

The Garden Clippings

Somerset Garden Club

2014

WINTER



President's Message

By Arlene Blissell

Now the holidays are a memory and the slow rhythm of a Somerset County winter is upon us. Short days and long nights mean candlelight and firelight and poring over new plant varieties in catalogs. This down time will eventually fade into spring, but after January I find myself watching eagerly for any sign it is near.

As a club we can certainly be proud of our accomplishments in the last months of 2013. "Rejoice" was a perfect theme for our November flower show, and I am so grateful for all the members that gave their time and talent. A great crew came to decorate the planters on the square, just in time for Light Up Night. They then returned to add bows and pine cones to our wreaths. Our wreath sale is an important fund raiser for us, and I think the new supplier provided us with a quality product. If you get a chance to pass Somerset Trust on Main Street, be sure to take a moment to admire the swags Linda Musser and I made. The mix of greens and red bows are a perfect holiday accent.

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Take these next slow weeks to rest after the hectic Christmas season because spring will return, bringing with it more chores needing attention. Savor the cold air and snow, hard to do at times, I know, when the snow shovel never gets a rest. Dream of the flowers resting under a blanket of white, returning one day to be greeted like an old friend. Winter is a time for rest and dreams. Then it is over, followed by a mad rush of activity. I can't wait!

CONSERVATION

Protecting Outdoor Terrain

Snowshoeing is a fantastic way to experience our state parks, especially Laurel Hill and Kooser, during the winter months. The sport is easy to learn, poses little risk of injury and is a great way to exert energy and enjoy nature during the cold winter months. Everyone from young children to senior citizens can learn to snowshoe and enjoy their first time out.

Trails of various lengths in our parks can be used as snowshoeing trails in the winter. In addition, snowshoeing is sometimes permitted on local golf courses or across farmers' fields, but ask permission first. Conservation of sensitive areas must be a priority.

Remember that sufficient snow is needed to create a base for snowshoeing. The woods generally need even more snow to fall because the trees shield the trails. Be sure to use only designated and maintained trails in state parks.

Trail systems protect environmentally sensitive areas and provide quiet refuge for wildlife. Off-trail snowshoeing, hiking and skiing destroy snow tunnels used by native small rodents due to the trampling effect. These small mammals play an important role in our conservation efforts to protect meadow and forest ecology. Destruction of these tunnel networks make small mammals more vulnerable to predation.



CLUB NEWS

Meeting Place and Schedule

Monday, January 13: 11:00 am at the Dressler Center. Program is making dyes from plants. The Executive Board will meet at 10:00 a.m.

Monday, February 10: 11:00 am at Spice Up Your Life on North Center Avenue.

Monday, March 10: 11:00 am at the Dressler Center, Board at 10:00. Program is on Wildlife.

Christmas Events

Our annual Christmas wreath fundraiser was a success, with \$2,450.72 raised. Sadly, weather caused our Christmas Luncheon to be cancelled.

Phipps and Longwood Gardens Visits

On December 10 Arlene Blissell, Daryl Jones, Sandy Pritchard and Judy Rach traveled to Pittsburgh to enjoy the beauty of the Phipps Christmas display, including an evening of flowers and candlelight.

On December 20 Linda DeLia and her family visited Longwood Gardens in Chester County. They enjoyed the lavish outdoor Christmas display of lights as well as the charming Conservatory, featuring extravagant, fruit-adorned trees towering as high as 18 feet and where green and red apples float artistically in the Exhibition Hall. The Music Room display paid homage to the Green Room at the Hotel du Pont in Wilmington, DE, featuring sugared, fruit-laden trees and a lavish holiday tea.



NATURE

Cardinals in Winter

Cardinals don't migrate and they don't molt into a dull plumage, so they're breathtaking in winter's snowy white backyards. Even the female is an attractive red-brown color and sports the distinctive crest. A perennial favorite, the Northern Cardinal is the state bird of seven states, including nearby Ohio, Indiana and Illinois.

Northern Cardinals eat mainly seeds and fruit, supplementing these with insects. The northern cardinal's strong, thick bill is perfect for large seeds, and black oil sunflower seeds and safflower seeds are two of their favorites. Other foods cardinals like include cracked corn, peanut pieces, fresh berries, apple chunks and small pieces or shreds of suet. These foods should be offered in large, wide feeders that provide plenty of space for them to perch. Small tube feeders are unsuitable for

cardinals unless they include a large tray at the bottom.

Cardinals hop through low branches and forage on or near the ground. It's a joy in winter to see their brilliant plumage against a snowy backdrop, foraging for seeds that have dropped from the feeder. The distinctive crest can be raised and pointed when agitated or lowered and barely visible while resting. You typically see cardinals moving around in pairs during the breeding season, but in fall and winter they can form fairly large flocks of a dozen or even several dozen birds.

These bright winter birds sometimes forage with other species, including Dark-eyed Juncos (often called snowbirds), White-throated Sparrows and other sparrow species, Tufted Titmice and Goldfinches. Pairs may stay together throughout winter, but up to 20 percent of pairs split up by the next season.

