



Bethesda Community

GARDEN CLUB

"One Hundred and One Years of Brightening Lives and Landscapes"

www.bethesdacommunitygardenclub.org

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Read about Barbara
Collier's ideas for tam-
ing exuberant native
plantings on pages 2-3.

Photo by Barbara Collier

THE SPEAKER FOR OUR NEXT MEETING ON WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 30TH AT 10:30 IS....

DR. SARA VIA WANTS YOU TO BE FREE of the tyranny of your lawn! Dr. Via is a professor at the University of Maryland well versed in the effects of climate change and the toll of maintaining "cool weather" grasses in a climate that endures suffocatingly hot summers. The short-rooted grasses that most adoring lawn folks grow require enormous amounts of human energy and treasure and demand care that depletes the soil and harms the water. Dr. Via is aware of the peer pressure that leads most of us to make at least some kind of effort to grow a presentable patch of grass. But she has solutions that are ecologically sustainable, improve soil and water, require less mowing and produces green spaces that don't alarm or irritate our neighbors.

Dr. Via has a bachelor's and Ph.D. from Duke in Zoology and a Master's in Insect Neurobiology from Australian National University in Canberra. She is also an active Naturalist, and has won many awards. She has previously addressed the club on two other occasions; she always has ideas and solutions that gradually ease us toward a better stewardship of our environment while giving the eye enough time to begin to appreciate the new look of a healthier, sustainable environment.

Plant Sale News: BCGC Digs, Personal Digs, and Pot Collection

Please look for emails announcing the remaining "Fall Digs" in our members' beautiful gardens and join a dig if you are available. We warmly welcome and need volunteers who can dig, pot, or write plant labels. (No experience necessary!) Also, it is loads of fun!

NOW is the time to dig and pot plants from your own garden to contribute to the sale. Well-potted perennials will overwinter nicely in a shady location in your yard. They will be full and beautiful for the sale on May 8, 2025. Check last month's newsletter for plants to dig this fall.

We can recycle your empty, excess pots for the Plant Sale. Most needed are pots 6-10 inches in diameter, especially mum pots. Also, larger pots (up to 16 inches in diameter) are needed for big plants and shrubs. Email us to arrange to drop them off.

To reach the Plant Sale Committee, send a brief email to:

Elaine Hope: paris71197@gmail.com or Mary Horan: mfhoran@gmail.com

Invitation to The Holiday Greens Workshop 2024

Mark your calendar: Dec. 11, @ 9:30am

Date: December 11, 2024 at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church (rain or snow)

Time: Arrive by 9:30 to 'settle,' drink your coffee/tea and be ready by 10:00

We are hoping to make over 135 MEDIUM table arrangements so we will need 65 members to make 130 arrangements, or 2 per person. (Last year each participant made 3 but we only had 40 members. It was a little daunting and distracting from the fun, but we did it!)

This is our best time together in such big numbers and over the Holiday. We work hard, laugh, share the greens we've brought from our own gardens...(mostly), put ridiculous doodads and bows on our arrangements, listen to holiday music, and know everything we make will be given away to children, immigrant resettlement organizations, food serving organizations, health clinics, police stations and more. A list of the organizations we give to will be at your table. If you know of a new or particularly needy organization, please let us know. We will also give to our friends who are ill or need some cheer. Let us know in advance.

To make this happen we need volunteers

Here are the categories:

- o **Deliveries:** 2/delivery = 22
- o **Morning set up:** (8) arrange long tables for greens and doodads, putting newspaper on top of all tables.
- o **Kitchen people:** (3) to cut and soak the oasis then put in green dishes for arranging.
- o **Doodad and bow organizer:** Assist **Diane Beverly** in putting out bows and doodads on long tables near benches.
- o **Clean up:** (10) - bring some brooms and plastic bags, we are always short.

Anyone interested in volunteering, please contact Carole Gelfeld; email: cgelfeld@comcast.net



In another letter shortly before the November newsletter we will send out a **BLAST** that will explain the importance of conditioning your cut greens the day before the 11th of December and how it's done. This will be one page you can print out and **glue** on your fridge or mirror to help you remember all details for this wonderful day.

After the November 20th general meeting, I will be happy to give a demonstration of how to make a table arrangement.

—Lizzie Glidden-Boyle

Environmental Concerns

Hindsight

Barbara Collier

This is the time of year when indulging in hindsight is not just tempting but can also inspire ideas for next year. I'm now planning to apply some ecological gardening principles to a couple of problem areas in my garden.

