

TAKOMA HORTICULTURAL CLUB (THC)
Newsletter for March 2009

www.takomahort.org

WELCOME to the Takoma Horticultural Club (THC) monthly newsletter, which we hope is a useful resource for you about Club news, events and garden-related items of interest.

Upcoming THC Events

Wednesday, March 18 , 2009

THC March Meeting, 7:30 pm

Takoma Park Community Center Auditorium, 7500 Maple Avenue, Takoma Park, MD

If you dream of a lush tropical paradise, come to the THC March meeting to learn how to create the tropics in your own backyard. Wednesday, March 18 the Takoma Horticultural Club hosts Joe Seamone (aka Boca Joe) who will discuss plant selection, care and overwintering. Boca Joe has many years experience growing hardy palms and bananas, and other exotics like elephant ears and gingers. The meeting will be held in Auditorium of the Takoma Park Community Center; 7500 Maple Ave. Takoma Park, MD We suggest that you park in the back of the Community Center, off East West Highway. Bring a recycled nametag or we can supply one. This event is free and open to the public. You are encouraged to bring a check for \$12 if to join or renew your 2009 club membership

Thursday, March 19, 2009

Rain Garden Talk, 7:30 pm

Takoma Sammy Abbott City Building

What should you do when you have standing water in your yard, or worse, in your basement? Get it to the street as fast as possible, right? It's time to rethink that solution. The bay-friendly solution is to keep more rain in your yard, slow its flow, and let it soak in to your yard away from your house. Rain gardens, rain barrels, more native plants and trees and less grass, and perhaps some permeable pavement or terracing could be in your future to facilitate those changes. What's a rain garden? It's a hole in the ground with the mostly clay soil dug out and replaced with a more sandy soil mixture and native plants, that helps hold rainwater in your yard (and limit pollution flow into the creek and your need to water). On a large scale, it will help restore healthy watershed functioning. It's the start of a process of change in peoples' stormwater management practices - a visible symbol of that change to more native plantings and less grass. In tree-rich Takoma, it's a concentrated way to help manage rain in a Chesapeake Bay friendly way. We'll talk about why and how you can change your yard flood control practices to limit swimming pools in your yard, and rivers running down the street and into Sligo Creek. The Stormwater Committee of Friends of Sligo Creek has received a generous grant from the Takoma Foundation, in conjunction with CASA de Maryland, and working with the

Takoma Park Committee on the Environment and Audubon Naturalist Society. We will do this presentation, as well as talks with other Takoma neighborhood associations, and training of workers to learn how to dig rain gardens. We then will help site a few rain gardens and other fixes to neighborhood flooding areas. Come on March 19th, and contact Kit Gage at kgage@verizon.net to set up a meeting with your neighborhood association this spring. Do it soon – we have limited meeting time availability - first come, first served.

Report on Past THC Events

Our February 18th meeting featured a talk by University of Maryland Graduate Assistant, Ellery Krause. She works as Paula Shrewsbury's research assistant in the Entomology Dept. She spoke to us about insects: identification and control. She presented information about the beneficial insects and the harmful ones. Having a very diverse garden is the best way to encourage the beneficial predatory insects. With this diversity, you encourage the beneficial insects to keep the harmful ones under control. You couldn't come away from the presentation not knowing the difference between bag worms and tent caterpillars! The 25 + attendees enjoyed an informative question and answer discussion. Information about many Spring gardening events was also announced.

Membership Update

Please Renew Your Annual THC Membership for 2009 or Join The Club Anew!

We want to welcome James Kocornik-Mina, who joined THC in January. Our membership list contains about 180 names. Forty six people have paid their 2009 dues ~ Thank You! More than 110 have not paid their 2009 dues, which were due February 1. We also have 20 Life Time members, who never have to pay dues again! If you are one of the 110 "2008" members, please activate your membership by paying your \$12 dues. Go to the "Join THC" link for renew/join information. www.takomahort.org Membership questions? Please contact Carole Galati at cagalati@rcn.com.