A week or two before the female starts nest building in the early spring, she starts to visit possible nest sites, with the male following along. The pair call back and forth and hold nesting material in their bills as they assess each site.

Nests tend to be wedged into a fork of small branches in a sapling, shrub or vine tangle and hidden in dense foliage. Males sometimes bring nest material to the female, who does most of the building. She crushes twigs with her beak until they're pliable, then turns in the nest to bend the twigs around her body and push them into a cup shape with her feet.

The male helps incubate the eggs when he is not out foraging for food. When the baby birds hatch, he tends to them, feeding them insects, while the female scouts for a site to make another nest for the second brood of the season.

US populations are generally in good shape. The expansion of people and their backyards over the last two centuries has actually been good for

cardinals, so buy a platform feeder and a bag of oiled sunflower seeds to enjoy their winter show.



UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Somerset Garden Club Summer Flower Show

Arlene has talked to Laurel Arts about holding a summer flower show during Summerfest in July. They are very willing to help find room for our tent. If you have never tried to create a design, do attempt one. It is fun and a learning experience that builds on every design until the creative process becomes more natural. Winter is the perfect time to dream of summer flowers, study the catalogs for new varieties and germinate new plants for your spring and summer garden.

In winter the stars seem to have rekindled their fires, the moon achieves a fuller triumph, and the heavens wear a look of a more exalted simplicity.
~John Burroughs, "The Snow-Walkers," 1866



HORTICULTURE

Victorian Winter Houseplants

Take a walk down the main street of any town built a hundred years or more ago, including Somerset and Berlin, and you will find evidence of the 19th century fascination for houseplants. Horticultural hobbies were such a natural part of Victorian life

that the architecture of the times reflected the prevailing plant-related tendencies.

Look at the sun porches that bulge off the sides of so many Victorian homes or consider the popular recessed bay windows that inhabit many 19th-century homes. It was all part of a plan to invite nature indoors. The Victorians had fallen so madly in love with nature that they could scarcely survive the winter without a friendly plant or two offering their beauty to the resident family. Many of us feel the same.



The Victorian enthusiasm for houseplants can be easily explained. After all, houseplants were definitely a new invention. Before the 1830s, typical colonial homes were too dark and cold for plants to thrive indoors. That situation changed abruptly when the Age of Technology arrived, bringing a number of innovations. Windows in the home were larger with the manufacture of less expensive and better quality glass. Sunlight streamed in. Gradually, warm stoves replaced open fires, making the home more comfortable for people, pets and plants. In a “home of taste,” houseplants became paramount. Bay windows, collecting light from three exposures, provided an ideal spot for flowering plants and helped fuel the interest in growing plants indoors, especially newly introduced tropical plants.

The Victorians had an astounding repertoire of plants at their disposal. Most modern houseplants can be traced back to the Victorian era, when plant exploration was at its height and nurseries carried numerous botanicals for their eager customers. Some favorite Victorian houseplants were Abutilon, Jasmine, Fuchsias, Citrus, Heliotropes, Sword ferns, Maidenhair ferns, Holly ferns, Boston ferns and Palms. The African violet has been a favorite since Victorian times.

Let’s look more closely at three hardy Victorian favorites: *Aspidistra*, *Sansevieria* and *Dracaenas*.

Aspidistra

They’re known as the Cast Iron Plant because their resilience matches that of the great Victorian decorative metal. Just keep them out of direct sunlight, don’t overwater (you can get away with underwatering for long periods, however) and avoid repotting them too often.



Aspidistra (Cast Iron Plant)

Sansevieria

If anything, *Sansevieria* is even harder to put down than *Aspidistra*. Perhaps this indefatigability is what lies behind *Sansevieria*’s alternative name, Mother-in-Law’s Tongue. The stately leaves of

Sansevieria can really be stopped only by freezing temperatures and heavy overwatering in winter.



Sansevieria (Mother-in-Law's Tongue)

Dracaenas

Popular in Victorian times, Dracaenas are coming back into fashion and are now perhaps the most popular large foliage plant. Look for Dracaena Marginata, a type well able to cope with dry conditions, cold, lack of light and those times when you forget to water it.

New Member Linda Parke

Linda Parke first attended a meeting as a guest last fall and quickly became our newest member, whom we are delighted to have in the club. Linda tells us a bit about her life:

"I was born and raised in Somerset and graduated from Somerset in 1968. I went to Cambria Rowe Business School and received a degree in accounting. My first job was with Hi-Way Truck Company in Somerset. I married and had two daughters, Michelle and Julie. Michelle lives in State College and has four children; Julie lives in Somerset and has two children. I also have two stepsons and a total of eight grandchildren, with one on the way in April. I stayed home and raised the girls until they started school, and that is when my life in the medical field started. I then spent 34 years working for four different doctors, two

specialists and two family doctors. I retired last year.

