


February 10, 1999

Dues are Due for 1999—see backside of newsletter. If you don't see a "99" by your name on the address label, you owe!!


Notes from the HPS Mid Atlantic Group's October Perennial Conference

Adam Levine commented in the January newsletter of this group about several of speakers that were featured at their Perennial Conference last fall, held at the Scott Arboretum on the Swarthmore College campus.

 One was Tony Avent (WHPS speaker on Feb 17). Adam states that Tony, owner of Plant Delights Nursery and self-proclaimed "plant pusher" announced "My job is to addict every one in the room....Buy it and then try to cram it in....My landscape philosophy is to plant in drifts of one." Tony raved about every plant he showed in his 110 slides. He is, after all, in the plant selling business.

Adam couldn't help being overcome by lust for what he called "plants with an attitude." Among them were several new verbena hybrids, including 'Blue Princess' and a new lavender-pink selection, 'Edith,' that he called "a flowering machine". He touted various baptisia hybrids, including B. 'Purple Smoke' and the unusual yellow-flowered B. 'Carolina Moonlight'. Native hybrid stands of baptisia with red/yellow, purple/yellow, purple/white bicolor flowers have been known in Texas since the 1930s, Avent said, but they are only now beginning to be commercially propagated. Among his other recommendations: *Lilium formosana*, which blooms the first year from seed, self-sows, and has attractive seed pods; *Aster laevis* 'Bluebird', which is rigidly upright and *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' the virtues of which Adam could also testify to. It has bluer and larger and more numerous flowers than any other *A. foeniculum* type. Two goldenrods also showed up: *Solidago* 'Fireworks', whose flowers really do resemble yellow fireworks, and the creeping cultivar, S. 'Golden Fleece'. While solidago is clearly not considered a weed anymore in American gardens, *Phytolacca americana*—better known as pokeweed—is a plant most of us still rip out of the garden beds. It now comes in a variegated form and is a striking plant especially in the

fall with its dark purple berries. Avent showed pictures of two selections: 'Annie', a white-edged form discovered in Plant Delights gardens, and 'Silberstein', with yellow creamy speckling throughout the leaves. 'Silberstein' was not developed by a German hybridizer but by a New Jerseyite, Steve Silberstein. Tony is going to speak on the World of Hostas at our February meeting. Needless to say, he is ecstatic about this genus.

 Adam was more impressed with Darrell Probst's presentation at the October symposium. Darrell will be one of our featured speakers at the November 6 *Great Shady Gardeners Symposium*. Adam's comments about Darrell's talk:

"My copy of Probst's slide list reflects my excitement. It's a jumble of notes, and dozens of items are circled and starred and underlined. His plants really were new to me, and not at all what I've come to expect from epimediums. My experience is mostly with the commonly available forms such as *E. x versicolor* 'Sulphureum', which is a great foliage plant for dry shade but whose flowers I often miss because they're so small and pale. Probst showed slides of some of his finds from a 1996 trip to China, where more than 20 new epimedium species have been discovered since 1975. He showed plants with flowers two inches across; others with masses of flowers on stems a foot or more above the leaves. Some of the many species he grows have evergreen foliage that persists even in his cold Massachusetts climate. Some of his epimediums form clumps, while others spread. I hesitate to try to match my jumble of cryptic descriptions to the following plants, but they were among the ones that most impressed me: *E. x youngianum* 'Milky Way', *E. grandiflorum* 'Album', *E. grandiflorum* var *higoense*, *E. grandiflorum* ssp. *Koreanum* 'Harold Epstein', *E. fargesii*, *E. platypetalum*, *E. franchetii*, *E. brachyrrhizum*, *E. rhimatosum*, *E. wushanense* 'Caramel', *E. ogisui*, and *E. epsteinii*."

Mea Culpa: This Hoe for Hire

by Teresa Countryman

The sky was cloudless, boiling blue, windless but never at rest. Heat beat down on the back of my neck as I bent to that endless task, deadheading a Johnson's Blue. Overhead in a blue spruce, a crow softly cursed his luck. Not far off, an ice-cream truck played "The Entertainer" in an endless loop at a merciless volume. Fatcat neighborhood like this, why couldn't the truck play classy music? Boccherini maybe, or a little Scriabin? I'd had enough. "The hell with it," I sneered at the geranium. "Go to seed."

