



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-nine Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Itea virginica puts on a fall show. See Barbara Collier's article and more photos on pages 2-5.

Photo by Barbara Collier

FIG (*Ficus carica*)

According to the Britannica, the fig is a plant of the mulberry family and is indigenous to an area from eastern Turkey to northern India, but it also grows, and is cultivated, in most Mediterranean countries and is so widely used it's known as the "poor man's food." Its fruit is extremely nutritious as it contains substantial amounts of calcium, potassium, phosphorous and iron. The fig also grows in my backyard and 2 ½ blocks down the street in another yard there is a tiny fig orchard of 3 trees, one of which is now quite tall. My fig tree produces 8 or 10 figs a year to the delight of birds. Although the tree is over 15 years old, I've delighted in only 2 or 3 figs. This summer the neighbor's trees were somewhat more prolific. The neighbor posted a sign inviting passersby to enjoy the figs but admonishing them to leave some for others. There were quite a lot of figs smashed on the sidewalk making for an adventurous walk. It's hard to harvest figs at the optimum moment, which contributes to fig casualties.

Our speaker at the meeting on **November 15, Jafar Vossoughi**, is an expert on figs. In his other life he has taught many technical/biomedical courses to engineering students and physicians, has directed many student experimental and design projects, and has engaged in experimental research for the NIH, NSF, the Army and the Navy. He has designed and built research laboratories for universities, governments and private concerns, and has served as editor of two international journals and associate editor at two others. He's received many honors as well as being an honorary member of the International Physicians for the prevention of Nuclear War, a group that received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1985.

On November 15, though, his topic is figs and he'll share his knowledge with us, including information on which cultivars do well in our Zone 7 area, and how to cultivate them for maximum production. Don't miss this opportunity to learn from an ardent champion of that ancient plant about how to succeed in growing them.

Jane Malish

All Hands On Deck for the Holiday Greens Workshop Dec. 13

Lizzy Glidden-Boyle

Of all the many events we do that create the community we are, the most important is our Holiday Greens Workshop. It brightens the lives for others as well as for ourselves as we work together making our arrangements, helping our new and 'older' members. Afterwards, we will have lunch together and catch up with 'whassup', how are you doing. This is a big project. We will be making well over 125 arrangements to be delivered to

assisted living facilities, residents of shelters, health clinics for DC residents, food distribution centers for local residents, immigration facilities for mothers and children... The list goes on. This year we will make a complete list of where our arrangements are going with a description of the organization and what they do in case anyone wants to follow up with a personal contact or volunteer offering.

We will begin at 10am but please ARRIVE by 9:30 to bring the greens you have collected and CONDITIONED (we will write how to condition in our December Newsletter).

Sign-up sheets will be passed out at our November meeting for members to help set up tables and to provide desserts and salads to go with the sandwiches we bring. There will be a sign-up sheet for those who can help clean up.

We will have roving advisors who will help with any questions and in particular will show you how to cover ALL your oasis.

I thought that the music that Carol Meyers put together at our Centennial Lunch Celebration was beautiful so I've asked her to try to do this again for our Holiday Greens Workshop. We'll see if it's possible at St. Mark Church.

I will send out more details in our December newsletter.

Committee members: *Dawn Landsman, Carole Gelfeld, and Karen Eppinger.*

Plant sale gratitude

As the fall digging season ends, we'd like to thank our committee members and volunteers who dug, potted, labeled, and agreed to overwinter many of the plants we'll offer at the plant sale next May.

We're grateful to the club members and friends who shared plants from their lush gardens. The energy, skill and collaboration of these women is a marvel.

We're looking forward to another successful sale, and hope you'll join us in the spring for more Plant Sale fun.

*Judy Termini and Elaine Hope, Co-Chairs,
Plant Sale Committee*

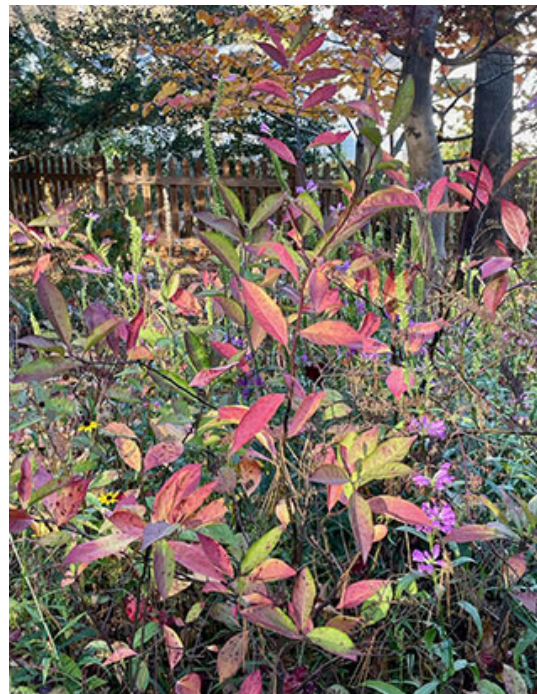
Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Last gleams of autumn

