



NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

GARDENnotes  
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*Lindera obtusiloba*  
Photo by Richie Steffen

# PUGET SOUND NURSERIES

## A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

### PART 1: VAN DEN AKKER NURSERY

*Words and Images by Tanya DeMarsh-Dodson (unless otherwise noted)*

*Author's Note: While I intended to begin this series with the early nursery people and families of the Puget Sound region, the pandemic prevented my efforts at research. So, for this first article on Van den Akker Nursery, I have turned primarily to oral histories and my own connections to local nurseries.*

Many visiting horticultural speakers begin their presentations by expressing admiration for the gardens and gardeners of the Puget Sound region. We are fortunate to have an enthusiastic and knowledgeable group of people gardening our soils and many fine gardens. Attendance at the annual Elisabeth C. Miller Memorial Lecture is another indicator of the keen interest in horticulture here as it has the largest audience for an annual horticultural lecture west of the Mississippi.

What makes the Pacific Northwest such a gardening mecca? There are many contributing factors including climate, weather, soils, the out-of-doors culture, the beauty of our natural environment, and the amazing number of garden-worthy native plants, to mention just a few.

One factor, not so often acknowledged, is the contribution of those who grow the plants with which we garden – the men and women in the nursery business. Their contribution has been considerable since the first garden store in the Seattle area was started in 1893 by Charles Malmo on 2nd Avenue in what is now downtown Seattle.



Tony Van den Akker (on left)  
– Al Dodson

I first visited the Van den Akker nursery with my mother. We were buying plants for our home garden in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Antonius (Tony) Van den Akker started his nursery in the mid-20th century in Bothell, Washington. Later, after I entered the nursery profession, I purchased plants from Tony for retail offerings at Swanson's Nursery in Ballard – his deciduous azaleas sold especially well around Mother's Day. Much of the information for this article came from his eldest son, Robert van den Akker and his good friend and my husband, Al Dodson. Al worked for Tony in the nursery intermittently from the time he was eight years old until he finished college, essentially becoming part of the family.

The 2nd World War devastated Europe. Vast regions of the countryside were scarred or destroyed, the cities bombed out, and the civilian population poorly nourished and reduced in number. The economies, social institutions, and the arts in countries on the continent were in varying degrees of disarray. People living in the United States, by contrast, were spared the destruction associated with waging a war on the very land you inhabit. In the first decades after the war, Europe was economically depressed and in the initial phases of rebuilding. The nursery industry suffered. Public and private ornamental gardens, some devastated in battle while others by neglect and vandalism, were not high on the list for public or private funding. Nursery customers were few. In the Seattle area, however, wholesale and retail nursery owners were expanding their businesses to meet the demands of expanding residential neighborhoods. They recruited skilled



*Acer palmatum* 'Van den Akker' (left) & *A. palmatum* 'Viridis' (right) in the author's garden

nurserymen from Europe to help them propagate and grow the plants they needed.

In the early 20th century, the Van den Akker family was already in the nursery business in Boskoop, Holland; and then, as now, it was a center of the nursery business in Europe. All four of the Van den Akker brothers were nursery owners, growing plants and marketing them throughout Europe. After WW II, when business prospects for the family business were limited, Tony received an invitation from the Seattle area to help run Shur-Gro Nursery. He made the decision to emigrate to the United States. Both Tony and his wife began to study English to prepare for their life in America. Frederick William Anhalt, who had started Shur-Gro nursery in 1942, was to be Tony's boss. Arriving in Seattle in 1951, Tony was accompanied by his wife and two sons. Working with Anhalt he learned which plants did well in the Puget Sound basin and which were popular in the ornamental trade. Anhalt's nursery was on land

not far from the Malmo nursery location opened in 1937 by the founder's son, Clark Malmo. Both were located near the University of Washington where University Village is today. There were a number of other Boskoop nurserymen with whom Tony enjoyed comradery and rivalry while working for Anhalt. They had been brought to the United States to work for Clark Malmo. Tony worked for Anhalt until about 1954.



*Acer palmatum* 'Van den Akker' summer foliage – Richie Steffen

In 1953, Tony purchased land near the Sammamish Slough in Bothell and started his own nursery. He built a greenhouse, cold frames, and prepared fields for growing. Within a few years he had his nursery up and operating. He was able to grow a wide variety of plants because he was adept at propagation. Depending on the plant, he started from seed, from cuttings, by layering, or grafting. He used professional notebooks

he brought with him from Boskoop which were guides for the proper timing of propagation. Tony chose to focus primarily on woody ornamental plants: trees, shrubs and groundcovers. He had a keen eye for plants and learned enough in the early years

of working in this region to be able to select plants he found appealing and well-suited to Northwest gardens which he could propagate and grow successfully. By the late 1950's he had a good selection of conifers, weeping Japanese maples, deciduous shrubs, broadleaf evergreens, and a selection of groundcovers.

His specialty, however, was deciduous azaleas which he grew from seed he initially procured from Holland. He began hybridizing these plants as soon as the seedlings began to bloom. Tony crossed plants for the characteristics he wanted. He was not meticulous about the genetic heritage of the plants he crossed, rather he watched for

the characteristics he sought in the offspring of his crosses. He had some specific goals in mind which centered on the garden worthiness of his hybrids. He bred for a notable pleasant scent to the flower, a compact flower head that stood up well in full sun and in rain, a long season of bloom, foliage that had good fall color and was not susceptible to mildew (this was, and still is, a failing of many deciduous azaleas), and finally a plant whose flower buds were resistant to spider mite damage. He did also try to select for a dark red flowering shrub, a bloom color not found in deciduous azaleas in the 1950's.

