



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-six Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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The National Capital Area
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Enjoy Carole Ottesen's
spectacular photos of
spring wildflowers on
pages 3 and 4.

President's Message

Susan Lass

Of all the out-of-my control events I worried might impact BCGC over the course of my term as president—blizzards forcing cancellations of general meetings, teeming rain on plant sale day—the likelihood of a pandemic never crossed my mind. Yet here we are, every aspect of our lives affected, and the end of our club year brought to an abrupt halt. Board and general meetings, plant sale, picnic, all canceled. We can only hope that by September life will have returned to some semblance of what we used to think of as normal and we can resume club meetings and activities. We will be so glad to see each other again!

That said, since I did not have the opportunity to close out my term as expected, I would like to say what a pleasure it has been to work with such a fantastic group of hard-working and dedicated women. A huge thank you goes out to the chairs and members of the various committees, without which BCGC would come to a screeching halt. Also, all club members brought enthusiasm and gardening knowledge to the group, sharing camaraderie while enjoying our speakers and delicious lunches. You are the lifeblood of this organization.

I'm sure we have all realized by now that the brightest silver lining to the current situation is the opportunity to spend more time enjoying and working on our gardens. I sincerely hope you, your families and all your loved ones stay well, and that we can once again meet in September. One day at a time, fellow gardeners!

Election of Club Officers

The new slate of 2020-2021 officers is not yet ready for publication in this newsletter. It will be presented to the membership for voting via an email blast at a later date. IF YOU ARE WILLING TO SERVE AS A CLUB OFFICER, PLEASE CONTACT SHARON SOUTHERLAND (sharonwashburn@verizon.net).

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Eat Your Enemies!

Our nice long cool spring, along with our enforced stays at home, have given us plenty of leisure to observe the happy, happy weeds filling our gardens (and our happy desirable plants, of course). In my neighborhood, it appears that the lush growth also extends to the woods, as the

deer have barely felt the need to come and eat my hostas and lilies, or much of anything else. The lovely four-legged pests are not even grazing on the green expanse that I laughingly refer to as a lawn.

The winter annual weeds, on the other hand, are reveling. Maybe it's time—especially given the current challenges of grocery shopping—to consider the advantages of chowing down on plants we find in our own gardens. Now, it is possible to harvest wanted plants for the pot or the salad bowl—fiddleheads from ostrich ferns, emerging hosta leaves, and spring beauty tubers (referred to as “fairy spuds”) are apparently quite tasty. But I would never consider sacrificing a single spring beauty, no matter how delicious—not to mention the quantity that would be required for a meal.

On the other hand, many weeds are recommended for salads, which is hardly surprising as so many were reportedly introduced by Europeans just for their edible qualities. Hairy bittercress, ground ivy, chickweed, creeping veronica, dandelions, and garlic mustard start becoming abundant in late winter and early spring, and our ancestors apparently were happy to forage for them when food and especially vegetables were scarce at the end of winter. And if you consider violets a weed (most are native, but many are aggressive), you might be interested to know that both leaves and flowers are edible: violet flowers are lovely in salads, and they can be candied if you're ambitious.

Even the dreaded lesser celandine was apparently regularly foraged. Its leaves are said to be high in vitamin C, but since they also contain a substance called protoanemonin, which is an irritant, one is advised to get them very young, before flowering (in January, say), or to cook them. (The tubers are also supposed to be edible, but I can't imagine spending the hours it would take to prepare them unless I was really starving.) Another famous villain, Japanese knotweed, can also be harvested when the stalks are tender in late winter. Supposedly it's good for you, if not for our natural areas.

If you have joined our Facebook page, you will notice an article I posted on using the whole dandelion—rather a tempting prospect when I look at the many specimens all over my garden. Not even digging up the roots for roasting is likely to put a dent in this most renewable of resources. Unfortunately, it's a little late to use the roots now, I gather; apparently they're better before flowering.

But it will soon be the season for purslane, lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*, which is actually native but definitely weedy), and pigweed (*Amaranthus retroflexus*, likewise), which appear a little later and are also on many lists of edible weeds. Even bishop's weed, the bane of many a gardener, can be eaten in salads or cooked. And virtually indestructible chameleon plant (*Houttuynia cordata*) is prized in Vietnamese cooking, so there are some new horizons to explore if you haven't already.

And come summer, if you venture into natural areas afflicted with beautiful but invasive autumn olive, you can gather the fruits, which are red and tasty (although tart). The ubiquitous Bradford pear also produces fruit (which accounts for its invasiveness). This is not very tasty to humans, and the seeds within the fruit are mildly toxic, but apparently it is possible to make it into jelly and wine. So—drink your enemies?



Lois Brown observed that even the deer are social distancing!

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Carole Ottesen

Wildflowers

At this time when we are obliged to keep ourselves apart to keep others and ourselves safe, the garden is more of a solace than ever. It is a comforting destination when staying inside becomes too confining. Perhaps it is simply because we slowed down, spent more time outside, and paid greater attention to what is out there, that it seems this spring has truly outdone herself. Especially notable are the wildflowers, presenting an amazing show, often popping up where least expected and in greater quantities than ever before.

One plant that has multiplied and seeded itself everywhere in my garden is the giant trillium, *T. chloropetalum*, a species native to California. It's a "sessile" type; its three flower petals and three sepals perch atop three leaves that are held aloft on a tall, leafless stem. The southeastern species Sweet Betsy trillium, *T. cuneatum*, is very similar with mottled leaves. This species also includes plain green and even silvery green leaves among its members.

The poster child of the 39 species of American trilliums is the wake robin, *T. grandiflorum*. Long lived, but slow to mature, many have emerged in spots where there is spring sunshine, summer shade, and leaf litter in the garden—this last a happy result of less than uptight maintenance. This trillium is "pedicellate" because the flower is on a short stalk.

*Trillium chloropetalum**Trillium erectum**Trillium catesbei*

Photos by Carole Ottesen

Other wildflowers are keeping the trilliums company—clumps of spring beauties and Dutchman's breeches peek out between mossy stones, a couple of early Jack-in-the-pulpits stand straight and tall, and swaths of Virginia bluebells and wood poppies and bushy bleeding hearts are everywhere.

Rather than read about them, how about seeing their photos?



Dutchman's breeches



Moss wildflower



Spring beauties

Jack-in-the-pulpit



Bleeding hearts