



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-eight Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

Vol. 48, No. 7 ■ March 2022

Member of
The National Capital Area
Garden Clubs and
The National Council of State
Garden Clubs, Inc.

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Photo by Caroline Turner

Caroline Turner's photo of snow-covered cherry blossoms reminds us that winter is still here. See more of Caroline's photos on pages 3 & 4.

Pink Muhly Grass etc.

If you subscribe to the paper edition of *The Washington Post* and happened to see the Travel Section for the Sunday March 13 edition you may have noticed the article about native plants that can be seen at area gardens. There was a dreamy photo of an ethereal cloud of pink muhly grass to seduce you to read more and to incite you to find specimens for your own garden.

Happily for us, our March speaker, **Marie Rojas**, is on target and topic with her presentation on "Ornamental Grasses" and it so happens one of the grasses she lists in her handout is pink muhly grass. She also includes numerous other grass varieties should you not be captivated by the froth of pink.

Marie has spoken to the club in the past about bees and beekeeping. She has her own company *Borders and Butterflies*, which has been in business for more than 25 years. and she serves on the Environmental Program Advisory Program for Montgomery County public schools. Marie has been a MoCo master gardener since 1994 and she lives on an historic farm in the Agricultural Reserve of Montgomery County where she keeps heritage chickens as well as bees. Don't miss this opportunity to hear Marie talk about beautiful grasses including pink muhly grass.

The meeting will take place on Wednesday, March 23, at 10:30 on zoom.

Jane Malish

Plant Sale News

Mary Horan

Mark your calendar for **May 12**, 9 a.m. to noon, for the BCGC Plant Sale. This spring, we return to its traditional location, in front of the Farm Women's Market in downtown Bethesda. Once again, the sale is open to the public.

At our previous public Plant Sales, enthusiastic buyers come early and plants sell out quickly. The more plants we have to sell, the better.

How can you support the Plant Sale? The best way is to donate excess plants from your own garden. When you thin or divide your overgrown or oversown plants this spring, please pot and donate your surplus. Closer to the Plant Sale date, there will be plenty of additional volunteer opportunities to help with the sale and its preparation.

Plants that emerge early can be potted early. Whatever is peeking through the mulch and leaves can be divided and potted NOW for the May sale, but at least by mid-April. That way the plants will both look better and be healthier when sold.

One trick for easy potting is to have pots, soil and plant labels ready when you do regular spring maintenance. We will sell plants in three pot sizes: medium (6-8 inches diameter); large (9-12 inches) and "shrub" (larger than 12 inches). You can pick up pots and plant labels at the homes of Barbara Collier, Susan Lass, and Judy Termini. Please contact them before showing up in person.

Plants from teardowns and neighbors

We do plant rescues! If you know of a future teardown that has a garden, please let us know. We possibly can arrange to rescue plants from the garden for the Plant Sale before the demolition starts. If you have a neighbor who would be willing to share excess plants, please contact us.

Which plants to donate?

Pretty much everything, even plants that spread too well in your garden or that you may consider too run-of-the-mill.

A few categories of plants to avoid donating:

- No nonnative invasive plants like honeysuckle, English ivy, creeping euonymus, houttuynia, barberry, common daylily, pachysandra, vinca minor and Bradford pear. By contrast, even aggressive *native* plants are fine to donate.
- Ordinary green hostas are fine to donate, but should be potted only in large size containers.
- No patent-protected plant cultivars. It is illegal to sell them. Please see the sidebar.
- No bulbs, except if they are flowering at the time of the sale. These don't sell.
- No mystery plants. We can't sell unidentified plants.
- If you don't know what it is or whether it's a good candidate for donation to the Plant Sale, ask us!

Notes about Plant Patents

Some popular plant cultivars are patent protected, which means it's not legal to propagate those plants by dividing them or by rooting a cutting. Our garden club can't risk selling such contraband.

So if you plan to divide a plant to donate to the Plant Sale, please first check its patent status. How to check? The label of a patented plant will have PPAF, PP followed by a number, or say "do not propagate." Or you can look it up online, using search terms like the plant cultivar name and the word patent.