Tony's pursuit of hybridizing azaleas echoed the work of his oldest brother in Holland who chose to focus his azalea hybridization work exclusively on yellow-blooming deciduous azaleas. He sought to create a plant with the fragrance of *Rhododendron luteum* (the honeysuckle azalea) but with a larger bloom. The plant to which Tony gave his name, 'Van den Akker's Perfection', was the azalea which Tony considered had the greatest garden merit of all his hybrids. This selection was sterile so it had, besides his other desired attributes, an exceptionally long bloom time.

Most of Tony's customers were landscapers, wholesale nurseries, and retail nurseries. He did also sell to home gardeners who stopped by his nursery. Because of his specialization in azaleas, his busiest time of the year was spring, especially around Mother's Day. He sold seedling azaleas wholesale to a number of local retail nurseries, and he sold them himself, in May, for some years from his nursery truck parked beside the road from Kenmore to

Bothell. He delivered azaleas, conifers, shrubs and groundcovers on a fairly regular basis to Seattle Wholesale Nursery located near 145th and Aurora Avenue owned and operated by the Malmo family. There were some local plant brokers who, acting as middlemen, kept track of what Tony had on hand in the nursery and supplied local nurseries with his plants.



*Acer palmatum* 'Van den Akker' summer foliage – Richie Steffen

Tony's plant selection, aside from azaleas, was a thoughtfully assembled blend of plants he could propagate and grow fairly easily and those which were valuable ornamentally but not so easily propagated and grown. Those that were fairly easy to propagate and grow

included *Buxus sempervirens* cultivars (boxwood); *Vinca minor* (vinca); *Hedera* cultivars (ivy); *Sagina* cultivars (Irish and Scottish moss); *Mahonia nervosa* (Cascade Oregon grape); and *M. aquifolium* 'Compacta' (Oregon grape).

*Cotinus coggygia* 'Royal Purple' (purple smoke bush), newly introduced from Holland in the 1950's, *Corylopsis* (winter

hazel) species, *Hamamelis* × *intermedia* cultivars (witch hazel), *Chamaecyparis obtusa* cultivars (hinoki cypress) *Pinus parviflora* and *P. strobus* cultivars (Japanese and Eastern white pine), *Pinus densiflora* 'Umbraculifera' (Tanyosho pine), and dwarf hybrids of *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* (Lawson's cypress) grafted onto a *Phytophthora lateralis* resistant rootstock were harder to propagate and grow.

Thus, these plants were more difficult for landscapers or retail nurseries to acquire. This blended inventory helped to maintain his sales volume throughout the year and helped him, too, to have better control over the prices on a portion of his inventory. His commitment to offering plants that had great ornamental value in our local growing conditions also helped gardeners and

landscapers add interest to the landscapes of this region.

Tony was singular in his approach to his chosen profession, finding his own path in the nursery industry. He did, however, involve himself in the nursery industry's most important organization, the Washington State Nursery Association (now known as the Washington Nursery and Landscape Association).



Tony Van den Akker hybrid azalea in the author's garden

He attended meetings and supported the state government lobbying efforts of Bruce Briggs (founder of Briggs Nursery) in Olympia on behalf of the nursery industry statewide.

All three of his sons chose careers in horticulture. Emile Van den Akker started his own landscaping company, Van Den Akker's Landscaping LLC, having graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in Botany. Robert Van den Akker purchased property in Monroe, Washington, and operated a wholesale nursery there for many years. His plants supplied many retail and wholesale nurseries,

landscapers, and land restoration businesses in the area. The third son, Bob Eugene Van den Akker, chose a career with the city of Bothell and worked in park maintenance until retirement, caring for public open spaces.

Tony left Northwest gardeners some wonderful plants some of which are still available at nurseries in the area. Probably the most widely used is a conifer *Cupressus* (formerly *Chamaecyparis*) *nootkatensis* 'Van den Akker' (Van den Akker's weeping Alaska cedar, a Great Plant Pick). Its popularity has grown as our residential lots grow smaller, as its tall narrow stature helps those who would like to plant a tree in a narrow urban or suburban garden bed. It has a beautiful slim graceful form with weeping branches, occasionally escaping to ease what might otherwise be a rather severe pole-like form. Tony selected it from among the many seedling trees of this somewhat variable species.

Another plant that drew his attention was a seedling lace-leaf weeping Japanese maple. This maple seedling was similar to many others of the then sought-after plant in that the foliage emerged red in spring but the leaf color faded to bronze-toned (a greenish red) with the summer heat. The difference with this seedling was that while most red lace-leaf maple cultivars had red fall color, this one did not. What attracted Tony's attention was its atypical fall color, a beautiful pumpkin orange (yellow orange in some specific cultural circumstances). Tony named it *Acer palmatum* 'Van den Akker'.



