

# From the Potting Shed

December 2023

[www.mgofbc.org](http://www.mgofbc.org)



## Setting up for the Skylands HOH



MG of BC volunteers Sandy Pancrazi, Class of 2010 (above), and Debra Sweet, Class of 2022 (below), unpack decorations for the Holiday Open House at Skylands Manor, Ringwood, through Dec. 3. Click [here](#) for ticket information.



Photos by Sue Sheridan, Class of 2013

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## From the President's Desk

**By Melody Corcoran, Class of 2016**

What is a hemiparasitic plant? It's a plant that uses a specialized root-like structure called a haustorium to penetrate the host plant's xylem to obtain water and nutrients. It also has leaves that contain chlorophyll and so can also produce its own food.



*Phoradendron serotinum*, or American mistletoe, is the mistletoe that is used as a traditional winter decoration and is an example of a hemiparasitic plant. It is native to the eastern third of the United States from New Jersey to Florida. It can be found growing in tangled masses of stems and leaves attached to the branches of woody trees such as oak, poplar, and elm.



Pixabay photo

These mistletoe masses are sometimes as large as 5 feet across and can weigh up to 50 pounds. Unless a tree is heavily infested, the mistletoe is not a serious nutritional burden for its host. But large, heavy masses of growth can break off weak branches.

Mistletoe masses

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## MG OF BC NEWS

### Time to renew your MG of BC membership

As 2023 winds down, it's time to renew your membership in the Master Gardeners of Bergen County. Membership provides a number of benefits, such as quality lectures to meet your continuing education requirements, discounts at select nurseries, and seasonal get-togethers.

Annual dues for 2024 are \$20. Please make checks payable to the MG of BC and mail to our **new address**: Master Gardeners of Bergen County, PO Box 284, Saddle River, NJ 07458.

Now... about the form. Visit our [website](#). As you scroll down the home page, the "Renew your membership now" box will appear in the lower right. Click on "Download membership renewal form" and read the instructions to update your information for MG of BC records. Choose either 1, 2, or 3. **New this year**: By choosing 2, you can submit your information online. Please contact [Theresa Schneider](#), Membership chair, if you have any questions about membership or the web directory.

### Thank you to our 2023 volunteers!

#### Bergen New Bridge Medical Center

Linda Bourke, Class of 2023; Karen Clemments (2022); Donna Faustini (2012); Lenore Liebskind, MG alum; Rose Santos Martinez (2017); Patrica Pacheco (2022); Theresa Schneider (2016); Lynette Stewart (2017); Janet Stofkoper (2023); Janet Troy (2015).

- **Lynette Stewart, site coordinator**

#### Bergen County Zoo

Jeffrey Chan, Class of 2011; Anita Hall-Davis (2022); Sharon La Monica (2022); Sharon Ma (2018); Louise Mullen (2018); Dineen Policano (2023); Hugo Steiner (2023).

- **Jeffrey Chan, site coordinator**

#### Butterfly and Native Garden

Peter Cammarano, Class of 2023; Terry Campbell (2018); Karen Clemments (2022); Kim Correro (2023); Carol Ennis (2019); Dawn Giambalvo (2023); Pat Knight (2009); Tammy Laverty (2015); Christine Mueller (2015); Dena Ressler (2023); Anne-Marie Romano (2022).

- **Tammy Laverty, site coordinator**

### What's new for 2024?

Our MG of BC January and February meetings will be virtual. That'll give you a chance to earn an education hour in your bunny slippers. Our friend Bruce Crawford, manager of horticulture, Morris County Park Commission, will speak Jan. 23. His topic is "Barking Up the Right Tree." See more information in the January Potting Shed. Here's Bruce, at right, when he last spoke to the MG of BC in September 2019.



#### Garretson Forge & Farm

April Barth, Class of 2017; Christine Belli (2015); Martha Carlucci (2021); Terry Cohn (2020); Melody Corcoran (2016); Linda DeWolfe (2023); Donna Dorgan (2018); Lida Gellman (1999); Nora Hamawi (2009); Sal Lagattuta (2015); Gimai Ma (2021); Beverly Malabrigo (2023); Christine Mueller (2015); Arta Pagano (2016); Barbara Patete (2009); Lynne Proskow (2022); Gary Puzio (2021); Liz Scholl (2011); Noel Schulz (2016); Janet Stofkoper (2023).

