

*It's beginning to look a lot like . . . a holly, jolly holiday*



*Photo by Sue Sheridan, Class of 2013*

Trees, lights, wreaths, ribbons: The MG of BC Holiday Open House Decorating Committee began re-imagining Skylands Manor as "Christmas Eve at the Clauses'." Lynne Proskow (on ladder) and Pat Pacheco, both Class of 2022, were among the volunteers who began this labor of love on Monday.

This year's Holiday Open House theme is "A Holly Jolly Holiday." The HOH is the annual fund-raiser sponsored by the Skylands Volunteer Association to benefit the New Jersey Botanical Garden. The event is scheduled Dec. 1-4 at Skylands, 5 Morris Road, Ringwood. Click [here](#) for ticket information.

MG of BC volunteers decorated the front hall, vestibule, and ladies parlor.

### Thinking of replacing your artificial tree?

The Holiday Open House Decorating Committee will happily take your old artificial trees in good condition for future open houses; lights don't have to work. Call Sue Sheridan at 201-664-2120 (home) or 201-281-0639 (mobile) if you have an artificial tree to donate to the cause.

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### From the President's Desk

*By Melody Corcoran, Class of 2016*

Whether you pronounce it "poin-SET-ee-uh" or "poin-SET-uh," poinsettias are the signature plant of the winter holiday season. Red, white, pink, solid-colored, speckled, or marbled, the plants are seen everywhere.



Euphorbia pulcherrima is a tropical spurge that is indigenous to Mexico and Central America. In its native habitat the plant is a shrub that can grow 10-15 feet tall. Joel Poinsett, a physician, botanist, and the first US ambassador to Mexico, introduced the plant to the United States in 1828 when he sent cuttings of the plant to his home in Charleston, SC. The plant was named poinsettia in his honor.

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### Speaking of poinsettias ...



Rutgers annual poinsettia sale, going on now, offers many varieties of poinsettias in colors ranging from scarlet red to pink and yellow at

\$8 per plant. Pick out your plants at the Rutgers Floriculture Greenhouses (pictured above), 64 Nichol Ave., New Brunswick, Dec. 1 from 11 am-2:30 pm and Dec. 2 from 11 am-1:30 pm. You can pay by check or in cash.

## SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

### **Sharon La Monica, Class of 2022**

#### **By Miriam Taub, Class of 2011**

Sharon La Monica credits her late mother with her getting the job as grounds manager at Holy Name Medical Center in Teaneck.

Sharon had been working for Holy Name since 2015 in the Environmental Services Department. In 2017, she was promoted to supervisor overseeing housekeeping and cleaning services and keeping an eye on transport to be sure patients on floors 4, 5, and 6 didn't have to wait more than 10 minutes for discharge or to be taken for a test. The pace was frenetic with all the beeping and buzzing of a hospital setting.

Then, in late 2017, Sharon's mom, Pat Pecoraro, was admitted to the hospital and passed away in June 2018. When Sharon returned to work after her mother's death, instead of energizing her, she said the beeping and buzzing made her sad as she thought of her mother. She told her boss she wanted to quit. Instead, he suggested that before making any final career decision she should go outside and take the job of groundskeeper as the previous hire had left.

The decision was the right one for both Sharon and Holy Name. Sharon jumped into the job, she said, and it's been non-stop ever since. Sharon and her staff of two maintain the grounds of Holy Name Medical Center; two buildings it owns across the street from the hospital; another hospital-owned building at 222 Cedar Lane in Teaneck; HNH Fitness in Oradell; and Bergen Catholic High School. When construction is completed, Sharon will add Holy Name's Villa Marie Claire residential hospice in Saddle River to her list. While the hospice comprises 26 acres, most of the property is wooded.

When she first joined the department, she and her staff pulled a lot of weeds and she assessed. She reviewed what her predecessor had purchased for the four seasons, looked at what was planted, what spaces lacked plantings, and where she could do better.

Typically, plantings are based around mums in the fall, ornamental cabbage in the winter, and pansies in the spring. This past summer Sharon went with SunPatients®. And, she decided to emphasize native plants, pollinators, and other perennials. She and her team pulled out the cannas and will have them overwinter in a shed rather than toss them out.

