

The Clod-Hopper



Volume 31 Edition 1 Gardeners of Wake County, Inc. – Raleigh, NC

JANUARY 2015

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

by Sherrill Johnson

I am excited to serve the Gardeners of Wake County as President in the upcoming year. Our wonderful organization is full of diverse members eager to explore the world of horticulture and share our common interests in all types of gardening.

Thank you for participating in the club. It is so important in making us a team. I am constantly im-

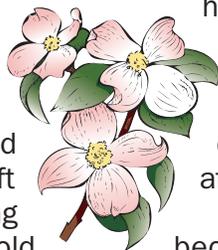


pressed with the enthusiasm, knowledge and generosity our members provide. Your ideas and suggestions are always welcome and appreciated. Being able to share the beauty of gardening and nature with each other is truly a gift. I am looking forward to the new year of fellowship and teamwork. Keep on digging!

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

by Laine Thomas

I started watching dogwoods when I first moved to North Carolina in 2004. The springtime bloom of dogwoods together with azaleas was like nothing I've ever seen before. A few years later, my husband and I shared a 500 sq ft apartment overlooking Cameron Village. Large, old dogwoods surrounded our brick apartment. I loved the white flow-



ers in spring, the red leaves in fall and the shape of the trees in winter. When we bought our first house, one of the first things we planted was a dogwood tree. Our 2 year old named it "My dogwood" and he still affectionately "owns" it.

I watch dogwoods closely because I love the small changes over the seasons. In the past few years I've also noticed a white powdery mildew and wrinkled leaves. This summer many of landmark trees in our historic Five Points neighborhood were covered with powdery mildew and died. Even our little tree didn't look very healthy. I called the arborist and learned that powdery mildew can be

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CLUB MEETINGS

Meetings are at 7:30pm at the JC Raulston Arboretum every 3rd Tuesday.

Next Meeting will be January 20th and feature the club's annual seed exchange. Will Farmer will discuss a variety



of plant propagation ideas to get everyone excited about spring. The seed exchange is open to everyone and there is always plenty to share. So if you had a poor harvest or just forgot, please come see the variety from our member's gardens.



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 Steven Thomas

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LITTLE RUBY™ DOGWOOD (Cornus 'NCCH1' PPAF):

The First of a New Breed of Dogwoods

– Tom Ranney, Professor of Horticultural Science, NCSU

Once heard my old mentor Dick Bir (former NC State Nursery Crops Extension Specialist) say, "A house is not truly your home until you have planted at least one dogwood". He summed it up well. Indeed, dogwoods are one of those plants that seem to be universally known and cherished, a quintessential symbol of home, beauty, gardens, and all things good - right up there with mom and apple pie.

Unfortunately, our native flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) is not without problems. Dogwood anthracnose (*Discula destructiva*) was initially observed in southeastern Connecticut in 1978 and has since spread rapidly through native populations in the Appalachian Mountains and associated highland areas down to northeastern Alabama. Dogwood anthracnose has severely affected large numbers of dogwoods in forest settings, but the impact has generally been less devastating in nursery and landscape settings. A second disease, powdery mildew (*Erysiphe pulchra*) became a seri-



ous problem starting in 1994. Since that time, dogwood powdery mildew has become ubiquitous. Fungicide applications to control powdery mildew can increase production costs considerably and long-term control in the landscape is usually impractical.

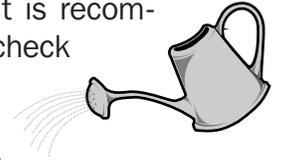
The diversity of dogwood species provides considerable opportunities to not only breed for improved disease resistance, but also to develop entirely new concepts and niches for dogwoods as landscape plants. Within the genus *Cornus*, the big-bracted dogwoods (including subg.

Cynoxylon, subg. *Syncarpea*, and subg. *Discocrania*) form a closely-knit group that includes both deciduous (*C. florida*, *nuttallii*, and *kousa*) and evergreen [*C. capitata*, *elliptica* (*angustata*) and *hongkongensis*] species. Many of these species will hybridize and the recent availability of new accessions of Asian taxa has greatly expanded possibilities for mixing and matching desirable traits. Deciduous species can offer substantial cold hardiness and a range of bract colors while evergreen species can contribute persistent foliage, stellar disease resistance, reblooming, tree and shrub forms, and ability to root from cuttings. As such, the potential for improving and reinventing dogwoods is considerable.

We have been breeding dogwoods for over a decade now with help and support from the North Carolina Nursery and Landscape Association, the North Carolina

GARDENING REMINDERS

WINTER WATERING – We have had a wet winter but newly set plants, young trees and perennials can be damaged by dry cold weeks. It is recommended to check dry areas and water as needed on days above 40 degrees.



BULBS and PERENNIALS – This time of year the ground expands and contracts a lot. Be sure to check for loose or exposed roots and bulbs that have pushed out of the ground. Adding a bit of mulch will keep plants from drying out. Fertilize daffodils and other bulbs as the tips emerge. This is also a good time to check for root rot with bulbs stored indoors such as caladiums.



ROSES – Spay with lime-sulfur this month or apply a horticultural dormant oil to control insects and diseases.



EDIBLE PLANTS – January is a great time to plan your garden. Lettuce and cool season edible crops can be started indoors and moved outside in late January or Early February.



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Published monthly by The Gardeners of Wake County, Sherrill Johnson, President; Laine & Steven Thomas, Editors.

