

TAKOMA HORTICULTURAL CLUB NEWS

February, 2011 Edition

www.takomahort.org



National Garden photo, US Botanic Garden

The President's Plot

Dear Fellow THC Members,

Allow me the indulgence of staking out a little piece of the monthly THC newsletter for myself, henceforth to be called "The President's Plot". It's where I'd like to post items of interest that I think you should be aware of...such as, you have a new president! Yes, Kit Gage has turned in her trowel. Please join me in wishing her many thanks for all her tireless efforts on behalf of the club. And though she's stepping down, she certainly won't be gone; rather, she'll be turning her focus to another passion, the National Capital Region Watershed Stewards Academy (www.ncr-wsa.org). She has worked hard on this endeavor with fellow club member (and former club president) Wendy Bell to get this established—please see the December 2010 club newsletter for more info on the Academy. There has also been some activity in the other club positions—please see the club's website for all the details (<http://www.takomahort.org/about/index.html>). By this point, you're possibly wondering who's been talking to you thus far; and that would be me, your new club Prez, Sherrell Goggin. I'm a native Washingtonian, a 10+ (see *Plot*, page 4)

February Club Meeting

The National Garden, with
Curator Bill McLaughlin

Wednesday, February 16, 7:30 pm

Takoma Park Community Center

7500 Maple Ave. Open to the public.

Join us tonight to discover a \$10 million dollar garden in your own backyard—the U.S. Botanic Garden's National Garden, which opened October 1, 2006 after a 15 year fundraising and planning period. Life-long DC area native William B. McLaughlin, Curator of Living Collections for the USBG, will tell us about his participation in this three-acre gem, beginning in 1996 when he was placed in charge of plant selection and design review. In 2005 his focus shifted to oversight of the entire garden's plant-based content; and when the National Garden opened in 2006, he shifted again to refining the plant collections throughout the Botanic Garden's holdings. Of the four main areas within the National Garden (Butterfly Garden, First Ladies Water Garden, Regional Garden, and Rose Garden), Bill will highlight plant selections from the Butterfly and Regional Gardens.

Bill traces his interest in horticulture to earliest childhood. Though he was uninterested in reading at first, his parents bought him plant books; within days he was bringing plant parts home for identification and learning to pronounce their Latin names (don't worry, he's figured them all out by now). Upon earning a B.S. in Ornamental Horticulture from the University of Maryland, he was hired as a gardener at the U.S. Botanic Garden in February 1986. After many years experience with a range of tropical and sub-tropical plants, the purchase of his first home reignited an interest in outdoor gardening and native plants. ~



Photos this page by Jane Pellicciotto

Starting Vegetables from Seed by Eileen Schramm

Growing vegetables from seed is a great way to try some of the wonderful heirlooms and exotics that are not available as transplant stock, as well as a way to save some money when creating your vegetable garden. There are massive amounts of information for seed starting if you have a greenhouse, or if you have the space to set up a lighting system—from purchasing complete systems, to plans and ideas for all all kinds of do-it-yourself versions. The March/April issue of "Urban Farm" (who knew?) magazine has instructions for a very simple light setup built with PVC pipes which looks easy. If, however, you have neither, there are still options available, although your success rate will likely be smaller.

The easiest solution is to try only seeds that are sown directly into the garden, but that is fairly limiting. There are so many possibilities if you can start your seeds indoors. The most important things to consider before you try indoor seed-starting are light and temperature requirements. If you cannot set up a light system, then you need a window with all-day light. That sun may seem bright to you, but it's not as strong as a seedling would like. Some seeds do require less light than others, such as lettuces and parsley. Broccoli needs a bit more, and the warm weather plants such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant need the most.

Temperature is another factor: seeds need to

be quite warm to germinate, although until they do most don't need light. Some suggestions for cozy spots for germinating: on top of the fridge or the hot water heater. They can also be placed on a radiator if it is not going full blast or if you can raise them slightly. Some seeds do need light to germinate, so check the specifics on the package. A clue is that the seeds do not get covered with soil when planted.

Once you've found a space that will be suitable for your seeds, you'll need something to put them in. Again, there are many systems available commercially, from small and compact to enormous. But you probably have quite a few things around already that can be used successfully: the cell packs and small pots from last year's plant purchases (wash these well before using in case of any plant diseases -- a bit of bleach in the water is recommended); yogurt and other small plastic containers only need some holes poked in the bottom for drainage; cut off milk and juice cartons (again, drainage holes), and even the clear containers that strawberries etc. come in can be used -- leave the lid on these and use during the germination phase. The fruit containers are especially good for larger seeds/plants. Peat pots seem like a great idea, but in reality only the most robust plant roots will be able to push their way through them. Styrofoam trays are good to use underneath the pots, as are the trays from

window boxes, or cookie sheets with rims. What you end up using will depend on your space, the seeds you choose to grow, and how "mobile" your system might need to be. And remember: label those containers! Last year's melons were cucumbers!