IN THE GARDEN by Madeline Caliendo:

This month I am pleased to share, with permission, a reprint of an article by Jeri Metz entitled, "[The Fruits of My Labor, 10 Lessons From The Summer Garden.](#)" This article was originally published on-line at www.startingover.it, a website dedicated to living a simpler and smaller life. Jeri is a friend of mine who moved from her small urban farm in Cabin John, Maryland to Spello, Italy in in the country's Umbrian region. Jeri publishes a monthly subscription-only newsletter available through her website, www.startingover.it. The newsletter is simplicity oriented with a heavy emphasis on gardening and growing food. This article I am sharing with you is from the November 2008 issue and offers insights from Jeri's many years gardening both here in the DC area and in Italy.

Unfortunately, I was unable to include the lush photos that accompanied Jeri's article, due to technical difficulties and my limited IT skills. Enjoy the article!

Jeri' Metz's Article:

***THE FRUITS OF MY LABOR: 10 LESSONS FROM THE SUMMER GARDEN
LIVING IN ITALY*** by Jeri Metz

Fall takes her sweet time sashaying into Umbria. Not until ovember do I need a jacket during the day, now that the previously insistent sunny mornings are overwhelmed by a thick fog. It rolls in and hangs out until February, transforming Spello into a damp Brigadoon. We wear neck scarves now, no matter what the weather. They are to ward off sore throats and influenza and I am required by village etiquette to put one on or my neighbors will worry that I will be felled by pneumonia. The temperatures stay resolutely in the high forties at night, allowing me to continue growing a massive number of vegetables. But, regardless of the wealth of greens, it is time for reflection. Once All Hallows Eve is seen cresting on the horizon, I take stock of my harvest, in the most literal as well as the philosophical sense. I linger over my morning tea longer these days, contemplating the generosity of nature as well as where she was withholding while I stare at day-glo orange persimmons outside my window.

GROWING A GARDEN:

TEN THINGS I LEARNED FROM MY SUMMER GARDEN

The following is a list I continue to add to and re-evaluate every year over the second cup of morning tea. (The first cup is just for fragrant warmth while I sit and appreciate the view.) Some thoughts may be familiar from my earlier pieces, but I refine them as I age and look for short cuts to save energy, time and money. For those who want lots of specifics, I will post them on the website when I burrow in during the bone chilling dampness of January and February.

1. GROW WHAT THE NEIGHBORS GROW. This is THE cardinal rule for beginning a garden, for the first time or in a new area. Look over the fence, check out the front yards when you take a walk, talk with the neighbors. Find out which locally grown plants (and the specific species) are successful with the minimum of effort and where they can be purchased. (Your best resource will be the oldest gardening neighbors on the block... the ones pushing wheelbarrows, not riding on mowers.). Check with the native plant society of your state and connect with the local chapter. They will know all the plants that will thrive in the region, are abundant, and waterwise. They will also have a list of the local native plant nurseries on their website. (They may have plants to give away.) Start with something simple and ask the neighbors how to grow it. They will love giving advice. The fruit above is from an ancient Chinese tree in our garden, Ziziphus jujuba or red date. Two Januarys ago, my neighbors stopped me from cutting it down, assuring me that the small naked tree in the corner of my yard had great beauty and delicious fruit. It is a beautiful tree, requiring zero care, with no apparent pests. Ziziphus grows in a wide

variety of conditions (see Nuts and Bolts) and has survived this past summer's drought to provide fruit for months. (And, after three months, it still continues to do so.)

2. COVER YOUR BASES: GROW MORE THAN ONE SPECIES OF A DESIRED PLANT. GROW A RANGE OF PLANTS WITH DIFFERENT MOISTURE REQUIREMENTS.

