

Sow and Tell

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Member of the National Capital Area Garden Clubs, Central Atlantic Region, District III

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President's Message

I just came in from spending four hours out in the yard. Although the calendar says it's February, the thermometer on my back deck read 74 degrees. I pruned some rose bushes and other shrubs, cleaned some of the gardens and cleaned out some of the bird houses. My soul has been refreshed. Although I love winter, this has been a nice reprieve.

February and early March is the best time to prune your Crape Myrtle, butterfly bushes, some hydrangeas and roses before they set their buds. It is also the best time to prune fruit trees. The flower catalogs are now appearing in the mail. Order your flowers and bulbs early for the best selection.

There are many opportunities for gardeners happening around the area. Some of the garden centers have free classes. There are classes to register for through the NCAGC. Other garden clubs have programs that might be of interest and have invited guests. I will forward some opportunities to you as I receive them.

Recently Anita Parke, Karen O'Meara and I attended a "sharing workshop" sponsored by District II and III. We picked up some great ideas that we might want to consider for our garden club.

I quote Cora Lee Bell who said "An addiction to gardening is not all that bad when you consider all the other choices in life".

Although Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow, spring isn't far away. We can soon be out doors and in the dirt again.

Noreen

FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Mon Feb 6 Landscape Design School
Tues Feb 7 Meadowlark Gardens Volunteers
(cancelled)
Tues Feb 14 Board Meeting, 10 am
Tues Feb 21 General Meeting, 10 am
Mon Feb 27 Garden Therapy, 9:15 am

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February 21 Program

David Roos: "Gardening with Native Plants"

Back by popular demand! David Roos will visit and bring us another fun-filled program with his personal insights on plants and gardening. David has a gardening consulting practice and a down-to-earth attitude. He received his design training at the New York Botanic Garden's Landscape Design program. His message uses common sense and witty approach filled with humor. You won't want to miss his return visit to our club!



Brent & Becky's Overnight Field Trip, April 9 & 10



Our next field-trip is Brent & Becky's Bulb Farm, Gloucester Virginia, April 9 - 10. Hope you can join us! A signup sheet will be available at the Board and regular February meeting. You may also sign up by emailing karen.s.fleming@gmail.com (Approx. cost of trip is \$85 which includes the hotel room (twins), breakfast & Monday's boxed lunch.)

April 9

Take to Virginia's back roads and enjoy a relaxing trip to Gloucester. Arrive in the afternoon to shop and explore the village. Meet at 6:30 p.m. at LuLu's Cafe for some #1 rated seafood. Overnight at the Hampton Inn Gloucester where the camaraderie and good cheer will continue.

April 10

Start Monday morning with breakfast at the Inn. At 10 a.m. our tour of Brent & Becky's begins. We'll see acre upon acre of bulbs on their farm, as well as their personal gardens. Brent (who has appeared on the Martha Stewart Show!) will present "Summer Bulbs." There will be an opportunity to ask questions and get expert advice on your gardening needs. No visit is complete without a stop at their gift shop and a chance to submit your order on site.

Customized boxed lunches will be available.

Karen Fleming

Garden Therapy Monday, February 27



It is the year of the “rooster” so our theme for this garden therapy session will be arranging flowers in Chinese take-out boxes complete with chopsticks and fortune cookies. :-) Our volunteers are Shelia Creswell, Nancy Walker and Dottie Hanson. We have a lot of fun working with the wonderful residents, and welcome any new volunteers (no flower-arranging experience needed). We will meet at 9:15 on Monday, February 27 at Braddock Glen Assisted Living Center located at 4027 Olley Lane in Fairfax.
Thank you, Gail Gile and Janet Kremer

Documentary Showing, “Hometown Habitat”, Thursday, March 9

The Friends of Oakton Library, together with the non-profit Plant NOVA Natives, is sponsoring a showing of the documentary **Hometown Habitat, Stories of Bringing Nature Home** on Thursday, March 9, at 7:00 pm at the Library. This documentary features Dr. Douglas Tallamy, who many of us heard speak several years ago.

Among the information to be displayed in conjunction with this program will be photos and plant lists from our Five Hills gardens at the Library, as well as the rain garden which Fairfax County planted (with volunteer help) two years ago.