I was just killing time, in the garden of a deluxe new joint the size of the Astrodome, only with better parking. The lady of the manse had asked me to come out for a landscaping consult, but from the wobble in her honeyed voice, I could tell she'd heard of my night job as a caretaker. You got a problem, I take care of it. My younger brother Felix helps me, or so he thinks. I could have hired a qualified secretary, but nepotism runs in our family.

I don't know much about architecture—the house was some big white carbuncle—but I studied the garden for as long as I could stand it. Construction hadn't managed to kill some fine old spruces and maples—or not yet: soil compaction is no day at the spa for tree roots. Foundation plantings of yew and cotoneaster were still small and scrubby—wonder why they hadn't sprung for larger shrubs right away? Couldn't be lack of cash. The rest of the yard forcefully illustrated triumph of money over taste. Lots of lawn, of course, new-laid sod as green as antler velvet. Lawn represents failure of the imagination, the default setting for landscaping.



It was the flower beds that really ground my gizzard. No plants, except for grizzled survivors of the tractor treads, a New England aster and the Johnson's blue. The beds were all given over to doo-dads. Fountains. Gazing balls. Gargoyles that smiled. Bird-

baths, windchimes, sun-dials with Happy Faces. A corpulent cherub with the face of a corrupt Cub Scout. Butterfly houses. But lowest of all was underfoot. Beauty-Bark. Always brings rushing back that bad half-hour in the sawmill with Lance Boyle, just before his timely demise.

Then the breeze riffled the maple leaves, and sun and shade played tag on the patio underneath. She moved through

the wavering light into the glare of July. Hair of every color of blonde, obviously natural, drawn back on her neck with a red ribbon. Slim, except where it counted. Legs that went all the way down to the ground. She wore a black halter top, and shorts the color of antifreeze. Her eyes I couldn't see for sunglasses, but her mouth, not full, not mobile, spelled heartache for some poor moke. I decided to keep Felix out of this case. I'd seen her type before—all soft curves on the outside, but inside, a heart as hard as a two-day-old baguette.

"Ms. Culpa? I'm Alice Chalmers. I'm sorry I kept you waiting, but at least that gave you a chance to look around the garden. I love gardening, and naturally I've got lots of ideas, but I'd like to hear yours first."

You've got yourself a house on this played out clay, with the topsoil scraped away, with lousy drainage and a detached garage that blocks the morning light, and you love gardening? Let's see what you know.

But what I actually said aloud was, "Let's start with the bones, the trees and the existing beds, and flesh it in. You should give some thought to how you want to use different areas of your yard. Around this patio, for instance, say you wanted to have a drink out here in the evening, you might like some sweet-scented shrubs, like dwarf aphasia or False Benevolence, and this lattice could support a flowering vine, maybe hysteria or climbing colitis. That

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.....
..... But beside my bed? Ah, that is another place.
..... That is my private domain. It is for escape, for illusion, and for mental balm brought by a printed page.
..... No pictures. Please God, no pictures. None of those unwieldy books laden with glossy photographs full of deception, misleading the innocent into thinking the impossible. . . Perhaps one day someone will write a book about gardens specifically to send us to sleep.
..... I don't mean a glossary of 'leaf-blotch eelworm', 'tulip fire', 'sawfly' or 'polypore', which would certainly guarantee Morpheus, but a book not much bigger than a hand, with no practical advice, only with words, words that drowse through the mind summoning up visions of Elysian fields forever unapproachable.

.....
..... From Mirabel Osler's *On My Bedside Table*,
..... Hortus, Fall, 1998
.....

The Rural Life— Planning a Garden in the Snow

Verlyn Klinkenborg

Snow has been falling all day long as I write. The skylights are drifted over, and by noon dusk seems to be in the offing, the day so gray, so white, that the winter color of the goldfinches—pale as olive oil—feels like an overdraft on the eyes.

Some days chores are barely that, just a visit to the barn and then back for coffee. But this morning the gates were deep in snow and the Dutch doors on the barn needed shoveling out, as did the deck and the path to the woodpile. The horse dropped sweetfeed from their mouths, staining the snow molasses. Three crows foraging beside the black rubber feed pans seemed to stand watch over their shadows, except that there are no shadows on a day like this. One horse had rolled in a drift, leaving what looked like the wing print of a giant owl descending on its prey.

