

From the Potting Shed March 2021

Master Gardeners of Bergen County

Virtual meeting – Tuesday, March 23

Announcements at 7:20 pm; program to follow

Bill Kolvek presents:

Native and Exotic Grasses and Grass Relatives

To attend the meeting, click [here](#) before 7:15 pm to allow the meeting organizer enough time to let attendees into the meeting.

Bill Kolvek has been gardening in some form for more than half a century and formerly owned a nursery in Chestnut Ridge, NY, frequented by many MGs.

Are you ready to try grasses? Bill will identify and discuss some of the most garden-worthy grasses for the landscape. Grasses offer a range of height choices from under a foot tall to 15 feet. Most true grasses prefer sun but there are a few exceptions. Then there are grass relatives, like the sedges, and many of them luxuriate in part shade.



Bill Kolvek

Grasses, Bill said, are great choices to extend garden interest late in the season. In the wind they add motion to the garden. Many grass choices have been around and are tried and true. There are newer selections and introductions to feast upon as well. He will review growing information and general maintenance techniques.

Bill started a perennial plant nursery in 1987 selling wholesale to the green industry trade. Years later the nursery opened its doors to the public as well. Through the years the nursery produced perennials, ornamental grasses, ferns, vines, and some woody plants for plant lovers to try, assess, and savor. This is his passion.

Bill has taught a course on Ornamental Grasses at the New York Botanical Garden for more than 10 years.

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From the President's Desk

By Melody Corcoran, Class of 2016

Snow, snow, and more snow. It's hard to believe that spring is only a few weeks away. Have you been wondering how your outdoor plantings are surviving under their thick layer of snow? The answer is that they are most likely happy and surviving surprisingly well.



Snowflakes are individual ice crystals or clusters of ice crystals. Each individual ice crystal contains microscopic air pockets. As snow falls and accumulates on the ground, the snow traps air; a fresh, uncompacted layer of snow is approximately 90%-95% trapped air. All this trapped air makes snow a great insulator — snow as a thermal blanket. The temperature under the snow is usually warmer than the temperature above the snow.

The cycles of freezing and thawing that can occur in winter and spring can heave plants out of the ground and turn bulbs into mush. Once there is a good layer of snow on the ground, the plants are protected from the effects of temperature extremes.

Snow protects your plants from desiccating winds. Snow is also a source of nitrogen; nitrogen (and other particulates, such as sulfur) are collected as the snow falls through the atmosphere. In the spring, the nitrogen is slowly released as the snow cover melts.

If possible, try not to bury your plantings under heavy piles of snow when clearing the driveway and sidewalks. If you can, gently remove snow from shrubs and trees that are heavily weighed down with snow by brushing up, not down. Brushing down increases the weight on the branches. Spring will be here on March 20. Until then, enjoy the beauty of snow and its gardening benefits.

HORTICULTURE

Hydrangea lovers: This one's for you



Rutgers University photo

Hydrangea arborescence (smooth hydrangea)

Rutgers updates hydrangea factsheet

By Miriam Taub, Class of 2011

If you appreciate a beautiful pink, blue, purple, green, or white hydrangea, you'll want to read the recently updated Rutgers [hydrangea factsheet](#), which includes a pruning guide.

Bruce Crawford, program leader in home and public horticulture at Rutgers, has revised the information that was published around 2010. "With the current increased interest in plants and knowing that hydrangeas were always a love of gardeners old and new, I just thought it was time for an update," said Bruce, who became program leader last summer.



Bruce Crawford

"The writing was essentially my experiences with growing, pruning, and every so often killing the plant! Fortunately, I did not kill any in the hydrangea trials at the [Rutgers] Gardens," Bruce said. "The deaths occurred when I had my own business and was learning

by trial and error. I hate to say it, but that is often the best way to learn."

The factsheet focuses on seven species, which Bruce said were observed and photographed at several places, including Rutgers Gardens; Crystal Springs Resort in Hamburg; Longwood Gardens; and private gardens on Long Island. "I observed the plants at those gardens — Longwood and Crystal Springs especially — along with a number of other gardens that I worked on when I had my own business and at other public gardens, like Wave Hill and Chanticleer," he said.

While Bruce pointed out that new cultivars are continuing to appear each year, "My only comment is how I hope gardeners do not forget about the older selections that really are great plants and need not be ignored."

The factsheet credits Edith Wallace (a Bergen and Passaic County MG) and Elaine Fogerty, a former ag assistant in Passaic County. Bruce said they wrote the original factsheet more than a decade ago. Diane Larson, home horticulturist in Monmouth County, and Debbie LaGattuta, Monmouth County MG, also contributed to the pruning section.