*Acer palmatum* 'Van den Akker' fall foliage— Al Dodson

It may seem odd that the Van den Akker hybrid deciduous azaleas are not as easily available to gardeners today as they were in the 20th century. One reason, I would speculate, is that the deciduous azaleas are not in favor at this moment in time. I

believe that they do have a potentially valuable role in our shrinking residential gardens as a small multi-trunked "tree." They can reach 10 to 15 feet tall and 8 to 12 feet wide and they offer profuse long-lasting bloom, good fragrance, spectacular flower color, and bright fall foliage color. A garden designer based in Bellevue purchased the whole of the Van den Akker hybrid collection after his death and

may still be a source for his hybrids today. There are many gardens in which you will find Tony's hybrids, unrecognized for what they are. There are also known hybrids in private and public spaces in the area today; if there are some growers interested in reintroducing these azaleas to the trade, I think there are gardeners who would be willing to share their plants with others.



Tony Van den Akker – Al Dodson

As Tony aged, the selections of plants available at his nursery diminished. Some few years before his death in 2000 he sold a portion of his nursery growing area near his residence. His youngest son, Bob Eugene, worked in the portion of the nursery surrounding the family residence helping his father as his health and energy declined. Tony continued growing plants and hybridizing azaleas until his death. If you stopped by the nursery, found Tony and a plant you wanted, even in the spring of 2000, you might have been able to purchase the plant. The nursery and residence were sold shortly after Tony's passing.

Europe's loss was our gain. Tony van den Akker was not alone among nurserymen who have contributed to the thriving

garden community and fine gardens of this region, there are many others. His contributions, however, are notable. ♡

*Tanya DeMarsh-Dodson is a board member of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden Trust, a long-time volunteer at the Dunn Gardens, and she worked in horticulture for many years.*



# AN UGLY DUCKLING IN THE GARDEN

*Words and images by Richie Steffen*

Early in my years in Seattle I had an unusual and rare shrub pointed out to me at the Washington Park Arboretum. My usual reaction to seeing something new was that I needed to grow it, but I remember my impulses that day were tempered by the thought “that is one ugly shrub”. This unusual shrub was called  $\times$  *Mahoberberis miethkeana*, a bigeneric hybrid. These types of crosses, between two genera, are highly unusual, and often they are something for the plant collector to take into consideration. This plant was thought to be a cross between our native *Mahonia aquifolium* and a *Berberis*, or one of the barberries.

Unfortunately, this bizarre combining of DNA resulted in more of an ugly duckling than a beautiful swan.  $\times$  *Mahoberberis miethkeana* is an upright grower forming a broadly arching vase-shaped shrub. An evergreen plant, it sports two entirely different types of foliage appearing rather randomly placed on the bush making it look a little disheveled. One set of leaves is compound with a long oval-shaped terminal leaflet with two smaller oval leaflets at the base. These compound leaves are well serrated with small spines. They have a thick leathery feel to them; and if viewed without the distraction of the rest of the shrub, they are rather attractive. The other leaf type is also quite attractive. It is an undivided elliptical-shaped leaf with a thick leathery feel, but it is viciously spined with long very sharp points. I am sure we can thank both parents for this prickly trait. Yellow flowers are produced in spring in small tight clusters followed by infertile small blue fruits.



As unattractive as this plant was at first sight, it has lingered on my mind over the years due to its significance to regional horticultural history.  $\times$  *Mahoberberis miethkeana* was discovered in 1940 at Miethke's Nursery and Flowers in Tacoma, Washington by the proprietor, Henry O. Miethke. It appears to be the first  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* to be discovered, although it is the third  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* to be officially described with its write up in 1954 by L. W. Melander and G. W. Eade in *The National Horticultural Magazine*, the journal of the American Horticultural Society. Knowing that this oddity was unofficially the first of its kind, and discovered regionally, made it stick in my mind as a plant to consider for the garden.

In the 1940's and 1950's three other  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* were discovered in Europe. In 1943,  $\times$  *Mahoberberis aquicandidula* (*M. aquifolium*  $\times$  *B. candidula*) and  $\times$  *Mahoberberis aquisargentii* (*M. aquifolium*  $\times$  *B. sargentiana*) were discovered in seedling batches in Sweden. These two hybrids were officially described in 1950 by the famed botanical garden curator Gert Krüssmann.  $\times$  *Mahoberberis aquicandidula* is a weak grower of limited ornamental use while  $\times$  *Mahoberberis aquisargentii* looks much the same as  $\times$  *Mahoberberis miethkeana* but is not as vigorous and is shy to bloom.  $\times$  *Mahoberberis neubertii* (*M. aquifolium*  $\times$  *B. vulgaris*) was discovered in France and is the least attractive of this unusual cross, being a wiry, open and leggy plant that rarely flowers and is often semievergreen. This is a plant only its mother could love!



Recently three new hybrids have been recorded in Europe:  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* 'Dart's Desire',  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* 'Dart's Treasure' and  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* 'Magic'. These are reported to be more compact, but they are unlikely to gain enough popularity to warrant the costs of importing to the United States.  $\times$  *Mahoberberis*, as well as *Berberis* and *Mahonia* are strictly regulated for international and interstate movement due to the possibility of spreading wheat rust. So far, the  $\times$  *Mahoberberis* forms in the US are listed as resistant to the rust.