**"Blast" volunteers:** Peter Cammarano (2023); Jeanne Etter (2023); Liz Gil (2019); Scott Japko (2022); Karen Norton (2023); Donna Picheria (2023).

- **Lida Gellman, site coordinator**

#### Hermitage

Herb Arbeiter, Class of 2019; Patricia Crossley (2022); Cynthia Drennan (2019); Ed Drennan (2019); Liz Gil (2019); Scott Japko (2022); Chris Kozar (2020); Katherine Montgomery (2023); Donna Picheria (2023); Maggie Raywood (2022); Marie Scotti-Bosworth (2023); Debra Sweet (2022); Bernadette White (2021).

- **Bernadette White, site coordinator**

#### Washington Spring Garden

Wendy Bucceri, Class of 2023; Maureen Caban (2022); Suzanne Danzig (2008); Jeanne Etter (2023); Chris Kozar (2021); Janet Stofkoper (2023); the late Pat Vellas (2014). Pat was our good friend and site coordinator with me. She lost her battle with cancer Sept. 21. She will be missed and remembered forever as a loyal steward of the garden.

- **Suzanne Danzig, site coordinator**



## IN THE GARDEN

### *A passion develops for the passion flower*

**By Edith Terzano, Class of 2018**

Passion flower. I wonder how many of us have grown one or eaten its fruit? Since my birthday, Easter, and Mother's Day fall within a couple of weeks of each other each spring, I have been the lucky recipient of many beautiful hydrangea, tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths.

But in 2021 I received a plant of a different sort: *Passiflora edulis* (possum purple) more commonly known as a passion flower plant. What was that? Well, I thought to myself, "I'd like to get to know you."

Turns out this is a fast-growing tropical vine that grows well outdoors down to 30 degrees F in Zones 6-10 (Most of Bergen County is in Zone 7.) It is a perennial plant that likes full to partial sun. It grows from mid-summer until frost and can reach up to about 20 feet using curly tendrils to support itself. *Egads!* What mystery awaits me.

To my delight, toward the end of that summer, a light green and delicately folded flower bud (at right) appeared on the plant. It was slow to



bloom, and I wondered when — if ever — it would actually happen. But finally it did. The flower was fragrant, but wow was it different in a rather exotic, three-dimensional, extraterrestrial sort of way. It has been described as kaleidoscopic with its delicately arranged colors and shapes and dimensions. Sadly, the unusual-looking flower only lasts about one day.

Having both male and female parts, passion flowers are hermaphroditic. Although some varieties of passion flower plants are self-pollinating, others are not. The blossoms on my plant were self-pollinating. The flower was a whitish green with five longer petals alternating with five shorter, rounder sepals. At center, there was a darker, deep crimson corona with violet and white filaments. Rising from the center were three stigmas, the female part of the flower that receives



*Photos by Edith Terzano*

pollen and directs it toward the ovary. The ovary contains the ovules (female egg cells).

Also rising from the center of the flower are five stamens that support five anthers. The stamen is the pollen-producing male part of

the flower. It is composed of a slender filament that supports the anther where pollen is produced. Pollen is deposited on the stigma and begins the reproductive process that produces the fruit.

My *Passiflora edulis* is a common passion flower variety that is mainly cultivated for edible fruit. Because my plant is self-pollinating, it can produce fruit but so far has not.



Nonetheless, if my plant *were* to produce fruit, it first would appear as little green balls. As the fruit grows larger and ripens the color would transition from green to orange to brown or purple. Since I wanted to taste a passion fruit, I found a purple one in a local market. I read that the wrinkled ones

were the sweetest. As I sliced the fruit in half, a fragrant, enticing aroma wafted through the air.