Some possibilities for increasing the amount of light if using a window are to put the pots in a deep aluminum roasting pan (you could plant directly in the pan if you punch drain holes - mark a grid in the soil so you can later cut it into chunks with your seedlings), or make your own by lining a box with aluminum foil. If that's too bulky, cover a sheet of cardboard with foil and prop it behind the seeds so the window light is reflected back at them.

Grow medium: buy sterile seed-starting mix. You can mix your own, but for a small setup, it's probably not worth the effort. Fill your containers to about 1/4 inch from the top. Firm the mix, but don't compact it. Water it lightly (a mister is useful for this since it won't disturb the seeds). Then follow the planting directions for your seeds. The seeds now need extra warmth to germinate, and must be kept moist (not soggy!) until they do. If your containers had lids, they can be used, or put plastic wrap over them. Make sure there is space between the cover and the soil. Check every day, and as soon as the seed has started to sprout, put it in its spot in the light and remove the cover.

Once your seedlings have come up, they might need to be thinned. Snip off the ones to be removed rather than trying to pull them out. Keep an eye on them at this stage as damping off disease can be a problem. This is a fungal disease and can be exacerbated by too cold and too wet conditions. Some suggestions on guarding against it are to spread a thin layer of milled sphagnum moss (NOT peat moss) on top of the soil, or even a layer of vermiculite. Your seedlings can also be strengthened and air circulation improved if you set up a small fan to blow over them for 10 or 15 minutes. This time can be increased as the seedlings grow, and will also help harden them. Just running your hands over them gently will also help with the strengthening process, although it won't do much for the air circulation.

About a week before your seedlings are to be planted in the garden, they will need to be introduced to the harsh cruel world. Take them outside to a sheltered, shaded area, beginning with an hour, and leaving them longer each day.



A screened porch is a good place, or under a tree or against the house. Don't leave them in the full sun at first, and make sure they don't dry out. Don't take them out if really bad weather is expected! And when the great day for planting out comes, it's easiest on your seedlings if it's overcast and mild.

The part of seed-starting that many find most difficult is the timing. There are now internet sites where you can put in the last frost date for your area and the site will generate dates for seed starting and/or direct sowing. Two that I have found useful are from "The Old Farmer's Almanac" www.almanac.com (a list of the vegetable garden standards, which also includes best moon dates -- a whole other article!) and Johnny's Selected Seeds www.johnnyseeds.com with a list that also includes annuals. Another great reference is a handout from a talk on vegetable gardening which Cynthia Brown of Green Spring Gardens Park gave last year. Best quick lesson from that: the Asian cabbages do better as fall plantings in this area as they tend to bolt at the first heat.

While these tables are useful, they still require translation into a real schedule. To make this as easy as possible, I have created calendar pages with the plants and their planting dates entered. These pages are available as a pdf on the Hort website (see **NOTE** below).

This leaves the most difficult task of all: deciding which seeds to try! The best advice came from a farm market grower: grow what you spend the most on.

NOTE: Eileen's planting calendar, adapted from material by Cynthia Brown, can be found at http://www.takomahort.org/information/what_to_plant_when.pdf Photo this page Eileen Schramm

*Comments on and contributions for the
THC News can be sent to the Editor,
dbsvenonius@msn.com*

(Plot, continued)

year volunteer at Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens, and a Master Gardener since 2007. And while I've only been a club member since 2008, I've been doing my best to immerse myself in club activities ever since, starting with the website. This resulted not from a coup d'état, but rather because our long-serving webmaster Karen Helfert was ready to pass on the keyboard. One of my focuses for 2011 is to keep the website a vibrant, engaging place for members and non-members alike to visit. Kudos, critiques, and ideas for improvement will be more than welcome; please send them to me at the Webmaster address, THC_webmaster@yahoo.com. We've got our usual line-up of terrific events scheduled for this year (two potlucks, two plant exchanges, local garden tours, etc), new programs (look for our own local farmer, Charlie Koiner, to be spotlighted at the March meeting with a viewing of his film), and lots more! I look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events, and hearing your thoughts about your club!

Sherrell Goggin

President, Takoma Horticultural Club

WELCOME...

...to our newest members: **Lisa Orr, Diane Glisson and Barbara Schubert**. At our delicious Potluck, 16 members paid their dues, Barbara joined as a Life Member, and **Sharon Cohen** became a Life Member! Welcome back, **Carol Hooks**. We look forward to seeing you all at our upcoming THC events. Thanks!



Dining out at the Winter Potluck and Plant Exchange

Dues Ditty

Our membership list impresses with 182-

Including Life Membership, numbering 42!

Forty six paid 2011 dues - and that's very fine.

But the embarrassing number is 89 - They have paid not their dues on time!

Ditty aside, if you are one of the "89'ers", please consider staying in the club and pay your 2011 dues. Send me a \$12 check made out to THC and that will do the trick! Remember, at least half of our THC club events are for Members Only. Feel free to include verse with your check, if you are inspired. Winter can be very long for gardeners!

Send to: *Carole Galati, 106 Melbourne Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20901*

Mt. Cuba Center Trip with Beltsville Garden Club

Yes, Dorothy, there really is a spring! And with it comes our 2nd annual spring garden trip with the Beltsville Garden Club. This all-day bus trip to Mt. Cuba is on Thursday, April 28. We will leave from Beltsville at 7:15am and return by 6:00pm. Check out www.mtcubacenter.org to learn all about Mt. Cuba in northern Delaware.