More information about the documentary itself can be found at:

<https://themeadowproject.com/>

Those who wish to attend this free program should register at the link below:

<https://va.evanced.info/fairfaxcounty/lib/eventsignup.asp?ID=411564&rts=&disptype=&ret=eventcalendar.asp&pointer=&returnToSearch=&num=0&ad=&dt=sd&sd=3/9/2017&df=list&EventType=ALL&Lib=15&AgeGroup=ALL&LangType=0&WindowMode=&noheader=&lad=&pub=1&nopub=&page=1&pgdisp=25>

Calendars for Military

Please remember to bring in your 2017 calendars. They are collected each month for the military members in appreciation of their services. Janet Kremer will deliver them to the Army's Fairfax Family Health Center. Thank you!

OLD FASHIONED? NO WAY. THE PEONY IS HERE TO STAY!

Peonies are not native but rather traced their roots from the Mediterranean to Asia. There are about 40 species and they grow in all types of conditions. Peonies are generally divided into two groups: herbaceous and woody (or "tree") but now add to that the Intersectional peony. They all share many of the same characteristics. They have beautiful flowers, are long-lasting and hardy (zones 3-7). They depend on the cold to set a good show of spectacular blooms. They don't like to be moved, so select a final site with care. Many are very fragrant and are superb as cut flowers. The deer question pops up again. This writer has observed over many years that peonies are left untouched in an area where deer grazed each night. I recently read in Fine Gardening that peonies are believed to be poisonous to deer. The care and feeding of the different species is a little different. Following is a short lesson on herbaceous peonies. If you are interested in the other peonies, there is an excellent online article/catalog at peonysenvy.com. This site covers so much, so... if you like the idea of peonies... pour yourself a cup of tea before you start.

Herbaceous Peonies

Most of our herbaceous peonies are derived from the Chinese peony, *Paeonia lactifolia*. The popular 'Festiva Maima' is one of the early (1851) cultivars. The availability of new colors and type of bloom increases with each season.



Blooms may be: single semi double, double Japanese or anemone type and bomb type.

Site Selection: Choose a sunny (six hours) well-drained spot well away from competing tree or shrub roots. Consider that after flowering the foliage mass can be a backdrop for annuals or "knee coverage" of tall perennials such as New England asters.

Planting: Plant bare root specimens in the fall so roots may have time to become establish. Dig a hole about two feet across and at least 18" deep. Mix several shovels of compost or well-rotted manure with the bottom soil. Fill the hole 1/2 way with topsoil mixed with more compost and a cup of bone meal. If soil is acidic also mix in a cup of ground limestone as peonies thrive in a pH between 6.5 and 7. "Eyes" should be at a depth of 1-2 inches. Tap gently (protecting the eye buds) to eliminate air spaces and water, gently please. Finally, add light mulch. Don't expect too much the first year. I have had luck with well-potted plants in spring.

Staking: The large flower heads can cause droopy plants. Staking rings or cement reinforcement wires cut to height and width to circle plants are used prop up the stems.

Deadheading spent blooms is recommended to improve look, prevent disease and to prevent the diversion of the plan's energy to seed formation.

Intersectional Peonies

I thought I would tempt you with two paragraphs from the Peonysenvy site to close. They are in New Jersey and I plan to visit their open gardens in June.

“Intersectional Peonies, also known as Itoh, are a hybrid created by crossing a tree peony with an herbaceous peony. These peonies produce tree peony flowers and leaves on plants that behave like herbaceous peonies, dying down to the ground in winter and reemerging each spring. A mature plant may produce 50 or more dinner-plate sized flowers on strong short stems that do not require staking. They reach peak bloom near the end of the herbaceous peony bloom. Each plant can remain in bloom for 3-4 weeks with new buds continually opening over this period. They can be used as cut flowers and offer an astounding array of yellows and golds -- colors not widely available in herbaceous peonies. They are disease resistant, less susceptible to powdery mildew than their herbaceous parent and less susceptible to botrytis blight than their tree peony parent. Intersectional peonies grow to approximately 2.5 feet tall by about 3 feet wide. Their compact form is well suited to the front of the perennial border as they produce leaves and flowers that cover the entire plant. *Dinner plate size flowers, easy to grow, nicely shaped plant, deer proof.*”

“Due to the relatively new hybridization of intersectional peonies the characteristics of plant height, shape, leaf coverage and flower form tend to be fairly uniform. The choice of cultivar is then determined by color. It should be noted that intersectional peonies have great leaf coverage from the base to the top of the plant and make excellent accent plants as well as function well at the front of a garden border.”

