
THE REAL DIRT

The Horticulture Committee's Quarterly Publication

Grow vegetables with ease

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Botanical Paintings: Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Exhibition



VEGETABLE GARDENING – OLDER ADULT STYLE

by Tootsie Crutchfield
Former Editor of *The Real Dirt*
Magnolia Garden Club, Zone IX

Ahh – I had just reached the stage of life that allowed an abundance of time to devote to growing vegetables as family and community commitments had become less demanding. A problem quickly became evident — my aging body did not appreciate the necessary bending and kneeling required for this endeavor. I recalled noticing livestock water troughs being used as decorative planters to give a rustic look to particular venues and recalled a friend using these troughs for her garden.

One day in October 2016, I had the perfect combination of family members and hired help who were willing to do the heavy labor to execute my trough idea. For decades our vegetable garden had been a long, narrow bed bordering a deep drainage canal — an area that receives full sun. I realized this set up was an invitation for a tumble by an older person. So, we purchased three 6.5' x 2' galvanized metal troughs from an agricultural supply store and placed them inside the existing garden bed thereby providing space for sure footing. Holes were drilled in the troughs and broken pieces of Styrofoam insulation (a product that will never deteriorate) were placed in the bottom for drainage. Styrofoam cups would work just as well. Then, sacks of soil were poured on top. I was giddy with joy over these raised beds.



I used a mixture of garden soil from a big box store with a slow-release organic fertilizer, Micro-Life™, that doesn't burn the soil. I am not sure whether or not it is a regional product – we who use it down here absolutely love it. Once the seeds germinated in the spring, I mulched with cypress needles (from our tree), which are smaller than pine needles and work well in containers. I must say that we are eating our weight in green beans and will enjoy this crop well into the summer. Living near the upper Texas Gulf Coast (USDA Zone 9) means gardening is almost a yearlong activity; however, most of us retreat into air conditioning in August and early September. My first crop planted in the fall consisted of broccoli, spinach, lettuce, onions and carrots. When the first heat arrived in April, we planted tomatoes in the ground between the troughs and planted green bush beans, a variety of peppers and some herbs in the troughs.

No longer do I dread the necessary chores required when growing vegetables. The absence of intruding weeds and ease of harvesting make the tasks a pleasant activity.

A side note to this story, the weekend all of this was being constructed, a son and his family were visiting from another city. The oldest grandson (age 12) was quite enchanted with our project, so much so that they installed a trough for vegetables in their backyard. My hope is that the success they have had will instill a love of gardening in the grandson and his brothers.



Botanical Paintings from the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Exhibition at Corcoran Art School, Wash. D.C. 2006

“An Idea Blooms”
by Jan Denton,
Botanical Artist
Santa Fe Garden Club, Zone XII

In 2003, I was studying for my Certificate in Botanical Art and Illustration at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, DC. I was also reading “Undaunted Courage” by award-winning historian Stephen Ambrose. With the bicentennial of the Lewis & Clark Expedition on the horizon, I was intrigued by the idea of creating new art to celebrate the botanical achievements of this remarkable journey. I also wanted to find out what happened to the original collection of plant specimens, and distressed that the untimely death of Meriwether Lewis never enabled him to analyze what he had collected.

The Corcoran College and the Museum responded enthusiastically to the exhibition idea. Three of us – a teacher and two painters - became its curators. Twenty-five expert artists committed to creating the work and to be guided by historical and botanical experts.



Balsamorhiza sagittata -
'Arrowleaf Balsamroot'



Claytonia lanceolata -
'Western Spring Beauty'

Under the guidance of Dr. James Reveal, a well-known Lewis & Clark botanist, we made two summer field trips to Idaho to find the actual plants and do our field studies. More than 45 works of art were produced, included new drawings, paintings, sculpture, and a quilt. In 2006, our exhibition entitled "*Botanical Treasures of Lewis & Clark – New Art for the Bicentennial*" opened at the Corcoran Museum of Art. Surrounded by the history of the region, inspired by the stories of the explorers and impressed by the experts who assisted, our experience as artists inspires us still.



Frasera fastigiata -
'Clustered Elkweed'



Mimulus lewisii -
'Lewis' Monkey Flower'

Botanical jewelry

by Alice Farley
Wissahickon Garden Club, Zone V

Origins

Plants have been a key inspiration for jewelry design since there was the idea of 'ornamentation'. The early artists turned to the forms found in nature for design inspiration, even when their ideas were then rendered in metals or stone. However, in many cultures, various actual beans and seeds were used both for barter and for decorative uses. In the Caribbean, Central America and Africa, places where many unusually attractive seeds and beans grow, they are still the basis today for many types of jewelry and accessory.