In habitat and ecological gardening, we are often reminded that many native plants have evolved to survive in less than perfect conditions. As a result, if these are planted in enriched garden soil, they may grow very large and flop over—especially if they are meadow plants, which usually are supported by tall grasses. We are also advised that cutting weeds repeatedly can be more beneficial and efficient than pulling them, since pulling disturbs the soil and brings up more weed seeds to germinate. After repeated cutting (there's the challenge), the exhausted weeds die, aerating the soil as their roots wither away and mulching it with their decaying tops. With these ideas percolating in my head, I contemplated my mini-meadow and the small orchard next to it.



An exuberant fall “meadow”

In retrospect, my first mistake may have been to start a meadow garden on a spot where a huge pile of wood chips had spent several months. After the chips were finally moved elsewhere, I observed that they had successfully smothered the grass—including Bermuda grass, the bane of my existence in our sunny backyard. Greatly inspired, I started seeds and began planting—not realizing, among other things, how exuberant some meadow plants could become in soil enriched by the smothering wood chips.

As the plants matured, the result was a little too spectacular. A great tangle developed: giants like cup plant and wild senna, wide-ranging passion-flower vines, and swathes of wild bergamot and common milkweed (from just one initial plant). The pollinators loved it! But by the end of each summer, the cup plants especially would be flopping all over the place, lacking the support of a robust grass crop surrounding them. Too late, I realized how inadequate was the proportion of grass I had managed to plant, and how important it was to choose plants of more or less the same height—and in this case, shorter—so that the tall ones would not overwhelm the shorter ones, especially any grass seedlings trying to survive.

As I was figuring out how to address these problems (get more shorter grasses!), my husband helped by persistently whacking down the cup

plants in the meadow. (A prolific self-seeder, the cup plant is now growing in more suitable places where it can be kept in check by deer, which like to browse it.) I hauled a lot of the debris out and piled it up to compost somewhere else, since the meadow area already had (too much?) organic matter enriching it. So much debris would also inhibit the grasses.

In the nearby orchard where my husband had four apple trees, a similar problem arose. Too many tall meadow plants seeded in, along with volunteer Canada goldenrod, an aggressive native that not only can get enormously tall, but also has rhizomes that want to take over the world. For the sake of the birds and insects, though, I let things grow, bloom, set seed—and proceed to flop over. The orchard paths became blocked by tall helianthus, goldenrod, bonesets, asters, and others, lying peacefully over the paths, gazing up at the sun. It became obvious, even to a lazy, laissez-faire gardener like me, that I had to mend my ways.

Resolution for next year! I heard an interview with a southern gardener who uses a string trimmer to battle crab grass and (shudder) Bermuda grass in a meadow planting. Inspired by this example, I intend to become proficient with a string trimmer both to whack weeds and to cut back foliage. If I can discourage the unwanted by



An overgrown orchard

Photos by Barbara Collier

cutting them down to the ground, the desirables can fill in and crowd them out. If I can consistently trim back the tall desirables, they can grow shorter and bushier, shade out the weeds, and not flop into the paths. All this while protecting the soil!

We'll see how well these good intentions turn out. It will be one of those "learning experiences," I guess.

Of course, the first step in carrying out my plan is totally inconsistent. I feel the intense need to set back the Canada goldenrod by pulling and digging *now*. Next year I can weed-whack the remnants as they emerge. (I'm only human.)

My Garden Legacy

Carolea Logun

If you came to the September meeting, you heard my unusual contribution to the roundtable. Instead of sharing a favorite tool or plant, I told you what I'd decided last summer – to officially direct my family members how to share my garden when I'm gone.

We're all saddened when we see older houses torn down, and the gardens destroyed, and that's why the club tries to save as many plants as we can. One of my neighbors died recently, at 96, and her house was a teardown. Her daughter managed to save most of the plants, sending some of the 40 azaleas to relatives as far as Seattle and Cape Cod. Other plants came to neighbors. It was lovely to see how this garden was passed along, and I think about that as I wander through my own garden.

Many of my plants came from my parents and neighbors in New York City. My peonies came from my great uncle, Alphonso. And of course I have plants from BCGC members and from other neighborhood teardowns. When I walk through my garden, I see loved ones who are no longer with me, but they live on through their plants.

I've told my family to save as many plants as

they can – to plant in their gardens or to give to friends. I've directed them to contact BCGC so the club can dig as many plants as they can, either for the plant sale or for their own gardens. And then I instructed my attorney to write a clause to that effect into my estate plan. He smiled and said, "Well, this is the first time I've been asked to do this." I told him that I hope it won't be the last!

I encourage everyone to put your wishes for your garden in writing now – don't wait!