



TAKOMA HORTICULTURAL CLUB

www.takomahort.org

August 2010 Newsletter



July Club Meeting

Letting it All Soak In...

Real Life Storm Water Solutions

For the club's July event, Kit Gage and Wendy Bell, THC's President and past president, led a group on a tour of interesting solutions to serious rain water and erosion problems, in and near Takoma Park. About eighteen people, including some Friends of Sligo Creek members, gathered at the TP Community Center, whose new roof garden was the first stop on the tour. Designed to absorb and release rainwater and reduce heat, the roof is planted with a varicolored desert-like landscape of low growing succulents, set in about four inches of small rocks and soil. The degradable fiber netting that was used to place and anchor the plants is still visible, but plants will gradually fill in. In the center, an overflow catch takes excess water down from the roof. Kit explained that a roof of this kind is very heavy and the center was constructed to handle this weight.

(see *WATER MANAGEMENT*, p 3)

August Club Meeting

Annual Members'

Pot Luck Picnic

Sunday, August 15, 4-7 pm at Wendy Bell's
Don't miss this fun annual get-together! This year's picnic will be hosted by Wendy Bell and Vivian Fong at their home at 7211 Willow Avenue, Takoma Park, on Sunday, Aug. 15, from 4-7pm. Wendy's front yard was featured in the *Washington Post* in July---- now you can see what's in her back yard!!

Please bring a favorite food for many people, and anything you'd like to drink. The club will provide tasty chicken. Chairs are also a good idea. Help with set up and clean up is welcome.

Note: The picnic is a Takoma Hort Club "members only" event. If you'd like to renew or join the club at the potluck, bring a check made out to THC for \$12. You can download a membership form from www.takomahort.org.

Please RSVP for the picnic to Wendy Bell at bellandfong@gmail.com.

TREES: TODD BOLTON September 15 at 7:30 p.m.

It's tree night with the THC! If you want to learn how to take care of your trees, what are the best trees to plant in your yard or on the street, or why Takoma Park won't let you cut down your tree, join us on September 15th to ask Todd Bolton, the Takoma Park arborist, all your tree questions.

We will meet at the Takoma Park Community Center at 7:30 p.m.

Growing Their Own: Vegetables in the 'Hood

How do THC vegetable gardeners cope with the heat, drought/gully washers, extra shade, impervious clay, and munching and sucking entomological specimens that characterize a local area summer? Not to worry, judging from two gardens visited in July.

Abundant is the word for **Becky Lavash's** sunny Silver Spring garden. Plants climb, sprawl and sprout everywhere. A big volunteer squash plant decorates the garden path, next to a six-foot tomato inside a bean cage; oregano spreads underfoot, and a big bed of horseradish, started from a small gift plant, must be at least three feet tall. Lots of earthy-colored garlic is drying near its former bed.

Becky started growing vegetables as a teen and "can't remember not gardening." She grows vegetables for that rewarding feeling of producing-- that "I grew dinner" fix. Admittedly the vegetable garden isn't always pretty, especially after she mulches it with shredded newspaper and grass clippings, but it keeps producing. Her current garden gained "scalding hot" afternoon sun after two trees had to be removed, and had benefited when its previous owner raised the level of the yard with a thick application of manure. She amends the soil annually with manure, uses Espoma fertilizers where needed, applies insecticidal soap to deter those stripey cucumber beetles, and ignores flea beetles.

Many gardeners are used to perennials, which do okay with periodic inputs once they get established. "Vegetables are needier. It's asking a lot of the plant -- you want it to produce a lot of fruit." She thinks soil is most critical to success. "You need the sun to grow the plant large," but fruit does not need sunshine to develop.

Sufficient water is especially critical for fruiting plants like tomatoes.

Though amply blessed with sunshine, Becky thinks gardeners shouldn't give up if they don't have it. "People think of tomatoes"



when they think of a vegetable garden, she says, and many think you can't grow vegetables unless you have eight hours of sun, but there is a range of things you can grow with less light. "If you have less than full sun, you can often grow cherry tomatoes. In winter, when the leaves are gone there is sunlight in which you can grow lettuces, chard, and so on."

Asked if she cans or stores the harvest, Becky gave the reporter a jar of delicious pickled eggplant in answer. But for the most part, she eats or gives away the bounty. The pleasure comes in stepping out the back door and picking a warm tomato to serve a dinner guest.

Beth Richwine and Randy Cleaver are also long-time vegetable gardeners. Beth has gardened "since she was a kid" and had a community plot when she lived in DC; Randy has gardened since college. Their Takoma Park garden, which those who went on the Open Garden tour in June will remember for its stone-surrounded pond and front yard butterfly habitat, began to get afternoon sun after a large tree fell.

