



Bethesda Community

G A R D E N C L U B

"Ninety-eight Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Member of
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Photo by Caroline Turner

Caroline Turner shared this stunning photo of tulips from her "indoor garden." See more photos on page 4.

Grow Your Own Groceries!

The speaker for our meeting on **February 23** is a busy man. Niraj Ray, an educator and agricultural expert whose mission is to transform urban food deserts into urban fresh produce markets, holds a bachelor's degree in Evolution, Ecology and Organismal Biology from Ohio State University and a master's degree in Integrated Environmental Science from Bethune-Cookman University. He is a former National Wildlife Federation Emerging Leader and has worked with the EPA in the Office of Water.

His first garden, when he was very young, was in Daytona Beach Florida and was also his first step on a journey to founding Cultivate the City, an enterprise to help bring fresh food to underserved neighborhoods in the District. He focuses on hydroponic and vertical gardening to reduce pollutants as well as to save space while increasing production, and he is intent on finding innovative and sustainable ways to provide fresh food to communities that lack it.

He'll tell us about how he started Cultivate the City and the how he formed partnerships with Gallaudet University, the Washington Nationals, and several schools and restaurants. He'll also share information and tips on how we can garden hydroponically and vertically both indoors and outdoors, if we're inspired to try it for ourselves. And we can visit (and volunteer at) H Street Farm, a Cultivate the City undertaking, now located at 910 Bladensburg Rd., N.E., on the roof of W.S. Jenks and Son hardware store. Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity to learn about efforts to garden more effectively and creatively that benefit the local community.

The meeting will begin at 10:30 on zoom.

Jane Malish

PLEASE PAY MEMBERSHIP DUES NOW

An increase in dues for the upcoming fiscal year, July 1, 2022- June 30, 2023, was approved by both the Board and General membership in 2021.

Membership Dues 2022-23: \$45.00

Renew by Date: **APRIL 1, 2022**

Payment Options:

By Check or Cash – Payable to: **Bethesda Community Garden Club**

Mail to: P.O. Box 25, Garrett Park, MD 20896-0025

By Credit Card: go to the Club's website:

<http://bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org>

Click JOIN and follow prompts to pay by credit card

The Plant Sale returns!

Our Plant Sale is returning! The sale will be held outdoors on Thursday, May 12, in front of the Farm Women's Market in downtown Bethesda. This sale, the Club's biggest event of the year, will be open to the public. Best of all, it will offer members lots of ways to participate and reconnect safely with each other, which will be especially welcome after not having met in person for so long.

We intend that this sale will be as Covid-safe as possible for members and the public. Details of the sale, of course, may change as the pandemic and CDC guidelines evolve.

Watch for updates and volunteer opportunities in the newsletter and through email blasts.

PLANT SALE 101

Every May, except for the last two years, the garden club holds a large public plant sale that is unique in the area. It features hundreds of plants, including unusual plants and native plants. All of the plants are locally grown by members. There are no greenhouse-grown plants like those found at a typical local sale. What's offered are plants that we know will thrive in the metro area, plants that were divided, dug and potted by club members from their own gardens.

Proceeds from past sales provided several thousand dollars annually to support local public gardens and other horticultural and conservation organizations. Sale proceeds also support club gardening projects at the Connie Morella Library in Bethesda and at Davis Library in North Bethesda.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **The Plant Sale needs plants!** Start thinking now about what plants you can share from your garden: plants that need dividing or that expanded their territory a bit too much. Wait to dig them until late March or April. Our March newsletter will have lots more information about choosing and digging plants.

- If you would like to donate plants from your garden but would find digging and potting physically challenging, we may be able to help. Do you just need advice on which plants in your garden to share? Contact Barbara Collier, Mary Horan or Carolea Logun to discuss.

Plant Sale committee

Judy Termini, Co-chair
Elaine Hope, Co-Chair
Barbara Collier
Hilary Fitilis
Mary Horan
Carolyn Kulik
Karin Kelleher
Susan Lass
Carolea Logun
Carol Meyers
Janine Trudeau

- The Plant Sale needs publicity! We'll ask you to help publicize the sale in local stores, post offices, houses of worship, libraries, community centers and on your neighborhood listserv. Both paper and electronic flyers will be available.

