



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-six Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Oh Deer!

Many of us have a love-hate relationship with these graceful creatures; lovely to see them cavorting in a meadow but infuriating to see the devastation they can bring to our gardens. At the meeting on **January 22**, horticulturist **Christopher Lewis** will offer some ideas and advice on how we might control these pesky critters. Bring a sandwich to share. The meeting will take place at 10:30 at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Rd., North Bethesda.

Holiday Greens Workshop

Patricia Pennington, Chair

Many new Bethesda Community Garden Club members may be surprised to learn that the Holiday Greens Workshop is a tradition that started around sixty years ago! On December 11th club members met for the annual Holiday Greens Workshop and turned greens cut from members' gardens into beautiful arrangements. Club members and guests enjoyed the spirit of the season making a variety of arrangements for shelters, charities, and other organizations that look forward every year to the cheerful living works of art we create for them.

Everyone pitched in, especially many of the new members, and in a few hours 149 greens arrangements were created in various sizes – from big, beautiful centerpieces to nine small visually interesting greens in festive red solo cups. To ensure the greens would last for weeks, each arrangement included a laminated tag with care/watering instructions and BCGC's website.

Twelve organizations in Montgomery County and two organizations in DC were the recipients of our 2019 efforts. Members who volunteered to deliver arrangements loaded their vehicles, and that afternoon the organizations were enjoying their festive arrangements.

The 2019 Recipient organizations and BCGC delivery volunteers:

- A Wider Circle – Marilyn Tenenbaum
- Bethesda Police Station – Jeanne Weiss
- Catholic Charities Men & Women's Shelter – Sylvia Diss
- Central Union Mission (in DC) – Candy Kessel & Nina Stark-Slapnik
- Cornerstone Montgomery (formerly St. Lukes) – Anthea Levy
- Goodwill Dinner (Rescue Squad) – Marge Pray & Judith Hackett
- Interfaith Works Women's Center – Sylvia Diss
- Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless – Carolyn Randall
- National Center for Children & Families – Barbara Collier
- Rainbow Shelter (Woman's Shelter) – Dee Letora



Barbara Roberts shows one of her finished arrangements from the Holiday Greens Workshop. See more photos on page 5.

All photos are by Vickie Baily unless otherwise noted.

- Shepherds Table – Kathy Benjamin
- Stepping Stones (Family Shelter) – Dee Lertora
- Waverly House – Jeanne Weiss
- Whitman-Walker Health (in DC) – Candy Kessel & Nina Stark-Slapnik
- Lou Olin delivered arrangements to a couple of house-bound members

We also made 3 arrangements for the staff of Saint Mark Presbyterian Church to show our appreciation for all the work they do throughout the year setting up the room and kitchen for our meetings.

Thanks to everyone who brought conditioned greens. Because of your efforts we had an abundance of interesting materials to create the arrangements. Many others also deserve thanks. Sabita Sankaran soaked oasis at the church the night before the Greens Workshop to ensure it was ready first thing Wednesday morning. Diane Beverly once again provided a wide assortment of bows, and Carolyn Randall yet again created the laminated care instruction tags. Many members pitched in—covering the tables with newspaper, organizing the doodads, putting Carolyn's laminated tags onto picks, and participating in the clean-up. Lois Brown and Lou Olin continued in their role organizing the arrangements for delivery. American Plant donated boxes for delivery again this year. Shout out to the members who helped load vehicles and to the women who delivered the arrangements. We also appreciated the Luncheon Committee and the volunteers who contributed to the tasty lunch!

Thanks all to a successful 2019 workshop! And, surprise, we're already preparing for the 2020 Holiday Greens Workshop. Immediately following the January 22nd meeting we are going to put picks on the new doodads purchased after the holidays. We hope you'll plan to join in for about half an hour. It's a great way to participate and to get to know club members. Watch for an email reminder in mid-January.

Editor's note: It should be noted that in spite of working full-time and nursing the flu, Patricia managed the preparations and saw to the many details that make this event possible. Many thanks, Patricia!



This year we created 149 arrangements that went to shelters, nursing homes, and hospitals.