We live now with enormous fluctuations in our weather patterns, with unpredictable droughts and deluges during vital food-growing seasons. I have found that as long as I have a mix of species that thrive on dry soil, wet soil or can go either way, I always have food, flowers and herbs in the summer garden, no matter if we have ninety degree days or hail. (I had both this summer.) I have had years when the beans were infested with Mexican bean beetles and years were they were the hardiest plants in the entire garden. The seeds were the same, only the amount of rainfall changed. If you are growing tomatoes, select standard hardy varieties of cherries and romas, and mix in some heirloom Brandywine with the hybrid beefsteaks. Mix them in with other plants. At least one will be productive. In dry spells, plant close together to conserve moisture. In wet, and particularly flooding conditions, established perennials have a better chance of making it. Fruits seem to fare best in adverse times. There are small fruits which produce abundantly whether or not it rains—like easy-to-grow raspberries, blackberries and figs.

3. COMPOST EVERYTHING FROM THE KITCHEN... AND THEN SOME

Toss out all the "should nots" you have heard in the past about what to put in the compost. Anything you have used in the cooking process, from coffee grounds to fish heads, will decompose and contribute to healthier soil. If you have something questionable—meat scraps and bones, eggs shells, anything you think might lure a rampaging creature into your compost bin—bury it in the earth. Dig a hole in the garden or stash it in a flower pot, somewhere it will decompose fast and have no odor. If you have a great deal of acidic food—coffee grounds and orange peels—compost them with eggshells or bones, something with calcium for neutralizing the acidity. You can toss in all garden refuse, pet waste and cut flowers.

QUICK COMPOSTING: I have always raised chickens alongside my garden. I cover the finished compost mounds with a thick shell of chicken manure (mixed with sawdust or soil, whatever I was using on the coop floor at the time). My kitchen garbage turned to soil in one to two months, depending on the rainfall—compost needs to stay damp and warm to decay quickly. Previously, I used tarps to cover the pile from flies, heat it up quickly and contain the moisture but in our very wet autumn, I discovered that the chicken manure sped up decomposition, there was no odor, and the pile grew hot within a few days from the rampant bacteria that proliferated with the manure.

I spread out cardboard and collected all my neighbors' garbage, which I piled on top. I asked them for a mix of wet and dry. (They tossed in paper towels, napkins and cardboard.) When the piles were about two feet high, I covered them with manure, then soil and left them to sit in the spring rains. In June I spread the compost—perfectly

balanced earth—over the cardboard, which by then was on its way to killing the grass beneath. I let it rest until the late August when I turned the soil—the grass was now humus—and planted tiny cauliflower and broccoli seedlings. I am harvesting them now.

4. GROW VERTICALLY.

Walls and fences, even rooftops of sheds and houses are an underutilized space and, for the small-scale farmer/gardener, a way to double the yield. Pictured above is an old grate from our cistern, something my husband could not bear to throw out. Attached to a stone wall and taking in eight hours of summer sun, it supported cucumbers for our meals until last week. I grew pole beans (pictured on page 3), roses, tomatoes, and squash all vertically. Up off the ground, they had almost no problems with the omnivorous marauding slugs and snails we have in these parts. Large vases work too. Almost any food-bearing plant—and this is especially true for fruits—can be planted in pots on a balcony or terrace, tethered gently to a bamboo pole and led skyward.

5. USE WHAT YOU'VE GOT.

Somehow humanity was able to cultivate all its own food and flowers for almost ten thousand years without schlepping to an expensive garden center. Most of us already have all the containers, supports and potential soil to grow what we want; we just haven't seen them as such. Out in the boonies, no one throws anything away. What are basements for except to store something of questionable use until its new purpose becomes clear? Rusted out copper pots and wheelbarrows, wooden wine boxes, even olive oil tins make excellent planters. I've saved bamboo for supports—it grows like a weed everywhere. Our kitchens, yards, and paper trash provide the stuff of which compost is made. We save wire, twist ties from plastic bags, rubber bands, feed sacks, all which come in handy for trellises, bundling herbs or transporting food. Refusing to see my profits eaten by bugs, I make my own garlic or onion tea to spray as an insecticide, though food plants grown in compost start out hardy to begin with. Though I do buy many of my seeds, I have saved seeds from the locally grown produce I purchase and all my wildflowers are from scavenging on country walks.

