



# TAKOMA HORTICULTURAL CLUB NEWS

January, 2011 Edition

[www.takomahort.org](http://www.takomahort.org)



## HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

### FEBRUARY CLUB MEETING

*Bill McLaughlin, Plant Curator  
U.S. Botanical Garden  
will speak on designing and planting  
The National Garden  
Watch for details at [www.takomahort.org](http://www.takomahort.org)*

### January Club Event

### **Member Pot Luck and Indoor Plant Exchange**

*Wednesday, January 19 at  
Heffner Park Community Center,  
42 Oswego Ave. (off Ritchie Ave.)*

Make plans to join your fellow THC members for our fabulous Potluck & Indoor Plant Exchange. Join us around 6:30 p.m. for appetizers and chat and we will have dinner around 7 p.m.

Bring your favorite hearty main dish, salad, side dish or yummy dessert! No need to coordinate, you are all great cooks, and never disappoint! As usual, the club will provide beverages.

Do however, let us know if you plan to attend--our prep volunteers would like to know how many people are coming, so we can be sure that we have enough chairs.

Heffner has a kitchen with a sink, a microwave and a cook top but no oven, so if you need to heat up your dish, think about the pan being able to fit in the microwave or be heated up on a burner. Bring a serving utensil for

*(See Pot Luck and Plant Exchange, page 2)*

### In this Issue...

#### **Natural Gas Not So Hot**

#### **For Local Trees.... see page 3**

Natural gas, leaking from old corroded pipes under the street, may have caused the demise of trees in Forest Glen. Could this be happening in Takoma Park?

**... while a Garbage Cocktail might be just the thing.... page 2**

**Applications are being taken  
for the National Capital Watershed  
Academy.... page 2**

**but first pay your dues.... page 4**

**...and feed the birds.... page 4**

The THC News is published monthly to the THC listserv and at [www.takomahort.org](http://www.takomahort.org). Contributions and comments are welcome. Contact Diane Svenonius, [dbsvenonius@msn.com](mailto:dbsvenonius@msn.com)

*(Pot Luck and Plant Exchange,, continued)*  
your dish.

Following dinner will be our Indoor Plant Exchange. Bring an indoor plant if you have one you're willing to part with. Otherwise, how about those great garden catalogs that have begun to arrive? Or, bring extra garden tools, gloves, pots, books, or magazines to share with fellow gardeners.

If you have questions or would like to help, contact me at

[anne.hardman@gmail.com](mailto:anne.hardman@gmail.com)

\_\_\_Anne >^..^<



## National Capital Watershed Academy Invites Applicants

Past THC presidents Kit Gage and Wendy Bell announced that the National Capital Region Watershed Stewards Academy is accepting applications for its first 12-session course, which will begin in March. The classes will be held at the University of Maryland College Park campus. Applications must be filed by January 10, 2011.

The course is designed to empower students to guide the members of their communities in changing the way they handle storm water. Those who complete the course, and undertake a “Capstone Project”-- as part of a 2 to 4-person team-- to reduce pollution and runoff at its source, will become Master Watershed Stewards.

Information about the course and its requirements, and an application form, are available at [www.ncr-wsa.org](http://www.ncr-wsa.org).

## Love That Garbage!

\_\_\_by Carole Galati



In the absence of any inspirational thoughts about my frozen garden, I thought maybe there would be room for some garbage in the newsletter! Yes, garbage is on my winter mind. I have a somewhat bizarre view of garbage -- I love it, welcome it, and use it wisely. Since critters starting digging up my buried garbage (Garbage Plan A) years ago, I began evolving a Garbage Plan B. Yes, rats will eat anything and they are great diggers! So I started putting my garbage in the blender with water and making a pea soup type of mixture. Egg shells do fine. No meat, fish, mushrooms or cheese tidbits allowed. These all seem to create odor problems eventually.

I still had a problem in winter as the ground froze up. Chopping into frozen soil is very hard on aging shoulders. But I think a Winter Garbage Recycling Program has evolved. Around the end of November, I dug two large holes, each about 18” deep and at least 12” across. These are in my soil mixing area, so digging is easy before the ground freezes up. I covered these holes with an old piece of plywood. The soil seems to stay loose and does not freeze down in the holes. When I blend my winter mix I use very hot water and a thinner mixture. This perks easily down in the holes. I mix it up a bit, just for fun. (Because I can?) And then I put the board back over the holes. I’m hoping having two holes will get me through the winter. Stay tuned! Between recycling newspapers, cans, glass, plastic bags and most of my garbage, (plus a tiny bit of hoarding), I only have a small bag of trash to put out each week. Oh, and I put all meat and fish trimmings in the  
*(See Garbage, bottom of p. 3)*

## Gas Leaks Damage Trees in Forest Glen Neighborhood

Natural gas, leaking from old corroded pipes under the street, can rob nearby trees of needed oxygen and cause them to deteriorate and die. A leak too small to affect people's health can harm trees over time. Trees affected by leaking gas may display thin canopy with branches dying back from their tips, and sometimes dead patches of ground near the base of their trunks.