If you find yourself compelled to search out this choice plant, there is one more detail worth knowing. DNA studies now show that all *Mahonia* are now considered *Berberis*. Unfortunately for the unique  $\times$  *Mahoberberis*, it now becomes an ordinary *Berberis*. Yet another devastating strike against incorporating this plant into your garden. But for those of us who are name-change deniers and not willing to acknowledge this shift in nomenclature, we can still rejoice in growing this locally significant shrub. I think I will have to look for one this spring and add it to my growing connoisseur collection. ☺

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# Great Plant Picks Celebrates FOLIAGE FASHION

*Words and images by Richie Steffen (unless otherwise noted)*

*Saxifraga 'Primuloides' hort.*

FLOWERS MAY PACK THE PUNCH IN THE GARDEN, but foliage is what holds it all together. Once the blooms are long gone the leaves that remain are what you are looking at for rest of the season. To help gardeners find beautiful and interesting foliage, Great Plant Picks (GPP) is celebrating great foliage plants in the 2021 garden theme *Foliage Fashion*.

When Betty Miller started adding the first plants to her garden (now the Elisabeth Miller Botanical Garden), she realized the value of good foliage. Using skills and techniques she developed as a fine arts major at the University of Washington, she selected plants that brought texture and interest to her plantings. These are features we still follow today as we continue to plant at the Miller Garden. Following her examples, each area flows with elegant, dazzling and brazenly bold combinations. Using these

clues, GPP has created collections of plants with a similar theme for gardeners in the maritime Pacific Northwest.

### **Elegant and Delicate**

Elegant foliage can come in many different forms. Fine willow foliage is a classic example as well as finely divided foliage. Less obvious, yet equally elegant are shiny green leaves. When seen en masse, these foliage types can create beautiful patterns, adding repetition and building unity. Elegant and delicate leaves also lend a calming feel to the garden.

Few garden moments are more soothing and graceful than watching a breeze move ornamental grasses in the garden. The swaying blades and stems and seed heads capture the shifting air





*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Yaku Jima'



*Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata'



*Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah'

currents and translate them into a tangible connection between garden and nature. Taller grasses are the best at projecting this feeling. Japanese silver grass, *Miscanthus sinensis*, has many cultivars available with 'Morning Light' and 'Yaku Jima' being two tried and true selections. Some more compact grasses to create movement in the landscape are *Molinia caerulea* 'Variegata', variegated moor grass, with bright creamy yellow striped blades and red switch grass, *Panicum virgatum* 'Shenandoah', with red and green blades taking on more red in late summer and autumn. This prairie native prefers lean soils and full sun with only occasional watering during dry weather.

The deeply cut and finely divided leaves of lace-leaf Japanese maples, *Acer palmatum* Dissectum Group, convey a delicate and fragile appearance. Indeed, if these beautiful small trees are growing in too hot of a location, the tips of the thinly sectioned leaves will burn and brown by early

summer, but when grown in the proper location there is no equal to its beauty. *Acer palmatum* (Dissectum Group) 'Tamuke yama' and 'Orangeola' are two widely available selections that have red summer foliage with brilliant autumn color. 'Tamuke yama' will remain slightly narrower in spread as it matures, but 'Orangeola' has a mid-summer flush of foliage with an unusual orange-red hue.



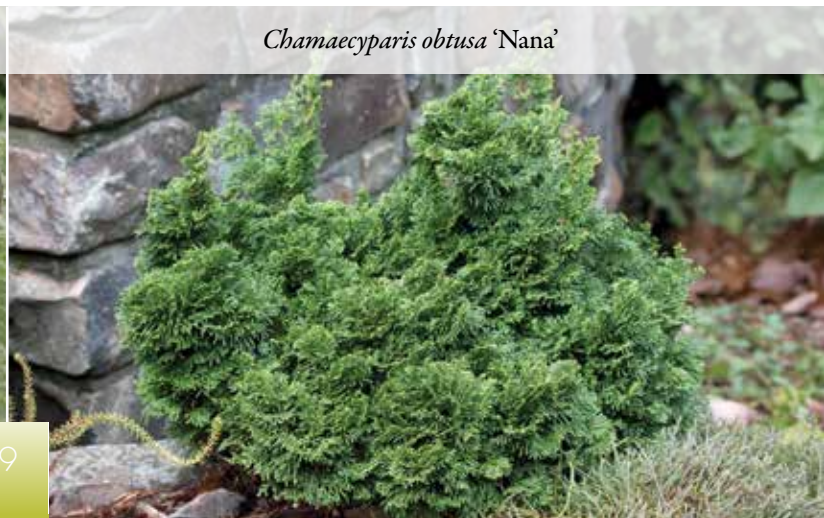
*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Kosteri'

A much faster grower with lovely, divided leaves is the cut-leaf elderberry, *Sambucus nigra* f. *laciniata*. The large lacy leaves are dark green and show well in full sun to open shade. Once established this can be treated as a cut back shrub being pruned to 12 to 15 inches tall in winter allowing for vigorous upright stems reaching 6 to 8 feet tall the next summer. This shrub is great mixed in perennial borders.