- Just before the sale, volunteers are essential! They assure that potted plants are labeled and tidied for sale, then transport them to a staging area and to the sale site. On the day of the Plant Sale, we need people to set out the plants, work the sales floor, tally customers' purchases, provide snacks for hungry workers and clean up after the sale. You can sign up for tasks within specific time windows or work through the day of the sale.

Questions? Talk to Plant Sale committee members, your mentor (if you have one) or other club members. Be sure to read the March and April newsletters, too!

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Desperately Seeking Phacelia

Last month I mentioned detecting the mottled green leaves of *Phacelia bipinnatifida*, a biennial that is quietly waiting for spring (aren't we all?) to begin producing its attractive purple flowers. This is one of those plants that can self-seed prolifically in the right conditions, which turns out to be leaf litter under deciduous trees. (Another reason to leave the leaves!)

The genus *Phacelia* includes about 200 species, and *P. bipinnatifida* is one of only six native to Maryland, according to USDA plants. (California, in contrast, has over 90 species—well, they're bigger than we are.) This New World genus is part of the *Boraginaceae*, the borage or forget-me-not family, and the *Hydrophyloideae* or waterleaf subfamily. The leaf mottling I mentioned, reminiscent of watermarks, is a feature of the waterleaf subfamily.



Phacelia bipinnatifida in bloom

How *P. bipinnatifida* (also known as fern-leaf phacelia) came to be introduced into my garden (and that of Suzanne Grefsheim, whose garden abuts mine) is a tale that began back in April 2015, when she, I, and several other BCGC members went on a memorable weekend trip that included a visit to Mt. Cuba Center. At that time, many of us were struck by the lovely purple blooms that were carpeting many wooded

areas there, and of course we had to know what they were. The following April, Suzanne and I persuaded our husbands to go with us for another weekend to Mt. Cuba, which reinforced our craving for these plants. (If you go to the center's website, you can see pictures: <https://mtcubacenter.org/plants/purple-phacelia/>)

Well, acquiring seeds was a challenge. When I started trying to do so, the only phacelia that seemed to be commercially available was *P. tanacetifolia* (lacy phacelia)—one of those California species—which can also be used as a cover crop. This would not do, however, as I wanted a locally native species that would spread in the garden.

On our previous trip we had visited a seed-seller and wildflower gardener near Mt. Cuba, so I contacted her to inquire about availability of *P. bipinnatifida*. She advised me to ask Mt. Cuba itself. Imagine my delight when Mt. Cuba staff responded that, having had many visitors comment on this plant, they were collecting seed that year and were willing to send some to me and Suzanne. Alas, a series of unfortunate postal events ensued, which led us to take a day trip to Mt. Cuba that August to pick up a box of seeds personally. At that point, we were not sure how viable the seeds might be, but we scattered them carefully in areas we thought might be suitable.

The following spring, I was crawling around to minutely inspect several tiny seedlings to see if they might possibly be seedling phacelias, when—great excitement!—I was astonished to find a plant in full bloom. It turns out that one of the tricks this biennial can play is to send up a first-year plant in the fall, which then blooms the following spring. Generally, the first-year plant emerges in spring and blooms the next spring.



Phacelia leaves in leaf litter

In the end, both Suzanne and I were lucky enough to have our *Phacelia* seeds take, and each year they become better established.

The only real way to encourage them to increase is to wait for the flowers to dry so that the seeds ripen, and then spread the seed in leaf litter, as mentioned. Mt. Cuba let us know that, unfortunately, trying to transplant the seedlings is not usually successful, so I have not tried to give away young plants. However, at least one plant did hitch a ride in a pot of *Amsonia* to another BCGC member's garden—so exceptions do occur!

And in April, when my *Phacelia* appear, I like to check out Suzanne's crop, too. It has become one of those spring rituals, like observing the first mayapples poking their umbrella tips out of the ground.

Barbara Collier



Above: Grape hyacinths from Caroline Turner's "indoor garden."



At left: Looking for signs of spring, a hardy group of members gathered at Green Spring to enjoy their huge witch hazel collection. The sun and temperatures warmed us considerably as we searched for our favorite cultivar — whether more yellowish, goldish, reddish, crinkly petals, vase-shaped, spreading, etc. This spider-like *Hamamelis x intermedia 'Jelena'* was a beauty and a favorite of many.

—Outings Committee