Karen Riede, Class of 2017 and the county's horticultural assistant, said she gets many calls about hydrangeas so this new factsheet "will surely help."

Limp leaves? There's a cure for that

Orchid expert Carrie Buchman, who introduced us to the world of orchids at our November 2020 Zoom meeting, provides tips to care for an orchid in need of help. Contact [Carrie](#) if you'd like to chat about orchids.

*Dear Carrie,
Is there any hope for my orchid's limp, leathery leaves?*



Yes, there's still hope. Your orchid is a Phalaenopsis. There's an excellent [primer](#) on Phalaenopsis care on the American Orchid Society website. There's a lot of good stuff there, so poke around.

Limp leaves are due to dehydration, which can be from either underwatering or overwatering (helpful huh?).

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I suspect that it's overwatering, and it's also overpotted, which adds to the overwatering as it doesn't dry out fast enough. The flower spike [left side of the photo on page 2] needs to be sacrificed as you want the plant putting its energy into root production and not flowers. Cut it with a sterile instrument about ½ inch from the bottom.

This plant should be repotted in a clear plastic pot with drainage holes at the bottom and airflow slits on the sides. I often make my own out of deli containers. Phalaenopsis roots photosynthesize, hence, the clear pot. Trim any dead/mushy roots with a sterile tool and repot in the smallest pot that will accommodate the roots using loosely packed, good-quality New Zealand sphagnum moss.

Those roots want air. Phalaenopsis are epiphytes, so the loosely packed part is very important. However, the plant must be stable in the pot or delicate root growing tips will break off. Watch [Norman's Orchids](#) or [Miss Orchid Girl](#) on YouTube for how to's.

Water when the moss is dry. If the moss is so dry that it repels the water, then soak the moss for 20-30 minutes in a dish of water. If you have a water softener, do *not* use that water as its salt concentrations are so high that it will burn the roots. If you have highly chlorinated water, as I do, let the water sit in an open container for 24 hours or so before using to allow the chlorine to evaporate. Your plants will thank you for it.

In winter when the humidity is lower, I water mine two times a week. In summer, it might be every 10 days. You have to check until you understand what works in your environment.

The clear pots will help you see when you need to water. When the roots are silver/white, it's time to water; if they are green, wait. Water early in the day so that the leaves are dry by nightfall. And avoid getting water in the crown (where the leaves come together). Use a tissue to wick it out or blow on it. I have fans in my growing area to dry leaves off quickly.

I also use a product called Mega Thrive (Amazon, Kelley's Korner, and Norman's Orchids are sources) to encourage root growth. I use it every two weeks as per the instructions. It really does work.

Event suspensions and site closures: All in-person events, classes, programs, MG meetings and events, and other group activities organized by or under the auspices of Rutgers Cooperative Extension have been suspended through March 31, 2021.

Color in the landscape



Photo by Bob Lyons

Dr. Robert (Bob) Lyons, professor emeritus at the University of Delaware, spoke at our February virtual meeting about long-lasting color in the landscape. He presented an array of photos of herbaceous plants, both in-ground and in containers highlighting color and texture

At left, from top down is Persian shield; bronze sedge; and licorice plant. He encouraged use of plants from all zones. (So what if the plant dies back in the fall!) Bob affirmed there's no such thing as gaudy. He doesn't have a website, but you can click [here](#) to view his artwork.

MG OF BC NEWS

Ralph Lombardi, Class of 1989, died Feb. 20 at home. You may send condolences to his wife, Mary Lombardi, at 23 Chestnut Place, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423. Click [here](#) to read his obituary.

WEBINARS

March 1, 3-4 pm: Duke Farms sponsors Vegetable Seed Starting. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 8, 6:30-7:30 pm: Rutgers Cooperative Extension Earth Day, Every Day sponsors Starting a Native Plant Garden. Free. Click [here](#) for more information, and click [here](#) to register.

March 9, 5-6 pm: Cornell University Cooperative Extension sponsors Planning Your Garden. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

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March 9, 7-8 pm: Jersey-Friendly Yards sponsors Cultivating Respect for Insects - An Overview of the Ecosystem Services That Insects Provide. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 10: 6:30-7:30 pm: Penn State Extension sponsors Gardening by the Foot - Small Space, Big Yield. Fee: \$5. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 16, 7-8 pm: RCE of Ocean County sponsors Pruning - Not a Mysterious Art. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

See more webinars in the March Mid-Month Update.

CONFERENCES

11th Annual Community Garden Conference March 6, 9 am (virtual this year)

Sponsored by the Friends of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum and RCE of Morris County. Fee: \$25. Registration deadline is noon March 5.

Some sessions will be recorded while others will be live. Click [here](#) for the list of speakers and topics and registration information.