Karen Lucas

Hort Table

Winter Treasures

Early bloom(s) in your garden? Share with the members. Bring it in a green bottle for display. Identify the class into which you might enter it in a Flower Show. (pictured, flowering quince)

Or . . .

Try your hand at a small dish garden using information from the newsletter or your own experience. Create a dreamland!

Rewards!



Coyotes in Fairfax County

On Monday my dog and I saw a coyote about 200 feet away on a well-travelled road into River Bend Park. My dog wanted to give chase and barked furiously. Meanwhile the coyote turned, looked at us and ambled on its way up the road we had just left. I knew from neighbors that the coyotes were here, but seeing one makes a bigger impression. In addition, I know that we have some rabies in the area, as an acquaintance was recently attacked by a rabid raccoon in the park, and he had to get the vaccinations. Therefore, I thought I would do a bit of a review of coyotes in this area.



Coyotes (*Canis latrans*) are highly adaptive members of the canine family that survive in a wide range of habitats, including suburban and urban areas. In Fairfax County, coyotes are an established part of our local environment, and serve an important role in the ecological community. Coyotes generally avoid humans. They usually coexist in areas with people without raising attention to their presence. Coyotes started moving into northwest Virginia in the 1970s; they have been documented in every part of the county, and are now permanent members of the wildlife community in Virginia.

What do they look like?

Coyotes are medium-to-large-sized members of the canine family, which includes wolves, foxes, and dogs. They have pointed and erect ears, a long, slender snout, and a bushy tail pointed downward. Fur coloration varies from reddish-brown to tan, gray or black with a pale blaze on the chest. The tail usually has a black tip and is held downward while running. Coyotes in the eastern U.S. are typically larger than their western counterparts and average between 30-40 pounds, but they can weigh as much as 60 pounds. Coyotes have been mistaken for German shepherds or collies.

Where are they?

Coyotes use diverse habitats, and where they go is determined by the availability of food. They prefer wooded patches bordered by fields and brushy areas that provide abundant prey and shelter for concealment. During their breeding season, coyotes will use dens that could be in hollowed-out tree stumps, thickets, or burrows made by other animals such as foxes, along steep banks and rock ledges, in culverts, or under out-buildings and crawl spaces in urban areas. Coyotes may wander into residential areas in search of food that could be in garbage, pet dishes, and compost, but they normally stick to their natural diet.

Coyotes are opportunistic foragers with a generalist diet, feeding on both animal and plant material. They will consume rabbits, rodents (mice, rats and voles), squirrels, groundhogs, turkeys, deer (primarily fawns), fruits and vegetables, seeds, acorns, and insects. Coyotes will scavenge on carrion and use human-provided urban food sources such as garbage, pet food, compost, and gardens.

Coyotes in urban areas usually are solitary travelers or small family groups. Small packs usually are composed of a breeding alpha male and female pair and a few close relatives, including pups that were born that year. Coyotes have an organized social hierarchy and will defend their territories from other coyotes. They appear to be strongly monogamous and breed during February and March. They give birth to a litter of 5 to 7 pups on average in April or May. Pups become independent and disperse around 6-to-9 months of age. The coyote uses a range of howls, barks, yips and growls to communicate. Although you might hear one, our eastern coyotes are not as vocal as their western cousins, referred to as “coy-dogs.” As a safety measure, keep dogs on short leashes (less than 6 feet) while walking outside. If you keep other animals outside, such as poultry or rabbits, provide them secure shelters. Keep all pets up-to-date on their vaccinations in case they come into contact with coyotes or other wildlife.

What do I do if I spot one?

Coyotes can sometimes be seen moving through yards or crossing streets in search of food, usually in areas that border open space. In most cases, coyotes will flee from humans, and you won't have to do anything. If you see one, keep a respectful distance away and do not approach it. If the coyote does not leave the property, there are techniques (see next question) that can be used to scare them away so that they do not feel welcome. If a coyote acts aggressively or appears to be sick or injured, call the county police non-emergency number at 703-691-2131 and ask to be connected with Fairfax County Animal Control Services.