An elegant feel is not only accomplished with fine foliage, but also with dark green, shiny foliage. The tiny and shiny leaves of



*Beesia deltophylla*



*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Nana'



*Cardamine trifolia*



*Berberis thunbergii* f. *atropurpurea* 'Concorde'



*Corylopsis spicata* 'Golden Spring'

*Azara macrophylla* partially hide the extremely fragrant small, winter-blooming flowers but accentuate the graceful branching habit. Camellias also have excellent glossy foliage. *Camellia* × *williamsii* is a mid-winter bloomer that will drop its faded flowers keeping it clean looking as spring approaches. Most *Camellia* × *williamsii* selections are pink with my favorite being 'Donation'. The large, ruffled blooms glow on gray winter days. If you do not have space for small trees or shrubs, try European wild ginger, *Asarum europaeum*, or *Beesia deltophylla* in the garden. Both perennials prefer open to dappled shade and have rounded to heart-shaped leaves. The glint of light off their polished leaves adds a touch of brightness to the shade garden.

Groundcovers and shrubs that have a repetitive pattern to the leaves is yet another way to add a touch of elegance. Who can dispute the gorgeous look of dwarf forms of Hinoki cypress, *Chamaecyparis obtusa*. The dark green, scaly

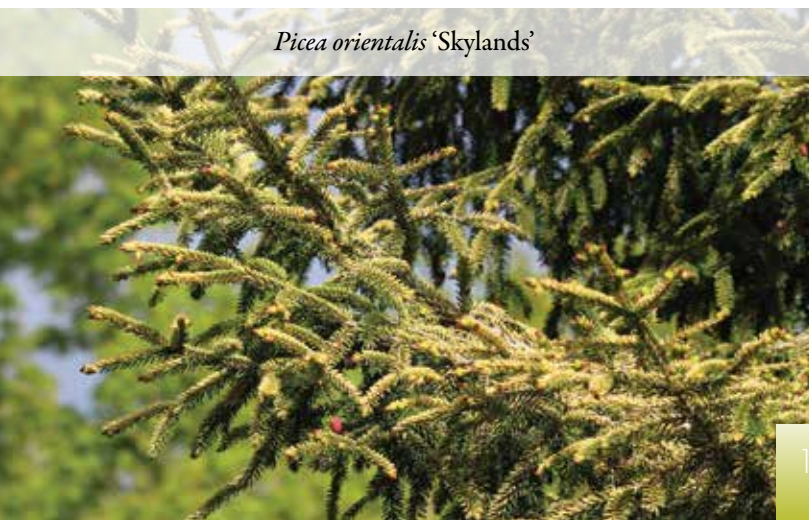
foliage forms compact fan-shaped branchlets that create an air of sophistication that few other plants can muster. One of the most popular and common selections is 'Nana Gracilis' which forms a broad conical shrub about 6 to 8 feet tall over many years. Two smaller selections are 'Kosteri', with uniquely triangular fan-shaped branchlets and maturing to 4 to 6 feet tall and, for the truly patient, the very slow growing 'Nana' that becomes an irregular bun about 12 inches tall in ten years. Small areas in need of a groundcover with repetitious foliage patterns would benefit from *Cardamine trifolia*, three-leafed cardamine or *Saxifraga* 'Primuloides', dwarf London pride. Both grow low and tight with spikes of small white flowers in spring.

### Dazzle with Color

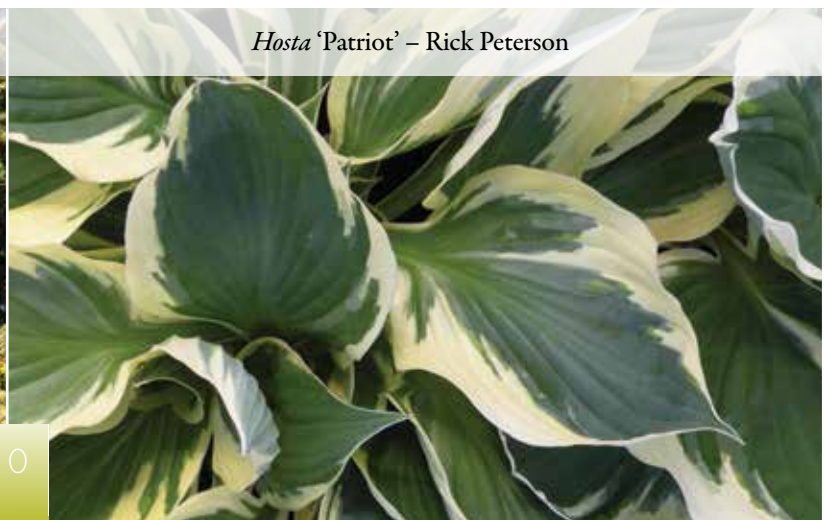
The quickest way to add long-term excitement to the garden is by embracing colorful foliage. Bright burgundy, yellow or blue foliage quickly becomes a focal point



*Camellia* × *williamsii* 'Donation'



*Picea orientalis* 'Skylands'



*Hosta* 'Patriot' – Rick Peterson



*Vitis vinifera* 'Purpurea'



*Rodgersia podophylla*



*Parthenocissus henryana*

and a centerpiece to contrast flowers and other foliage. It is best to have a restrained hand with colored foliage. Too much can feel like an assault on the senses. Use colorful foliage like a royal wedding hat, to draw attention to an ensemble that is already well put together.

