meyers (1 year position) and Karen Fricke (2 years)

Treasurer—Lise Ringland (1 year left of present term)

Voting will take place at the April meeting.

*—BCGC 2020 Nominating Committee: Sharon Washburn Southerland, chair;  
Regina Fitzgerald, Holly Joseph, Maria Marzullo, Lou Olin*

## At the April Meeting enjoy lunch while getting to know other members and learning about club projects

*Patricia Pennington*

Member survey responses highlighted members' interest in finding ways to get to know each other and learning more about club activities.

Want to know what members do when they work at the Bethesda libraries? Plan to sit at luncheon Table #1 to enjoy your tasty lunch while you talk to committee chairs about what members do at Davis Library and Connie Morella Library in downtown Bethesda.

If you're new or don't know much about the annual Plant Sale, sitting at Table #2 with seasoned Plant Sale members will give you an overview of what's involved. Plus it's an opportunity to have your questions answered.

Need information about digging and potting plants for the Plant Sale? Look for Table #3 where that topic will be covered during lunch.

Interested in flower arranging? You'll want to sit at Table #4 with like-minded members and the member who made the floral arrangements for April's luncheon tables.

Table #5 is where to sit and enjoy your lunch if you want to learn about the annual December Holiday Greens Workshop and all the ways club members can be involved.

Learn about Membership and Mentoring from the committee chairs when you join them for lunch at Table #6.

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the meeting April 24. And just a reminder, please feel free to arrive any time after 10:00 a.m. to socialize with old friends and make new ones prior to the start of the meeting.

## Environmental Concerns

*Barbara Collier*

### One Word: Plastics

Do plastics belong in the garden? On the one hand, we depend on plastic pots for special purposes like the plant sale (coming up soon!), and many of us depend year-round on plastic planters in our gardens, because we can't manage the heavy ceramic ones. We can also find many ways to recycle plastics in the garden: many of us have probably used soda bottles for slow-release watering, modified dairy tubs to start seeds, cut up plastic bottles to make cloches or collars for protecting plants and seedlings, and so on. (At the very least, we've seen tips for these and other handy tricks.) Further, we are truly fortunate to live in an area where heavy plastics like flower pots can be included in our regular recycling pickups.

On the other hand, we are all becoming aware of the growing problem of plastics in the environment. It's hard not to look askance at the plastic we see everywhere after reading recent news stories about microplastics being found in the marine environment, freshwater systems, soil, the air, and of course our food. And as I have found from unhappy experience, certain plastics used in gardens are just bad news, both from an ecological and from a gardening perspective. I am thinking particularly of the thin, flexible plastics that seem like such a good idea—until they don't.

For example, we tried using flash tape to keep birds away from our fruits and vegetables. This thin reflective tape made a nice flashing display in the sun, but unfortunately, our birds were pretty unimpressed. If they were scared, they managed to get over their fears. To top it all off, after a season or two, the tape began to fall apart, and I found myself picking up silver ribbons and confetti all over the yard. There I was, polluting my own yard with microplastic!

Similarly, we used black plastic to smother weeds, back when that seemed like a good idea. (Lately, I have learned that this method is not really advisable for home gardeners, since it kills everything, both good and bad. It is often

used in agricultural production to attack the large populations of pests and pathogens that occur in monocultures.) Some types of black plastic, you won't be surprised to hear, are tougher than others. And you also won't be surprised that when it falls apart, the hapless gardener is left to try to collect hundreds or thousands of tiny bits of shattered plastic. Be warned.

Then there is the siren song of landscape fabric, which is much thicker and stronger than plain old black plastic. It was touted as the easy answer to weed problems; just put down landscape fabric, cover with mulch, and relax in your weed-free garden. Well, maybe for a while. But one finds soon enough that the mulch breaks down, the weed seeds fly in (some weeds even pierce up from below), the tree roots creep in at the sides, and pretty soon you have a big chore on your hands. Even if you're using the landscape fabric under rocks, unless you're very lucky, the dirt sifts in, and the tree seedlings and other things start to sprout. So either you weed your rocks or you change your ideas on the look you're hoping for.

The real horror stories, though, are those of the people who move into a new garden and discover that 6 inches to a foot down it is all landscape fabric, entangled with roots that have broken it up somewhat but not (alas) made it go away.

In the end, a good thick mulch of wood chips is a better bet. You know it will need to be

renewed as it breaks down, but in the meantime it is making nice new soil. (For more details on the benefits of wood chips as mulch, see this publication from Washington State University Extension: <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/FS160E/FS160E.pdf>.)



The Club has 124 members and 74 attended the March meeting where Lisa Bierer-Garrett spoke about monarchs. The meeting also featured festive cupcakes and a dramatic arrangement by Phyllis Daen.



## HORTICULTURAL NOTES

# *A Shaky Truce*

*Carole Ottesen*

It's been two growing seasons now since the deer fence came down. The hydrangeas have been trimmed up more or less out of reach, the hostas and daylilies have found new homes, the little lawns of dwarf mondo grass and the single remaining tulip are sprayed with Plantskydd. It isn't a perfect garden world, but a shaky truce between gardener and the wild—at least as far as ornamentals are concerned.

Vegetables are a sadder story. If everything were in the onion family, it would be easier. Leeks and spring onions are fine in the ground. Almost everything else is at risk—lettuces, tomatoes, peas, beans, cucumbers, etc.

Grown in a container on a high deck last year, tomatoes were safe from deer, but handy enough for the groundhog to take one bite out of each plump red orb. This year there will have to be a barrier to the deck—perhaps a metal baby gate from Craigslist? That should take care of potted tomatoes, but what about everything else?

Answers may be found among the types of containers available. One that will sit astride on a deck rail could be one answer. Hopefully, it will be inconveniently out of reach to frustrate the groundhog's efforts.

Deer seem to browse mainly between four to five feet and the ground. Raised containers and hanging baskets, while limited in the amount they can hold and produce, may be another answer.

The Kinsman Company carries a line of Pamela Crawford planters, among which are containers on tall stakes that are anchored into the ground by metal spikes. Out of reach, out of danger? Only time will tell.



*Photos by Carole Ottesen*