Can coyotes be scared away?

There are techniques that can be used to discourage coyotes. From a safe position, yell and wave your arms at the coyote. Noisemakers such as whistles, air horns, bells, “shaker” cans full of marbles or pennies, or pots and pans banged

together can be used. Throw non-edible objects such as sticks, small rocks, cans, or tennis balls in the direction of, not at, the coyote. Spray the animal from a distance with a water hose or water guns. If the coyote still does not leave, back away slowly while continuing to harass it, and go indoors if possible.

For additional information on resolving human-wildlife conflicts, call the Virginia Wildlife Conflict Helpline toll-free at (855) 571-9003, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. This helpline is a collaborative effort between the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Wildlife Services.

How can I make my home less attractive to coyotes?

Remove food sources. Secure garbage and compost in an animal-proof container, such as a metal trash can with latches on the lid, or secure them with bungee cords. Keep trash inside until the morning of trash pick-up whenever possible. Do not feed pets outside or store pet food outside. Put away bird feeders at night to avoid attracting small rodents and other coyote prey. Close off all openings under porches/decks, crawl spaces or out-buildings. Few fences are completely coyote-proof. Fencing should be at least six feet tall, have an outward slanting overhang or roller-type device to prevent coyotes from climbing or jumping, and have an L-shaped mesh apron buried one to two feet to deter digging.

Hope this is useful in our continuing interaction with nature. This was adapted from our Fairfax County information on Coyotes in our community. All the best,

Elizabeth Huebner



Announcements



Cares and Concerns

It is with sadness that we announce that three of our members have had deaths in their families this past week. Erma Rockholt's husband died, and Julia Smith and Lana Ambler's fathers have died.

We are sorry to hear of their losses. Please keep these friends in your thoughts and prayers.

Our Annual Membership Dues is Now Due

Membership Dues for the 2017-2018 program year are due by March 1st. Please bring your check for \$40 to the February 21 meeting. Checks should be made payable to Five Hills Garden Club. Alternatively, checks may be mailed to Joanne Menke, 1723 Larkmeade Drive, Vienna, Virginia 22182. Thank you!



Remember

**Please don't park in
the Church parking
lot**

PLEASE NOTE - BOARD MEETING VENUE CHANGE:

The March board meeting will be held at Joanne Menke's home, and Elizabeth Huebner will be providing the lunch for that day.

Announcements



Free
Upcoming
Educational
Gardening
Seminars from
3 Local
Merrifield
Nurseries

Feb 25 10 a.m.

One of our former speakers, Karen Rexrode, will present a program on *Bulbs with Striking Summer Interest* at the nursery in Merrifield.

Former Five Hills president, Peg Bier, will present *Planning a Four Season Garden* at the Fair Oaks Merrifield.

Pat Reilly will present a program called *Landscaping with Native Plants* at their Gainesville store.

March 4 10 a.m.

Michael Fahey will give a talk on *The Art of Pruning* at the Merrifield store.

Kathy Jentz, editor of Washington Gardener Magazine, will present *Getting Your Garden Ready for Spring* at Fair Oaks.

Danielle Hall will speak on *Spring Color with Trees and Shrubs* at the Gainesville store.

March 11 10 a.m.

Renatta Holt and Lou McEver speak about *Landscape Renovations* at Merrifield.

Peg Bier will present *Our Gardeners Picks: Perennials* at Fair Oaks.

Danielle Hall will talk about *Summer Color with Trees and Shrubs* at the Gainesville location.

March 12 1 p.m.

Enticing Butterflies into Your Garden will be presented by Steve Gable at the Fair Oaks store.

Editor's note: This may be my last write-up of free Merrifield garden seminars which I and others have found so educational over the years. However, others may feel free to contribute.

Announcements



The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research, and sharing the experience of its members with the community.