Jewels for a Belly Dancer
pine needles and grass seed heads
by Alice Farley

GCA discovers the Botanical Arts

Although, surely, artists have played with the use of natural materials in sculpture, design and jewelry making for millennia, the introduction of botanical arts to GCA can be traced to 1990-1 in Philadelphia (Zone V). It happened that a member of Wissahickon Garden Club, Christine Smart, now a member of Georgetown Garden Club (Zone VI) was living in Belgium. When several garden club friends went for a visit, they attended floral exhibitions in Brussels and Paris where they saw examples of dried plant material used to create artistic constructions, including wall decorations and smaller items. At the same time, two other Wissahickon members, Ginny Simonin and Joly Stewart were at a show in Bermuda and saw some intriguing uses of treated plant material used to design jewelry.



Rhythm & Texture Necklace
grass, mustard seeds and
brazil nuts
by Alice Farley

Wissahickon was planning a flower show at the Woodmere Museum and it was decided that our members would try their hands at this mysterious new art form. I know one class was a necklace, because I made one using *Alchemilla* foliage and

mustard seeds. Other early ‘practitioners’ include Wissahickon GC artists Jane Kilduff, Ginny Simonin, Lisa Howe, Leslie Purple and Emilie Lapham all of whom continue to create and are widely admired for their skillful and unique creations. To say our efforts were embryonic would be a kindness...but it was an exciting new concept eagerly embraced by members of other GCA clubs, and the following year the Philadelphia Flower Show introduced a new competitive division of Botanical Arts. Although displayed that first year in a dark and old-fashioned vertical display case borrowed from the jewelry firm J. Caldwell, it was a big hit with visitors to the show. Over the next few years, the exhibits grew in sophistication and technique. More exciting, GCA shows beyond Zone V started to include Botanical Arts classes in their schedules, sponsored workshops to learn the techniques and carried the art forms in interesting and fresh directions.



“Tutti Frutti”

by Leslie Purple and Alice Farley

Cedrella sinensis, Canella
Soy beans, Eucalyptus seeds

Botanical jewelry as seen in The Garden Club of America shows in recent years not only draws inspiration from nature, but MUST solely use natural materials manipulated in various ways to create the illusion of various precious stones and metals. All visible materials must start as unprocessed plant materials (for example no dimensional wood, macaroni, etc.) to be used to create these botanical creations. Unlike the colorful bead jewelry often for sale in tropical countries today, many of the pieces of botanical jewelry created by contemporary ‘botanical jewelers’ are so delicate that, as real as they appear, they could never be worn or used. They are items of considerable beauty and artistry which APPEAR to be fully functional, but better considered to be decorative ‘objets’ rather than truly functional items. Some are so skillfully created that it would take an actual jeweler to discern that they are not stones or metals.



Dutch Bonnet

by Jennifer Fiss and Lisa Walker

Wissahickon G.C. Zone V

Materials

Artists are a creative and inventive lot! An amazing array of natural materials have been used to create the various components of entries in Botanical Arts divisions. They range from the most exotic tropical seeds and barks gathered on trips to far off lands to the most ordinary things from the market like onion skins, tangerine peels and the odd weed found by the side of the road. Some of the most successful entries have been made from just two or three different materials, such as dried flower stalks, rice and beans. Other winners have thirty or more different materials. One thing that all materials have in common: The plant is in a stable state: i.e., it is not a fresh leaf, a pulpy berry, or seed head

which will fall apart when dried. Whether few or many materials are used, all entries must be accompanied by an identification card including a sample of the material, correctly identified with the botanical name. This can involve some fancy sleuthing- from visits to botanic gardens, to trolling the internet, using plant id apps, to using the database of the Philadelphia Flower Shows competitive divisions.



"A Shoe"

by Jennifer Fiss and
Lisa Walker

There are several reasons that plant material used must be identified. Foremost, GCA flower shows are intended to be educational as well as inspirational! If you are intrigued, you should be able to glean insight into how the materials evolve in creating the design. Second, often the raw materials undergo a dramatic transformation and would be hard for the casual observer to sort out what the material might have been originally. Third, the judges will review each type of material to ensure that it is 'from living nature' and not something manufactured or commercially transformed such as string, lumber or pasta... materials which at one point in their existence were 'from living nature' but are now 'man-made' products.

For a fledgling botanical jeweler, some relatively easy-to-manipulate materials might include peas (not the type you eat, but those you plant), dried leaves, pressed flat, seeds such as mustard or chia, dried grasses, bits of vines and twigs, and nuts. These commonly used, readily available bits of plants are very successfully treated to 'become' pearls, gems, chains, wires, and metals. This is not through alchemy! Rather, the transformation is due to carving, shaping, cutting, lacquering, gluing and applications of silver and gold leaf or many layers of paint and nail varnish.

