



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-nine Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Learn how to nurture a
moss lawn in Carole
Ottesen's Horticultural
Notes on p. 5.

Learning from a Hay STRAW Bale Gardener!

Back in the summer of 2022 I overheard an animated conversation where straw bale gardening was mentioned. **Patty McGrath** was talking about the good success she was having gardening in straw bales. She emphasized you had to be sure you used STRAW bales – not hay bales. There's a difference?

Becoming frustrated with the unyielding-to-the-hoe soil in her yard, she heard about the benefits of planting in straw bales and became a convert. She was so enthusiastic about this method that I was fascinated and proposed she tell the club about her experience. She was a little reluctant at first, but constant pressure and a wrangled invitation to view her set-up wore her down, and at last she agreed to share her expertise.

Patty's currently in Rome for two months where she keeps an apartment and visits her children. So to get the information on straw bale planting to us in a timely manner she agreed to talk to us via ZOOM. She has also recommended the following videos which she suggests we view before the **February 22 ZOOM meeting at 10:30.**

- Jan 1 thru April 30 - Video 1:
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=tMw7-oZirjo>
- May 1 thru August 31 - Video 2:
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=Zmz1MkandfeFw8>
- Sept 1 thru Dec 31 - Video 3a:
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5W3sVnGy4>
and Video 3b:
<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=gPFW2bonbyA&pp=QAFIAQ%3D%3D>

Don't miss this opportunity to hear a "real person" describe her life as a straw bale gardener, the mistakes she learned from, the plants she found that flourished as well as the ones that didn't, and how she went from being a one-bale gal to a 20-bale enthusiast.

Jane Malish

Silent Auction Postponed

The opportunity to find new homes and owners for our unwanted garden goodies has been delayed. BCGC won't be conducting a silent auction at our March meeting, as previously announced.

If you've been setting aside items as you reorganize, empty, clean out or downsize, thank you. Please hold on to them until next fall if possible. We will provide an opportunity to share our discards and tired treasures plus raise some money for the club later this year.

Candy Kessel

Plant Sale News

Mary Horan

The BCGC Plant Sale will be held **Thursday, May 11**, at the Farm Women's Market in downtown Bethesda. This sale is the Club's biggest event of the year, and we need your help to make it successful.

What is the Plant Sale?

Every May, the garden club holds a large public plant sale that is unique in the area. Unlike typical sales, there are no commercial greenhouse-grown plants. Instead, our sale features over a thousand plants that we know will thrive in the metro area. That's because these plants were dug, divided, and potted by club members from their own gardens.

The Club uses sales proceeds to provide several thousand dollars to support local public gardens, horticultural and conservation organizations, and our own gardening projects at the Connie Morella Library and at Davis Library.

How can you help?

The Plant Sale needs your plants! What plants you can share from your garden? You probably have plants that need dividing or that have spread more than you'd like. Last year we sold out of plants early; so the more plants *you* can contribute to the sale, the more successful we will be.

Our March newsletter will have lots more information about choosing and digging plants from your garden for the sale.

Need advice on which plants in your garden could be divided and shared? Would you like to donate plants from your garden but find digging and potting physically challenging? Contact Judy Termini (judytermini@gmail.com) or Elaine Hope (paris71197@gmail.com) for help.

The Plant Sale needs publicity! In the spring, 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.

Plant Sale committee

Judy Termini, Co-chair
Elaine Hope, Co-Chair

Barbara Collier	Susan Lass
Mary Horan	Carolea Logun
Karin Kelleher	Carol Meyers
Carolyn Kulik	Janine Trudeau

The Plant Sale needs volunteers! They assure that plants are labeled and transported to the sale site. On Plant Sale day, we need volunteers to work the sales floor, tally customers' purchases, provide snacks for hungry workers, and clean up after the sale.

Questions? Talk to Plant Sale committee members or other club members. Watch for updates and volunteer opportunities in upcoming newsletters, at our meetings and through email blasts.

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Slow mulch and hedge fun

My late friend, Fanny Phillips (1928–2004), was an enthusiast for many things. She wasn't so much a gardener as a passionate collector and student of mostly exotic plants. She gave me my *Bowiea volubilis* (see picture), as well as several flats of snowdrops from her compost piles, where they had naturalized. But she was especially devoted to the *Amorphophallus* species, including the gigantic *Amorphophallus titanum*, the famous corpse lily pollinated by carrion flies. (She and her husband Craig gave seedlings of this plant to the U.S. Botanic Garden and the Smithsonian and lived to see them come into triumphant bloom at last.)