Lately I have been appreciating the heck out of all the colors of autumn. We spent the first three weeks of October in Scotland—which was lovely, but the color palette is very different. We are lucky in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions that our native plants present such a glorious fall spectacle. On my return home, I felt privileged to watch the redbud and dogwood outside my bedroom window go through their changes, with the oaks and maple beyond as backdrops. Now, at the beginning of November and after the first frosts, many of the leaves have dropped—but not all! Some colorful leaves and late flowers are still gleaming through.

My two cultivars of Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*)—chosen mainly for their reduced size compared to the straight species—are excellent for late season color. My newest, *Itea virginica* 'Scentlandia', newly planted this fall, has turned a really satisfying red. The 'Little Henry', which was planted 10 years ago, is now substantial enough to make its presence known despite all



Itea virginica 'Little Henry'

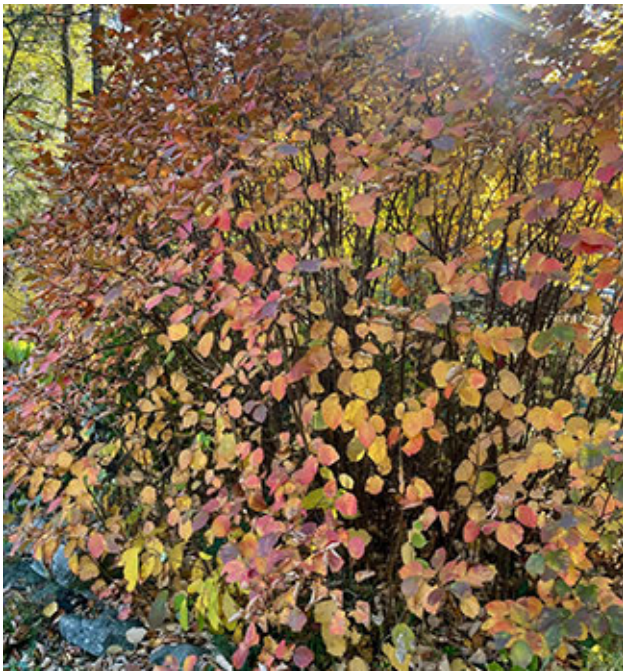
Photos by Barbara Collier



Itea virginica 'Scentlandia'

the aggressive perennials surrounding it. Its color is more muted than the 'Scentlandia', but it is pleasingly varying.

Our *Fothergilla gardenii* (witch alder), planted in 1999, always has very satisfying fall color, and this year is no exception. I keep photographing it as its color changes through the season. From its earlier bright yellow to its later mottled reddening, it's wonderful in almost any light.



Fothergilla gardenii

It seems almost superfluous to exclaim over the yellows of *Amsonia* (bluestar) in the autumn: surely everyone knows all about it? But I still find the various shades fascinating, from this bright yellow picked up by the sun, to the mottled yellows and greens backing up the seed-heads and silvery leaves of mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum incanum*).



Amsonia fall color (top), and planted with *Pycnanthemum incanum* (bottom).

Then there are the flowers that decided that this lingering warmth was a cue to rebloom. I had not noticed before that *Zizia aurea* (golden alexanders) could rebloom so late, but there are several in the sunnier spots. Elsewhere the odd brown-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*) pokes out.

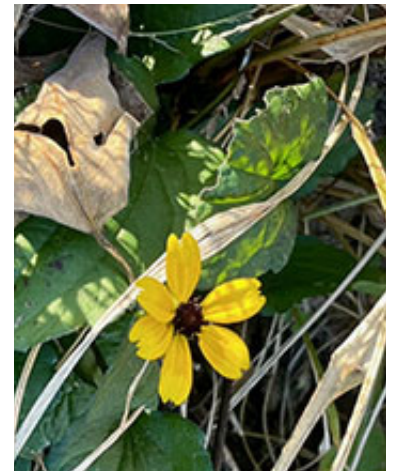
And of course the blue wood aster (*Symphyotrichum cordifolium*) and the obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) are still going strong, and my beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) still has its berries.