Many (Loving) Hands Make Light Work at the Connie Morella Library

Jeanne Weiss, Chair

It is winter. It is pretty cold most days. However, I am thinking about how not so long ago the summer heat was oppressive, over 90 degrees; the air was still and humid, and there was no rain for days on end. The asphalt parking lot at the Connie Morella Library in Bethesda radiated heat, and even the early mornings started out hot. I am thinking about Nancy Davidian, Maj-Britt Dohlie, Hillary Fitis, Betsy James, Candy Kessel, Dawn Landsman, Lynn Lichtenstein, Gwen Stewart and Sharon Wright. They watered and kept the landscaped, cultivated areas green, and kept the new honey locust, swamp white and chinkapin oak trees alive on the west side of the library, lugging heavy hoses around to do so. They were amazing. I heard that some library patrons praised them in passing. Thank goodness Maj-Britt persuaded Jeff Burton of Bethesda Urban Partnership to get his crew to water the new trees in and around the parking lot and along Arlington. We really like Jeff Burton.

Watering was not the only demonstration of care for the Connie Morella Library grounds. Maj-Britt, Candy, and Betsy tore down vines and put in numerous plants wherever they could. Margaret Edison and Sharon Wright are charged with the care of the Davis Library, but they still worked hard at the CM Library. So

many good souls showed up to clean up and weed throughout the growing season. A few of them were my “mentees”—so to speak. What I’ve discovered is that these so-called mentees are at least two steps ahead of me. How wonderful it is to work with such enthusiastic new members as well as our more seasoned members.

Speaking of which, a few of these new members managed to successfully present a preliminary plan for a children’s garden on the south side of the library building while at the staff and volunteer appreciation luncheon at the CM Library on Monday, January 6. Nancy Benner, head librarian, likes the idea as does Joan Greenbaum, president of the Friends of the Library, Connie Morella chapter. And, we should mention that Connie Morella herself came to our table to thank us for our work. As always, the idea is to cultivate caring in people as well as to cultivate plants.

We welcome any who want to join in maintaining and improving our local library grounds, AND, we will have LIGHT WEIGHT HOSES in 2020!

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Gathering Moss

Moss doesn’t seem to leave people indifferent. It seems either to thrill (such a beautiful green carpet!) or horrify (It’s killing my lawn!). Or perhaps when we’re neither thrilled nor horrified, it’s that we just don’t notice it—it is pretty small.

My own experience with moss leans more to the thrill end of the spectrum. Besides lacking a passion for lawns, I also understand that moss is not so much a threat to lawns as a symptom of the unsuitability of turf grass in conditions such as shade, soil compaction, and low fertility, all of which moss tolerates nicely. (On top of that, our mid-Atlantic climate is challenging for lawns anyway, as we are in the “transition zone” between areas most suitable for cool-season grasses and those better for warm-season grasses.)

For those who, like me, are not wedded to the notion of a grassy lawn, the appearance of moss in the yard



Photos by Barbara Collier

Moss lawn in spring.

may be quite welcome. We realized about 10 years ago that our front yard’s rather sad excuse for grass was underlaid by a fair amount of moss, and I began spending inordinate amounts of time pulling up grass and uncovering moss. This worked rather well for a few years, giving us some nice undulating mossy effects in the front (see picture above).

But it didn’t last: after the loss of a big tree across the street let in more sun, maintaining most of the moss became untenable. Moss, it turns out, is a great seed-starting medium. This is fine under the dogwood next to our front walk, where we now have loads of columbine volunteering in the moss every year. But in sunnier areas, especially those beyond easy arm’s reach of a path, volunteers, including weeds and scrubby grass, are happily settling in (and I am exploring new base layer plants).

So what if you want moss? First, check places where it may already be trying to colonize: patchy areas of lawn (like mine), for instance. Moss tends to like firm substrates, so look at shady areas otherwise bare of plants and duff (like north of a structure or evergreen hedge). If you find no moss at all, you can try buying some (there are dealers) or getting some from a cooperative friend or neighbor, but the odds are better if the moss chooses you, rather than the other way round.

This is where some understanding of moss physiology is helpful. Lacking roots, mosses instead have rhizoids that give them stability. These rhizoids do not provide nourishment (nutrients or water) from the substrates on



Sporophytes in moss

which mosses grow (as you might guess when you see moss on asphalt). Rather, mosses take up nutrients by direct absorption

into their bodies—their leaves are mostly one cell thick (they also make nutrients by photosynthesis). Some mosses will absorb nutrients directly from the substrate and may be very particular about where they grow; other types will grow on almost anything firm, provided there is enough water. (When water is scarce, established mosses will simply dry out and wait for better times. This means that mosses generally take much less water to survive than vascular plants: a boon in our alternating droughts and floods.)