Examples of cultivars that are patented are: *Eupatorium* 'Little Joe' (but not 'Gateway'); *Nepeta* 'Junior Walker' (but not 'Walkers Low'); *Rudbeckia* 'Little Gold Star' (but not 'Goldsturm'); Goldenrod 'Little Lemon' (but not 'Fireworks').

Plant patents expire after 20 years. Many great plants are sold in nurseries long after their patents have expired. So older cultivars in your garden may no longer be patent protected, and can be donated to the Plant Sale. Also, if plants reproduce sexually by setting seed, then their offspring are not identical to the parent. That means that volunteer seedlings of even currently patented plants are fine to donate to the Plant Sale.

Preparing your plants for the sale

- Water the plant to be dug the night before.
- Dig your plant by removing the full root ball.
- Look at the foliage and root ball to determine what size pot to use. One full pot is better than two skimpy pots.
- Pot the plant by placing some leaves in the bottom of the pot. Then cover with a little soil.
- To minimize transplant shock, leave the root ball as intact as possible. Place the plant at the same soil height as it was growing. Fill the

sides of the pot with soil and press down.

- Water well and keep the plant in the shade for the first few days after potting.
- Label each plant with its botanical and common names, flower color and light requirements.

Jumping worms and soil diseases: If you know or think you have invasive jumping worms in your garden, please consider these steps to avoid their spread. After dividing your plants, rinse the roots gently in water to remove any remaining soil. Then, pot the bare root plants into sterile potting mix. The University of New Hampshire Extension Service, where these worms are more prevalent, has a good tutorial.

Would you like more help?

Some members have beautiful gardens and would like to donate plants. If you find digging and potting physically challenging, then volunteers may be able to help you. Or perhaps you're a newer member in need of plant ID or a digging and dividing demo. Please contact Barbara Collier, Mary Horan or Carolea Logun as soon as possible.

Questions? Contact Judy Termini or Elaine Hope

Spring Outings Scheduled to Brighten Doldrums

- On **Monday, March 28**, members and friends are invited to tour and explore an incredible botanical array, the private garden of Jim Dronenburg and Dan Weil, about five miles from Harper's Ferry. Their one-acre property includes some 400 hellebores including *Hellebore thibetanus* (an ephemeral), crocus, daffodils, snowdrops, hardy cyclamen, cornelian cherries, wintersweet, *Edgeworthia*, witch hazels, magnolias, camellias, probably some *Stachyurus* and more.

Jim is opening his garden that day to BCGC as

well as other garden groups in which he's active. So if you wish to invite a garden buddy, you may. The tour is open to all but our hosts say please don't come if you and your party aren't vaccinated and boosted. Also, please rsvp by emailing Candy Kessel so we can provide a tally to the hosts. We'll keep a list of participants that we'll share a week before the outing so participants can arrange carpools to make the drive more enjoyable.

The garden is at 3536 Cemetery Circle, Knoxville, MD 21758 but the parking area is at 3542, so set your GPS for #3542.

We'll meet by their garage at 10:00am on Monday, 3/28, for Jim to give us a tour. That's the best way to see the property as it's not a formal garden and many specimen plants are scattered around the one-acre property. Jim will point out and identify everything that's in or near blooming so it's ideal to follow him, at least initially.

- Our outing on **April 13** will be to the National Arboretum for a tour of the Gotelli Collection led by Curator Joe Meny. Joe spoke to the club via Zoom in October about that special collection. After the tour, which is limited to 20 because of space constraints, members can enjoy the beauty of the Asia Collection where a number of different camellias should be blooming.

- On **May 4** we'll head out to the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area in Markham, VA, which offers the area's most spectacular public display of trillium.

Outings Committee

Another view of the late-winter snowfall coating cherry blossoms.

