



NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

GARDENnotes
FALL 2018



Arbutus unedo
Photo by Richie Steffen

GARDENnotes

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EVENTS

November 14, 2018

Annual Meeting

John Wott

Horticulture Out of the Box: A Look
at the Future Learned from the Past
CUH

Reception 6:30 p.m.

Annual Meeting 7:00 p.m.

Lecture immediately following the
Annual Meeting

January 9, 2019

Monthly Lecture

Ron Gagliardo

Year Five on Day One: Growing
the Amazon Spheres
CUH

Reception 6:45 p.m.

Lecture 7:15 p.m.

March 23, 2019

Spring Symposium

Gardening Through the Seasons

Nigel Dunnett

Susan Goetz

Lucy Hardiman

Claudia West

Bastyr Auditorium

8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

President's Message



Writing this final message, it is hard not to reflect on the last two years serving as president. During this time so much has changed in my life, personally, from becoming the director of the Miller Garden to moving an entire garden from Federal Way to a much more spacious property in Kingston. These big changes have made me appreciate how an organization is not just one person, but a team of individuals focusing on common goals. I am thankful for the strong and active board members we have; they make our organization the best hort group in the region. I would be happy to

spend a day in the garden with any one of them!

I also enjoy continuing to build the relationship between the Miller Garden and NHS. Mrs. Miller was the founder and first president of NHS and it was not lightly that I took this position. Serving as president continued a tradition of support that has lasted over 50 years and I hope that it will last at least another 50! As I turn over the leadership to another at the annual meeting in November I will look forward to continuing as a member of the Board of Directors.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the annual Meet the Board Tour. There was an amazing turn out for such beautiful and diverse gardens thanks to the work of our co-chairs, Ellen Hecht and Justin Galicic. Thanks also to all the members who came to purchase at the annual fall plant sale. I found some interesting treasures there and almost have them all planted at the new garden.

In my last few words, I also want to thank Karin Kravitz, our NHS administrator. Karin's attention to detail and ability to make every aspect of our organization run smoothly has made my presidency a joy. I will be looking forward to seeing everyone at the annual meeting and future events! 🌿

All the best,

Richie

Fall and Winter FRAGRANT PLANTS

Words and Photos by Richie Steffen (unless otherwise noted)

Osmanthus heterophyllus 'Variegatus'

AS AUTUMN DRIFTS INTO WINTER and the flowers of summer fade into memory, I find I look for subtler, yet delightful, qualities to carry the garden through the season. Most people think of fragrant flowers for warmer seasons, but we are blessed with a wealth of autumn and winter blooming shrubs that can provide a luscious scent until the spring bloom returns.

Daphne and *Sarcococca* are go-to standards for winter fragrance. The three top daphnes for perfuming the winter garden are *Daphne odora* (winter daphne), *Daphne bholua* (Nepalese paper daphne) and *Daphne mezereum* (February daphne). *Daphne odora* is most commonly known through its variegated and hardier cultivar 'Aureovariegata', but there are several selections



Daphne odora 'Aureomarginata'



Daphne bholua – Wikipedia Commons



Daphne mezereum 'Bowl's White'

available now with varying degrees of variegation and flower colors. This evergreen shrub demands light to dapple shade and well-draining soils. The roots on young plants are often weak and plants will typically lean, resting their main branches on the ground with age. The heavily fragrant flowers begin opening in February and continue into late March or early April.

The largest daphne we can grow is *Daphne bholua*. This vigorous grower can reach 6 to 7 feet tall in ten years and mature plants can reach 12 to 15 feet tall. Unfortunately, it is generally hardy to only about 15°F and can be regularly damaged by cold outside of warmer urban areas. Even with its tendency to be a bit tender the intensely fragrant flowers make it worth a try. The first blooms can open in late December and continue well into February. The heavily perfumed flowers have a scent that lingers in the winter air and you can catch a waft of fragrance from some distance away. This plant demands partial shade, protection from hot afternoon sun and well-drained, good garden soil.

One of the easiest daphnes to grow is *Daphne mezereum*.



Sarcococca hookeriana var. *digyna* 'Purple Stem'

Growing best in full sun to light shade with well-drained soils, this deciduous shrub will grow to 3 to 4 feet tall and about the same in width. The thick, rather coarse branches become covered in deep purple-pink flowers in February into March. One of my favorite forms is a white-flowered strain called 'Bowl's White'. I purchased my first plant of this nearly 25 years ago and have not gardened without it since. The sweetly scented flowers are pure white with no hint of pink and an upright oval habit with true-to-type plants easily grown from seed. This cultivar is difficult to find, but the Miller Garden has been providing some plants at NHS plant sales.

