



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-nine Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Even former BCGC
president Susan Lass
likes digging to supply
next spring's Plant Sale.

BethesdaUP and the Wider Environment

Jane Malish

On **October 26, 2022, 10:30am**, Jeff Burton, executive director of Bethesda Urban Partnership, will address Bethesda Community Garden Club on **BUP's** mission. Essentially, **BUP** does it all. But first a little information about its origin: it was "established by Montgomery County in 1994 as a downtown management organization that maintains and markets downtown Bethesda ... and promotes it as a desirable place to live, work and visit, with restaurants, retailers, art venues and more."

BUP also manages the Bethesda Circulator, the Bethesda Arts and entertainment District and, possibly of most interest to us gardeners, handles the landscaping and maintenance of downtown Bethesda. Bethesda**UP** seems to recognize the role the natural environment can play in enhancing the built environment.

So maybe one of the first things you notice as you travel slowly along Wisconsin Avenue during rush hour is the prettily planted lane dividers that are well-kept and flourishing. They're the work of **BUP**. And as you walk around Bethesda among the shops and restaurants you see the large planters brimming with all those fillers, spillers and thrillers that delight the eye – a spring and summer project of **BUP**.

Jeff will tell us about all the many things his organization does to create a welcoming environment for residents and for businesses. Hopefully we'll learn about how plant choices are made and the logistics of managing all the pots and plots that contribute to our attractive environment. And while BCGC is celebrating its 100th anniversary, **BUP**, at 28 years, is over a quarter of a way to its centennial! Let's hope it's around for its 100th year continuing to add flora to our surroundings.

Plant Sale news

Mary Horan

Being together and digging plants in members' lovely gardens is lots of fun. Look for email blasts to sign up to join the plant sale committee and club volunteers for scheduled digs.

At the most recent Plant Sale, we ran out of plants quickly, so we need many more plants for the May 2023 Plant Sale!

Now is a great time to dig and pot plants from your own garden for the sale. Potted perennials will overwinter well in shady spots in your yard. Contact Judy Termini (judytermini@gmail.com) or Elaine Hope (paris71197@gmail.com) for labels, pots or advice.



Diggers and potters toasting Carolyn Kulik and her beautiful garden.

Photos by Dawn Landsman

Preventing powdery mildew:

Mix one teasp. baking soda and half a teasp. Dawn in one quart of water (or 4teasp. and a couple of drops of Dawn in 1 gal. of water), Use a spray bottle to spray plants susceptible to powdery mildew—zinnias, phlox, peonies.etc. It must be used in spring when plants are a few inches tall. (I did it a couple of times.) It's a preventive measure, not a cure for already active powdery mildew. It seemed to work for me.

Joyce Mulcahy

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Fall Tasks

Fall cleanup ain't what it used to be—like a lot of traditional gardening activities, it has changed with the times and with new information from horticultural and environmental sciences. Rather than cleaning up every bit of debris and dead plant material, the new emphasis is on leaving things to carry on as nature intended: leaves stay on the ground and dead flowerheads and stalks stay up to gradually senesce as the winter moves in. The nice thing is that (like abandoning discredited practices like tilling and double-digging) it's a lot less work.

But wait! What if I don't want leaves to compact my lawn or messy old vegetation to sprawl across my paths or generally look unsightly? Well, yes, compromise is important; we're supposed to enjoy our gardens, after all. If you have an actual lawn (as opposed to the green carpet of weeds, grass, clover, and violets many of us have), taking the fallen leaves off can be important, particularly if there are too many to break up in the last mowings of the season. But if you can, use those leaves to put under shrubs, in beds, and perhaps in a nice leaf pile that will provide you with leaf mulch in the future. (If the county takes them, you have to buy them back as Leafgro.) Leaves will provide habitat for insects to winter over, including next year's crop of beneficial insects and bird food.

As for the fading perennials, it can be important for the health of the plant to have a lot of the old foliage intact for winter protection. And leaving those spent stalks, especially of Joe Pye weed and other hollow-stemmed plants, provides nurseries for native bees and other insects, which really prefer upright stems for nesting. And of course the seedheads allow birds to feed in the fall and winter.

But if it's all too much, remove the most visible or most offensive stuff and either chop and drop it, or pile it on a compost or stick pile: stick piles are great for wildlife, and having hollow or pithy stems on the pile is another opportunity for insects to find and use them. An option I heard about the other day is using stalks to make little wattle-like barriers: use sturdier stalks as uprights driven into the ground, and weave the softer ones between them like wattle fencing. I haven't tried this yet, but doing something like that as a temporary border could make a garden of spent perennials look more intentional. Lately I've been making paths with big logs between path and "lawn" and smaller sticks between path and bed: maybe I will add some trimmed hollow stems for the bees (yes, I still have more cup plants than a reasonable person needs).

