



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

“One Hundred Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes”

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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The purple coneflower (*Echinacea*) is a well-known native. Learn more about native plants and Carole Ottesen's experience at Cullowhee on pages 4-5.

Photo by Carole Ottesen

Learning to Love Native Plants

My mom was always campaigning for a magnolia tree (certain species are native to North America, BTW: *magnolia grandiflora*, *M. Virginiana*, etc.) and my dad, who was a forester, always said no because they were too messy and too big and maybe he just didn't like them. Mom persisted and, as a peace offering he one day brought home a twig he planted near the driveway. It became a gracefully shaped small tree and in the spring it covered itself in a frothy veil of white blossom. We all fell in love with it. It was beautiful and it was a native and dad said it was a Grancy Greybeard. We also loved the name. It's better known as a Fringe tree – *chionanthus virginicus* and the Missouri Botanical Garden has designated it a “Plant of Merit”.

Carol Ottesen, our speaker on **January 24**, probably knows what it's like to come upon a native plant that's a treasure and whose delicacy and hardiness can more than compete with non-native treasures. She knows about natives that grow well in our area and which ones the deer don't like so much. She was a loyal presence for many years at the Cullowhee Conference on Native Plants first held in 1984 at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee N.C. Her experiences there inspired her book “The Native Plant Primer,” published in 1995. Although she's a native plant aficionado, she also cultivates exotics because they're beautiful, too. AND she's one of us BCGC members, having joined in 2013. This is a great opportunity to learn from a gardener in our area who has wide experience gardening with native plants and whose shared expertise can help us with our own endeavours!

The meeting will begin at 10:30 and will be held at St Mark Presbyterian Church, 10701 Old Georgetown Road, North Bethesda.

Jane Malish

A Message from the Membership co-chairs

Dee and I are retiring in June as Membership co-chairs. For ten years we have very much enjoyed our role and are looking for two people who will welcome new members and bring fresh approaches and ideas.

It has been very rewarding to be the initial contacts for new members. Being part of this team is an important and integral position as well as being the first to extend a warm welcoming hand.

We will work with you for the rest of this term so that you have a good sense of the work involved.

Looking forward to hearing from you. Refer to the BCGC directory for our contact information.

Marge Pray and Dee Lertora

Silent Auction Coming: Donate Garden Stuff

By Candy Kessel

Our March 27 general meeting will offer you a chance to get rid of unwanted garden-related gear and acquire “new” appealing items. We haven’t held a silent auction since February 2020. That was a noteworthy gathering because covid shut the world down shortly after that.

No doubt you have potential auction donations. So, please start checking your basement, garage, attic, closets, shed, etc., and pull out all those garden gizmos you no longer want or use. Then bring them to the March meeting — garden art, plant stands and stakes, nice pots, tools, interesting décor pieces, tchotchkes, etc. Your castoffs will be raffled off in a silent auction to the highest bidder. In previous years we’ve raised as much as \$500 for the club. Even better, this task can offer an easy start to spring cleaning.

Note, please do not bring garden books, common plastic pots or terra cotta pots. Vases are welcome but not florist vases. It seems most everyone is overloaded with those.

Environmental Concerns

Barbara Collier

Real Winter

So now it’s really winter. Not the wishy-washy sort-of-autumn stuff we got in December, but actual winter. How to respond? Besides staring out the window to admire (or deplore) the view, or returning peacefully to one’s mug of hot beverage and book (or seed catalog), we might venture out and nose around to see what’s going on.

First the fun part: looking at what is working in the winter garden. This is entirely up to you. I like the look of the carpet of leaves that we leave everywhere (we are fortunate not to have them in overly smothering numbers), but judging by all the leaf-blowers, other people don’t share my taste. Of course I try to practice what I preach and leave spent flowers and seed pods standing, but in the front yard especially, one can cut back some things to about 15 inch stalks for a less unkempt look. All those things that lean into paths can also be cut back; brushing through liv-



Browns are colors, too!

ing blooms may be fine, but not so much the dried up remains. And at this time of year, you don’t necessarily have to take things to the compost pile: just crumple them up and throw them on the ground.