Native Plant Society of New Jersey annual conference (free!)

March 6, 8:50 am-4 pm

Schedule

- ✓ 8:50 am: Welcome
- ✓ 9-10:10 am: Nurturing Nature During Climate Change (speech)
- ✓ Business meeting
- ✓ Break
- ✓ 11-12:10: Restoring Native Habitats - Identifying and Removing Invasives (speech)
- ✓ 1-2:15 pm: Curious Cotyledons - Identifying Native Plant Seedlings (workshop)
- ✓ 2:30-3:45 pm: Designing and Planting with Native Plants - Creating a Native Garden (workshop)
- ✓ 3:45 pm: Closing remarks

Click [here](#) to register. Click [here](#) to visit the Native Plant Society's website.



Karen Pennell, Class of 2009, snapped this awesome sunset Feb. 7. She said she positioned the camera to avoid obstructions. "The view was gorgeous," she said. We agree.

THINGS WE LIKE

Anything you'd like to share with MG of BC members, like a favorite website or video or your unusual Covid mask? Send the information/photo to [Miriam Taub](#).

From Janet Schulz, Class of 1988

"The Gardener" is a documentary about Frank Cabot and his Les Quatre Vents, aka Cabot Garden, a magnificent private garden in the Charlevoix region near Quebec City. Frank Cabot was the founder of the Garden Conservancy and this film shows how it came into being, said Janet, who's viewed the film three times. "It takes a visionary with an unlimited budget to create a garden of that form of perfection."

The film is available for rent or purchase via the Garden Conservancy [website](#). Watch the trailer on [YouTube](#).

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From Mary Bergonzi, Class of 1991

My cousin, Hugh Conlon, has a website, [What Grows There](#). Hugh lives in Johnson City, TN, (USDA ag zone 7, just like Bergen County). Hugh has been a horticultural educator for 30-plus years and worked as the University of Tennessee Extension area horticulturalist in east Tennessee and in southwest Iowa.

Said Mary: "We were both brought up in the same brownstone my grandfather, an Irish immigrant, bought in Brooklyn's Park Slope. All of us could use the backyard, which had some veggies growing, a huge grapevine that I would pretend was my house, and flowering hydrangeas." Hugh's website has sections featuring flowers, garden maintenance, perennials, and more.

HORTICULTURE GRAPEVINE

Deadline for the Horticulture Grapevine is the 25th of the prior month. Submit information about garden club meetings that are open to the public to [Janet Schulz](#).

March 3, 7:30 pm, Bergen County Audubon Society via Zoom. Speaker: Rob Fergus, ornithologist. Topic: How Birds See the World. Click [here](#) to join the meeting. Meeting ID: 863 0280 2655; passcode: 798264.

March 3, 7:30 pm, Ridgefield Park Public Library via Zoom. Speaker: Robyn Lowenthal, Class of 2011. Topic: Vegetable Gardening 101. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 8, 7:30-8:30 pm, Old Tappan Public Library via Zoom: Speaker: Robyn Lowenthal. Topic: Vegetable Gardening 101. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 9, 7-8 pm, Bogota Public Library via Zoom: Speaker: Arnie Friedman, Class of 2004. Topic: Beautiful Gardens, a Virtual Tour - North America. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 11, 7 pm program, 7:30 presentation, North Jersey Orchid Society via Zoom: Speaker: Pungky Nanda Pratama, live from Sumatra. Topic: Conservation of Orchids and Flora in the Sumatran Jungle. To attend, send an email to njorchids@gmail.com. You'll receive a Zoom link a few days before the meeting.

March 11, 7 pm, Ridgewood Public Library via Zoom: Speaker: Arnie Friedman. Topic: Garden with a

Landscape Designer - Artistic Groupings. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 12, 11-12:15 am, Peninsula, NY, Public Library via Zoom: Speaker: Arnie Friedman. Topic: Gardens on Tour - Europe. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Getting the spa treatment



Robins enjoy my heated bird bath (on Jan. 22), which is made of plastic and is about 22 years old. It sits atop a "hose minder" which protects the electrical cord [see hole in hose minder at bottom right]. The bowl of the birdbath used to sit on a stand, but it often tipped over, thanks to other creatures that came for a drink. Now that it's at ground level everybody is happy. Robins are the dirtiest birds. They poop while bathing. When dirty, I scrub the bowl with a bristle brush and add water as needed. In March, I'll clean it and store in the garage until the fall.

- Janet Schulz, Class of 1988

Bergen County Rutgers Cooperative Extension Office

Joel Flagler Agricultural/Resources Management Agent/County Extension Dept. Head
201-336-6780

Karen Riede Horticultural Assistant 201-336-6788

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