6. GIVE UP ON GROWING FOOD DURING HEAT WAVES.

This was a hard-to-learn lesson when I first moved here as I was used to the convenience of turning on a tap and pointing a hose during a dry summer. I wanted my lettuce in July and spent hours hauling water and nursing along sunburned and overheated plants. The neighboring croplands were bare in those months. Yes, of course there were the usual tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and basil, started in May. They withstood the heat and dryness, drooping a bit but plumping out and perking up as soon as there was rain. Anything requiring water is seeded in August and hangs around waiting for the September rains to do anything. Lettuce and radicchio, spinach and arugula are grown in September and October. The fall leaves form a frost-proof cover for the winter and we harvest them as needed. The winter hardy species sit happily under the leaves in a state of suspended animation until cut.

7. PLANT TREES, PREFERABLY FRUIT AND NUT TREES and then plant more trees. The photo on the left is my daughter picking our red dates, which were a huge hit with the neighbors. The two-month date harvest, along with our walnuts, persimmons, olives, and figs, came from trees, which required no care, no watering, while providing us with food and shade. We also put in apricot, cherry and pomegranate saplings and so far, these have only needed watering during the first summer. On the occasion of the once a year pruning, we have firewood for heating and cooking for the coldest weather.

8. WINDOW LEDGES ARE GARDEN EXTENDERS.

I have my greenery year 'round without a mess indoors by placing a planter on every outside window ledge, filling it with compost and then seedlings. In the north, I have ivy growing. The east and west windows provide me with perennials—winter hardy thyme, rosemary, comfrey and sage. In the south, I plant flowers in the spring, interspersing them with basil during the summer months.

9. PLANT ALONE... the best therapy I know. I spend hours by myself, lost in thought, while seeding trays, digging weeds, planting herbs. When anger or sorrow or disappointments come up, it is time for some energetic work and I haul compost or turn soil, giving the earth my unwanted energy. When it is all finished. I sit with a cup of tea, sometimes re-evaluating or planning but more often than not, just admiring my handiwork and feeling relieved of my pain. Works every time.

10. HARVEST WITH FRIENDS: Above: the view from the olive trees we are harvesting on the mountain. Below: Phil and Carmine setting up the nets for picking. We get exercise, save money, and spend our weekends outdoors having a blast with friends.

REAL FOOD: A Recipe for CAULIFLOWER SOUP.

This fall, after a bugless summer, I was inundated with caterpillars. They ate the hell out of all the cauliflower leaves before being felled by the falling temps. (Never, never plant cauliflower next to moth-seducing lavender.) The leaves looked ratty but the huge white fruits grew vigorously and were left unscathed. I will have cauliflower through January. I fry it until golden brown with oil, garlic, and salt on very low heat, pan covered, until it is tender and brown. But I also cover oil-browned garlic with six cups of water, pop in 1-2 heads of chopped cauliflower, a few potatoes, a few chopped carrots and 3 vegetarian bouillon cubes. In one half hour, when all is tender, I cream the whole pot with a Cuisinart 'wand' or mash it with an old-fashioned potato masher and splash on a swirl of olive oil.

Any budding garden writers among us? Would you like to do a little research or share your expertise/experience by writing a short article (500 words or so) for the newsletter? Is there a particular plant or flower you love? Want to tell us about it so that we might

want to grow and enjoy it too? If so, send Madeline Caliendo, the Newsletter Editor, an email at vivaitaliana@gmail.com

Selected Upcoming Garden-Related Events in the Community

Sunday, March 1, 2009 1 to 2 pm

Saturday, March 7, 2009 11am to 1pm

*Orchid Care Lecture at Hillwood Museum & Gardens, 1-2pm, \$15
4155 Linnean Ave, NW Washington, DC 20008*

Orchid curator Dan Paterak shares his vast knowledge of orchid care, cultivation, classification, in addition to his work with Mrs. Post's unique collection. Paterak uses orchids, images and hand-outs to illustrate his presentation. Info: (202) 686-8500.

