

From the Potting Shed

March 2024

www.mgofbc.org



Meeting news: Tuesday, March 19

Anthony Bracco Small Space Gardening

1 Bergen County Plaza, 1st floor
6:30 pm 'meet and greet'; announcements
at 7:20 pm; program to follow



Anthony Bracco

You don't need a backyard to grow vegetables. Anthony Bracco's Small Space Gardening talk is for people who don't have traditional backyard spaces for their vegetable gardens. In fact, he noted, using spaces such as decks, balconies, stoops, and verandas can be just as productive and rewarding as a backyard space.

Anthony and his family live in Cedar Grove. After running a graphic design business for 30 years, in 2009 he and his wife bought a 25-acre farm in the "Black Dirt" region of Pine Island (Orange)

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Calling all MGs, interns, and alums

Join us March 19 at 6:30 pm for an open forum discussion with board members followed by a "meet and greet." Ask questions of board members; learn the functions performed by the board; and find out how you can take a more active role in the MG of BC. Several volunteer site liaisons will be available to explain the work done at their sites and answer questions about volunteering.

Bring seeds to share from your garden or your volunteer site or both! Then grab a snack while you decorate a seed packet for the seeds that you'll take home from the seed swap. All of this will be followed by speaker Anthony Bracco. Come and get to know your MG of BC colleagues.

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From the President's Desk

By Theresa Schneider, Class of 2016

I'd like to share two thoughts today:

First thought: How fitting that our first in-person meeting of 2024 is Tuesday, March 19, the spring equinox. To celebrate spring and catch up with each other after the long, wet winter, the March meeting will start at 6:30 pm with an open forum to present questions and suggestions to board members.



We'll also have a seed swap and seed packet design activity prior to the presentation by Anthony Bracco, owner of Bracco Farms, at approximately 7:30 pm. Please bring seeds from your volunteer sites or your own garden to share and swap while enjoying a cup of coffee and a nosh.

Second thought: I'd like to introduce the new members of the MG of BC Membership Committee: Janet Stofkoper (chair) and Dineen Policano, both Class of 2023. Welcome, and thank you Janet and Dineen for taking on this duty.

Meanwhile, it's never too late to renew your membership in the association. Your membership dues help to fund eight continuing education lectures throughout the year; Master Gardener intern projects

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WEBINARS

All times are Eastern.

March 6, 7 pm: Somerset County Chapter, Native Plant Society of New Jersey sponsors Beech Leaf Disease: What's at Stake in NJ and Strategies to Mitigate Impacts (speaker Jean Epiphan). Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 7, noon: Smithsonian Gardens sponsors Reconnect to Nature. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 9, 10-11:30 am: Penn State Extension sponsors Second Saturday Gardening Series: Noxious vs. Native Weeds. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 9, 10 am-noon: Penn State Extension sponsors Good Gardening Saturday: Why Won't My Plants Bloom? Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 13, 7-8 pm: Penn State Extension sponsors Know Your Natives: Expanding and Improving Your Pollinator Garden. Fee: \$10. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 13, 7:30-8:30 pm: Bergen-Passaic Chapter, Native Plant Society of New Jersey sponsors Landscaping with Colorful Native Plants: Beautiful Plants for Beautiful Places (speaker Dr. Randi Eckel). Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 16, 10-11:30 am: Penn State Extension sponsors Why Pollinators Matter and How to Create a Pollinator Certified Garden. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 20, noon-1 pm: AARP Virtual Community Center sponsors The Secrets to Growing Tomatoes. Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. AARP membership not required.

March 28, 1-2 pm: Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation sponsors In the Life of the Bumble Bee Queen (and the Cuckoo, Too). Free. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

(Anthony Bracco, continued from page 1)

County), NY. Anthony, an avid gardener most of his life, had intended to be a hobby farmer on just an acre growing the cleanest produce possible using non-GMO seeds and old-fashioned farm equipment.

His goal was to remove weeds by hand, pick vegetables only when ready, and not use chemicals, fertilizers, irrigation, pesticides, herbicides, or glyphosate but instead to allow the beautiful Black Dirt soil to naturally regenerate each season.

Anthony said that these simple, time-honored, sustainable farming techniques produced a shocking abundance of produce and that chefs began to take notice of the dramatic difference in taste.

As a result, after just one season, [Bracco Farms](#) was born out of that demanding momentum of the growing food movement. Bracco Farms, he said, continues to grow its wide variety of market-basket produce types for individual customers, families, and chefs. The farm also supplies farm-to-table eateries and country clubs primarily in New Jersey.

(President's desk, continued from page 1)

for the county Fall Festival; MG outreach activities at county events; food and drinks for our semiannual social events; donations to local food banks; and MG outreach to support the NJ Botanical Garden.