Outside the Breast Center, she introduced a profusion of pinks and purples. Sharon said the Breast Center is a special place for her as she is a breast cancer patient

there herself. She thought the array of colors would reduce a patient's stress when arriving for a test or treatment.

Most of the time, Sharon is based at the medical center and her work is based around the seasons. She and her staff ride around the medical center property in carts to transport plants and garden supplies and pick up trash. But there's always a few surprises thrown in — like the day the grounds crew found a whole cooked chicken behind a shrub or had to remove a wayward tire on a street bordering the hospital.



**Sharon La Monica**

Sharon recounted how she became interested in gardening when she and her husband, Pete La Monica, bought their home in River Edge in 1994. Ivy covered a quarter of the backyard, she recalled, while a "snowball" bush occupied the middle. In brief, she said, they ripped out all the old stuff and basically started from scratch. "Now it's an oasis," she said.

Prior to working at Holy Name, Sharon was a stay-at-home mom for 16 years. For 10 of those years, she taught CPR at Valley Hospital. She and her husband have two sons, Pierre, 23, and Christian, 21.

Why did Sharon enroll in the MG Class of 2022? Her annual review at work noted that she should consider taking online classes. "Soil info was a big eye opener for me," she said of her MG of BC online training.

Sharon has already done her planning for summer 2023. "I'm trying to incorporate more perennials so we can do fewer annuals," she said, adding that she'd also like to incorporate more evergreens in the plantings.

Asked about her major achievement so far, she replied it's the number of flowering plants her team has installed. "There were never as many flowers here as there are now," she concluded.



## HORTICULTURE

**Leave the leaves, reduce pollution, save \$\$**



Photo by Arnie Friedman

The leaves at Arnie's house are being ground up and will be blown into the beds.

**By Arnie Friedman, Class of 2004**

Save money and reduce pollution! If you push your leaves into your driveway or onto your lawn you can easily grind them up and blow or sweep them back into your beds for a great mulch cover.

We've been doing this the past several years at my house. I haven't needed to buy mulch as the leaves easily break down and amend the soil. Here we use an electric mower and an electric blower so we reduce the carbon emissions and noise levels dramatically, too.

Many towns pick up your leaves from the street. Have you thought about what happens when they're taken away by the town? Most towns don't have compost piles, so the towns have to transport these leaves to a recycler and use your tax money to dump them. Then a diesel machine and grinders have to process them. Then someone has to buy this mulch and cart it to your house where you have to spread it into your beds.

Instead, why not skip the middleman and save the town and you money and pollution by doing what I do. If you have a landscape maintenance company, ask them to do the grinding and place the leaves into the beds. You'll be paying only for one service instead of two.

## December to-dos in the garden

The holiday season doesn't give us a pass on working in the garden. Bruce Crawford, manager of horticulture, Morris County Park Commission, has a list of chores longer than Santa's to keep us busy in December. Bruce echoed Arnie's advice (in the previous article) to shred the leaves with the lawn mower and add them to perennial and annual beds as mulch. Shredded leaves that remain in the turf, he added, are actually beneficial for the grass.

Bruce also suggested leaving the stems and seed heads of black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*), cup flower (*Silphium*), and purple cone flower (*Echinacea*) standing for the winter, since the seeds provide food for the birds while the hollow stems yield habitat for beneficial insects. See the attachment that came with this month's Potting Shed for all of Bruce's "to-dos" for December.

## 'Plants of the month'

We have two plants — from October and November — to share from Bruce Crawford, manager of horticulture, Morris County Park Commission.

**October:** Bruce chose cyclamen. Most people, he wrote, "think of cyclamen as a somewhat finicky winter-blooming houseplant that all too often is overwatered during the summer and perishes. Discouraged, we fail to take notice of the various hardy selections that can provide low-maintenance additions to the woodland garden with blossoms during nearly every season," he wrote. Click [here](#) to read more.