Photos by Barbara Collier

Fanny grew species of *Amorphophallus* in her Silver Spring house and garden, and one thing she did routinely was to wander around her yard picking up twiggy sticks, breaking them up, and throwing them on her *Amorphophallus* garden beds. So I think of Fanny as I do the same thing, making slow mulch (artisanal, locally sourced). In this way she and I were following one of the principles of ecologically minded gardening: minimizing inputs and outputs. That is, trying to avoid things that require importing a lot of external inputs, such as fertilizer, pesticides, extra water, and effortful maintenance. (You shouldn't try to have a lush green lawn in Arizona, for instance.) You also want to keep naturally occurring material in your garden, including capturing water and using organic material on site rather than having it hauled away. Just as nature uses all the leaves that fall to nourish the trees and soil as they gradually decompose, so as ecologically minded gardeners we try not to remove all our leaves and yard trimmings and give them to the county. (Of course, the county does turn those leaves and other material into nice LeafGro, but rather than buying it back, you might as well try to keep yours in the first place.)

So as well as producing slow mulch from twigs, I've been using logs and sticks to line paths in various ways, and of course making brush and stick piles. Many stick piles. I even developed piles of dead vines from my constant efforts to remove ivy, vinca, creeping euonymus, pachysandra, honeysuckle vine, porcelain berry, etc. (It takes a long time for pulled vines to really die and become brittle.)

So I was pleased to come across an idea that fits right in with the principle of minimizing outputs: "dead hedges" of cut wood and sticks. Famous gardener Nigel Dunnett makes these, both straight ones and curved "nests." (So cool. Please search on the web!)

Basically, you can create hedge-like barriers from logs and sticks by stacking them not in a pile, but in a linear arrangement. First, drive two parallel lines of stakes into the ground along the area where you want your barrier. The stakes form the outline and support for your hedge. Then lay

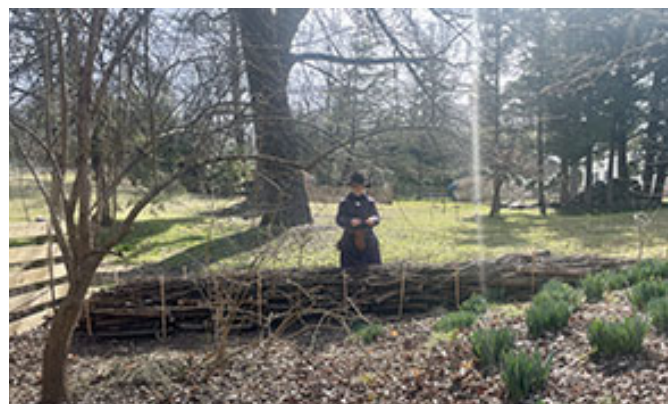
your logs, sticks, brush, and other debris down along the path between the stakes until you get a wall of wood and sticks.



Dead hedge 1 provides a small visual barrier to the road beyond.

In my case, I also flattened out and buried my old vines at the bottom of one hedge. I may add brush to the top as well, but at the moment I'm concentrating on sticks. We deviated from true purity by buying stakes rather than making our own, but we are producing some as we go along. Winter pruning provides the opportunity to turn the straighter, stronger branches into stakes.

Consolidating my scattered piles let me uncover areas for more planting. In those places where there had been stick piles, I find good soil (and lots of twig mulch), in which the remnants of smothered weeds and aggressive vines are easy to find and eradicate.



Dead hedge 2 defines a property corner and may help slow runoff a depression.

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As structured stick piles, dead hedges provide useful habitat to small creatures, allow my wood and sticks to gradually decompose in situ, and provide me with physical and visual barriers, adding definition and structure. They also give me a satisfying sense of accomplishment as I wander the garden, admiring Fanny's snowdrops and planning for spring.



FRESH FIG CAKE

Marilyn Tannenbaum

Country Living Great Cakes

by The Editors of Country Living

Not your standard fruit cake, this versatile fig version can be served year-round—all day long—for a sweet breakfast treat or the perfect finish to a meal. Serve warm right from the oven so the cinnamon flavor is at its most intense.

Makes 8 Servings (One 9-inch Cake)

Ingredients

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/4 cup butter (1/2 stick), softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup vanilla nonfat yogurt
- 1 large eggs
- 12 large fresh purple figs, stemmed and cut lengthwise in half

Directions

1. MAKE THE BATTER: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly coat a 9-inch springform pan with butter or vegetable-oil nonstick cooking spray. Set aside. Combine the flour, baking powder, and

Lizzie's Tea Bag Wisdoms

These are quotes from the back of my tea bag tags "Traditional Medicinals." They have many types. Presently I'm drinking Nettle tea that does help with skin irritation or itching.

1. "The plants have enough spirit to transform our limited vision." *By Rosemary Gladstar, Medicinal Herbalist.*
2. "In all things of nature, there is something of the marvelous." *Aristotle*
3. "Are not flowers the stars of the earth?" *Clara Lucas Balfour, an English Temperance Campaigner, lecturer and author. Died 1878.*

Elizabeth Glidden-Boyle

cinnamon in a small bowl and set aside. Beat the butter and sugar in a large bowl with a mixer set on medium speed until well mixed. Beat in the yogurt and eggs until blended. Reduce the mixer speed to low and beat in the flour mixture by thirds, beating until the batter is smooth.