For a while, they tried planting directly in the gravelly clay back yard soil. Plants grew well until they hit the unimproved clay and promptly died off. Three years ago they built raised beds and filled them with a combination of soil and leaf mold, which they amend with Takoma Park compost. (see *LOCAL GARDENERS*, p.3)



(LOCAL GARDENERS, continued)

Each year at the end of the season they plant a cover crop, a green manure mix of vetch, buckwheat and clover from Peaceful Valley Farm and Garden Supply, which gets dug into the soil in the spring.

Because there is less than optimal sun, Randy and Beth experiment with varieties that are suitable to the situation, such as “short” carrots. They grow marigolds alongside the carrots for moral support. Squash seemed not to do well, but this year to their surprise and pleasure, four different varieties of squash appeared spontaneously, flowered and fruited in a compost area. A butternut, an acorn, a zucchini and a miniature pumpkin have emerged so far.



Beth and Randy grow what they like to eat and are adventurous eaters. Crops that do particularly well here are the leafy ones. After deer wiped out the chard, Beth built a lightweight cover out of PVC pipe and netting, which can be lifted and replaced (see photo) and this year’s chard is growing happily inside. They plant kale in the spring, pull it when whiteflies appear, and then plant again in the fall. Bush beans are flourishing, and tomatoes are growing up strings suspended from a wooden frame.

Weeds are burned or pulled-- they tried vinegar, which didn’t work well because the weed seeds survived. To replenish the soil they bring home the well-made TP compost,

but “what the plants *really* like”, said Randy, is the dark fluid that comes from three worm colonies down in the basement. He showed this reporter one of them-- a plastic kitty litter box in which a pile of green kitchen scraps was pulled aside to reveal a mass of wigglers.

Thanks to Beth, Randy and Becky for sharing their gardens & letting me worm out their gardening secrets- DBS

(WATER MANAGEMENT, continued)

Next stop was the Hancock Avenue engineered rain garden, largely funded by the City of Takoma Park and featured in the July THC News (see www.takomahort.org). More than a month later, the garden is full of blazing red cardinal flowers amid other native plants. A bed of sandy soil lies below about eight inches of coarse mulch, a layer designed to capture pollutants which must be replaced with clean mulch annually. More plants will be purchased in the fall with the funds donated by the THC.

The group moved on by car pool to see another engineered solution to roaring rainwater, this one on Cleveland Avenue. The bottom of the sloping street is covered in pervious pavers set in gravel, surrounded on either side with a thin strip of pervious concrete and ending at a grate. Here overflow is sent by pipe into a large rain garden on private property with a big collection of plants. This garden has a very deep basin and, according to the homeowner, was replanted after construction with her own shrubs and other suitable plants. She said that after a heavy rain the garden becomes like a pond, on which her ornamental Buddha appears to be floating, but within hours it is merely damp, having absorbed the runoff. This sophisticated project was funded by a grant to the City of Takoma Park.

Final stops were in the Sligo Park Hills neighborhood of Silver Spring, to see a handsome basket weave brick driveway set in a permeable bed of two feet of gravel and sand that captures water, and to check out Kit’s back yard rain garden, a 200 gallon above-ground cistern that replaces her previous 55 gallon rain barrels, extensive patches of conservation landscaping in place of lawn, and other projects that address erosion issues on her property and her neighbor’s. The garden, which members saw at the 2009 pot luck picnic, has filled in nicely in the intervening year.

Vibrant Vegetables at Brookside Gardens

If you want to have both good eating and good looking beds, visit Brookside Gardens and check out the glamour varieties of the vegetable world.

In this first year of the park's three-year emphasis on food gardening, the staff and volunteers have planted vegetable varieties with visual appeal in beds designed to please the eye with color, texture and form. They have also tucked edibles into other spaces all through the park..

In front of the conservatory, great big cabbages sit with marigolds near blazing ruby chard. If you look closely you can even see a few decorative harlequin bugs on the cabbage, probably not part of the design.



In the Trial Garden a long border of vegetables was planted like a perennial bed, in swathes of contrasting color and form, and

with trellised scarlet runner and hyacinth beans and tall waving grains providing height. Here there are several varieties of small colorful peppers, tall Cajun Delight okra with golden flowers and green pods, orange Turkish eggplants (lacy-leaved from the beetle squad), waving magenta amaranth, tomatoes, potatoes, radishes, pumpkin, sweet potatoes, tomatillos, chives,



and so on. Everything is healthy and handsome, though some vigorous vegetables, not having read the blueprint, outgrew their roles. A bright curve of yellow and red 'Chilli chili' peppers runs for a few feet- until it tunnels under the leaves of the rambunctious zucchini. On the other side of the sundial bed, handsome black pearl peppers are in a row by themselves; elsewhere they are contrasted with bright impatiens and orange

marigolds. A long bed contains tall grains: rice in sunken tubs of water, soy, red wheat, sorghum and millet.