Our trip will include a guided tour of Mt. Cuba, lunch at a local restaurant and a chance to splurge at Gateway Nursery. All this plus drinks and snacks on the bus for only \$65!

Please use the form on page 6 of this newsletter to register. Fill it out completely, especially your cell number.

This might come in very handy the day of our trip. Our trip last year had a waiting list, so don't procrastinate!

Questions? Let me know: cagalati@rcn.com

Thanks to Katharine Lambert for potluck photos this page and next.

**THC Officers, Committee Chairs,
and Contacts**

President: *Sherrell Goggin*

Vice Pres: *Carole Galati*

Listserv: *Anne Hardman*

Membership & Program Coordinator:
Carole Galati

Newsletter: *Diane Svenonius*

Public Relations: *Kathy Jentz*

Secretary: *Becky Lavash*

Treasurer: *Taffy Turner*

Webmasters: *Karen Helfert &
Sherrell Goggin*

SAVE THE DATE!

**THC's March 16 Meeting features
David Vismara of Montgomery County
Parks on Community Gardens**

For orchid lovers this month....

The annual **Smithsonian-US Botanic Gardens Orchid Exhibit** continues through April 24 at the National Museum of Natural History. This year's theme is "Orchids, a View from the East" and focuses on orchids in Chinese art and culture. In conjunction with the show, there is an art exhibit at the Freer/Sackler Galleries of "The Orchid in Chinese Painting".

Be sure to check out the Orchid Exhibit Family Day from 11am to 3pm on Saturday, Feb.26, with activities for kids and adults. Go to <http://www.mnh.si.edu/exhibits/orchids/> for more information.

Brookside Gardens

Green Matters Symposium

Feb. 25, 8:30 am to 4 pm

Visitors' Center Auditorium

Taoma Hort helps sponsor this annual event. This year's theme Real Food Renaissance, focuses on the growing number of grassroots efforts to encourage Americans to eat "Real Food." Registration and fee information at www.BrooksideGreen.org

**Rooting DC 2011! 4th Annual Forum for
Urban Gardening**

Coolidge High School, 6315 5th St. NW, DC

Whether you're new to gardening or an experienced green thumb who wants to explore the role of gardens in our community, Rooting DC has something for you! This year we will be taking a close look at schoolyard and youth gardening, as well as workshops on gardening basics, roundtable conversations, cooking demonstrations an information fair to connect you to DC's Field to Fork Network, and more!

Green Spring Gardens Park

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/lectures-w11.htm>

Creating Garden Habitats, Big and Small

February 13, 1:30 pm

Wildlife habitats are lost to urban development at an alarming rate. Sustainable landscaper Catherine Zimmerman shows how you can help solve this problem by creating beautiful and sustainable habitats in your own garden. Book sale and signing to follow

Lovely Low-Maintenance Gardens

February 19, 10:30 am

Start gardening smarter, not harder. Brenda Skarphol, Green Spring curatorial horticulturist leads you to marvelous, multi-season plant combinations and eco-friendly gardening techniques that make your garden more beautiful while reducing your maintenance needs. This is a beautiful way to spend a winter morning.



After dinner, taking turns at the plant exchange

Mt. Cuba Center Garden Tour

Thursday, April 28, 2011

Beltsville Garden Club & Takoma Horticultural Club

Invite You to Join Us for Our Annual Spring Trip to Mt. Cuba (Northern DE)

(www.mtcubacenter.org)

Cost is \$65 per person which includes coach bus transportation, guided tour of the gardens, lunch at Back Burner Restaurant, snacks/drinks on the bus and a side trip to Gateway Nursery.

Meet the bus at 7:15 a.m., in the Calverton Towers Office Building Parking Lot, 11785 Beltsville Drive, Beltsville (just past the shopping center; office building has a blue roof). We will leave at **7:30 am sharp** and return by 6 p.m. Deadline for registration is **Monday, April 18, 2011**. For information, contact Sandy Lange at 301.474.1402, (cell: 301-802-1246), email: salange1940@yahoo.com or Carole Galati at 301.442.2023, email: cagalati@rcn.com

SAVE THIS INFORMATION. YOU MAY NEED OUR CELL NUMBERS THE DAY OF THE TRIP.

~ TRIP ITINERARY ~

7:15 a.m. Board Bus
7:30 a.m. Bus Departs Beltsville
10:00 a.m. Tour of Mt. Cuba Center
12:30 p.m. Lunch at Back Burner Restaurant
2:00 p.m. Gateway Nursery to Shop
3:30 p.m. Depart Nursery
6:00 p.m. Return to Beltsville

Cut on the dotted line below, fill out the form **completely** and mail with your check.

Name(s) _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Total Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Garden Club/Affiliation: _____

Make check (\$65 per person) payable to: **Beltsville Garden Club (BGC)**

Mail this form & your check to:

Sandy Lange 12 Pinecrest Court Greenbelt, MD 20770