2. BAKE THE CAKE: Pour the batter into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Arrange the figs, alternating cut sides and skin sides up, around the rim of the pan on top of the batter. Arrange the remaining figs in the center.

3. Bake until a tester inserted into the cake near the center comes out clean—about 40 minutes. Cool in the pan on a wire rack to lukewarm. Use a knife to loosen the cake from the sides of the pan and remove the pan rim. Place the cake on a serving plate and serve warm.

Nutrition Information Per Serving—protein: 4 G; Fat: 7 G; Carbohydrate: 48 G; Fiber: 4 G; Sodium: 118 Mg; Cholesterol: 69 Mg; Calories: 268.

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

A Moss Lawn

Carole Ottesen

Before there were dinosaurs and humans, there was moss. Seedless, flowerless, and rootless, moss reproduces slowly by spores and stays anchored in place by sticky filaments known as rhizoids. Today, more than 12,000 species of moss are out there. They are great substitutes for turf grass and excellent candidates for an easy care lawn.

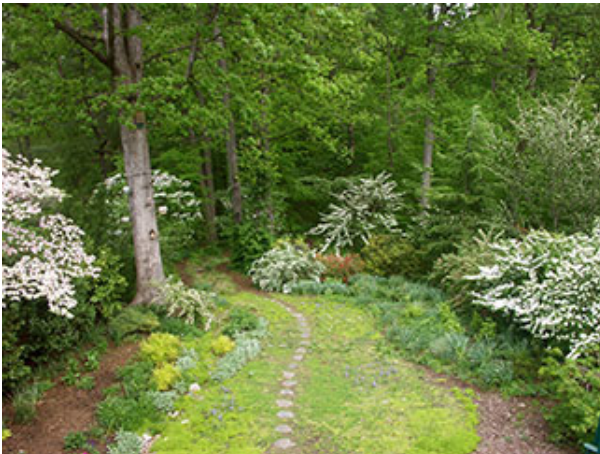
A moss lawn has numerous advantages. Foremost among these is the fact that it doesn't require mowing. It thrives in shade. And there is no need to aerate its site. Nor is fertilizing necessary. Moss derives nutrients from water and light. It prospers on acidic soil so there's never a need to add lime to adjust the pH. In fact, the kind of acid, compacted soil that doesn't happily support grass is ideal for moss.

flourish in a medium that is moist and well-drained.

Recent research has brought other benefits of moss to light. Its presence signals a clean environment because it removes CO₂ from the air, something a lawnmower will never do. In addition, moss absorbs harmful toxins and minerals from the soil. A small but welcome bonus is that there are fewer mosquitoes in mossy areas.

New and promising attributes of mosses are being discovered. Researchers at Kew Gardens discovered that mosses play a vital role in the development of new ecosystems by colonizing deforested or burned sites and stabilizing the soil by retaining water.

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To start a moss lawn, the best place is one where there is already a bit of moss growing. Remove grass and weeds and keep it free of leaves. If you do so, moss will spread. And so may wildflowers such as bluets (*Houstonia*), delicate plants that only

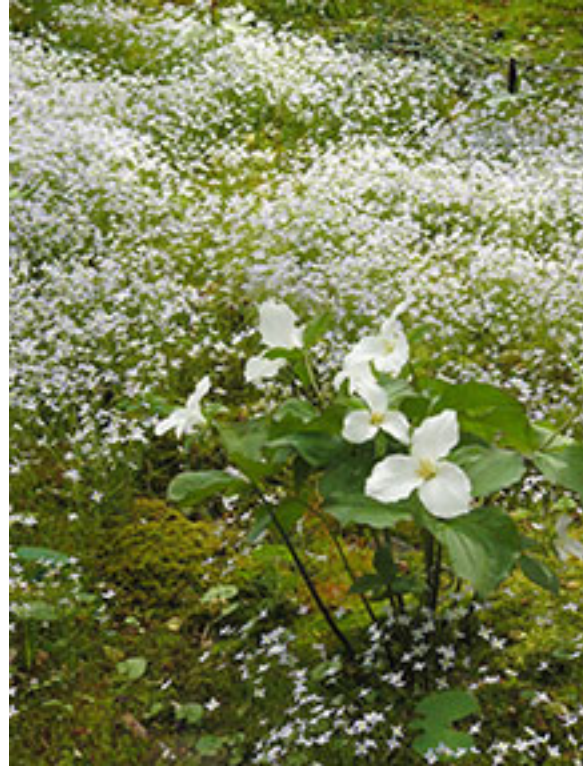


Photos by Carole Ottesen

The medicinal uses of mosses have been known since antiquity. They were used in both World Wars to stem bleeding and as an antibiotic to treat wounds. Recently, mosses have been found to contain a polysaccharide that helps in cleansing the gut. An even more delightful possibility is that moss can reduce body fat. But wait! More research is needed. Don't eat it yet.



A shady moss lawn



Moss with Trillium and Bluets



Moss with Trailing arbutus