In the Fragrance Garden you can find many herbs including decorative basil and bronze fennel, Purple Flash peppers, Little Lucy okra, and several Abyssinian banana plants tucked in among the usual inhabitants. An urn of Burgundy rice sits in a fountain in the perennial garden.

The vegetables are maintained without the use of pesticides. Taffy Turner is one of the Master Gardeners who groom the beds and tie up the tumbling tomato plants. She says the ripening produce draws an occasional two-legged nibbler as well as the six-legged sort... another tribute to success.



Some Varieties to See at Brookside

Amaranthus 'Hot Biscuits'

Basil: Ocimum Basilicum 'Amethyst', 'Purple Ruffles'

Beans: Lablab purpureus 'Ruby Moon', *phaseolus coccineus* Scarlet runner

Chard: Beta vulgaris 'Bright Lights'

Eggplant: Solanum melongena Turkish orange

Grains: triticum aestivum 'robin' (hard red spring wheat), *sorghum spp.* Milo, *Zea mays* corn, *Oryza Sativa Nigrescens* Burgundy rice

Malabar spinach- basella rubra

Okra: Abelmoschus esculentus "Cajun Delight"(photo to left), 'Little Lucy'

Peppers: Capsicum annuum 'Black Pearl' (front page photo), 'Explosive Ember', 'Chilli Chili'(photo above), 'Purple Flash'

Tomatillo: Physalis ixocarpa 'Purple de Milpa'

Dues and Don'ts

— Carole Galati

The THC membership list has been updated. Those who have not paid their 2010 dues have been removed from the current list. But if you are an extremely “late bloomer” and want to pay up, go to our website: www.takomahort.org to find out how to pay dues and maintain your membership. Some “Members-Only” events are coming up: the Summer Potluck and the Fall Plant Exchange. And keep in mind: members get a discount on bulbs purchased at the Takoma Street Fair in October. All club events and details are on our website! Don't miss out!

Gardening Events in the Community

Washington Gardener Magazine's 3rd Annual Tomato Tasting

Fresh Farm Market, Silver Spring*
Saturday, August 28; 10:00am-12:00noon
Sample the multitude of tomatoes at market and vote on your favorites. Stop by for tomato recipes, growing tips, and much more...
Wear a bib!
*The market is on Ellsworth between Fenton Street and Georgia Avenue.

Washington Gardener Magazine

Urban Garden Talk Series

Historical Society of Washington, DC

2:00-3:30pm

The series will resume in the fall. Dates:

Sept 26 [Kathy Jentz](#) “Getting the Most out of Small Space, Urban Gardens”

October 31 [Cheval Force Opp](#)

“Vermicomposting and Composting Basics”

November 28 [Michael Twitty](#) “In Search of African-American Heritage Seed”

FREE and open to the public

Green Spring Gardens

4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria, VA

28th Annual Begonia Show and Sale

August 28, 9am-4:30pm; August 29, 12-3:30pm Feast your eyes at this free flower show sponsored by the Potomac Branch of the American Begonia Society . Expand your plant palette; be tempted with splashes of color for homes and greenhouses that last long after frosts have put our outdoor gardens to bed!

Folger Shakespeare Library

Elizabethan Garden Tours

The garden was inspired by herbal references in Shakespeare's plays and incorporates plants popular in his time, including lavender, creeping thyme, and English ivy. There's also a knot garden and Shakespearean statues created by American sculptor Greg Wyatt. www.folger.edu

Brookside Gardens

Cactus Show

Saturday, August 7, 9:00am-5:00pm

Sunday, August 8, 9:00am-4:00pm

Visitors Center

Sponsored by the [National Capital Cactus and Succulent Society](#)

Daylily Show

Saturday, August 14, 1:30-5:00pm

Outside the Visitors Center

Sponsored by the [National Capital Daylily Club](#)

Common Good City Farm

300 V Street NW, Washington, DC

Uncommon Uses for Common Herbs (third in a series of four herb workshops)

August 14 11 am – 1 pm

Parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme: you grow them in your garden and use them to flavor your cooking, but how else can they benefit you?

Learn medicinal uses for the herbs in your spice rack by making teas and brews in this hands-on workshop. Tricia McCauley, www.nutriciaconsulting.com



The Takoma Horticultural Club News is

published monthly and welcomes suggestions and contributions from readers. Most material is written or submitted by THC members. Get in touch with editor Diane Svenonius at dbsvenonius@msn.com

Photo Credits:

Above, *National Capital Cactus and Succulent Society*; photos of vegetables are the editor's.