In August, Barbara Schubert, president of the Forest Glen Park Citizens' Association (FPGA) noticed a number of dead trees along Woodley Avenue with bare spots appearing on the ground around them. She thought first of drought or disease, but then learned that some towns near Boston were finding natural gas under their sick and dead trees. The Massachusetts Public Shade Tree Trust formed to address a seeming epidemic of leak-sickened trees, and a firm, Gas Safety, Inc. discovered more than 500 such trees in Newton, MA alone. "Then it clicked for me," said Schubert. "We have had gas leaks throughout our neighborhood for at least five years. There are metal plates or vent holes all along those streets with the dead trees."

In 2007, the *Washington Post* noted "Natural gas contaminates the soil with methane, causing methane-consuming bacteria to multiply and suck up the oxygen in the soil. That interrupts the crucial exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between the soil and air; methane, carbon dioxide...and other components in natural gas build up and contaminate the tree's roots."<sup>1</sup>

Todd Bolton, Takoma Park City Arborist, says that he's not aware of any cluster of trees within the city limits that have displayed symptoms suggesting gas contamination, and that Takoma Park's tree removal data comprises too small a sample to make a determination about cause and effect.

However Bolton confirmed that gas exposure can harm trees, and said that recently a gas leak led to the removal of a large white oak just outside the city limits. A larger data base, like the County's, might be sufficiently rich to identify possible problem areas, for example by comparing tree removal rates in areas with housing built in the 40s and 50s, with those of newer neighborhoods.

The FPGA raised money to pay for the Gas Leaks, Inc. expert Robert Ackley to test on Woodley Avenue. He found contamination there and in other places in Forest Glen. Armed with his report, Schubert contacted county officials and with the help of Valerie Ervin's office met with a representative of Washington Gas. Although expressing little interest in her data, Washington Gas shortly afterward expanded a project to replace pipes in Forest Glen to include the entire Forest Glen Park neighborhood, and the County removed more than a dozen mature trees and replaced them with new young trees at taxpayer expense.

Ms. Schubert is convinced that this could be happening in other areas, such as tree-rich Takoma Park. She says she was told that no applicable law or regulation made the utility responsible for harm to trees; there seemed to be no agency whose job was to address the problem even when she had evidence in hand.

Mr. Ackley, the specialist, will be in our area in March and would be willing to bring equipment for testing if there is interest. He can be reached at [www.gassafetyusa.com](http://www.gassafetyusa.com). Barbara Schubert can be contacted at [fanschu@aol.com](mailto:fanschu@aol.com). To read more, see the Trust's web site [www.MPSTT.org](http://www.MPSTT.org)

### ***(Garbage, continued)***

freezer until trash day. I've done this ever since I found two baby raccoons in my trash can, noshing on salmon leavings. Ain't nature great?! My garden loves the garbage fertilizer and the worms do too!

PS. A foot or three of snow will send me back to the drawing board to begin work on Plan C!

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<sup>1</sup> "Trust Targets Gas Leaks That Kill Trees", Washington Post, March 26 2007

## Season of Renewal Continues!

—by Carole Galati

It is January, 2011. Can you believe it?? It is time to pay your THC dues, if you have not already done so. Our dues cover the calendar year and go from January 1 to December 31. Here are some updated membership facts: only 25 have paid their 2011 dues, but we have an additional 38 Life Time members, which means 63 people are paid up for 2011. That leaves 104 current (2010) members who have not paid their 2011 dues. These are due by the end of January. If you are one of those 104 people, you can mail your \$12 check, made out to THC, to: Carole Galati, 106 Melbourne Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20901. If you are not sure, send me an email and I will let you know.

([cagalati@rcn.com](mailto:cagalati@rcn.com))

Welcome to **Betsy Slack**, **Chris Lancette**, and **Kati Nolfi**, our newest members. And our long-time member **Eileen Schramm** is now a Life Time Member!! Welcome and thank you! We wish you all a Happy New Year.

P.S. Our Potluck on January 19 is Members Only. You can renew or join the THC at the Potluck but you must pay by check. There will be no cash transactions at the Potluck.

## For the Birds

Barbara Runion, a former neighbor of the editor, kindly agreed to share this Hyattsville listserv post. Having attracted birds to your yard (see December issue), here's how to keep them healthy for the winter.

Birds may seem to enjoy stale bread, but bread to a hungry bird is like popcorn to a hungry human. Lots of filler, but no real nutritional value. In addition, any food source left on the ground can attract undesirables such as rodents.