Formatted and printed by Piedmont Litho, Inc.

For membership information or to change your address contact Barbara Brown, membership chairman at the address published in the membership directory.

Club Website:
www.gardenersofwakecounty.org

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MY FAVORITE PLANT IN JANUARY: *Southern Maidenhair Fern*

– Laine Thomas

As a relatively new garden-er, I try a lot of plants and plenty of them don't survive. This year, my big winner was a pleasant surprise. I bought a Southern maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillus-veneris*) at Plant Delights, stuck it in the most remote part of my yard and neglected it. Not only is my fern thriving, but it is beautiful in winter. Now that the perennials are dormant, the maidenhair fern is an impressive focal point. The leaves remain bright green and delicate, juxtaposed with the stark background. It makes me smile every time I look out the back window.



I thought I was taking a risk, sticking a famous house plant in the backyard. Of course, I picked a variety that was meant to be winter hardy in North Carolina, but I didn't expect it to be winter-pretty. It turns out that the North Carolina species of Southern maidenhair fern is truly robust, and will maintain its

foliage unless the temperature drops below 15 degrees. It prefers moist, well-drained soil in woodlands, broadleaf or coniferous forests. My plant is growing at the base of an evergreen tree, protected by the canopy, and at the low point of the yard where rainwater collects and the ground is generally moist.

The soil is rich in organic matter, due to the accumulation and decomposition of leaves over many years in our lower lot, safe from rakes and electric blowers.

Not surprisingly, the Southern maidenhair fern was highlighted by Tony Avent in a 2014 article for *WALTER* magazine*. He provides excellent background and describes a vigorous plant that even I can grow. This not the finicky houseplant that I've tried before, but a true gem.

*<http://www.waltermagazine.com/southern-maidenhair-fern/>

PROTECTION FOR A NORTH CAROLINA NATIVE

– Steven Thomas

My son is fascinated with *Dionaea muscipula*, the Venus flytrap. There really is something magical about any plant that can move and eat something as fast as a fly. We have yet to purchase one as they are difficult to grow in our shaded home. Each time we visit Duke Gardens we spend several minutes admiring their excellent display. It includes different varieties of Venus flytraps alongside other carnivorous plants. These rare oddities are found naturally in only a few high nitrogen environments such as North Carolina's southern coastal swamps and bogs. As of December 1, 2014 it is now a felony to remove Venus Flytraps from their natural habitat in the state of North Carolina. There are several cultivars available commercially for those that can replicate the delicate environment these plants grow in. In the wild their existence and variety has steadily diminished each year from illegal harvesting and habitat loss. The Venus flytrap is listed as vulnerable, just above endangered of extinction. In 2009 it was estimated that less than 35,800 plants exist in the wild and 70% of monitored varieties from 1982 have become extinct. Hopefully this new law will help protect part of North Carolina's diversity and heritage.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR (continued from page 1)

treated. For about \$50 a year they will spray our tree and guarantee healthy foliage. This is both reassuring and disappointing. For owners of existing specimen trees, it might be worth \$50 a year to preserve their beauty. But that is a high cost over the long term.

Fortunately, the NCSU horticulture professor Tom Ranney is working on hybrids that are resistant to this and other problems. He kindly agreed to contribute an article about these challenges and new developments which will be available in garden centers in the upcoming spring of 2015.

Change Service Requested

LITTLE RUBY™ DOGWOOD

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Biotechnology Center, and the The Kenan Institute for Engineering, Technology & Science at NCSU. We are making excellent progress. One of our undergraduate students, Kimberly Shearer, completed and published a paper on ploidy levels and relative genome sizes of species, hybrids, and cultivars of dogwood (*Cornus spp.*). That work gave us a valuable technique for rapidly verifying hybrid (vs. self-pollinated) plants at the seedling stage. Under the guidance of Dr. Darren Touchell, one of our Masters students, Jason Lattier, completed a thesis that included the development of methods for micropropagation of hybrid dogwoods. In addition to that, we have hundreds of new hybrids under evaluation and have just for-

mally released the first introduction from the program: Little Ruby™ Dogwood (*Cornus 'NCCH1' PPAF*).

Little Ruby™ is a unique addition to the world of dogwoods. Selected from an F2 population of *Cornus hongkongensis* × *Cornus kousa* 'Satomi', Little Ruby dogwood™ has a compact branching habit suitable for production as a shrub or small tree with a single- or multi-stemmed form. The flowers have showy pink bracts that vary in number from 4 to as many as 9. The young shoots emerge with a red/purple color, but in the fall and winter, the semi-evergreen foliage turns a brilliant ruby red — a true four-season plant. Little Ruby™ can be propagated in tissue culture or from rooted cuttings. We have not seen any signs of mildew or anthracnose. Suitable for USDA

Zone 6b (conservatively) – 10.

Plant breeding takes time and dogwoods are no exception. However, we are making great progress. Little Ruby™ is out of the gates and we hope to have an ongoing series of new dogwood introductions to follow. Look for Little Ruby™ dogwood at a garden center near you in 2015.

Acknowledgements:

Thanks to the staff and students of the NC State Mountain Crop Improvement Lab: Dr. Darren Touchell, Tom Eaker, Jeremy Smith, Joel Mowrey, Nathan Lynch, Andra Nus, Jason Lattier, Kimberly Shearer Lattier, David Roberts, and to the support staff at the Mountain Horticultural Crops Research and Extension Center for their excellent work on this project.