From Head to Toe: Queen Bee-atrix's Bonnet:

Acer palmatum
Actinidia arguta
Brassica junco
Citrus limon
Coriandrum sativum
Craspedia variables
Cucumis melo cantalupensis
Cuminum cyminum
Eucalyptus globules
Fagus sylvatica
Hevea brasiliensis
Hibiscus syriacus
Hydrangea macrophylla
IRIDACEAE *Liliales*

JUCACEAE
Lagerstroemia
Lens culinaris
Magnolia
Maize
Narcissus
Onoclea sensibilis
Phaseolus vulgaris
Pinus
Pipernigrum
Pisum Sativum
PROTEACEAE
Raphia
Sesamum indicum

Setaria italica
Solidago
Tillandsia usneoides

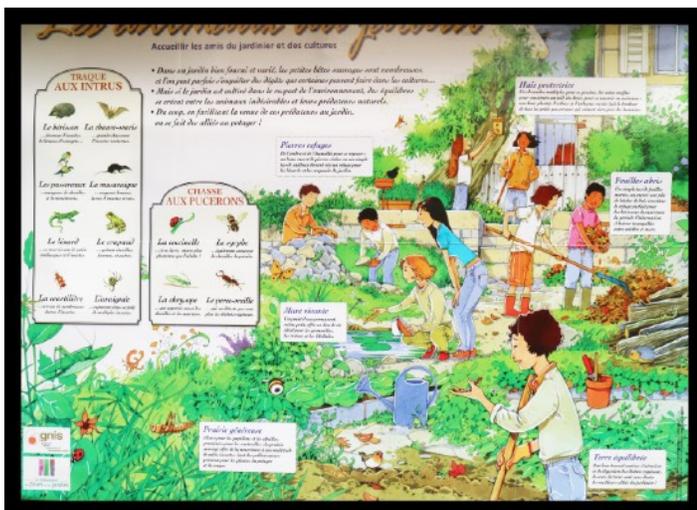
A French Pollinator Garden

by Caroline Borgman
Glenview Garden Club,
Louisville, Kentucky, Zone VII

Lucy Rhame and I stumbled upon a pollinator garden in Capdenac-Haut, in southern France in July 2016.

The Garden shows that pollinators are capturing the attention of gardeners around the world, and the movement to create pollinator gardens is receiving international interest.

This was a charming garden in the middle of the small French town.



[Click here to for better detail](#)

Installing a Rain Garden, Midwest Style

by Linda Grieve
Des Moines Founders Garden Club, Zone XI

The Iowa Arboretum has a small one room schoolhouse in their Children's Garden. Each of the downspouts ends in a rain barrel, demonstrating one way to conserve rainwater. The decision to build a demonstration rain garden was implemented when the Iowa Nursery and Landscape Association planned a student service day at the Arboretum.



To calculate the size and depth needed, we used the process outlined in Iowa's Rain Garden Design and Installation Manual, found online. According to the percolation rate, 120 square feet of roof draining in the space, multiplied by 20%, yielded a rain garden of 24 square feet, 6" deep. Plants that have been shown to last at the bottom of rain gardens over 10 years in Minneapolis were sedges and switchgrasses. We used fox sedge in this small area, *Carex vulpinoides*. These two species seem to tolerate flooding, yet live during periods of drought. Shortly after the rain garden was installed, 2 ¾" of rain fell overnight. It worked!



Book Review

The Hidden Life of Trees

By
Peter Wohlleben

When it was suggested by The Real Dirt editor, Catherine Allan, that I write a review of The Hidden Life of Trees, the title sounded familiar. I had been made aware of this small book through its appearance in many places, including the NY Times best science books list as well as through various horticultural organizations. It was even mentioned to me by a small book store owner in Connecticut who informed me that she had sold several copies and believed it was presently in reprint. This small, 300 page book written by a German forester seemed to be making a major impact in the horticultural arenas of our country.

The perspective of the author's observations of trees is based on the forest environment, not from the landscaped property point of view. He claims trees are very social beings and communicate with one another. Much of this communication takes place in the tree's structure beneath the soil. He indicates trees will often provide nutrition for a struggling tree through their root systems. They also appear to have relationships with those that live in their proximity, and many like to live in colonies of similar tree type. His statements sometimes seem unimaginable but many of his observations and positions are well substantiated by scholarly footnotes listed in the back of the book.

So much has been written and lectured of late about the mycorrhizal components of the soil. Trees pair up with the fungi residing in the soil to assist them in the uptake of water. Some of this information can be very complex in its presentation. The fungi within the soil are the foundation of the soil's health and the plants that grow within it. It is the basis of our strong encouragement to keep our soil amendments organic and not chemically based when attending to our garden soils. Mr. Wohlleben tells the story in a straight forward fashion that is understandable to all of us. The book is worth the read just for the understanding of this concept.

Through the pages of his book, the forests of Germany seem to come alive. Mr. Wohlleben describes the dynamics and interactions of trees, the rearing of their young, being under siege by insects, surviving adverse weather and just living their lives. My walks in the woods have been enhanced by reading this book and attempting to interpret Mr Wohlleben's message of what I think is so graphically and passionately described in this lovely book. It is short "read" with lots of valuable information for those of us who love being in the forest.

Gail Hamsher
Library Committee
Stonington Garden Club, Zone II