Sunday, March 1, 2009 2 to 4 pm

Saturday, March 7, 2009 11am to 1pm

*Orchid Repotting Workshop at Hillwood Museum & Gardens, 2-4pm, \$20
4155 Linnean Ave, NW Washington, DC 20008*

Orchid curator Dan Paterak teaches repotting techniques. Bring one or two orchids from your collection and terracotta pots for each. Limited to 10 participants. Info: (202) 686-8500.

Washington Garden Trip to the Philadelphia Flower Show on Wednesday, March 4, 2009, Fee: 90 (\$5 discount for Washington Gardener Magazine subscribers).

Registration is required **by March 1st**. The Philadelphia Flower Show is the largest indoor flower show in the world. This year's theme is Bella Italia. Enjoy the award-winning displays, hear a lecture, watch a demonstration, and shop the marketplace. Lunch is provided. Dinner is on your own. Surprises and prizes will be awarded along the journey. Wear comfortable walking shoes. For more information:

www.chevalsgardentours.com or call 703.395.1501.

Saturday, March 7th 10:00am to noon

Preparing Soils for Spring, sponsored by the DC Government, FREE

Each participant will receive a free Garden Tote Bag that includes gardening tools, soil tester and helpful factsheets. Sponsored by the DC Department of the Environment and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. The workshop will be held at the Lederer Environmental Education Center, 4801 Nannie Helens Burroughs Ave., N.E. To attend please RSVP by Thursday, March 4th to Kelly Melsted at: kelly.melsted@dc.gov or contact Aisha Gaskins at: 202-671-0350. Questions? contact Jenny Guillaume at: 202-535-2252 or email at: jennifer.guillaume@dc.gov.

Saturday, March 7th, 9:15am-3:15pm

High Mountain Flora

Gottwald Center for the Sciences, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA

While exploring the unique flora of Virginia's mountains, this workshop will also touch on the crucial need to preserve mountain vegetation in the face of modern pressures. Our keynote speaker will tie Virginia's Appalachians to the world's mountains—places of incredible yet fragile biodiversity, many in dire need of protection. Please join us to be amazed, educated and inspired by High Mountain Flora. Fee: \$40. Preregistration is required. For details: visit www.vnps.org or call 804.741.7838

Sunday, March 8th, 6:30pm to 8:30pm
Farming and Community Supported Agriculture,
From the Farmer Herself: Organic, FREE

Conventional industrial-scale agriculture and our complex food distribution systems have distanced us from our natural dependence and responsibility to the Earth. Learn about healthier alternatives by joining Mariette Hiu Newcomb, of Potomac Vegetable Farms. She will show you how organic farming and food distribution through CSAs (community-supported agriculture / subscription programs) allow us to become stewards and nurturers of the Earth. Hiu looks forward to sharing with you her thoughts and experiences! Hosted by Simplicity Forums in a private home in Bethesda, within walking distance of the Medical Center metro (Red Line), close to I-495 and Wisconsin Avenue. To RSVP (required): Call Marney at (301) 652-0492 or e-mail forum@simplicity-matters.org.

March 8, 9 & 10, 7:00-9:00 pm
Full Moon Hikes at the US Arboretum

This is a five-mile-long, mildly strenuous hike through moonlit gardens, meadows and woods. Guides share points of special interest and seasonal highlights. The two-hour walk over hilly and uneven terrain is more of a brisk hike than a tour so wear good walking shoes and dress for the weather. Not recommended for children. Register now! These hikes sell out quickly. Fee: \$19 (\$15 FONAs) Registration required. For registration information, call 202-245-4521. For program details, call 202-245-5898.