**November:** Bruce chose Virginia sweetspire, botanically named *Itea virginica*, which he praised as a low-maintenance shrub capable of providing the garden with close to four seasons of interest.



Photo courtesy of Bruce Crawford

Fall color of Virginia sweetspire "Henry's Garnet."

Although Virginia sweetspire is normally found in moist soils in shaded environments, the plant is amazingly tolerant of varying conditions and will thrive in full sun in soils with average drainage. Click [here](#) to read more.

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*(Horticulture, continued from page 3)*

## Tools rule! Yours for happier and easier gardening

**By Paul Sisko, Class of 2021**

This summer I discovered a new tool that really made my life easier in the garden: A cordless power pruner. (I blocked out the manufacturer's name as there are several on the market.) This pruner takes the place of running for loppers when you're doing medium-size pruning. This one cuts up to 1¼-inch dead wood, which is harder to cut than live green wood.

Why did I buy a power pruner? As one ages, the strength of one's grip on hand pruners decreases especially if you have arthritis or carpal tunnel issues.

Also, this pruner can get into narrow areas where loppers can't. Spreading the handles of loppers can't be done when trying to cut thick branches near the interior base of a shrub. It makes a nice clean cut as opposed to using a saw, which leaves a ragged cut. If you'd like to try mine prior to purchasing one, I'd be more than happy to allow you to do so.

Click here to contact [Paul Sisko](#) via email.



*Photo by Paul Sisko*

## Let's get real

### Holiday greenery from the garden

When gathering greenery for holiday decorations from your own garden and landscape plants, remember that you're actually pruning and so good pruning practices apply.

- Use sharp pruners and make the cuts at branch angles or leaf nodes so you don't leave a stub.
- Keep an eye on the shape of the plant and don't get carried away.
- Think about which branches to cut and which ones to leave.



**Live wreaths for sale at the Teaneck Dairy Queen.**

- Remove branches evenly around the plant to maintain a natural form.

On most conifers, don't cut beyond the innermost needles, since many don't regrow from this point. To help extend the life of the greenery, soak it overnight or apply an anti-transpirant, such as Wilt-Pruf, to keep the foliage from drying out.

#### **Plants for holiday greenery**

Arborvitae	Leyland cypress
Boxwood	Ligustrum
Cedar	Magnolia
Cryptomeria	Mountain laurel
Fir	Osmanthus
Gold mop cypress	Pine
Holly	Rhododendron
Ivy	Spruce
Juniper	

*From the Mountain Gardener newsletter, November 2022, North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Buncombe County Center.*

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(Horticulture, continued from page 4)



Photos by Tammy Laverty

## Frostweed — very, very cool

**By Tammy Laverty, Class of 2017**

Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) is a great native pollinator plant, always covered with bees or butterflies. It grows in sun or shade, is easy to grow from seed, and it has all the attributes I like for my garden.

But it also has a once-a-season — and only if you're lucky — special treat. On a chilly morning with the first hard freeze of the season I rushed outside in my jammies to see my frostweed plant's stems had burst open and turned to ice ribbons!

## WEBINARS

**For your convenience, all times are Eastern.**

**Dec. 1, noon:** Smithsonian Gardens sponsors A Natural History Approach to Protecting Pollinators. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 7, 6:30 pm:** AARP Virtual Community Center sponsors Making a Holiday Hanging Basket. Free. AARP membership not required. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 9, noon-1 pm:** Penn State Extension sponsors Garden Hotline Live: Winter Woes, Whims, and Wisdom. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 13, 7 pm:** Friends of the Frelinghuysen Arboretum sponsors Starting Seeds Indoors. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

## MG OF BC NEWS

***This means you!***

### Better Impact awaits input of your hours

The Master Gardeners of Bergen County gets credit for all volunteer hours earned by our organization from Rutgers NJAES Cooperative Extension. But you must enter your hours into Better Impact, the online recording system used by Rutgers Cooperative Extension.

Don't wait until 2023 to enter your 2022 hours; enter your hours as you volunteer them. You can enter your hours 24/7 by visiting [Better Impact](#). The deadline to enter 2022 hours is Jan. 31, 2023. For help with logging into or recording hours in Better Impact, please contact [Karen Riede](#) or [Suzanne Danzig](#).