One of my favorites for a powerful show is *Cotinus* 'Grace', Grace smokebush. The rounded leaves of this robust shrub hold a soft burgundy color with the shaded interior foliage turning burgundy blushed blue green. This makes a lovely frame for purple, pink or white clematis. The softer foliage tones also make combining this with other plants easier. A stronger burgundy color that is easy to incorporate into plantings is the dwarf barberry, *Berberis thunbergii* f. *atropurpurea* 'Concorde'. This small compact grower forms saturated purple buns in the landscape. It is excellent for marking the entrance to a pathway or making a brilliant edging.



*Cotinus* 'Grace'

Gold and yellow foliage is particularly useful in the Pacific Northwest. The gray weather makes these tones stand out. I

love winterhazel for its pale yellow, winter flowers, but a favorite is *Corylopsis spicata* 'Aurea' or 'Golden Spring'. After the floral show, chartreuse leaves will emerge intensifying in color to bright golden yellow until early summer when the color fades to a pale greenish-yellow. Growing low and wide in youth, it will eventually gain height reaching 6 to 8 feet tall. If an evergreen is preferred, the glowing brassy new growth of *Picea orientalis* 'Skylands' is outstanding. This architecturally beautiful conifer has a narrow conical frame with gracefully tiered branches. As the new growth fades, the tops of the branches hold a golden cast throughout the year.

Colorful impact is also accomplished with variegated foliage. Leaves splashed or edged with whites, creams and yellows can be immensely pleasing.



*Bergenia ciliata* 'Dumbo'



*Hydrangea aspera* 'Macrophylla' – Wikipedia Commons



Hostas are the queens of variegated foliage. *Hosta* 'Francee' is a beautiful perennial and was the standard of striking green and white variegation for years. Now it, along with *H.* 'Patriot' and 'Minuteman', both tracing their pedigree to 'Francee', set this standard. These two cultivars are very similar to each other and both have brilliant gleaming white edged leaves with deep green centers. These are best grown in open shade or morning sun in good garden soil with regular watering during the dry season. If a bigger statement is needed, the gorgeous, variegated pagoda dogwood, *Cornus alternifolius* 'Argentea', is a striking small tree that will fit into almost any garden. This slow-growing specimen plant has graceful, tiered branching with small green and white leaves. A vision of beauty and a pinnacle of elegance.

Focusing on autumn color is sure to dazzle the eyes. There are many choices that can deliver an intense and colorful show from early October to mid-November. A little-used choice that is now becoming more available is *Carpinus caroliniana*, American hornbeam or musclewood. A native to Eastern North America, it grows as an understory tree and is also a slow-growing plant which forms a small to mid-sized specimen over time. There are now several selections with excellent fall color ranging from deep red to intense orange. An added perk is the smooth gray bark with fluted trunks giving a distinctive muscle-like appearance. Vines should not be forgotten for fall color. Two favorites are *Vitis vinifera* 'Purpurea', purple-leaf wine grape, and *Parthenocissus henryana*, silver vein creeper. The purple-leaf wine grape is best in full sun. The leaves turn shades of burgundy in mid- to late summer, then erupt into crimson red in October. Silver vein creeper prefers shade for the best leaf color. In summer, the leaves are dark green with silvery veins; in fall, gorgeous tones of pink, gold and red run through the foliage. Both vines are moderate growers and are easy to keep contained in a space.

### Brazen and Bold

The dramatic and surprising way bold and large leaves contrast with other garden plants is a powerful design tool for the garden. Even the smallest garden can benefit from large foliage drama. There are several bold foliage perennials that

can be grown in containers. Try *Rodgersia podophylla* for an architectural look with leaves reaching over 18 inches across. Place containerized rogersia plants in a shallow dish of water during the summer months to help keep them from drying out. A low-grower that is also striking in a container is *Bergenia ciliata* 'Dumbo', Dumbo hairy pigsqueak. This *Bergenia* is deciduous but has larger foliage than nearly any other pigsqueak. The huge, rounded leaves are covered in soft hairs and can easily grow over 12 to 15 inches in size.

In smaller gardens, large shrubs can be limbed up to create small multi-stemmed trees. A great choice for this is *Hydrangea aspera* 'Macrophylla'. This tall-growing hydrangea has bold fuzzy leaves that are topped with huge lace-cap lavender and white blooms. When the leaves drop in autumn, the beautiful peeling bark

of the trunks holds your interest during the winter months. Another large shrub that is an unusual choice is the East Coast native *Asimina triloba*, the pawpaw. Easily pruned as a small tree, the large oval leaves add a bold textural contrast to the plants around it. In early spring, a keen eye can spot the bizarre purplish-brown triangular flowers. If you are lucky, large egg-shaped fruit will ripen in early autumn providing a tasty treat few on the West Coast will have enjoyed.



*Asimina triloba*

Keep in mind color, texture and form when selecting plants for your garden as these are the keys for creating a year-round experience. Using these ideas along with many other suggestions on the Great Plant Picks website can give your garden

an edge of distinction and an air of sophistication. Working with foliage is fun, and the more you consider it in your design process, the easier it becomes. Learn more about the new GPP garden theme at [www.greatplantpicks.org](http://www.greatplantpicks.org).

*Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and NHS past president.*



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Sue Ewens	Sashi Raghupathy
Beverly Fletcher	Deborah Riehl
PowellsWood Garden Foundation	Nita-Jo Rountree
Marjorie Gillespy	Marilou Rush
Marilyn Glenn	Linelle Russ
Susan Goetz	Liz Sanborn
Greg Graves & Gary Waller	Kim & Kenneth Schiewetz
Jeannie R Harris	Patty Schuchart
Lynne Harrison	Elizabeth Scott
Nancy Heckler	Katharine T Severson
Laura L Hudson	Louise Soltow
Janice Humeniuk	Florence Stiles
Jason Jorgensen	Karen Swenson
Christina Koons	Dennis & Dorene Tully
Kat Korab	Jennifer Veninga
Raymond Larson	Wendy Welch
Jack & Patricia M Leary	Joanne White
	Sherri Wilson

## NEW MEMBERS

Heather R Abbott	LeAnn Locher
Mindy Arbo	Joanna Long
Carol L Arnold	Daniel S Longbons
Jane E Baird	Kyra Matin
Cathy Barton	Laurie K Mattson
Dana Behar	Karen McCarthy
Michael Bento	Kimberly McDonald
Sarah Bergdahl	Deborah C.B. McGarry
Sonja Z Bertsch	Nan McKay
Kate Bodin	Clare L McLean
Linda Bothwell	Katherine McMillan
Melanie Nancy Branchflower	Elaine Meaker
Christine Bristah	Jeanette Milne
Carolynne Bryant-Dowdy	Kathleen A Moran
Jeff Buchan	Kathryn Morse
Christopher D Bye	Vanessa G Nagel
Kate Campbell	Kathleen Neal
Anthony J Cavalieri	Rick Nordby
Cherie Christensen	Mary Olavarria
Anne Clarke	James L Olson
Linda Cooley	Daniel Parker
Tyler Cooley	Jacqueline Parkes
Beth A Daynes	Jocelyn Pearl
A H De Clercq	Laurel Peterson
Ann DesJardien	Rodney L Pond
Susan Dickinson	Jacob Privat
Stan Dombrowski	Sheryl Ramstad
Ann Elbersson	Vaibhav Rastogi
Linda Ernst	Natalie Reeves
Cindy Evans	Michael A Reimers
Lori Fallon	Debra Ridling
Mary Foster	Cynthia L Riskin
Elaine Frazel	Jacquelyn Robinson
Jo A Frey	Sara Rothman
Diane P Froslie	Sally-Anne Sadler
Jan Funston	John B Sanders
Ashley Gossens	Aurora G Santiago
Laurie Grier	Tia Scarce
Joanne Hall	Annie Elise Schlipphacke
Lauren A Hall-Behrens	Kathleen A Sebastian
Bill Hammer	Katharine T Severson
Tracy Heffelfinger	Myla Sherburne
Jan Heinemann	Tamara Sherman-Jeans
Ikuko Hellevik	Nancy L Short
Heather Hodsdon	Jennifer Spigner
Diana Hoffman	Shirley Stanley
Donna Hunt	Avril Steele
Virginia J Israelit	Anne Stone
Meg Jacobsen	Patrick A Summers
Bess Jennings	Lene Symes
David Johnson	Marian Talen
Jon Kaplan	Rosanne M Tobin
Shirley Katz	Elizabeth S Triggs
Wistar Kay	Heather Tucker
James Keach	Leesa L Tucker
Dick Kelleit	Marybeth Turk
Todd Kelley	Gudrun Utz
Sue Kenney	Kathleen Veit
Colleen A Keyes	Angie S Vineyard
Jeanne M Keyes	Nadia A Wade
Vanessa R Kimling	Katy Walum
Linda Knapp	Patti Wilma
Kat Korab	Vickie Winters
Garnet G Kuronen	Thomas Woodley
Frank B Lawley	Scott Wu
Margo Leishman	Joan Diane Young

## 2021 Winter Symposium

### Botanical Bliss: Gardening with Foliage & Fragrance

The NHS winter symposium has taken inspiration from the 2021 Great Plant Picks garden theme, Foliage Fashion. We will be celebrating the plants that bring us beauty in the garden through their leaves, fragrance and color. Our featured speakers will be:

**Ken Druse**, celebrated lecturer and an award-winning author and photographer.

**Thomas Johnson**, accomplished plant breeder, owner of the amazing Sebright Nursery near Salem, Ore.

**Richie Steffen**, executive director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden will speak on color and texture in the garden.

This will be a virtual symposium with the three prerecorded lectures being distributed starting Sunday, February 14th and a virtual Zoom webinar Q&A session at 10:00am to noon on Saturday, February 27th. All three lectures and the Q&A session will be recorded and available to all paid participants for two weeks after February 27th.  
Members \$40 and Non-members \$60

## GARDENnotes

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# LITERARY NOTES

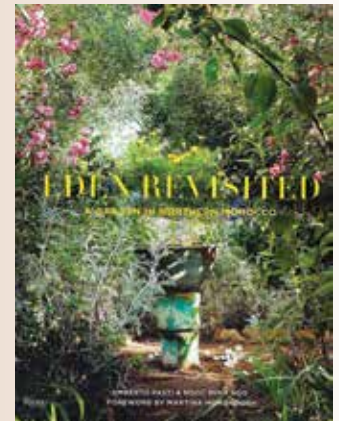
## from the Miller Library

by *Brian Thompson*

The NHS Symposium, *Gardening for the Future: Diversity and Ecology in the Urban Landscape*, helped raise my awareness of the complex and wide-ranging network, both human and natural, that foster the creation of our gardens. Several recent books have helped me in that learning process, too.