Zizia aurea (above)
and *Rudbeckia triloba*
(right)



Symphyotrichum cordifolium



Above and right: *Physostegia virginiana*, and *Callicarpa americana*

I hope others are cleverer than I am about making use of blueberries (*Vaccinium* sp.) as ornamentals. Whenever the fall reveals them in the odd places where we have stowed them over the years, I think, "How did I forget to take full advantage of these amazing colors?" Well, one reason is the eternal hope of occasionally getting to eat a blueberry before the birds or the deer get them. Blueberries in sunny cages allow us to get some fruit as long as the bird defenses hold, but I would like to find some more spots where I can hide some from the deer (but not from me) and just let the birds go nuts.



Of course, we also have some lovely colors on our nonnatives: the Japanese maples are just preparing to make a red carpet when they drop their dazzling leaves, the toad lilies (*Tricyrtis*) are somehow still eluding the deer's attentions, and the coppery witch hazel (*Hamamelis* x *intermedia* 'Jelena') catches the light beautifully.

Even so, the native foliage that we get all around us in the fall—in our gardens and elsewhere—is a real treat after the heats of summer. And having some mild days to enjoy them? Bliss.



Blueberries (*Vaccinium* sp.) uncaged in a shady spot (left), and caged in full sun (above)

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Hindsight

Carole Ottesen

Often, when surveying the garden, I think about how different (and not nearly as attractive or maybe even downright ugly) it is from the way I imagined it would look when this shrub or that tree or those perennials were added.

Probably the worst plant mistakes are those that were poorly sited. Among these, trees are the very worst offenders. Just about the time you realize they are in the wrong place—that they should have been much further from the house, the patio, the driveway—they are too large to move. At that point, you can either cut them down or deal with their unfortunate habit or habits forever.

One tree that doesn't belong anywhere near my patio is the Bigleaf Magnolia (*M. macrophylla*), a great, stately native that bears huge white flowers. In a perfect spot in the wild it can reach over 60 feet. In a garden it will more often grow to 30 or 40 feet, which means those gorgeous white flowers are only visible from second floor windows.

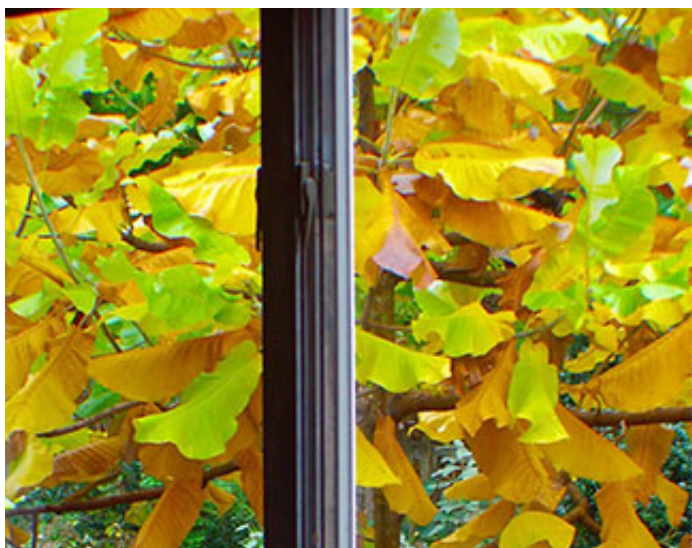
Casting lovely shade all summer long, its remarkable leaves are generally 2 feet in length. But it is in autumn that, though showy in fall color, regrettably they plop down without cease for two to three weeks, producing an unbelievable mess on the ground that completely camouflages a patio, flower border, or lawn.

Not quite as messy, the dove tree (*Davidia involu-crata*) is sometimes called “the handkerchief tree.” Its unusual blooms are a white-white that demands attention. After bloom, when the flowers fall to the ground, I can't help but think of it as “the kleenex tree.”

Impulse purchases can be another source of regret...like the plant that you found at a plant fair that intrigued you, either because you had or had never heard of it. One such is the Asian spicebush (*Lindera angustifolia*), a small tree, not unlike its native cousin *Lindera benzoin*. While the native spicebush glows bright yellow in fall, the Asian spicebush turns a brilliant orange before fading slowly to beige leaves, retained all winter. Fine, except for one thing. It self-sows prolifically. If you plant one, expect to hoick out dozens of seedlings for the rest of your life.

Another impulse purchase was the creeping raspberry (*Rubus calcynoides*). The description mentioned “an evergreen groundcover forming a dense carpet adorned with spreading branches” etc., etc. What the description did *not* say was how very far those branches spread or at what an alarming rate they did.

With time and experience, one learns caution and self-control, but often it comes too late.



Bigleaf Magnolia (*M. macrophylla*) leaves





Davidia involucrata

Photos: Carole Ottesen

Lindera angustifolia