Annual dues for 2024 are \$20. Please make checks payable to the MG of BC and mail to: Master Gardeners of Bergen County, PO Box 824, Saddle River, NJ 07458.

If you haven't done so already, please send the Membership Committee an [email](#) with your contact information. If you prefer, you can fill out the online MG of BC [Membership Form](#).

Thanks for your support; see you at the March meeting.

HORTICULTURE



Photo by Janet Schulz

Busy bee (upper left) on Janet's *Adonis Amurensis* in early February. If the bees are out there, shouldn't we be, too?

March garden chores

By Janet Schulz, Class of 1988

March weather, as it's said, goes "in like a lion and out like a lamb." So, consider the following garden chores for the month no matter the weather.

- Clean up winter debris and remove winter mulch (if you had put any down).
- Cut old leaves from hellebores to show off their flowers.
- Cut back ornamental grasses that were left for winter interest.
- Prune out any weak or diseased branches from shrubs and trees.
- When the forsythia blooms it's time to trim your roses.
- Start seeds for cool-weather vegetables.
- Clean out old bird houses; consider putting up another one or two.
- Think about what annuals you're going to plant in your beds and containers.

All work and no play make Jack a dull boy, so get out there: Take a hike. Visit Laurelwood Arboretum in Wayne or Skylands Manor in Ringwood, our state botanical garden. Or just take a walk around McFaul Environmental Center.

Spring is right around the corner. Happy gardening!

Rutgers needs your help studying stiltgrass

Rutgers is conducting a statewide project regarding the invasive plant Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*). The project's goal is to better understand the timing of stiltgrass germination and seed production so landscape managers and property owners can effectively time-control activities for stiltgrass management.

This level of research can be accomplished only through extensive community support from Rutgers Master Gardeners and [Environmental Stewards](#).

Your participation is needed for wide-spread, timely monitoring of seed germination in spring (starting mid-March) and seed stalk formation in late summer (starting in August).



Photo by Jean Epiphan, Rutgers U.

Stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)

The project is being managed by Jean Epiphan and Peter Nitzsche, Rutgers agriculture and natural resources agents, and Matthew Elmore, a specialist in weed science at Rutgers.

To learn more about the project:

- Click [here](#) to register by the March 7 deadline.
- Attend the live online information session March 12 from 1-2 pm. During this presentation, you'll learn about the project, how to identify stiltgrass, what data is being collected, and how to report your observations.

After registering, you'll receive information and the link to the March 12 webinar. If you can't attend the live webinar, you can view a recording and slides later.

To those who participated last year: Thank you, and please consider participating again so Rutgers can have accurate data replication at your stiltgrass site. Rutgers said it needs to repeat this project for a few years to account for climate variability that could impact germination and seed-emergence timing.

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(Horticulture, continued from page 3)

Mt. Cuba report on *Amsonia*

Mt. Cuba Center recently released its latest trial garden report on *Amsonia*, commonly known as bluestars. "Amsonia for the Mid-Atlantic Region" presents the results of a 10-year trial that evaluated 20 types of *Amsonia*. The report shows that *Amsonia* are attractive, long-lasting, and reliable plants that provide interest and beauty in the garden from spring through fall. Click [here](#) to read the report. Click [here](#) to visit the Mt. Cuba Center website.

- From Liz Gil, Class of 2019

GARDEN CLUB MEETINGS

March 4, 4 pm: Sundial Garden Club, Hillsdale Public Library, 509 Hillsdale Ave., Hillsdale. Speaker: Lynne Proskow, MG Class of 2022. Topic: Container Gardening in Small Places and Introduction to Self-Watering Containers.

March 7, 7:30 pm: Garden Club of Harrington Park, Harrington Park Public Library upstairs meeting room, 10 Herring St., Harrington Park. Speaker: Mary Jo Sichak, Passaic County MG. Topic: Garden Gems of the Garden State.

March 12, 7 pm: Ramsey Area Garden Club, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, 55 Wyckoff Ave. (corner of Woodland Avenue), Ramsey. Speaker: Marc Gussen, director of the Closter Nature Center. Topic: Hydroponics - the Art of Soilless Gardening.

March 14, 7 pm: Teaneck Garden Club, Rodda Center, Room 1, second floor, 250 Colonial Court, Teaneck. Drive up the hill to the rear parking lot. Speaker: Bill Muzychko, fig grower in Flemington. Topic: Growing Figs in New Jersey Without a Greenhouse. Click [here](#) for more information about Bill.

Remember when?



Photo by Joseph Cooper, Class of 2008

Relive the Yuletide décor from the 2023 Skylands Manor Holiday Open House via Joseph Cooper's video of the event. Click [here](#) to watch on YouTube. Above is the Great Hall.