To retain your certified MG status, you must complete a minimum of 25 hours of annual volunteer service and 10 hours of annual continuing education. All 10 of your education hours can come from attending webinars or attending in-person programs. You're also required to pay MG of BC dues of \$20 a year. Print the renewal form from the bottom of the home page of our [website](#). Instructions are on the form.

### Greens from the Garretson grounds



Photo by Lida Gellman

From left: Barbara Patete, Class of 2009, Martha Carlucci (21), Melody Corcoran (16), Sara Levin (22), Arta Pagano (16), and Noel Schulz (16) recently fashioned wreaths using Garretson greens, among them white pine, cedar, boxwood, holly, sage, and a variety of dried pods, seeds, flowers, and herbs. The wreaths will hang throughout the homestead and will be sold at Garretson's Dutch Christmas Dec. 3 from 10 am-4 pm. Garretson is located at 4-02 River Road, Fair Lawn. Sinter Klass awaits you!

- Lida Gellman, Class of 1999

## Holidays at the Hermitage



Photo by Kathleen Sullivan

Hermitage volunteers, from left, Deb Sweet (Class of 2022) and Ed Drennan and Cynthia Drennan (both Class of 2019) decorated the National Historic Landmark for the holidays. Cynthia made ornaments to showcase the theme "music." View her handiwork at a Hermitage [candlelight tour](#) or during the regular weekly tours Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 1:15 pm, 2:15 pm, and 3:15 or Thursdays by appointment. To schedule a group or Thursday tour, call the Hermitage at 201-445-8311. The Hermitage is located at 335 North Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus.

- Kathleen Sullivan, Class of 2010

### Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Bergen County

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### *(President's desk, continued from page 1)*

The plant has an undeserved reputation as being poisonous. In 1919, the 2-year-old child of an Army officer stationed in Hawaii allegedly died from eating a poinsettia leaf. The cause of death was poisoning but it was not from a poinsettia leaf.

The myth of the poisonous poinsettia still lives on 100 years later. The ingestion of a leaf or two may cause an upset stomach or vomiting; the leaves are very bitter and taste awful. However, no one is going to eat enough to cause any real harm. A 50-pound child would have to eat about 500 to 600 poinsettia leaves (over 1.25 pounds of leaves) before suffering any serious effects. The milky white sap, however, may cause skin irritation, especially in someone who has a reaction to latex.

There is no need to ban poinsettias from your holiday decorations if you have pets. Poinsettias are only mildly toxic to pets. Eating the leaves might cause mild signs of drooling, vomiting, or occasionally diarrhea. Contact with the sap might cause mild skin or eye irritation. Other popular winter holiday plants, such as cyclamen, paper whites, and amaryllis, are more toxic to pets than poinsettias.

National Poinsettia Day, Dec. 12, was proclaimed by the US House of Representatives in 2002 to honor both Joel Poinsett, who died Dec. 12, 1851, and Paul Ecke, the founder of the current poinsettia industry. Ecke discovered a grafting technique in the 1920s that caused the plant to branch, and the multimillion-dollar poinsettia industry followed.

Happy Poinsettia Day, and happy holidays to all!

## THIS AND THAT

### **Emptying 74 plant containers in 2 minutes**

Joseph Cooper, Class of 2008, cleaned out 74 of the 200 plant containers on his property in less than two minutes. How? Click [here](#) to watch Joseph's time-lapse video on YouTube. He worked wonders with pruners and a wheelbarrow. Visit Joseph's [YouTube channel](#) for video tours of sculpture and plant gardens, among other subjects.



