



# Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-three Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

[www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org](http://www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org)

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## Come and Help Santa, and with Greens Dec. 14

*Candy Kessel, Yvonne Orkin, Carolyn Randall*

Catch the spirit—brightening the holidays for our less fortunate neighbors—and join the fun to create festive arrangements. This month we will make some 140 arrangements to bring seasonal cheer to families at shelters, clients of soup kitchens, and folks who rely on missions and other local charities.

This BCGC tradition is nearly 60 years old, when members first made arrangements for shut-ins. That outreach effort has evolved into a glittering evergreen showplace and is a very special way to share our bounty.

**We start early—10:00 am on Wednesday, December 14,** at St. Mark Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Rd., North Bethesda. If you signed up to help set-up, please come at 9:30 so all the supplies are in readiness when members arrive.

**Please cut and condition greens** from your own garden and those of willing neighbors so we have a variety of fresh, attractive materials to work with. We can use most anything that's healthy and will hold up for several weeks including spruce, pine, balsam, boxwood, juniper, aucuba, cedar, holly, yew, Southern magnolia, nandina, winterberry, rosemary and lavender. Nearly all interesting plant material is welcome including berries, pods, cones and herbs. Please don't bring pyracantha, mahonia and other prickly plants.

Cut greens to 6-12" lengths or bring larger branches for on-site cutting. What's critical to our making quality products is for the greens to be conditioned *before* you bring them, to keep the arrangements fresh and attractive for several weeks. Directions for conditioning are on page 2.

The club provides all materials other than greens, including small ornaments and other baubles, pine cones, bowls, and floral oasis. We also have lots of beautiful bows thanks to Diane Beverly's handiwork. If you wish, bring any holiday trinkets you no longer use—a fine way to recycle Christmas baubles.

Again this year we'll provide guidance for those who aren't confident of their "floral" arranging skills or want help. This feature is strictly voluntary; you can sit at any table you want to arrange greens. But if you want assistance or suggestions, please sit at Maria Marzullo's table. She will be glad to explain her approach as she fashions stunning arrangements and answer any questions you have.

Our goal is for everyone to enjoy this holiday experience, cover the floral oasis completely with greens **and** feel confident adding the extra touches that make each design unique.

A sandwich lunch will follow the work session; please bring a sandwich to share. Elves assisting in the kitchen are Marilyn Tenenbaum, Marilyn Mitchell, Barbara Marin, Cris Gobin Steinbruner, Judith Graef, Sharon Wright, Pam Gates, and Barbara Nalls.



This winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) from Carole Ottesen's garden illustrates the greens that members are asked to bring for the workshop on December 14.

## Here's Your (Greens) List, Check it Twice

Please be prompt—10:00 a.m.—as we have a lot of arranging and delivering to do. Bring with you:

- Greens, which have been conditioned as described below
- Pruners and/or clippers and wire cutters (with your name or identifying mark)
- Gloves if you wish
- Ornaments, ribbons, pinecones, etc., if you have extras
- A sandwich to contribute to the luncheon menu
- A wrapped, garden-related gift (\$10 limit) if you want to participate in the gift exchange.

## How to Condition Greens

Take cuttings from evergreens on the weekend or Monday before the meeting. Lay them in a laundry tub or the bathtub in a solution of mild detergent and lukewarm water. Soak briefly, swish and rinse in cold water. Soak in cold water until Tuesday evening, then dry on old towels or sheeting and bring to the meeting.

## Creating Healthy Soil

Dr. Sara Via demonstrated how to recognize and develop fertile soil in her program "Life in the Underground: Healthy Soil, Healthy Plants, Healthy Planet" at the November meeting. Members enjoyed the opportunity to experiment with soil composition through the hands-on program.

## A Friendly Reminder

*Suzanne Grefsheim*

The Garden Club is a community of friends and like-minded individuals. We use email to share information about Club activities and other garden-related events. We all get more email than we want, I am sure, but hopefully, emails from BCGC are welcome.

Please don't add the email addresses of fellow members to **other** lists, especially commercial ones, without their permission. Thank you.

Vickie Baily is adding to the collection of member photos printed in the 2016-2017 Yearbook, and took this shot of new member Lise Ringland. Please clip out and add Lise's photo to your Yearbook:



Lise Ringland



## HORTICULTURAL NOTES

# *In Praise of Winterberries*

Carole Ottesen

There are still a few pale peach-colored leaves on the *Corylopsis* and, on the oak leaf hydrangeas, a rainbow of orange to maroon. Otherwise that glorious explosion of fall foliage is now down and brown. And soon—very soon—it will be rare to find any color but green in the landscape—unless you are fortunate enough to have a winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) pair in your garden. In that case, you'll have a cloud of bright red berries to cheer you through the gray days ahead.

Tough as nails, very hardy, tolerant of wet feet, *Ilex verticillata* is native to eastern and central North America. Every garden ought to have at least one winterberry (or rather two of them because winterberries are dioecious). That means that in order to enjoy the bright, red berries in winter, you'll need a male plant to pollinate the female. The trick is that both plants have to flower at roughly the same time.

Despite charts showing which pollinators are early and which late, it can be confusing to remember which female needs which male when you are standing in the nursery trying to choose. Generally speaking, 'Jim Dandy,' an early male, will pollinate early flowering females such as 'Red Sprite,' a 3'-4' mounding shrub. And 'Apollo' or 'Southern Gentleman' will pollinate later blooming cultivars such as 'Winter Red' and 'Sparkleberry.' The latter is the tallest winterberry topping at about 12'. It is a cross between the native species and *Ilex serrata* and not to be confused with *Vaccinium arboretum* that has the same common name.



Fortunately, some newer male/female combos have names that make selecting a fertile pair a no brainer. There is *Ilex verticillata* 'Scarlet O'Hara' (10'), whose mate is *I.v.* 'Rhett Butler' (3'). There are 'Berry Heavy' and 'Berry Nice,' both maturing at 6 to



8 feet, pollinated by 'Mr. Poppins,' who doesn't get much over 3 feet. And the new, 3-4' female cultivar, 'Little Goblin,' consorts with 'Little Goblin Guy.'

Breeders tend to produce short males because their *raison d'être* is pollination alone ('twas ever so: a single male can pollinate nine females). The other reason is that, while not unattractive, during the growing season, both sexes of winterberries are rather plain Jane shrubs. As males do not produce the showy berries of their mates, the trend is to keep them small and relegated to the background.

Recently, I've noticed (and bought) male and female combos growing in a single container. This doesn't seem to bother the plants and gives the somewhat loose habits of both sexes a bit more girth. You won't notice the bare male stems in the winter because, after the yellow leaves drop, the amply pollinated females will be positively aglow with berries.

Winterberries are must-haves. You'll enjoy a show of shiny, colorful berries through most of gray winter. And, after enough frosty nights have sweetened the berries, you can enjoy watching the birds feast on them.