



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"Ninety-nine Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

Vol. 50, No. 1 ■ September 2023

Member of
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Garden Clubs and
The National Council of State
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2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the club. Instead of meeting at St. Mark Church on Wednesday, September 27, we will gather for a celebratory luncheon at the Chevy Chase Women's Club. At least 66 members will be in attendance. It's been suggested that members include a splash of purple and gold in their outfits, hats or fascinators. (But not required!).

Plant Sale News

The arrival of fall means the Plant Sale Committee is getting back to work to prepare for our next sale in May 2024 at the Farm Women's Market

We're happy to report proceeds from our May 2023 sale were \$8613, a substantial increase over the previous year. Many of you helped make the sale a success, and we thank you! The proceeds are essential to support our work at Davis and Connie Morella libraries, to pay for our meetings and events and to donate to local horticultural and conservation organizations.

A perennial challenge for the Plant Sale is that we *always* need more plants to sell. Now is the best time to evaluate what plants from your garden might be donated for the Plant Sale. Which of your plants could be thinned or divided and potted for the sale?



Obedient plant bloom
See more photos from
Barbara Collier's garden
on pages 2-4.

Photo by Jonathan Paul



Wait until spring to dig these plants: ajuga, Japanese anemone, hardy begonia, crocosmia, native salvia, Solomon's seal, plumbago, irises, sweet box and pulmonaria. In our experience, these varieties do not overwinter well in pots.

Fall is a great time to dig and pot plants for the sale! Most perennials and woody plants happily overwinter in pots, including favorites like coneflowers, Joe Pye weed, daylily, hosta, aster, goldenrod and peony. And they will look beautiful for sale in spring.



Continued on page 2

We will sell plants in three pot sizes: medium (6 to 8 inches diameter); large (9 to 12 inches) and “shrub” (larger than 12 inches). If you have spare pots *in these sizes*, please let us know. We always need more pots, and it’s a great way to recycle your extras.

Contact Judy Termini (judytermini@gmail.com) or Elaine Hope (paris71197@gmail.com) *now* if you want advice on which of your plants might benefit from dividing or if you need pots or have extra pots. If you find digging and potting physically challenging, we may be able to help if you contact us as soon as possible.

WELCOME NEW MEMBER KATHY PHELAN

Kathy is a lifelong gardener—starting as a child when she worked with her family on a large vegetable garden and a formal rose garden.

As an adult she has continued gardening, belonged to the Chevy Chase Garden Club for a while, and loves spending time in her garden. She grows mostly flowering perennials and shrubs, but also dahlias and annual cutting flowers - mostly zinnias. She loves having flowers to cut for bouquets in the house.

Kathy also enjoys growing houseplants.

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Garden worthy

As I contemplate the wonderful/frightening chaos of my August to September garden, I have been thinking about “garden worthiness,” particularly regarding native plants. The excellent people at Mt. Cuba Center do trials of many species looking into this very thing, and the criteria they use for evaluation include habit, vigor, and floral display, as well as support for pollinators and other wildlife. This is very helpful, as we probably all value these things in our different ways.

A big goal for me is wildlife value, but who doesn’t like beauty? For instance, in August the naked ladies (nonnative *Lycoris squamigera*) were closely followed by the cardinal flowers (native *Lobelia cardinalis*). I find both of these eminently garden worthy, since they perform well and are



Photos by Barbara Collier unless otherwise noted.

Above: Naked ladies in ferns; Right: Cardinal flower



easy to control. Both have vivid flowers and pop up to brighten various more or less shady spots. Both are said to attract hummingbirds and butterflies. The *Lycoris*, a traditional garden plant that was here when we moved in, has a shorter period of bloom (in my garden at least), and it spends most of its time invisibly underground. Mine grow happily among ostrich fern (unimpeachably native). They are pretty easy to dig up and move if necessary (though the odds are that they will reappear from bulb off-sets). Cardinal flowers, still in bloom as I write, are less predictable in where they grow, since they may peter out in the face of competition. However, they can easily be started in new places: after the blooms have gone to seed, take the flower stalks and lay them down on lightly disturbed soil.

This year (thrilling to report), I still have *Spigelia marilandica* reblooming. Like cardinal flowers, *Spigelia* were challenging to establish, since at first deer found and nibbled them. It took a few seasons of fussy protection with barriers and stinks (and other plants growing up around them), but they now seem to hold their own and are eminently garden worthy. (I admit to giving the *Spigelia* the occasional spritz of peppermint-



Spigelia reblooming in competition with obedient plant

scented deer repellent. I don't trust entirely to precedent.) *Spigelia* offspring have even sprung across the garden path—quite a feat considering all the aggressive things opposite: obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*) now blooming in the midst of black-eyed Susans, mountain mint, *Monarda didyma*, and others. The bees just love the obedient plant.



Obedient plant running riot (Photo: Jonathan Paul)

Then there are the plants that are challenging because establishing them is just too easy: aggressively rhizomatous or self-seeding plants. Their garden-worthiness can be hard to evaluate: how much management will they need in a given spot? Are you willing or able to restrain aggressively spreading roots by regularly digging them

out or installing barriers? (Of course, if you're dealing with a naturally bounded spot like a hell strip, aka a road verge, these might be just the ticket!)