## AN ARCTIC TRAVELOGUE

### Hopscotching to the Arctic, spring 2022

*Edith Terzano offers this travelogue of her 13-day guided tour beginning in Edinburgh, Scotland, and ending in Svalbard, Norway. All photos are by Edith Terzano and her sister, Elizabeth Andrew.*

#### **By Edith Terzano, Class of 2018**

My sister, Elizabeth Andrew, and I are off to see the Arctic, hopscotching up the northern latitudes from Edinburgh, Scotland (55 degrees 57 minutes north latitude) as far north as Magdalenafjorden (79 degrees 35 minutes north latitude) in [Spitsbergen](#), the largest island in the Svalbard archipelago located about 600 miles from the North Pole. We're sailing with Poseidon Expeditions in search of the polar bear in its native habitat; Svalbard reindeer; the elusive Arctic fox; walrus, whales, and sea lions; and an ever-present multitude of Arctic seabirds.

Beginning in Edinburgh, we walked the historic Royal Mile where students were protesting Cambo, a potential new oilfield in the North Atlantic. We passed Princes Street Garden where gardeners were planting a variety of succulents in celebration of the 70<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth's reign.

We passed wind turbines along the shoreline as we sailed out of Edinburgh, learning that wind power is Scotland's fastest-growing renewable energy technology. This was a prelude to an increased awareness of climate change beyond our homeland borders.



**The seaweed-eating sheep in the Orkney Islands.**

The next day we arrived in Scotland's Orkney Islands to explore the heart of [Neolithic Orkney](#) where we visited major prehistoric cultural landscapes, some from 5,000 years ago. Sailing further north to Orkney's North Ronaldsay Island, more wind turbines were visible from both land and sea.



**Gåshamna, Spitsbergen.**

Once on land we saw the wild seaweed-eating sheep living there. Researchers have discovered that the seaweed diet of sheep appears to reduce the amount of methane produced during their digestive process. Introducing a seaweed diet to cattle may offer hope for reducing planet-warming methane emissions. After visiting a farming family of crofters, we set sail again this time arriving at Fair Isle, one of Scotland's Shetland Islands, where we hiked up a grassy mountainside to commune with puffins that were frolicking, burrowing, and flying among the cliffs covered in pink clover. Here we had some time to consider climate change and environmental impacts.

On day four — the last of our pre-Arctic hopscotching — we arrived at the Faroe Islands of Denmark. Here towns and villages are no more than 3 miles from the sea, so the climate is oceanic. Natural vegetation is moss, grass, and mountain bog.

Although some hardy trees have been planted in sheltered plantations, the islands are naturally treeless because of cool summers, strong westerly winds, and frequent gales. Wood is a very valuable material and is the subject of many wood legends, i.e., many historic buildings there were built from wood that floated in on ocean currents from Norway and collected on the shore.

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Now our true Arctic adventure begins. The next three days would mostly be spent at sea. We are reminded that there would probably still be significant ocean ice and ice floes and our destinations would be determined by the presence or absence of sea ice. Yet, as we crossed the Arctic Circle (66 degrees 30 minutes north latitude) there was no sea ice, so we were able to disembark at Jan Mayan Island, Norway.

Jan Mayen is a tiny volcanic island with a population of 18 scientists/support staff working in a research station. In 2010, Norway declared Jan Mayen a protected nature reserve, and strict environmental rules are in place to protect Arctic wildlife. Here the Arctic climate feels damp due to cloud cover, drizzle, and fog. We took rubber zodiac boats to shore where we could wander about or climb volcanic paths to observation points within the safety zone established by our rifle-bearing guides.



**Svalbard reindeer, Bellsund, Norway.**

We were surprised to find moss, lichen, and even a mushroom growing. Trip botanist Moshe Agami, retired professor of botany from Tel Aviv University, Israel, explained how it will take 100 years to turn the otherwise-barren landscape to green tundra. He called this process “succession.” Whale bones and driftwood from Greenland littered the ashen shoreline. We were among the lucky travelers who were able to see Jan Mayen’s Beerenberg volcano completely clear of clouds.

Ice willing, we finally sailed into our destination, the Svalbard archipelago. Spitsbergen is the largest island located about 600 miles from the geographic North Pole (90 degrees north latitude). Although the Arctic has two primary seasons — summer (midnight sun) and winter (polar night) — we were traveling at the early part of the Arctic summer where temperatures could rise to 45-50 degrees F. We were witness to the Arctic history of mining, whaling, trapping, and polar research by

explorers such as Roald Amundsen who was the first to fly over the North Pole in a dirigible. More recently, interest lies in international research stations and tourism. Here the Arctic tundra, isolation, climate, history, and geography determine what will live and grow.