One such book, about a garden in Morocco, wouldn't have normally crossed my desk except for a recommendation by a librarian colleague. Books about private gardens can be breathtaking in their beauty, but being a bit jaded, I often find that after one flip-through, I'm done.

Not so with *Eden Revisited: A Garden in Northern Morocco*. Author Umberto Pasti writes novels, non-fiction, and memoirs, typically in his native Italian but his works are widely translated. In some ways, this book is a blend of all three types of writing and is as equally engaging for its text as for the exquisite photography by Ngoc Minh Ngo. (<http://www.ngocminhngo.com>)



This garden is very much of its place. The book won't guide you to specific plants for your Pacific Northwest garden, but it is full of design ideas and may cause you to ponder the purpose of your garden and its place in a bigger world. Even better, this book gives a strong validation of the place of all gardens and gardeners in giving back to their communities by honoring and remembering local traditions and local landscapes.

Here's the tricky part. Pasti perceives his garden as an extension of his being. He doesn't hesitate to attribute human or spiritual qualities to his plants. For example, a wild gladiolus is content with its setting and smiles. While this may sound off-putting, this gentle animism provides an engaging rhythm and insight into an unfamiliar cultural and world view.

Even stronger is the spirit Pasti perceives in the people of his small community; all are welcomed in his garden. "I am proud of the love for plants that grows stronger every day in our young gardeners. In loving those plants, they love their country, its history, its beauty and culture."

Looking for a different gardening book? This is it, and it is perfect for wintertime inspiration. ☺

*Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.*

# President's Message



Dear NHS Members,

Once again, we find ourselves at the end of another year. This year, of course, has been one of the most challenging we have been through in our recent collective memories. We have had to change our lives in some of the most dramatic and swift transitions, but we have managed to stay connected in new ways with new technologies that supported, educated, and comforted us through these difficult times. It is well worth repeating, I want to commend everyone for embracing the new technological challenges in stride and maintaining your connection to the Northwest Horticultural Society.

We started 2020 with a very hopeful outlook for the organization. NHS was able to sponsor James Alexander-Sinclair, RHS Chelsea award winning landscape designer, as a guest judge for the 2020 Northwest Flower and Garden Festival, host our well-received and attended Spring Ephemeral Plant Sale, and lay the foundation with unanimous support from the NHS Board of Directors to make meaningful changes for inclusivity and diversity in our membership and our programming. Our outlook for 2020 was looking very promising but, unfortunately, the Covid19 outbreak quickly changed everything. With support and direction from the Board of Directors, we made the very hard decision to cancel all of our in-person events and transition to an all online programming format for the foreseeable future. While the beginning of that transition was a little bumpy with a steep learning curve, I can proudly say that all of our online programs are now exceedingly well attended, actually exceeding the capacity of the Wednesday Night Lecture series previously held at the Center for Urban Horticulture. Our membership has grown considerably, and we have over 250 new members this year as of the writing of this letter. We are engaging new members from all parts of Washington, Oregon, Western Canada, and all over the world. Seeing this growth in challenging times is indeed exciting from an organizational standpoint and further cements our standing and reputation in the horticultural community locally, regionally, and internationally. All these great events and changes would not be possible without your continued support.

Already, the Program Committee is planning an impressive lineup in the next year, so make sure to be on the watch for email updates from NHS and sign up to show your support! Of course, with online programming we can offer more lectures from around the world to a larger audience. The upcoming lineup for 2021 has great speakers for our monthly virtual lecture series and we are moving the annual spring symposium to February this year to brighten up the gray days of winter. The title is *Botanical Bliss: Gardening with Foliage & Fragrance* featuring noted author Ken Druse, talented plantsman Thomas Johnson, and our own past president and director of the Miller Garden, Richie Steffen. Be sure to check for more details on our website: [www.northwesthort.org/events](http://www.northwesthort.org/events). All these events do take resources to create and produce. If you are able, please donate to the [NHS Education Program](#). These donations will directly fund our new online offerings by providing honorariums, publicity, and technical support for our new and expanding virtual horticultural education program.

While this year has been a very challenging one, there is one constant with gardeners and our NHS members: we know how to manage this troublesome time with support from our gardens, plants, and friends. And while it is a very different year, it is also a very familiar year. Winter is here and we are finishing up the end-of-the-year garden chores, planning next year's gardens, thumbing through the many seed and plant catalogues that are inevitably showing up in the mail, and finally able to get through some of the garden books we have been buying during the year. Make sure to reflect on your hard work and efforts you have put into your garden this year and the great support your garden has given you. You have earned it! And, with that, I leave you with this wonderful quote that I feel sums up this year:

"A garden is a grand teacher. It teaches patience and careful watchfulness; it teaches industry and thrift; above all it teaches entire trust."  
Gertrude Jekyll

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I am wishing you all a safe and healthy start to 2021. Happy gardening! 🌿

Jason Jorgensen  
NHS President



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*Hope is one of the essential tools of a farmer or gardener.”*

— Amy Stewart, *The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms*, 2004

*Hamamelis × intermedia* ‘Diane’  
Photo by Richie Steffen