EVENTS

Three members of the MG of BC Speakers Bureau are presenting events in March. Check them out!

March 10, 10 am: Make Your Own Rain Barrel workshop at Thielke Arboretum, 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock. Fee: \$35 per barrel includes all supplies; 20% discount for Thielke members. Click [here](#) for more information and to register; space is limited.

March 10, 2-2:45 pm and 3-3:45 pm: Seed Starting-Microgreens, part of NJ Makers Day 2024 (fun STEAM learning for all ages) at the Teaneck Public Library, 840 Teaneck Road, Teaneck. Demonstration by Lynne Proskow, MG Class of 2022. Click [here](#) for the entire schedule and to register for either of Lynne's two workshops.

March 21, 7 pm: Water in the Garden presentation at Thielke Arboretum, 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock. Speaker: Arnie Friedman, MG Class of 2004. Fee: \$10; 20% discount for Thielke members. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

March 28, 7-8 pm: Vegetable Gardening 101 presentation at the Glen Rock Public Library, downstairs community room, 315 Rock Road, Glen Rock. Speaker: Robyn Lowenthal, MG Class of 2011. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.

Greetings from Florida!



Photos by Paul Sisko

That's Janet Sisko, wife of Paul Sisko, MG Class of 2021, with their century plant (*Agave Americana*) at their second home in Melbourne Beach, FL. Paul bought the plant about seven years ago in an 8-inch pot and periodically transplanted it into larger pots. About three years ago, he said that he noticed new pup offsprings growing from the sides. "I unearthed the plant from the pot, planted the pup plants, and repotted the parent agave to the same location as it was an eye-catching site." When he left Florida last April, "It was doing fine, and I just let it be. When I returned this January, a 10-foot stem had grown with side shoots and flower buds about 5 feet up the stem." Around Feb. 12, he said, "The lower flower buds (above) started to open with vertical yellow brush-like fuzzy hairs, which the bees just love. I feel so lucky that I am here to see this once-in-the-plant's-life happening."



HORTICULTURAL THERAPY

People-plant relationships and the human issues in horticulture

Joel Flagler, agricultural extension agent for Begen County, has shared this article he wrote for a new newsletter from the Chartered Institute of Horticulture (United Kingdom) in partnership with the Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association. In November, Joel spoke virtually to the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Applied Health Research on the role of plants and gardens in human wellness. He reported that he was invited "out of the blue" after educators there read about his decades of work in hort therapy in the United States. Joel is also a Rutgers professor of horticultural therapy and our county extension department head.

As more people learn about horticultural therapy it seems there can be confusion about what HT is and what it is not. Not every encounter between people and plants is horticultural therapy, even though there can be a feel-good value that results.

Every time a person receives flowers and feels better is not HT. Every time someone's mood improves as they relax in a local park around lush vegetation is not HT. Every time someone visits a shopping mall and feels good in the presence of a beautiful indoor tropical planting is not HT.



Pixabay photo

Pretty in pink but not hort therapy.

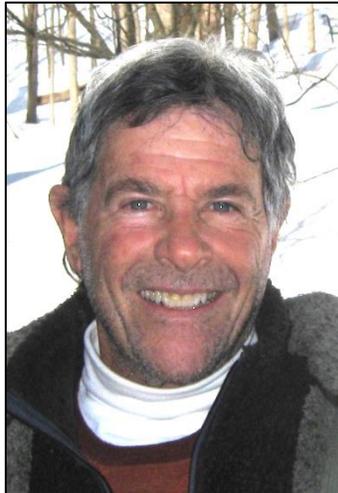
Indeed, if it only requires a person and the mere presence of plants, HT could be everywhere in every moment. With that, there would be no need for registered HTs who have trained in the profession and practice of HT. There would be no need for research into the ways in which HT can be used to address human disability and become an effective part of treatment. But that is not the case.

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(Horticultural therapy, continued from page 5)

It becomes important to recognize HT for what it is: A well-planned intervention that uses plants to reach established goals for individuals with physical, developmental, and social deficits and challenges. Trained HTs are skilled in the process of understanding the nature of disabilities and applying plant-related activities to help reach goals.

HTs work with occupational and physical therapists and others to establish and follow treatment plans to improve the individual and their functioning. Knowing the limitations a disease or injury imposes on an individual is a key part of the process. Knowing which plants and which activities are appropriate is another. Thus, HTs need to be skilled in the “people sciences” as well as the “plant sciences.”



Joel Flagler

What, then, is at work when everyday people encounter plants and experience elevated moods and reduced stress? To answer that we can look to the five internationally accepted aspects of people-plant relationships and the human issues in horticulture. They help to underscore the complex and essential connections between people and plants.