**Svalbard reindeer, Bellsund, Norway.**

Over the next five days we made eight wet or dry landings along the whole west coast of Spitsbergen between 77 degrees and 79 degrees north latitude. We would hike the shorelines, scale the hillsides, climb the mountainsides, and explore abandoned whaling, trapper, and miner cabins under the watchful eyes of our rifle-bearing guides.

As for Arctic fauna, through a spotting lens from the deck of our ship, we glimpsed a single polar bear nosing its way down to the shore. I wondered how it would hunt the shrinking bearded or ringed seal population because diminishing sea ice had reduced its hunting ground. Since the 1980s, the amount of summer sea ice has been halved, and some scientists fear it will be gone altogether by 2035. More bears are exploring built-up areas for food. And although Arctic reindeer were plentiful, they are now threatened by the polar bear as a new-found food source.

Walrus were hauled out on the shore of a nearby island, since they, too, had no ice to haul out on. The elusive Arctic fox made a brief appearance, its snowy white fur in the process of turning to its brown summer coat. The fox had almost been hunted to extinction but is protected now. Few beluga whales were spotted from the ship. A



**A mushroom growing on Jan Mayan Island, Norway.**

variety of seabirds flew in the air alongside our ship and were nesting on the barren rocky cliffs along shore. The guano below the cliffs provided fertile ground for vegetation.

As for the flora, it was surprising to find how much of the Arctic landscape had already turned green and was flowering.

Green, yellow, and red moss carpets had white fairy rings (moribund fungi) interspaced among them.

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We saw other mushroom varieties, and different colored lichen hugged the rocks.

Saxifrage was blooming purple, yellow, and white, although sedges and grasses had not started growing yet. Based on DNA testing, the polar willow, an Arctic “tree” and one of the smallest willows in the world, was growing. It grows as a dwarf shrub up to 2-5 centimeters high, close to the ground where tundra temperatures are usually highest. The root system probably develops only in the active layer of permafrost. The polar willow can form “forests” up to 1 square mile or larger. Although melting allows warmer seasons for longer growing time, more flora contributes to greenhouse gases.

Hiking among the snowy landscapes was where the ultimate reality of climate change truly hit home. Rising temperatures are causing an unprecedented thawing of frozen ground. We sank knee deep in thawing tundra and witnessed others sinking thigh deep with our guides digging them out. Scientific studies estimate the area is heating at six times the global average — the fastest-warming place on Earth.

The final stop in our Arctic journey to Svalbard was Longyearbyen, the capital of Spitsbergen and the world’s northernmost permanent settlement. Temperature in Svalbard has jumped 4 degrees C in the past 50 years. We watched as workers built/maintained avalanche barriers to help protect this Arctic community in winter. In



The Arctic fox on Alkhorner, a mountain on the western coast of Spitsbergen.

summer, mudslides are more likely to pose the greatest danger.

While there, we had hoped to visit the [Svalbard Global Seed Vault](#) where heirloom seeds from all over the world are stored. Unfortunately, even the seed vault was a victim of flooding and freezing. Luckily, the seeds within the vault were spared.

For me, this Arctic sojourn was an unexpected, unmistakable, up-close-and-personal greater awakening to climate change and its environmental impact. The lesson? Pay attention. There still may be time to save some piece of the Arctic wonderland.

## **2023 MG of BC winter-spring meetings**

**Jan. 17, Feb. 21, March 21, April 18, May 16  
1 Bergen County Plaza, Hackensack  
Multipurpose room, first floor**

**We’ll be back in person!**

## **Coming up in January**

- **Jan. 10-12: North Jersey Ornamental Horticultural Symposium.**
- **Jan. 13-15: North Jersey Orchid Society show and sale. Free admission. See poster sent with the Potting Shed. Read the orchid story in the January Potting Shed.**