



The Perennial ***February 2022***

2021-22: Issue 5

Website: <ArlingtonGarden.org>

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Greetings Club members...

As I sit by my window on this snowy, winter wonderland scene, my thoughts drift off to the coming seasons, although I do love winter. Most gardeners probably spend time thinking ahead about the coming season regarding, what new additions for their gardens would be good, what to keep and what changes should/could be made....so many ideas!

I feel strongly that lawns have become obsolete for the most part. Or perhaps could be reduced. Leaves should be mulched and spread on garden beds. Many leaves should be left under shrubs and trees for overwintering insects. Stems of hydrangea and other bushes and shrubs should not be cut until later spring because they afford habitat for overwintering insects and their eggs.

The following piece brought many thoughts along these lines to my attention. Mindfulness is not easily come by sometimes. Happy day dreaming on a sunny winter day!

Your President, Lolly Bennett

A Conversation Between God and St. Francis

God: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there Lord. They are called the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it is so boring, it's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it.... sometimes two times a week.

God: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

St. Francis: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now let me get this straight...they fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes, sir.

God: Frank, these Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this Lord, but when the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You'd better sit down, Lord. As soon as the leaves fall, the Suburbanites rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God: No way! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. Francis: After throwing the leaves away, they go out and buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis: They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

God: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

St. Catherine: "Dumb and Dumber," Lord. It's a really stupid movie about . . .

God: Never mind--I think I just heard the whole story from Saint Francis!

February Program

Wednesday, February 19th, 2022 – 10:30 am

Via Zoom

~ because of ongoing Covid concerns ~

February's previously announced speaker, Tree Warden Tim LeCuivre will, we anticipate, be presenting in person, in March. In the meantime, thanks to the efforts of Program Chairs Jan Ford and Carmen Torres, they were able to rearrange our March speaker....

“Gardening with Dahlias”

Betsy Szymczak

Member & Judge, American Dahlia Society



Betsy will brighten our winter morning when she shares her knowledge of dahlias, the late summer-early fall “Royalty”! This program will provide a brief history of the discovery of dahlias and their introduction into the American garden. You will learn how to select dahlia tubers, where to plant, how to water and fertilize. To stake or not to stake, to dig or not to dig – these are the questions! If you dig tubers, how to store, overwinter, and then how to wake them up and perhaps make cuttings. This will be followed by a brief discussion of American Dahlia Society Classification (ADS) and how to enter a Dahlia Show.

[The pdf of Betsy's handout will be sent with the Zoom reminder..]

As promised, here are some links from January's Program presenters

**“Gardening for our native pollinators:
Who’s doing it and why”**

~ What can you do? ~

Mystic Charles Pollinator Pathways Map Home Garden Survey

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdco4RuuTk4hSLYF_Tq7g3jFMn3zkVfzhVoyEJDEd5Ycxsonw/viewform>

Handout

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jTJdvQWAYRcPWwqjT_Ke68iCez1HrkFo/edit?usp=sharing&oid=115795115954464484693&rtpof=true&sd=tru>

<Xerces.org>

<<https://www.lexingtonlivinglandscapes.org/>>

What’s blooming on your windowsill?



*Thanks for photographic submissions in this issue from Karen MacKinnon &
Katherine Jones*

Environment – Stephan Miller, Chair

Tips for Climate-Friendly Gardening: Part II

Tips for gardening in a climate friendly fashion can be divided into two general categories:

- 1) The reduction of gardening greenhouse gas emissions
and
- 2) The storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide in plants and soil.

Last month, we made a good start on number one by switching from gasoline-powered to electric gardening tool, provided the electricity used is obtained from renewable sources. You could reduce emissions even further using a push mower and cutting up your garden waste by hand.

This month, I would like to continue with the reduction of emissions by discussing the use of organic fertilizers. One of the main nutrients that plants need is nitrogen, but plants can't absorb nitrogen directly from the air. Plants obtain the needed nitrogen by absorbing compounds high in fixed nitrogen from the soil. In the early 20th Century chemists discovered methods for mass-producing high nitrogen compounds such as ammonia. Ammonia itself is used as a fertilizer and is in the chemical fertilizers that most of us use.

The problem is that producing ammonia takes high pressures and temperatures which means that a lot of energy is used in the process and, therefore, a lot of greenhouse gas is released. To make matters worse, plants only utilize about half the soluble nitrogen we apply to the soil. The other half runs off into waterways or is converted by soil microbes into nitrous oxide which is a very potent greenhouse gas.

The most benign alternatives to chemical fertilizers are compost, composted manure and nitrogen-fixing cover crops. These alternatives can also be combined and processed into organic fertilizers which contain lower levels of essential elements that are slowly released into the soil as the plants need them. In addition, organic fertilizers contain trace elements that plants need in small quantities and are a good food source for soil microorganisms which, in turn, contribute to improved soil structure and enhanced plant growth. Natural fertilizers also usually contain a lot of organic matter which also contributes to building healthy soil structure.

I will close by sharing an important quote with you from Canadian-British journalist Cory Doctorow:

“What's more, the problem isn't primarily one of individual choices: you, personally, can't replace your gas car with an efficient, well-maintained, reasonably priced subway network.”

What Cory is telling us is that your individual contributions to limiting global warming are important, but much more important is your advocacy and support for leaders who believe in mitigating the coming climate crisis.

The most important thing we can do to mitigate the warming of the atmosphere is to support leaders who accept the idea that our climate is changing and who tell us they will do as much as they can, politically and economically, to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas being released into the atmosphere. That, along with reducing our use of fossil fuels, is the biggest contribution we can personally make.

Garden Therapy

Carol Nahigian & Carmen Torres Co-Chairs

January's program was cancelled due to COVID concerns