*(Continued on page 4)*

## **Thanks to a gift, Edith develops a passion for the passion flower**

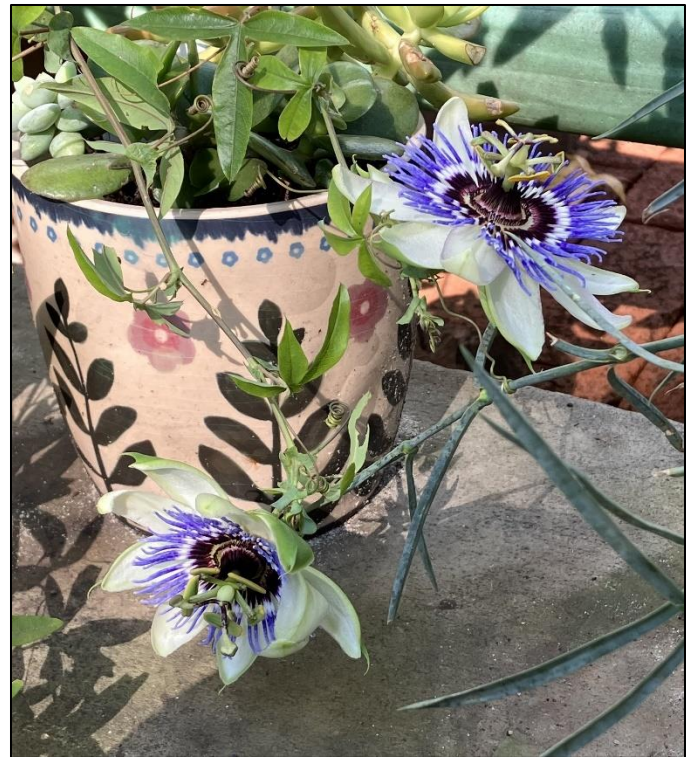
*(Continued from page 3)*

Although the skin was leathery, the inside pulp was watery, almost jelly-like with seeds scattered throughout. The pulp was easily and cleanly scooped out of the shell into a shallow glass. Using a teaspoon, I slurped up a small taste of the unusual-looking pulp. It had a tangy, tropical, citrusy flavor — not quite as sour as a lemon and not quite as sweet as an orange — sometimes described as having hints of guava, papaya, pineapple, and mango. The seeds in the mix are edible and add a crunchy texture. Passion fruit is also available in the form of dressings, desserts, and fresh fruit juices.

A note of caution: Not all species of passion flowers have edible fruit. Plant toxicity varies by type so be aware of the variety if you have little children or pets. Also, some varieties have flowers with medicinal qualities, while others are toxic. *It's important to know the features of the plant.*

I always enjoy learning about various traditions and folklore associated with plants. As for the passion flower vine, in Christian traditions the passion flower symbolizes the passion of Christ, hence the name. In Israel they are known as clock flower; in Greece and Japan, they are called clock plant because the bloom is said to resemble the face of a clock.

Passion flowers require little to no maintenance. If planting outdoors, follow nursery guidelines. I decided to grow mine outdoors in a container. Doing so prevents the plant from becoming invasive. I can control its size by careful pruning in late summer and it is easier to bring inside for overwintering.



*Photo by Edith Terzano, Class of 2018*

Although it grows best in a south-facing window, it may go semi-dormant until it is returned outdoors in spring. If it is grown as an indoor plant, it will not grow as vigorously or produce fruit.

This is the third year for my passion flower plant. In September, it presented me with two beautiful blooms. So glad I got to know it.

[Editor's note: Volunteers at the Butterfly and Native Garden also grew a passion flower this summer. See page 6.]

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## **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 your cuts 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.

- 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.

**- North Carolina Cooperative Extension,  
Mountain Gardener newsletter**

*(Continued on page 5)*



## IN THE GARDEN

(Continued from page 4)

### Paul's 'final' winter gardening tips

**By Paul Sisko, Class of 2022**

Again, we have been blessed with pretty decent weather to finish preparing our gardens for winter. I've put material like chicken wire over my newly planted bulbs to keep the varmints from digging them up. The few that I didn't protect got dug up. Nasty critters.

I've got all my hoses drained and put away in the basement along with my sprayers and water timers. Gas-operated equipment should be run dry of gas; if not, put fuel stabilizer in the gas and run it for a few minutes. Any painted steel furniture you have outside should be cleaned and covered to prevent paint from peeling leading to rust. Aluminum tends to hold up better, but it still helps to put it in a sheltered place.

Wire brush all your hand tools and spray them with WD-40 for the winter. It's also a good time to spray the tools that might get lost or misplaced with DayGlo/ fluorescent paint so you can find them more easily. It's messy digging through your compost or scrap piles looking for your pruners.