You can purchase birdfeeders at garden shops and some department stores. Ensure the birdfeeder is "squirrel-proof." My family have had luck with tube birdfeeders with a metal top/bottom and perching posts. If you don't have a tree from which to hang the bird feeder, a metal pole can be purchased and placed into the ground with brackets to hang feeders.

If squirrels are a problem, you can purchase a corn cob squirrel feeder for your yard.

When purchasing birdseed, read the label. The primary ingredients should be sunflower seeds (black oil sunflower seeds are preferred), millet and cracked corn providing protein and nutrition. Grocery stores mostly sell cheap seed mixes. If wheat, barley and milo are the main ingredients, buy your seed elsewhere. We add extra sunflower seeds for additional protein to help the birds survive the cold. We also purchase many jars of unsalted shelled peanuts on sale and unsalted peanuts in the shell at the grocery store which are enjoyed by cardinals, blue jays, various woodpeckers and other birds. To keep the birds healthy, wash the feeders monthly. This can be done with a light (9:1) water to bleach solution. Rinse thoroughly and allow to air dry.

Surprisingly, offering water is the single most important resource you can give birds in the winter, when most ponds and water sources are frozen. Birds expend a great deal of energy in the cold months searching for water. You'll also get a greater diversity of birds coming to your yard. Birdbath heaters, generally a simple copper element placed in the birdbath and plugged into an outdoor electrical extension cord, can be purchased from Internet suppliers.

(In warmer months, for hummingbirds, don't buy the red nectar found in stores, which contains harmful dyes. Make your own by mixing ¼ c. sugar and 1 c. water in a jar until the sugar is dissolved; pour it into a clean hummingbird or oriole feeder.)

There is a wealth of information about providing food, water and habitat for birds on the Internet. (For example see <http://birds.audubon.org/selecting-seeds> Ed.) We have documented over 75 different bird species in our yard and derive great pleasure in providing for the birds and watching them in action.

## *Gardening Events of Interest in the Community*

### **Brookside Gardens**

1800 Glenallan Avenue, Wheaton, MD

#### **Sixth Annual Seed Exchange**

January 29, 12:30-4:00 pm

Sponsored by *Washington Gardener Magazine*  
Visitors Center Auditorium

Register: [www.washingtongardener.com](http://www.washingtongardener.com)

#### **Green Matters Symposium February 25**

For 2011, Brookside tackles another food-related topic. *The Real Food Renaissance* will call attention to the growing number of local, regional and national grassroots efforts to encourage Americans to eat “**Real Food.**” From school systems serving local food in cafeterias and involving kids in growing school gardens to high profile chefs committed to changing the way we eat and think about where our food comes from, we’re experiencing a culinary renaissance. Look for more details:

[http://montgomeryparks.org/brookside/green\\_matters\\_symposium.shtm](http://montgomeryparks.org/brookside/green_matters_symposium.shtm)

### **U.S. Botanical Garden**

#### **Mid-Day in the Garden of Good and Evil: Medicinal and Poison Plants Tour**

January 11, 12 noon - 1 pm

Conservatory Garden Court

Biochemist Beth Burroughs will talk about famous, and sometimes fatal cases of poisoning by plants... and about plants used to make life-saving medicines. Free, no registration. Repeats February 8, same time & place.

### **Audubon Naturalist Society**

#### **A Year at Boundary Bridge**

##### **January 29 and three other dates.**

Melanie Choukas-Bradley, author of “City of Trees” will repeat her series of four walks (one in each season) on a 2.5 mile loop in the Boundary Bridge area of Rock Creek Park. The winter walk is an ideal time to admire the park’s topography, look and listen for winter flocks, and identify many species of woody plants. Each walk is \$25 for members, \$35 for non-members, discounted for additional walks.

<http://melaniechoukas-bradley.com/schedule.php>



### **U.S. National Arboretum**

#### **Perfect Conifers for Urban Gardens and Containers**

##### **January 29, 1pm - 3 pm**

Conifers provide striking color and form in your small garden or container during the winter. Learn which ones are perfect for your landscape’s size and style. The arboretum is home of one of the finest collections of dwarf conifers in the world, the Gotelli Collection of Dwarf and Slow-Growing Conifers. Our horticulturist will start this program with a brief presentation inside and then guide you through the collection, where you will learn about the great diversity of these winter gems and how you can use them in your garden. Rain date February 5. Fee: \$12 /\$10 Registration required.

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/registration.html>

### **Washington Gardener Magazine**

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Annual Photo Contest**

Between now and January 22, submit garden photos taken in calendar 2010 in four categories. For rules see

<http://issuu.com/washingtongardener/docs/wgphotocontestrules10/1>

### **Green Spring Gardens**

[www.greenspring.org](http://www.greenspring.org)

4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria VA

#### **Basic Gardening: Lush Feathery Ferns**

January 7, 1:30 pm

#### **Basic Gardening: Roses, Glorious Roses**

January 22, 1:30 pm

Conducted by Master Gardeners