On the way back to the house, I stopped to clean out the winter entrance to the beehive with a pocketknife. The beehive stands beside a white steppe that will be a vegetable garden one of these days—perhaps not one of these days, with snow falling and more promised, but one of those days, when April comes and the soil seems impossible black and fragrant once more.

Yet there is not a better day to plan a garden than this one. The landscape has a purity it will lose when the snow melts. The geometry of each bed is perfect at this moment, even hidden. The snow radically simplifies all of a garden's dimensions—height, width, scent, length of bloom, and color in each season.

One mail-order plant catalogue is folded open to its pulmonarias. Another is dog-eared where the hostas begin, and in another, from North Carolina, I have carefully marked every plant that could grow in this zone, while lamenting the crinum and kniphofias I can't grow. *Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs* lies open on the desk beside Hugh Johnson's *Principles of Gardening* and *The National Arboretum Book of Outstanding Garden Plants*, each one a source of inspiration and depression. Latin names skim across my thoughts like water-boatmen on a summer pond—*Tradescantia*, *Helleborus*, *Cryptomeria*, *Epimedium*, *Cimicifuga*.

But by afternoon, designs have begun to tangle, and the list of plants is far too long. The only sensible plan I can think of is this one: I'll walk outside with a stick and draw my gardens in the unadulterated whiteness, echinops here, *ligularia* over there, a Japanese pieris by this corner. Then I'll sit by the firs while the snow falls, watch them all disappear, and start over again in the morning.

For your reading pleasure

by A. Hort Hound

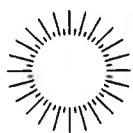
- ⊗ **Garden Artistry** by Helen Dillon—This is the story of her own garden in Dublin, Ireland. Inspirational, with remarkable photographs. Copies have been spotted at Half-Price Books for \$15.00.
- ⊗ **My Favorite Plant** by Jamaica Kincaid—Comments on favorite plants by well-known 20th century horticulturists, including Wayne Winterrowe, Michael Pollan, Ken Druse, Christopher Lloyd, Katherine White, D. H. Lawrence, Tony Avent, and Graham Stuart Thomas, among others.
- ⊗ **Gardening Life** by Lee May—More about lifestyle than pure gardening, but makes for wonderful bedtime reading.



The formula for a unique garden is an easy one. Combine the place and the person, and no two gardens should look alike. When you think how varied the lives that people lead are, the houses they occupy and the landscape that surrounds them, each garden ought to be as personal as a fingerprint.....The most telling quality in any garden is the fact that it is loved. Nothing else matters.

The Victorian writer Percy Lubbock once described the over-planted herbaceous border as a "mazy confusion of everything that gleams and glows and exhales a spicery of humming fragrance."

From Mary Keen, "Pleasing the Eye,"
Gardens Illustrated, February 1999



Whatever this coming spring brings, early or late, freezing or blazing, the properly seasoned (greatly abused) gardener is well aware that in some ways (not immediately apparent to the innocent) it will be the most beautiful and tender season ever beheld in the history of the world.

Almost every spring is normal, but no spring pleases the gardener altogether. A few hot days, and cries go up that flowers are stewed; a few gray days in the fifties, and the gardener predicts a new Ice Age.

This charitable notion entered my mind as I was reading the Thompson & Morgan seed catalogue, one of the world's great compendiums of fantasy, and as usual I resolved anew to order some datura seeds. I did once, decades ago, and they were marvelous. But since I think of them every year and never get around to acquiring them, I thought this year I might mention them and let you raise them instead of me.

When the gardener loses (as his experience sooner or later forces him to lose) his innocence and sweet dreams about the spring and the daffodil season, he then is able to detect in the real world of outrageous weather and dashed hopes, the finest display ever seen.

You don't garden and deal with gardeners for very long before you discover that good sense has little to do with it. A gardener with two flat acres of heavy clay loam baking in 95° sunshine will suddenly realize that the perfect flowers are lewisias. The gardener with sea-dashed granite cliffs will conceive a passion for camelias or (soon afterward) bananas.

Every gardener must have had the experience of hearing from some reputable and trustworthy gardener that a certain plant is iffy and uncertain, yet you have it all over the garden. Even more annoying is the comment that a certain plant is foolproof, yet you have utterly failed with it four times. The best any gardener can do is tell his own experience with a plant. If it grows like a weed he should say so.