The Herb Society of America Presents “Bats, Bees and Butterflies” Symposium, 9:30 March 18, 2017

Speakers: Sam Droege, Nicole Hamilton and Alonso Abugattas

The symposium will be held at Gunston Hall, 10709 Gunston Road, Mason Neck, VA 22079 (for GPS purposes please use the address of 10709 Gunston Road, LORTON, VA). There is a registration fee of \$45 per person which includes light morning refreshments, a light, herby luncheon, a raffle, and a guided tour of the home of George Mason. There is ample free parking available. All proceeds from this event go directly to the National Herb Garden Intern. If you have questions, please contact Jo Sellers josellers@cox.net H (703) 451-7037 (C) (703) 731-5858

It's Time to Hang Your Birdhouses

It is February and time to think about birdhouses. Where houses are already in place, it isn't unusual to see chickadees exploring them in January and February. A limited number of species accept manmade birdhouses. Among the most common birdhouse inhabitants are the chickadees and nuthatches. They are both attracted to the same house details, and competition can be fierce.



When the houses are mounted 15-20 feet above the ground, the competition for one increases. How accessible a house is to predators is critical. This is the primary reason why a house swinging from a tree limb often goes unused.

It's too easy for cats, squirrels and raccoons to reach the box and the inhabitants.

Which way the house faces also influences the tenants. It should be faced away from the prevailing winds. The feeding adults land into the wind and don't want it at their back. A house faced toward the morning or afternoon sun stands a better chance of being used than one facing toward shade. This positioning mimics what birds choose when nesting in the wild. Also, many birds like to nest at the edge of a wood facing a field.

Nesting birds are very territorial. Some won't tolerate another bird of the same species nesting anywhere in the vicinity of their nest site. Additional birdhouses should be out of sight in another location, at least a hundred feet away. Even that can be too close, depending on the nesting bird's territorial fervor.

In a Nutshell Program: Alonso Abugattas presenting “Ethnobotany”

In January our speaker was Arlington County’s Alonso Abugattas, who came to discourse on Ethnobotany — the local customs of a population in the practical uses of local flora for many aspects of life such as for medicines, food, clothing, dyes, and building materials.

Alonso recommended the book, *Native American Ethnobiology* by Daniel Moerman as a good resource for his topic.

He spoke of the historical uses of the yarrow plant, especially in the use of it for the care and healing of wounds, to staunch bleeding, and as an anti-inflammatory. Yarrow has been called “woundwort”; Alonso pointed out that if a word has ‘wort’ on the end, it generally means it is used for medicinal purposes.

Cattails have multiple uses; to Native Americans, cattails were a cornucopia, providing food, medicine and clothing. (Editor’s note: from *The Practical Herbalist*: “The jelly that grows between young leaves was used for wounds, boils and infected flesh. This treatment also relieved pain. This honey-looking product has strong antiseptic properties, which made cattail an indispensable part of the first aid kit on the American frontier for centuries. People living along cattail’s marshy shores still rely on it for treating everything from toothaches to spider bites.”) Cattails were used for bedding-fluff and packing, and their reeds were woven into mats.

Throughout the ages, various and separate populations throughout the world arrived at the same uses for the same or similar plants.

When colonists arrived from overseas, they asked themselves, “what can we get here that will substitute for the plants we had in Europe (or Asia)”. Where once they had used quinine from the bark of a cinchona tree to reduce fever and treat malaria, they chose dogwood as a substitute. They followed the Native Americans’ use of butternut, a species of walnut, which was being used as a laxative and tonic remedy to treat rheumatic and arthritic joints, headache, dysentery, constipation and wounds. (Colonists also used the dye of the butternut during the Civil War to dye uniforms, so much so that Confederate soldiers were commonly referred to as “butternuts”. The butternut is an oily and rich nut. Though popularly it has always been eaten on its own, the butternut also was prepared a variety of ways by the American Indians. The Iroquois had some of the most varied and interesting uses for the nut. The fresh nuts were crushed and boiled and served as either baby food or a drink (Moerman). The crushed nuts also were used for breads, puddings, and sauces as well as mixed in to dishes such as mashed potatoes. The oils of the nuts also were used to flavor dishes (Erichsen-Brown).)

Alonso spoke at length about the plants he has eaten and enjoyed, in some cases warning, “don’t try this at home”. Persimmons, when they fall off the tree just before the frost, are edible and enjoyable. Wild strawberries are delicious. He said violets are high in Vitamin C and are good in salads. Black willow provides aspirin, and the leaves were chewed for their medicinal benefits. He gave a fascinating glimpse into the world of foraging for plants for their historic uses in his most informative talk.