When taller things start breaking and lying down, you can tidy things up and stack the stalks somewhere out of view where the insects may still find them. In my case, I’m not sure why some of my many *Amsonias* decided to start breaking in mid-stalk, but cutting off the broken bits now lightens what will be a big job in the spring.

Besides enjoying or tidying the parts of your garden that you like, you can look out for places where more intervention is needed, now or later, such as pruning woody plants, planning removals, finding the gaps you might want to fill, and removing invasives and weeds. For example: in my war with lesser celandine, winter is the time to look for its early signs. I know it’s out in a nearby wooded area (where it basically never disappears), so if I patrol the perimeter of my garden where it has been in the past, or peer suspiciously at the lawn where it likes to hide, I might be able to grab my weeding tool and get it.

Much easier to find are the leaves of *Arum italicum*. This handsome but badly behaved import is invading natural areas and backyards alike, courtesy of birds that eat its red berries, as well as by spreading vegetatively via its deep corms. Last year I dug



Arum italicum

out a huge patch that was hiding among taller plants, so now I have to watch for the tell-tale leaves as they emerge: much easier to see at this time of year. The green of the invasive honey-suckle vine also shows up well.

Then there are our reliable winter annual weeds. I for one am not remotely close to conquering these, but I have noticed that they can be crowded out in the right conditions. So a scorched earth policy of relentless pulling will only work if there is something to grow in their place. And planting is more fun than weeding, right?

Meanwhile, I see that the flavor of hairy bitter-
 cress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) is “mild and peppery,
 not bitter” ([https://www.bbg.org/article/
 weed_of_the_month_hairy_bittercress](https://www.bbg.org/article/weed_of_the_month_hairy_bittercress)), and the
 seed capsules are recommended. And don’t forget
 that chickweed (*Stellaria media*) is also edible.
 Bon appétit!



**Yum!
 Hairy bittercress**



Common chickweed

Photos by Barbara Collier

Holiday Greens Workshop 2023



Photos: Dawn Landsman



HORTICULTURAL NOTES

Cullowhee

Carole Ottesen

Native plants are “in” now, but not so very long ago few people understood exactly what they were. The archetypical American landscape around a home featured lawn, often maintained with copious water, chemicals, and effort, and a “foundation planting,” shrubs lined up in front of the house. Anything much different could get you in trouble with the homeowners’ association.

The offerings at nurseries and garden centers were fairly standard. In 1984, word went around that there was going to be a conference on native plants. Forty years ago, natives were an exciting new concept and many gardeners were intrigued at the prospect of a “new” plant palette.

Of course, there had been sporadic interest in American natives before, but very often it produced field guides rather than gardening books.

The conference was to be held at Western Carolina University in a place called Cullowhee. Thinking North Carolina wasn’t far, some fellow gardeners and I decided to attend. We drove more than twelve hours to reach the little town of Cullowhee. In later years, we found it easier and shorter to take Interstate 81 into Tennessee and then turn east into North Carolina. It was still a long way.

That first year, 127 people attended, coming mostly from all over the Southeast. Among them were landscape architects, botanists, nurserymen, professors, horticulturists, people on the staffs of botanic gardens, and plain old gardeners. All were delighted to have found their interest in what seemed then a somewhat arcane subject shared by fellow enthusiasts. Yet, even though they were interested in natives, more than half of those who attended the first conference had one suggestion for a native in the garden: the coneflower.

That changed swiftly as an outstanding roster of speakers spread their knowledge and nursery



Echinacea
(Purple coneflower)



LA Iris

owners began binging promising native plants to sell at the conference. Attendees went home and began growing them in their home gardens.

Not long thereafter, articles on natives began appearing in garden periodicals, books were published, native plant nurseries sprang up, and garden centers began offering special sections of natives.

In addition to the Cullowhee Conference and its spinoffs, native plant conferences now take place in many states, a good thing because these plants can be climate, state, area, and site specific.

The native plant movement supports pollinators, and, hopefully, cuts down on the chemicals used in gardens. Best of all, it has enriched our gardens.



Northern meadow



Tricyrtis

Photos: Carole Ottesen



Texas bluebonnets