Once a gardener has some plant he once longed for, he takes it for granted. It is something like sex—the mad excitement cannot be expected to last.

Gardening is a long road, with many detours and way stations, and here we all are at one point or another. It's not a question of superior or inferior taste, merely a question of which detour we are on at the moment. Getting there (as they say) is not important; the wandering about in the wilderness or in the olive groves or the bayous is the whole point.

No, efficiency and practicality do not have much to do with the small town garden, I am afraid—or, rather, I am delighted to report. There are probably only about a hundred million Americans at the moment who understand this.

I well know that I have neither the time nor the energy nor even the desire to have a garden that people admire. It is not for them but for me. I attach far more importance to the progress of the plants—the cycle of growth and decay—than to the floral display of the moment or to the effects of open space. If I want a few tiger lilies, as I certainly do, and if the best site for them happens to be beside a crimson shrub rose, then that's were they go.

You will wonder how I know so much about lazy gardeners—a case of observation, merely.

The totalitarian frame of mind is now so common in America that I know there are apartments in which you cannot have a dog, cat, or pet mouse or grow anything on the balcony railing. Such apartments also forbid combread in the kitchen, I suppose, and it you like tyranny you go along with it, but my advice, if you find yourself living in such a place, is to wake up, tell the landlord to go to hell, and move out.

Thomas Jefferson, that extraordinary gardener, reckoned among his benefactions the introduction of the olive tree to South Carolina, and never mind if till this day Carolinians cannot grow olives. In the same way, he wrote in 1781 that among the edible crops of Virginia were pomegranates, and while it was probably true that there was an eccentric gardener or two within the commonwealth who finally managed



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to get a pomegranate fruit from a bush grown against a south wall, the inclusion of pomegranates among the agricultural riches of the dominion was misleading at best and asinine at worst.

The broadening of scope is the single most definitive quality of the true gardener: if you fail in small things and cannot perfectly manage your small garden, then expand and take on three times as much.

No pain, no gain, and that is why my garden has gained so little over the years, I guess. To me a garden is no place for pain. You can find enough of that at the office.



Mea Culpa...continued from page 4

would give you a bit of privacy. For a ground-cover along that pathway to the pool, I'd recommend something sturdy, like Creeping Heresy or a runner, like diarrhea."

Something heavy in the left pocket dragged at her acid-green shorts, disturbing the perfect symmetry of her hips. She never moved her hand from that pocket.

"Under the spruces, maybe a native shade garden-bog bladder, fenny toothwort, Dragon's corns—Lesser Fuzzy tongue if you can get it. That nine-foot security fence is pretty stark, but you could blur the edges with some fast growing woody perennials, like rhinoplasty or elephantiasis. They'd make a lovely dark background for pale night-blooming flowers-gonorrhoea and dementia preacox last a long time.

"Oh that sounds lovely." Her mouth was smiling, but the eyes behind her shades could have been anywhere, dodging the thoughts within. I smelled trouble, and that ain't tuberoses.

...to be continued



Quotes from David Wheeler "Clean Break" *The Garden*, November 1998

Country gardens are getting too smart, to clinical, too tidy. Suburban man and woman are on the march, and in their wake a manic suburban tidiness tends to follow. Gardening, in some quarters, is becoming indistinguishable from house work.

There is nothing wrong with a few weeds—after all, it is only opinion which has related some plants to such a low order.

Let the roses ramble, for the country's sake, for the garden's sake, and for our own well being. Without a little laissez faire, the garden soon becomes a sterile showcase of man's ability to intrude on the land, a celebration of commerce over common sense. Relax, forget the brick paving, oust the cold brightness of halogen glare, and let the stars light your path.



Woman's Place

There are the husband's apple and pear trees, twined by the wife's clematis; his cabbage beds fringed with her pinks and pansies; the tool-house wreathed with roses; his rougher labor adorned by her gayer fancy, all speaking loudly of their hearts and tastes... We trust the cottager's wife will love and care for the flowers and we are sure if she does that her husband's love and esteem for her will be heightened and strengthened.

From an English Gardening
Magazine, 1848



Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society

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Please mail completed form and checks made out to The Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society (WHPS): Richard Bloomquist, 5743 Wilshire Drive, Madison, WI 53711; 274-8326

Wisconsin Hardy Plant Society

February 10, 1999 Newsletter

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