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HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Quick and Dirty Gardening

Carole Ottesen

You find quick, easy, but non-standard and/or truly unorthodox methods of maintaining a garden and employ them—and then chide yourself because it is not the *correct* way, not quite *comme il faut*. You do it because you are busy, it works in a pinch, it may be cheaper, but best of all, it's immediate and gets the job done.

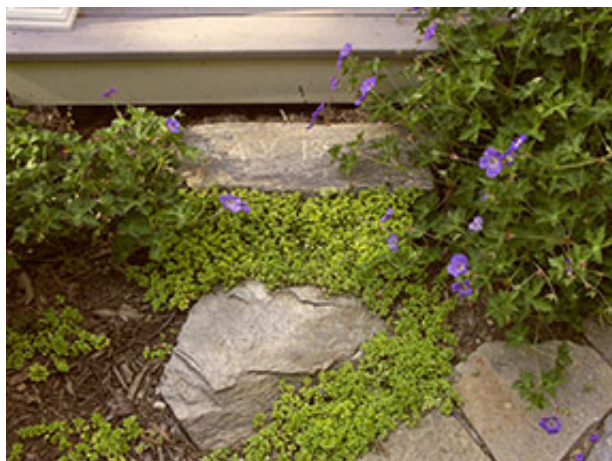
For example, you might use sheets of newspaper topped with fallen leaves under a sprinkling of mulch (if that) to keep down weeds around perennials and shrubs. Or you might dump piles of fallen leaves including *weeds!* etc. on weedy spots. The proper way, you have been told, is to

remove all the weeds and then mulch the spot. Or if you use fallen leaves, you *should* shred/mow them into smaller pieces. But that is far more time-and energy-consuming and requires a machine and/or increasingly hard-to-slog bags of mulch into the bargain.

Another quick and dirty deed is to stash biodegradable garden waste in a hidden space—behind a hedge, under a shrub, next to a fence. It instantly solves the problem of what to do with the stuff, without having to buy bags from the hardware store, fill them, and wait for a pickup. The hidden piles turn brown and degrade faster than you can believe.



Clockwise from above: Creeping Jenny, Mazus, Sedum



To eliminate weeds between stones, dig them out *once*. Then find an acceptable and robust spreader—sedum, mazus, creeping Jenny, pussytoes—to keep them out. Or, if you are facing a large swath of invasives, you can let the plants duke it out. Insert acceptable, but aggressive plants among the undesirable aggressive spreaders. For example, site ostrich ferns in a mess of basket grass. It will take a while, but the ferns will take over faster than you think. Bigger and taller wins every time.

Really pernicious weeds? Bag them in black plastic and let them roast in the sun.

Photos by Carole Ottesen

Sometimes an unlikely object is just the ticket to get the job done. A screwdriver with an extra-long shaft, found idling at the bottom of the toolbox, is the best ever tool to eradicate deep-seated roots. The pointy wooden sticks used for kebabs keep deer from grazing small plants. The tops of plastic bottles make good funnels. If you have an untidy tree, like a crepe myrtle that sheds, why bag up the sloughed bark and wait for the county to pick it up? Use it as free mulch. A rotting log? Use it as a planter.

Got any unorthodox solutions? Tell me please!



Free mulch

Log planter

Environmental Concerns *(from page 2)*

Finally, fall is a good time to get the mulch onto areas where the weed pressure is high, and winter weeds will be sprouting shortly (if not already). Spreading your leaves or other mulch is one more opportunity to remove annoying weeds. For annual weeds whose seeds may not have dropped, removing them by cutting at ground level, if possible, is better than pulling (if a little less satisfying), as this doesn't disturb soil structure or allow buried weed seeds to come up and sprout; it lets the dying roots add organic matter and aerate the soil as they shrivel away.

A lot of places in my yard will produce astonishing numbers of weeds if I don't mulch adequately (as I keep proving), but in other areas, a light touch—even some bare earth—may be desirable.

Ground-nesting and other native bees need some bare or minimally mulched earth for nesting. If you have an area with little weed pressure (dry shade, maybe), go lightly with the mulch for bees' sake. If you want volunteers from your self-seeding annuals, biennials, or short-lived perennials, mulch lightly where you want them so that the seeds stand a chance. And if you have cardinal flowers and want to propagate them, remember that they like disturbed soil, so move aside the mulch and scabble in the dirt before you lay down the spent flower spike and let it drop its seeds. A modern approach to cleanup doesn't leave a clean slate, but it can help you sketch next year!