Solidago 'Fireworks'

Photo by Jonathan Paul

In my garden, I like goldenrods and asters for their fall display and wildlife benefit, but I need to deal aggressively with those that don't "play nice." I find garden-worthy the shade-loving goldenrods like *Solidago caesia* (wreath goldenrod) and *Solidago flexicaulis* (zigzag goldenrod). For sunny spots, the selections and cultivars become useful: *Solidago rugosa* 'Fireworks' does spread, but much more slowly than (for instance) the truly thuggish Canada goldenrod (*S. canadensis*), which I have to dig out more and more. *Solidago shortii* 'Solar Cascade' is another cultivar that is a relatively slow spreader. You should take the "cascade" name seriously, however; it happily leans toward the sun and into my paths.

Shade-growing asters include the familiar white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), which seeds around freely but I find welcome, especially as it will grow in dry shade. I'm also trying to establish a true shade lover,

the rhizomatous big-leaved aster (*Eurybia macrophylla*), but it's been slow—perhaps because it's in my rather dry front yard. The blue wood aster, *Symphotrichum cordifolium*, grows in sun or shade and seeds around, and



Reliable white wood aster

Photo: Jonathan Paul



Passion flower vine clambering on aster

so, as with many sun-loving asters, care must be taken. I ruthlessly pull out a lot of New England aster (*Symphiotrichum novae-angliae*), which would be happy to take over the world while displaying naked lower stems. But I do like it, especially against a sunny fence when it's hemmed in by other plants. With asters, selections or cultivars can also be helpful.

For instance, 'Raydon's Favorite' and 'October Skies' are compact and manageable selections of aromatic aster (*Symphiotrichum oblongifolium*).

One of the most attractive late summer natives is blue mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*), which spreads by roots and self-seeding. It likes moist humusy soils in sun to part shade, which in my garden means it is happy along the edges of my sunny to part-sun wood chip paths, where log edging provides moisture. Maybe because it is growing in areas with lots of competition, I have not found it seeding excessively. However, I will need to stop it growing entirely into the paths.

A challenge for small gardens (or tight spots) is the plant, however garden-worthy, that just keeps getting bigger. The answer here is obviously "planning," but alas! Mine is often not good enough. Research will not necessarily tell you whether a particular specimen will go crazy in a

Clockwise from left: Monarch (slightly chomped) on aster; a profusion of asters, boneset, white snakeroot, and others; unexpected pink form of aster

Photos: Jonathan Paul



given spot. I know that in my garden some things get gigantic, but how to know which ones? In retrospect, I probably could have guessed that an elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) planted near our compost heaps might explode in its second year. But the big flowerheads turning to purple fruit (a bird favorite) are pretty spectacular.

Then there are the cup plants (*Silphium perfoliatum*).

I knew they would be large. I soon learned they would self-seed. But I also realized that the deer browsed them. And the insects love, love, love them. Have I figured out how to manage them yet? Not exactly; I cut them back, but somehow never radically enough. I'm still working on it.



Passion flower *Photo: Jonathan Paul*

And don't get me started on the gorgeous, rampant passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*).

HORTICULTURAL NOTES

A New Garden Ethic

Carole Ottesen

There's a new book in town, Benjamin Vogt's *A New Garden Ethic*, that looks at the landscape with "an uncertain future" in mind. In this era of climate change and extinction, he argues, how we garden is more important than ever before.

Gardening organically is a given for Vogt as are planting only natives, but he promotes supporting the entire ecosystem – the birds, the insects, and, presumably, deer and other mammals.

His gardening philosophy arises from painful-to-contemplate facts. For example, for every degree the global temperature rises, there is a corresponding rise in species extinction. A single example of a species affected by rising temperature is the cottonwood tree that supports hundreds of species of insects in addition to other forms of life we often don't consider, such as bacteria, lichen, and soil microbes. And the cottonwood is only one tree of the many hundreds threatened.

Vogt argues that we need "wildness" in our daily lives, that when we surround ourselves with concrete, monocultures of lawn, and alien plants, it causes significant harm to our physical and mental health. On his quarter-acre lot in a suburban Nebraska subdivision, he has installed a wild landscape to minimize the use of resources, a prairie. It's a "wildness" that may or may not go over well with his neighbors' more conventional notions of landscaping.

There can be a middle ground. For lack of a better term, it might be called "laissez-faire gardening" or, simply said, not totally wild, but not up tight either. Small changes can reap large rewards.

A good deal of time, money, and effort is spent simply maintaining lawn. And often, it is chemically treated—not good for anything or anyone. The simple measure of minimizing lawn as a



Two-and-a-half acres of barberry that took a bulldozer and a year of daily digging out to eliminate.

Photo: Carole Ottesen

blend of short green plants, and never treating it with anything toxic would make huge strides toward a healthier environment.

"Polite" exotics that don't out compete natives would be welcomed. Ridding the landscape of invasives such as barberry would allow more natives to prosper.

Maintenance need not be nitpicking neat. For example, instead of bagging fallen leaves, they might be recycled as mulch. It might not look as neat as those bags of shredded hardwood make it, but it quickly biodegrades, enriching the garden.

Vogt does have a point. As gardens become places of ideological conflict and political statement, what is needed is a new ethic, what the Buddha would call "a middle way," a thoughtful new way of viewing and understanding what we call "garden."