Treat yourself to a pruner holster and belt for next season and get into the habit of using it around your waist. See me in the spring if any of your pruners need sharpening and you're afraid to do it yourself. I've got about one or two more leaf-blowings in mind with some of the leaves going into circular baskets to cover plants like my banana trees, which have been cut down to ground level. This helps protect them a bit from the winter snow and freeze.



Photo by Paul Sisko

Spray those hands tools and keep them in a tool holster when not in use.

Final pruning of shrubs and roses should be scheduled or wait until midwinter or early spring to do that. I've cut down all my grasses and pruned most of my perennials, which I want to keep to a certain size. I've just topped my hydrangeas of the flower heads and will wait until spring to decide which stems to prune further, although I have pruned all hydrangeas and viburnum that grow on new wood already or just want to keep them to a certain size.

I've also planted my fig trees in the ground for the first time ever and wrapped them in burlap with other protective material. Google for full directions.

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

The plant produces small white flowers from May to July. The flowers are followed by white berries containing a single seed surrounded by a nutritious but very sticky substance called viscin. The viscin is rich in protein, minerals, and glucose. All parts of the plant are toxic, especially the berries. Even so, the berries and leaves are a food source for many birds, mammals, and insects.

The word mistletoe comes from the Anglo-Saxon words *mistel* (dung) and *tan* (twig). Because mistletoe often appears on branches where birds have left their droppings, it was thought that the droppings alone were the source of the plant. However, in the 1500s it was discovered that mistletoe was spread by the very sticky seeds that had passed through the digestive tract of birds and attached themselves to the branches; mistletoe was not spread by the droppings themselves.



Pixabay photo

Mistletoe berries: Will they be hanging in your home for the holidays?

Everyone knows about kissing under the mistletoe. This tradition became popular in the United States in the 1800s. But did you know that with each kiss a berry must be plucked from the mistletoe? And when there are no berries left, no more kissing is allowed?

Happy holidays!

## WEBINARS

*All times are Eastern.*

**Dec. 6, 7-9 pm:** Native Plant Society of New Jersey sponsors Orchids of the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 7, 1 pm:** Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation sponsors In the Life of Monarchs East of the Rockies: The Great Migration. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 9, 10-11:30 am:** Penn State Extension sponsors Second Saturday Gardening Series: Get Your Garden Ready for Winter Habitat. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

**Dec. 14, 5-6 pm:** AARP Virtual Community Center sponsors A Virtual Tour of the Holiday Flower Show at Phipps Conservatory (Pittsburgh). Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. AARP membership not required.

## EVENTS AND TOURS

### Dutch Christmas at Garretson Dec. 2

Spend a few hours at Garretson Forge & Farm, Dec. 2 from 10 am-4 pm to see the house in all its holiday splendor. A holiday sale will include craft vendors along with Garretson goods, gift shop goodies, our wonderful hand-crafted wreaths, and baked goods. Sinter Klass will hold court by the fireplace. Bring the little ones for a great photo op. Garretson is located at 4-02 River Road, Fair Lawn.

*- Lida Gellman, site coordinator and Class of 1998*

### Philly Flower Show bus trip

The Ramsey Area Garden Club is sponsoring a bus trip to the Philadelphia Flower Show March 5. The bus departs Ramsey at 8:30 am and will leave Philadelphia by 4:30 pm. The price of \$100 includes the bus and show ticket. Reservation deadline is Dec. 30. For more information, contact [Barbara Doxey](#), Ramsey Area Garden Club.

## VOLUNTEER SITE NEWS



*Photo by Anne-Marie Romano, Class of 2022*

### Passion flower from the ground up

Volunteers at the Butterfly and Native Garden recently sliced open their passion flower fruit; the flower is pictured below. That's Tammy Laverty, Class of 2015, in the light blue jacket, holding a slice. "A few of us will winter sow the seeds as an experiment," she said. "We'll see what sprouts in the spring." Behind Tammy, from left: Carol Ennis (2019), Dena Ressler (2023), Terry Campbell (2018), and Peter Cammarano (2023). See pages 3-4 for Edith Terzano's story about the passion flower she received as a gift.



*Photo by Tammy Laverty*