Wednesday, March 11, 6:30-9:00pm
Design Your Yard with Trees Workshop

Casey Trees, 1123 11th St., NW, Washington, DC

Workshop participants are encouraged to bring photographs or drawings and measurements of their yard and the location of existing trees, buildings and power lines. Principles for selecting tree species and identifying planting locations most appropriate for them will be discussed and each participant will be able to choose a tree appropriate for their site. Trees will be selected at the workshop and free trees will be distributed at a later date. This workshop and tree give-away is presented with the support of the District Department of the Environment as part of their RiverSmart Homes program to encourage residents to plant trees on residential property and to adopt other stormwater-slowng landscaping enhancements. Fee: \$0/Free. Preregistration is required. For more information: www.caseytrees.org or call 202.349.1907.

Saturday, March 14, 2:30-5:00pm
Yoga for Gardeners with Elizabeth Goodman

Willow Street Yoga Center, 6930 Carroll Avenue, Takoma Park, MD. Get your mind, body and spirit aligned for the coming gardening season! In this workshop, you'll receive alignment instruction for enhancing your gardening posture and learn yoga practices for before and after a good session in the garden to ease the impact of enthusiastic gardening on your body. Suitable for novice and experienced yogis and gardeners alike. Elizabeth will donate a portion of her proceeds to benefit the Youth Garden at the National Arboretum.

Fee: \$30. Preregistration is required. For more information:
www.WillowStreetYoga.com or call 301.270.8038.

Saturday, March 14, 2009, 10:00am to 4:00pm and Sunday, March 15, 2009

10:00am to 3:00pm: The Friends of Brookside Gardens Orchid Festival

Brookside Gardens, 1800 Glenallan Ave., Wheaton MD

In the Visitors Center and will feature orchid sales, re-potting, and some fantastic plants to admire!

March 16th thru March 19th, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm Solar Installation Workshop at the US National Arboretum

At this unique workshop, you will take part in a garden-focused solar power system installation from beginning to end. Participants will learn the fundamentals of planning, installing, operating and maintaining a battery-based Photovoltaic (PV) system. The workshop includes lectures and hands-on components, including instruction time each day on the proper sizing, operation, calculations, and maintenance of the system. Instructors and students from Alfred State College will lead the installation of this system, which will provide power for an irrigation system on the arboretum grounds. All levels of knowledge are welcome, from interested beginners to experienced installers. Fee: \$200 (FONA \$160) Includes all four days of the workshop and informational materials. Lunch is not provided. Registration required. For registration information, call 202-245-4521. For program details, call 202-245-5898.

March 18, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm

Environmental Film Festival: “Aigoual, the Forest Found” at the US National Arboretum

This film tells the story of the reforestation of a mountain in France whose forests were devastated by misuse in the late 1800s. Two men devoted their lives to the cause, facing many challenges remarkably similar to today's. Deborah Gangloff, Executive Director of American Forests, discusses the film, arboretum tree research, and her organization's reforestation efforts. Reception following. Presented as part of the Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital. French with subtitles. Free. Registration required. For registration information, call 202-245-4521. For program details, call 202-245-5898.

Through April 26, 10:00am–5:00pm

Orchids through Darwin's Eyes

Smithsonian, National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC

Explore the alluring world of orchids through the eyes of Darwin and those he influenced - naturalists, horticulturists, and scientists who continue to find new insights and curious

surprises while working with these captivating plants in greenhouses, laboratories, and in the wild.

Fee: \$0/Free. Registration is not required.

For more information: www.gardens.si.edu or call 202.633.1000.

Through April 12, 10:00am-5:00pm

Spring Display: Garden Elements

Brookside Gardens, 1800 Glenallan Ave., Wheaton MD

It will seem like spring in January when the conservatories will be filled with flowering plants that prefer the cool temperatures and short days of winter. Greenhouse snapdragons, tall stately, and fragrant, will be combined with other tropical and garden plants, such as cymbidium orchids, stock, florist geraniums, and petunias, to create scenes of welcome color and delightful fragrance. Accenting the flowers will be cast cement leaf ornaments and hypertufa trough containers created by the gardening staff. These natural garden ornaments and planters will be colored and planted in both bold and understated ways.

Fee: \$0/Free. Preregistration is not required.

For more information, call 301.962.1400 or go to www.brooksidegardens.org.

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