Moss reproduces both sexually (by spores) and asexually (broken off bits of moss form new plants). Moss spores are everywhere, so you want to recognize what “baby moss” looks like. The earliest stage of the moss life cycle is the protonema (plural: protonemata), which is described as “a thread-like chain of cells.” What it looks like to me is a green smear on the ground. So if you see something like that, don’t scrape it up! Wait and see.

And if your moss has leaves, you can look out for the spore-bearing structures (sporophytes), which are attractive in a small-scale sort of way (see picture at left).

If you want to encourage your moss, you will probably need to do some weeding. In theory, thicker moss has fewer weeds, but that can take many years. In the meantime, it turns out that hairy bittercress, for example, can miniaturize itself astonishingly in a moss bed: the tiniest imaginable rosette can put out a single minuscule flower and happily go to seed. You can see why some people use tweezers to weed their

moss. So unless you have a large staff of undergardeners, you want to make sure your moss garden is a manageable size. On the plus side, a quiet bit of moss grooming in the shade can be very Zen.

Another thing about moss is that birds really like to find tasty things under it: your carpet of moss will develop tears and holes as birds pull up chunks. (As a good ecologist, of course I am happy that wildlife enjoys my garden...) Still, one can pretty easily squash torn pieces back into the gaps and let them refill, or use them to propagate new patches—but don’t bother with the buttermilk moss slurry that you may have read about. That’s generally a rather messy waste of buttermilk.

Vickie Baily is adding to the collection of member photos printed in the 2018-2019 Yearbook. Please clip out and add the following photos to your Yearbook:



Christine Greenlees



Judith Himmelfarb



Mary Horan



Lauren Hubbard



Jeanne Parker



Barbara Young



There is a place for you at this table! Clippers, gloves, a soaked oasis in a bowl, and a pile of greens. Time to get busy!



Kathy Benjamin creates one of the small-sized arrangements some hospitals requested. They fit more easily on bedside tables.

Long-time members taught new members the all-important rule—Cover the Oasis!



Surrounded by ornaments and bows, Chair of the Holiday Greens Workshop, Patricia Pennington, works with Gwen Stewart on the list of recipients.



This was a year when new members stepped up. Ann Labriola (top) begins to gather her greens.. and Venil Namiah creates something brand new—a miniature Christmas Tree!



Anthea Levy pulls a cart loaded with finished arrangements, which she will deliver.

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Forcing for Indoor Bloom

Carole Ottesen

Are you longing for a bit of cheerful color to enliven winter's cold, gray days? It isn't too early to search the garden for branches to bring inside and force into bloom indoors.

Shrubs and trees that flower in earliest spring are the best choices for forcing material. While forsythia is the poster child of forcing—usually coming into bloom in just a week when brought inside—there are others that will produce flowers in as little as two weeks of warmth. Redbud, cornelian cherry, pussy willow, winter hazel, and spicebush are a few that respond quickly to indoor conditions.

Choose a warmish day—above freezing—to cut well-budded branches that are over 15 inches long. This is a good opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. Improve the shape of your shrub or tree by removing branches that are awkwardly placed or crowded. Make diagonal cuts with a clean, sharp pruner.

Purists may choose to soak branches overnight in a bathtub. Otherwise crushing the cut ends of the stems before placing them in a vase will enhance water absorption. Just be sure to



Corylopsis glabrescens 'Longwood Chimes'

change the water every few days to avoid rot. Martha Stewart suggests adding a teaspoon of bleach to keep the water free of bacteria.

As the season progresses, plants that bloom later in spring will make subsequent candidates for forcing. Magnolias, winter hazels, cherries, lilacs, and quince generally take about four weeks to flower but will require less time if cut closer to their normal bloom time.

By the time you have finished forcing a garden's worth of branches, the real things—spring flowers—will be ready to bloom outside in the garden.

Photos by Carole Ottesen



Winter hazel *Corylopsis pauciflora*