- 1. Plants and the individual - the psycho-physiological responses of people to plants.** Settings that include live plants are nearly always preferred over those that don't. Corporate offices, airports, hotels, restaurants, and shopping malls all include extensive plantings, and the benefits are numerous. These include reduced stress, higher productivity, less absenteeism, and higher rates of patronage. Plants also improve indoor air quality by buffering contaminants while generating fresh oxygen, adding further important benefits for humans.
- 2. Plants and human culture.** Plants impact human culture by influencing language, art and literature, and modern mass media as well as politics and world events. Plants are important symbols in many celebrations and rituals, holidays, weddings, and funerals. People in all parts of the

world recognize and utilize plants for much more than survival needs, though the ancient bond we have with plants is based on tens of thousands of years of dependence on them.

- 3. Plants and communities.** Human behavior in communities and social groupings is influenced by the presence of plants and horticultural activities. Community and school gardens, as well as neighborhood beautification, brings people together in positive interaction. Plants contribute to increased community pride. Gardens and landscapes influence our selection of residences, retirement communities, and leisure pursuits.
- 4. Horticultural therapy.** Plants and gardens have been shown to be effective tools in therapy and rehabilitation. Horticulture can be an important part of the treatment in hospitals, prisons, and substance abuse recovery. Horticultural therapy offers significant benefits for individuals with physical, developmental, and social disabilities. Plants respond to any caretaker, and anyone can have successes with plants, leading to other successes in their lives.
- 5. Research and implementation.** Research and formal investigation into the psychological, physiological, and social responses of people to plants can have application among diverse user groups. Research findings must be shared and disseminated among academicians, horticultural industry suppliers, government health and social service agencies, and diverse professional organizations.

[Editor's note: Bergen New Bridge Medical Center, one of our MG of BC volunteer sites, has an HT program. Click [here](#) to visit the “Volunteer Sites” section of our website for more information.]

Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Bergen County

| | |
|---------------------|---|
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MG OF BC NEWS

March 17 is opening day for volunteers at Garretson Forge & Farm

By Lida Gellman, Class of 1999

The 2024 season will begin March 17 at Garretson Farm with its annual Pea Day planting from 1-4 pm. In addition to planting peas, there's much spring cleaning to do in the other planting beds.



After that, regular MG volunteering begins Thursday, March 21 from 10 am-2 pm and every Thursday thereafter. We also meet on the second and fourth Sundays of the month from 1-4 pm. Bring gloves and small hand tools such as pruners and trowels; we have the rest. The group

meets rain or shine since there's a small greenhouse and plenty to do even in inclement weather. You'll also be able to pick up some free herb, vegetable, and

flower seeds at the Garretson Seed Library, which will be open on Pea Day.

Contact [Lida Gellman](#), site coordinator, if you have any questions. Garretson is located at 4-02 River Road, Fair Lawn. Click [here](#) to visit the Garretson website.



Volunteers packaged and distributed seeds during the Feb. 25 opening of the Garretson Seed Library. Above from left, Janet Stofkoper, Class of 2023; Noel Schulz (2016); Dave Bandfield, community volunteer; and Jane Nicholson (2017) counted and packed the seeds. In photo at left, Liz Scholl (2011) and Terry Cohn (2020) at the seed distribution table.

Maple sugaring at the Hermitage

By Bernadette White, Class of 2021

The trees have been tapped, and now the drippings begin!

Experts at the Hermitage demonstrated how to make maple syrup when volunteers tapped 15 trees on the historic property Feb. 17. Three presentations were attended by a crowd of 225. Nancy Moses, Hermitage grounds coordinator, and speaker Roseanne Weissel explained how to identify sugar maples, what conditions are needed to begin tapping, and how much sap it takes to make one quart of maple syrup. (Did you guess it takes 10 gallons for one quart? That explains the high cost.)

Next step in the process is collecting the sap daily and keeping it cool. The collected sap will be clear and watery. Depending on the weather, it takes several weeks for the trees to finish yielding sap. Then the boiling begins. Once the desired temperature and consistency have been reached,



Class of 2024 interns, from left, Wendy Sowa-Maldarelli, Irmayn Rowley, and Joe Gemignani put taps in the tubing used to extract sap from the maple trees.

the syrup is ready to be filtered, put into glass containers, capped, and placed upside down to seal the caps. Then the containers are placed on their sides to cool. Have sugar maples? Come to the Hermitage next year to learn the process.

Spring cleanup at the Hermitage site begins March 19. The Hermitage is located at 335 North Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus. Come join us and enjoy working on this beautiful property. Contact site coordinators Nancy Moses at 201-445-2532 or [Bernadette White](#) for more information.