Caroline Turner



Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

The Cusp of Spring

In early March we are in that uncertain season: the meteorologists and climatologists declare the arrival of spring (that is, the months of March, April, and May), but the astronomers put it off till the vernal equinox. Whatever we call it, it's the time of year when the earliest blooms of spring bulbs encourage us to spend more time in the garden (if the weather cooperates, of course). At this time, before spring planting and transplanting can really begin, my thoughts turn to... flowers and weeds.

In my yard, we've been planting bulbs ever since we moved in 40 years ago, so we now have a nice display of the ones that survived. First comes the succession of winter aconite, snowdrops, crocuses, and early daffodils. The species tulips and alliums will follow (some of the alliums are natives, and quite late). As March unfolds we start seeing our native ephemerals: the spring beauties, bloodroot, trilliums, Virginia bluebells, mayapples, and so on.

As ecologically minded gardeners, we know that planting natives helps support the various creatures that use our gardens, and all of us would like to have something flowering year-round. Including common garden bulbs like daffodils and tulips, even though not native to our continent, does extend the season of bloom. Does it also help pollinators? Generally, yes: something is better than nothing at this lean time of year—at least if we avoid double-flowering cultivars, which tend not to be useful for pollinators. (At my house we inherited some double-flowering daffodils that have very little to recommend them. Ever tried to kill daffodils? A word to the wise: don't put the bulbs in the compost.) Choosing simple or species forms of these highly bred flowers is more likely to provide useful pollen (plus, critters don't seem to eat species tulips, whereas they love to snack on hybrid ones).

Of course, when the weather and the flowers invite us into the garden, the henbit, chickweed,

creeping Charlie, hairy bittercress, and the like also flaunt themselves. These shallow-rooted things are fairly easy to pull. Most of the weeds are fresh and green, but some—the creepers Jenny and Charlie that escaped me last fall—cunningly turn old leaves bronze so that they blend in and evade notice. And if I tire of the fiddly job of hunting the little guys, I can turn to the full-body exercise of clearing ivy, vinca, euonymus, and the occasional honeysuckle vine from around our hedge.

I am trying not to clean up the garden beds too much though, so I put the fallen leaves and broken stalks back after pushing them aside to go after the weeds. To give overwintering insects a chance, I want to wait till the weather is consistently above 50° before I clean up dead stalks. This year I'm planning to leave much of the debris in situ, maybe crumpling some of it up for neatness. Debris (aka mulch) does help to keep down weeds!

It's encouraging that covering the ground with plants does reduce the weeds. The golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*) is pretty reliable for weed suppression. In other places, it looks like the phacelia is crowding out the competition, as is the nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*, the rather weedy native grass I wrote about in the October 2021 newsletter). Time will tell. It will also, of course, bring the next season's weeds...



Caroline Turner's hyacinth bulbs provide a charming prelude to spring blooms.

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Giants in the Earth

Carole Ottesen

Every year there comes a day when you know it absolutely: winter is over. It happens when you step outside, breathe in air that is still cold, but different. It is air that is perfumed by the awakening earth. At first glance when you inspect them, the garden beds, the shrubs and trees still look deceptively dormant. Yet there is an unmistakable sensation of change—a kind of fairy movement always slightly out of eyeshot. It happens while your back is turned and continues hour by hour, day by day, making the garden bigger, greener, lush.

As if at a signal, daffodil foliage emerges and stands at the ready. Bright green tufts of grass push out of the soil. The croziers of ferns unroll and stand tall. The blunt heads of sleeping perennials emerge from their underground confinement. Soon, the dominant yellows of aconites and forsythias will be joined by a multitude of blues—crocuses and chionodoxa and Virginia bluebells. On branches that were bare buds begin to swell.

Then the tempo surges. Buds explode into new leaves. *Epimedium* climbs the tall stems of narcissus, matt green Siberian bugloss opens its crinkled leaves, and the new green tips of liri-ope, rise like praying hands above last year's matted clumps. Crabapples and magnolias sport daring early flowers and, everywhere, ground that was bare is greening.

Truly, there are giants in the earth.



Clockwise from top: Virginia bluebells, Ostrich fern, *Crocus tommasinianus*, and *Aesculus pavia*.



Photos by Carole Ottesen