



Takoma Horticultural Club

A Hardy Perennial Since 1916

Happy Holidays, Yew All!



Another Great Year in the THC

—by Diane Svenonius

The Takoma Horticultural Club ended its 2011 program year in high style and high humor, with a lively demonstration of holiday decoration-making by Anne Brooks on November 16 at Heffner Park. Stabbing a succession of leafy branches into an Oasis form while telling nonstop witty tales of how they were (sometimes surreptitiously) collected, Anne made a luscious wreath (featuring kiwi and pomegranate), a door ornament, and a fall table centerpiece. She also gave many tips on materials, sources, and techniques; for example, how to give your door swag three dimensionality (a la Dolly Parton, Anne suggests).

Any evergreen but hemlock works for these arrangements, Anne said. *Chamaecyparis*—in green, gold or blue cultivars—is one of her favorites, among a wide range including variegated holly, *hypericum*, and magnolia. After the foundation was in place, Harry Lauder walking stick, cones, berries, fruit and red twigs were some of the embellishments she used from her baskets of goodies. A lucky gardener won the centerpiece as a door prize. (See *Year's End*, p. 3)

Almost Time for the January Potluck

—by Carole Galati and Diane Svenonius

Our first THC event of 2012 will be the annual Winter Pot Luck and Indoor Plant Exchange on January 18 for THC members who have paid their 2012 dues. This cozy event at Heffner Park Community Center on Oswego Avenue always features excellent THC cooking, lively conversation, and an exchange of plants, seeds, garden gifts, and books.

Don't be left standing out in the cold, make sure your dues are paid. If you have a friend or neighbor who would like join our garden club, consider giving them a THC membership for the holidays!



Anne Brooks adjusts the table centerpiece



Books about plants and gardening donated by THC to the Takoma branch of the District of Columbia library

Talk Marks THC Book Donation

Kathy Jentz, Editor and Publisher of *Washington Gardener Magazine*, and a past Takoma Horticultural Club president, gave a talk on November 10 entitled “Getting Your Garden Ready for Winter” at the Takoma DC Library. The event marked THC’s donation of funds to the library to acquire books about plants and gardening.

Along with her “to-do” list, Kathy also shared many tips on tool care, seed-saving and soil-improving from her lifelong gardening experience.

Marylanders can get DC library cards and borrow these and other THC-donated books from the branch. Among this year’s acquisitions are *50 High-Impact, Low Care Garden Plants*, by Tracy DiSabato-Aust; *Front Yard Gardens: Growing More Than Grass*, by Liz Primeau; *Gardening in Hard Times: Growing Food Where it Counts*, by Steve Solomon; and *Native Plants of the Northeast*, by Donald J. Leopold. A complete list of the books donated this year by THC can be found in the November newsletter, at www.takomahort.org.

The *Takoma Horticultural Club News* is published monthly on the listserv and on the website www.takomahort.org. Photos and articles are welcome. If you would like to contribute, please contact our editor Diane Svenonius at dbsvenonius@msn.com.

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Pages 2 and 3, Diane Svenonius.

Soil – The Roots of Gardening

—by Becky Lavash

We all know about the difficulties in dealing with the soil in our gardens in and around Takoma Park. Clay and rocks are everywhere and most plants do not seem to thrive in this type of soil. Some plants native to Maryland and the mid-Atlantic area do grow all by themselves in this soil, in forests and sidewalk cracks, it’s true, but many of us want to grow plants outside of their native zone, or even outside of their natural habitat. For example, ferns generally grow in moist areas with loose soil composed of lots of organic material. Many annuals, with their short roots and short life spans, require rich loose soil to enable water to flow down into the roots easily, and for the roots to spread out quickly to maximize water and nutrient uptake.

To have a successful garden we need to take the time to amend our existing soil to match the needs of the plants we hope to grow. In most cases soil amendments can be as simple as amending your soil with composted humus and manure, purchased in bags at the local hardware store; composted leaf mulch such as Leaf Grow or free leaf mold from the City of Takoma Park; or homemade compost. These are soil amendments however, not soil, and you cannot grow plants in them directly. They should be mixed into your existing soil before planting. And although it would be best to amend the whole bed, you can amend the soil just in the area you expect the plant’s roots to occupy, but you should, especially for perennials, ensure that you amend a sufficiently large area.

I also like to add some plant starter or straight phosphate (Espoma sells it in 5 pound bags) to the soil to stimulate root growth for perennials to ensure their
(See *Soil*, p. 3)

December Dues News

Please welcome new and returning members: Nancy Currier, Jerry Yokoyama, Nancy Traubits, JoAnne Thacker, Colleen Ward, Terry & John Dammann, and JoAnne D'Andrea. We hope to see you at our wonderful Winter Potluck on Wednesday, January 18. And we hope others who have not paid their 2012 dues will mail them in so they can also join us. Check out our website: www.takomahort.org for details.

(Soil, continued)

longevity and quick release fertilizer for annuals that need lots of food to put out the continuous blooms we expect from them.

Sometimes the way to improve your soil is to leave it alone. I have some beds where I allow the fallen leaves to build up over the years. The leaves break down into nice, friable soil compost that I can turn over into the harder soil beneath it. This can work for beds in the corner of your yard where you're not too worried about appearances. The leaves also act as a good mulch to block out weeds.

(Year's End, continued)

The annual election of officers was held, and the four incumbents were unanimously reelected for 2012: Sherrell Goggin, President; Carole Galati, Vice President and Program Coordinator; Becky Lavash, Secretary; and Taffy Turner, Treasurer.

This was the last of the club's speakers and workshops in a busy year which included talks on the National Garden, the county's Community Garden Program, and insects in the garden; a bamboo trellis workshop; a rain garden tour, and a trip to Mt. Cuba together with the Beltsville Garden Club. An equally exciting program for 2012 is in the works.

Eudora Welty Reasons with the Squirrels

Squirrel, squirrel, burning bright,
Do not eat my bulbs tonight!
I think it bad and quite insidious
That you should eat my blue tigridias.

Squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*,
Leave to me my small muscaris.
Must you make your midnight snack, mouse,
Of *Narcissus* Mrs. Backhouse?

When you bite the pure leucojum,
Do you feel no taint of odium?
Must you chew till Kingdom Come
Hippeastrum advenum?

If in your tummy bloomed a lily,
Wouldn't you feel sort of silly?
Do you wish to tease and joke us
When you carry off a crocus?

Must you hang up in your pantries
All my Pink Queen zephyranthes?
Tell me, has it ever been thus,
Squirrels must eat the hyacinthus?

O little rodent,
I wish you wo'dn't!

(from Haltom and Brown, *One Writer's Garden*)

Officers

President: *Sherrell Goggin*

Vice President: *Carole Galati*

Secretary: *Becky Lavash*

Treasurer: *Taffy Turner*

Committee Chairs and Contacts

Membership: *Carole Galati*

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