During my working life I found time for volunteer work. I have volunteered for the Salvation Army, Somerset County Chamber of Commerce and Rails to Trails! I also worked for Sunrise Counseling Ministries in Somerset and taught Sunday School at the First Christian Church for 13 years. I have belonged to the 11th Society of Farm Women for over 20 years. As the girls were growing I also helped with Girl Scouts and softball team.

I enjoy kayaking, biking, hiking and snow skiing. I used to be a good water skier, but that was "used to be!" I golfed for over 25 years at Indian Lake, Piney Run and Somerset Country Club. I enjoy playing with our grandchildren and watching them play their sports. For over 11 years Hank and I have helped our friends with their hot air balloon. That is fun.

I enjoy getting outside to garden, both flowers and veggies, but I would like to learn more about all aspects in gardening. I enjoy meeting new people and helping with the uptown projects, and I'm looking forward to enjoying 2014 in the garden club."

It is the life of the crystal, the architect of the flake, the fire of the frost, the soul of the sunbeam. This crisp winter air is full of it.

~John Burroughs, "Winter Sunshine"



Fall Luncheon and Amanda Dowie Award

In October club members met at Café Fratelli for their fall luncheon. A tasty buffet meal of Italian specialties was provided by Vickie Crimone, co-owner of the restaurant with her husband Joe. Dessert parfaits, whose tops looked like apples cleverly created by Vickie, were as delicious as they were charming.

The highlight of the meeting was the annual Amanda Dowie Dried Arrangement Contest. Entries had to feature natural dried materials, but they were varied and interesting, thanks to the open design rubric.

Linda Musser won the blue ribbon, as well as the \$50 prize for first place, with her captivating contemporary design; tied for second were Sandirick's stunning vertical arrangement and Sandy Pritchard's classic arrangement with Japanese lanterns and hydrangea.



Sandy Pritchard, Linda Musser and Sandi Wirick

Christmas Flower Show

We presented a Small-Standard Flower Show entitled "Rejoice" at the Pius Spring Women's Club Christmas Home Tour and Bazaar in Berlin November 16-17.



"Best in Show" for Horticulture was awarded to Arlene Blissell. Division 1- Horticulture, Section A- Arboreal Branches, Class 1, Coned Evergreen Branches: Blue Ribbon winner Lorraine Dupre, 2nd place Arlene Blissell, 3rd place Linda Musser, Honorable Mention Jane Sotomayor.

Class 2, Berried Evergreen Branches: Blue Ribbon winner Linda DeLia, 2nd place Arlene Blissell, Honorable Mention, Lorraine Dupre and Linda Musser.

Class 3, Other Evergreen Branches: Blue Ribbon winner Nerita Brant, 2nd place Lorraine Dupre, 3rd place Sandra Upor, Honorable Mention Tish Will.

Section B - Container-Grown Plants. Class 4, Blue Ribbon winner Judy Rach, 2nd place Barbara Witchie, 3rd place Barbara Witchie, Honorable Mention Ellie Peltier.

Class 5, Foliage Container-Grown Plants: Awarded Best in Show for Horticulture and Blue Ribbon winner was Arlene Blissell, 2nd place Judy Rach, 3rd place Tish Will, Honorable Mention Tish Will and Judy Rach.

Class 6, Christmas Cactus - Club supplied: Blue Ribbon winner Sheila Croushore, 2nd place Judy Rach, 3rd place Jean Ogburn, Honorable Mention Tish Will, Lorraine Dupre and Arlene Blissell.

Class 7, Christmas Cactus - any other: Blue Ribbon winner Jean Ogburn, 2nd place Linda Musser, 3rd place Barbara Witchie.

Division 11 - Design. Nerita Brant won Best in Show for Design.

Class 1 - "Little Drummer Boy," a 5-inch Creative Miniature Design: Blue Ribbon winner Nerita Brant, 2nd place Sandra Upor, 3rd place Sheila Croushore, Honorable Mention Judy Rach.

Class 2 - "Joy to the World," a 8-inch Creative Small Design: Blue Ribbon winner Jane Sotomayor, 2nd place Sandy Pritchard, 3rd place Arlene Blissell, Honorable Mention Sandi Wirick.

Class 6 - "We Three Kings," a Parallel Style Design: Awarded Best in Show, as well as Blue Ribbon, was Nerita Brant, 2nd place Linda Musser, 3rd place Nancy Bittner, Honorable Mention Linda DeLia.

A special thanks to Sheila Croushore and the Flower Show Committee for a job well done.



Nerita's Brant's Best in Show for Design and Blue Ribbon Winner: "We Three Kings"



Nancy Bittner's Third Place "We Three Kings"



Linda Musser's 2nd Place Winner "We Three Kings"



Jane Sotomayor's Blue Ribbon Winner "Joy to the World"



More Photos from the Christmas Flower Show



THE GARDEN CLUB FEDERATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
Judges' Comments:



THE GARDEN CLUB FEDERATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
Judges' Comments:
The variety of green and red
Innovative looking - not typical

