

Takoma Horticultural Club

A hardy perennial since 1916



March 2017

Hot Stuff: Compost!

Larry Himelfarb and Dennis May

Wednesday, March 15, 2017, 7:30pm

Historic Takoma, Inc., 7328 Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park

Larry Himelfarb and Dennis May are Montgomery County Master Gardeners, certified Master Composters and Takoma Park residents. They do composting in a big way for the large Master Gardener Demonstration Garden in Derwood Md., as well as in their own gardens. If you wonder whether your compost is as good as it could be, want to use your leaves and food waste, an impress the neighbors with a “really hot pile” come listen and ask questions at their presentation on Wednesday, March 15 at Historic Takoma.

This talk is free and open to the public. Doors open at 7 p.m. and the talk begins at 7:30. Bring a snack to share and a nametag!

Tips on Growing Edibles in Difficult Spaces

A lively and involved crowd assembled for the club’s February meeting which featured Meredith Sheperd’s talk on “Gardening in Unpromising Spaces”, drawn from fifteen years of experience in organic gardening. Her firm, Love and Carrots (“Coolest New Business” in DC for 2014) has developed hundreds of gardens and maintains about 120 with bi-weekly visits.

Some highlights: With 8 hours of sunlight, you’re ok to grow most edibles: fruits, herbs, greens and so on. If less—say 6–8 hours, you can reliably grow cherry tomatoes but not big ones, greens



Meredith Sheperd’s talk to a full house. Photo: Diane Svenonius.

such as chard, kale, collards, and many herbs. At 4–6, fruiting vegetables drop out, but herbs and greens, red Osaka mustard, winter lettuces and berries will succeed. Pots for crops need to be large. An oval metal cattle trough, with holes drilled at one end, makes a good bed with drip irrigation and soil mounded up like a bread loaf. (Her firm uses an intriguing but expensive gadget called the “Solar Pathfinder” to tell where and when sun hits an entire yard or plot).

For small spaces or a mostly paved yard, use raised beds, and keep paths to 18 inches wide (you can sit on the edge of one and weed the other, she says). “Progressive thinning” (thin plants so they are touching but not crowding) promotes growth. Grow upward: tomatoes on cattle fence, Romanesco squash, jade beans, shishito peppers will thrive on trellises. Run a squash vine along the top of a fence or deck, where it can seek out more light. You can place a “rusted wire” trellis against a brick wall and attach vining plants, or put quick growing plants under slow-growing ones, i.e. leafy greens under kale, cilantro under pepper plants.

—Diane Svenonius

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Public Gardens in Oahu—A Winter Visit

In December, my family went on a vacation to Australia with a short stopover in Oahu to help us adjust to the time zone changes. We wanted to focus on nature on our trip—gardens, wildlands, and wildlife. We had three exciting and exhausting weeks, seeing new plants and animals and learning to drive on the left side of the road. No one was injured by our driving. We stayed on Oahu for 5 days and started out with the gardens and ocean near the equator.

Oahu is only 20 degrees latitude north of the equator so its days and nights are close to equal and the temperatures rarely waver from the 60–80 range. We saw many palms and native vines and flowers, as well as imported plants provided to show a full range of specimens in public gardens. We visited the Koko Crater, Ho’omaluhia Botanic Garden, and Foster Botanic Gardens.



Above: Cycad Garden at Foster Gardens.
Right: Heliconia Standleyi flowers.



after a morning rain so the red clay of the crater was wet and slippery. Many local residents use this garden for their evening exercise, walking through the Plumeria and palm forests, focused on their feet instead of the trees. The plumeria were finishing up their bloom period during our visit and had lost most of their leaves. Like the Foster Garden, Koko Crater has non-native specimen trees as well as natives.



Ho’omaluhia Botanical Garden is in the rainforest in the volcanic mountains of Oahu. This garden was built by the Army Corps of Engineers to provide flood control for the eastern side of Oahu. This is a true rain forest, rain storms come up and pass several times per day and the forest floor is slippery, mossy, and muddy. Ho’omaluhia is a specimen garden with tropical plants from all over the Pacific and Africa: Polynesia, Sri Lanka, India, Africa and tropical America.

This popular park has miles of touring roads, picnic pavilions, a fishing pond, and limited paved hiking trails. President Obama visited Ho’omaluhia on his most recent visit to Oahu.

Next month, I will write about the gardens we visited in Australia.
—Text and photos: Becky Lavash

Plumeria flowers.



Above: entrance to Foster Botanic Gardens—poinsettias and bird’s nest ferns. Left: the author, dwarfed by a kapok tree — Ceiba Pentandra.

Foster Botanic Garden was originally the 14-acre estate of a wealthy family, established in 1853. The garden is full of enormous trees, many planted right at the time the garden was established. It was split in half when the H1 Interstate was built in 1959, and you can hear interstate noise in some parts of the garden.

The garden is primarily an arboretum with native and non-native plants. The garden did not seem to be highly visited but was beautiful with lovely lawns and mature tree specimens. This downtown Honolulu garden is worth visiting and has easy parking.

A list for all the tropical birds that live there is provided. We spent an entire afternoon walking in the garden, photographing the birds, and learning about the plants.

Koko Crater Botanical Garden, also in Honolulu, is a dry garden planted in an ancient volcanic crater. We visited in the afternoon