No winter garden is complete without at least one of the sweetly scented *Sarcococca*, or sweet box. The most popular species are *Sarcococca hookeriana* var.

humilis (recently redubbed var. *digyna* Humilis Group) and *Sarcococca confusa* (often sold incorrectly as *Sarcococca ruscifolia*). *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis*, dwarf sweet box, is a tough low-growing shade plant tolerant of dry conditions once established. The intense vanilla fragrance permeates the air typically from late December to early February. It will grow to about 12



Sarcococca hookeriana var. *humilis*



Sarcococca confusa



Osmanthus delavayi

to 18 inches tall and spread about 8 inches to one foot a year depending on watering and light quality. Two selections have recently become available: FRAGRANT VALLEY™ ('Sarsid

1') and FRAGRANT MOUNTAIN™ ('Sarsid 2'). Both are a little different from the typical form, but are clonally propagated so a planting will have a even and uniform growth pattern.



Sarcococca collection at the Miller Garden



Osmanthus x burkwoodii



Osmanthus heterophyllus – Wikipedia Commons

FRAGRANT VALLEY™ is 12 to 15 inches tall and FRAGRANT MOUNTAIN™ is about 18 inches tall with similarly fragrant flowers to the species. A graceful and charming taller form is *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *digyma* ‘Purple Stem’. Growing to about 3 feet tall it will slowly spread to 5 or 6 feet wide in ten years. The longer, larger foliage and willowy habit make it a choice garden addition. Decades old plants of this thrive in the Washington Park Arboretum.

Sarcococca confusa is often confused with *Sarcococca ruscifolia* in the nursery trade. Most plants sold are *Sarcococca confusa*. Fortunately, it is the hardier of the two species. Reaching around 4 feet tall and a similar spread it makes a nice informal hedge shrub for shady areas. Far Reaches Farm in Port Townsend recently introduced a beautiful form of true *Sarcococca ruscifolia* collected in China by the famous plant explorer Roy Lancaster. This selection is called *Sarcococca ruscifolia* var. *chinensis* ‘Dragon Gate’ and has recently been planted at the Miller Garden. Selected for its more compact habit, I have been impressed with our young plants.



Osmanthus heterophyllus – Attractive fruit in addition to fragrant flowers

There are other species that can be found, although in limited quantities. *Sarcococca orientalis* is a compact grower reaching 3 to 4 feet. It flowers in December, earlier than most sweet box, with the white flowers surrounded by a deep red calyx giving a pinkish appearance to the blooms. *Sarcococca saligna*, willow-leaf sweet box, and *Sarcococca wallichii*, Himalayan sweet box, are both best grown in a protected site or mild garden. Willow-leaf sweet box is hardy to about 10°F, with dark green long tapered foliage. Our young plant grows in deep shade and has a very lax and graceful habit. This is sometimes reported to not be as fragrant as other sweet box and may be an excellent choice for those who find the intense fragrance cloying. Himalayan sweet box has beautiful foliage larger in size than other species, but unfortunately is only hardy to about 20°F and can easily

be damaged in a cold winter. It might be a great candidate for growing in a container that can be protected during the worst of winter.

In addition to the above, a personal favorite is the genus *Osmanthus* or sweet olives. These medium to large shrubs are



Osmanthus x fortunei



Osmanthus x burkwoodii

tough and useful in the landscape. The late winter blooming *Osmanthus delavayi* and *Osmanthus x burkwoodii* are common in gardens and have some of the showiest flowers of the genus. Both produce dense clusters of small tubular white flowers that line the stems in early to mid-March. In full bloom they cast a sweet floral fragrance that carries in the cool air. Tolerant of sun or dappled shade their adaptable qualities have earned them a recommendation on the Great Plant Picks website.



Osmanthus heterophyllus

Another popular species also recommended by Great Plant Picks is *Osmanthus heterophyllus* or false holly. There are several excellent forms that are equally adaptable to our Pacific Northwest gardens with tiny, but powerfully fragrant flowers in late autumn into early winter. Their delightful jasmine-like fragrance clings to the autumn air and makes you think that spring is not too far away! The straight species or the spiny leafed cultivars 'Gulf Tide' and 'Ilicifolius' are some of the most reliable and prolific in flower. The very ornamental 'Variegatus' and 'Purpureus' add beautiful foliage as well as good flowering.

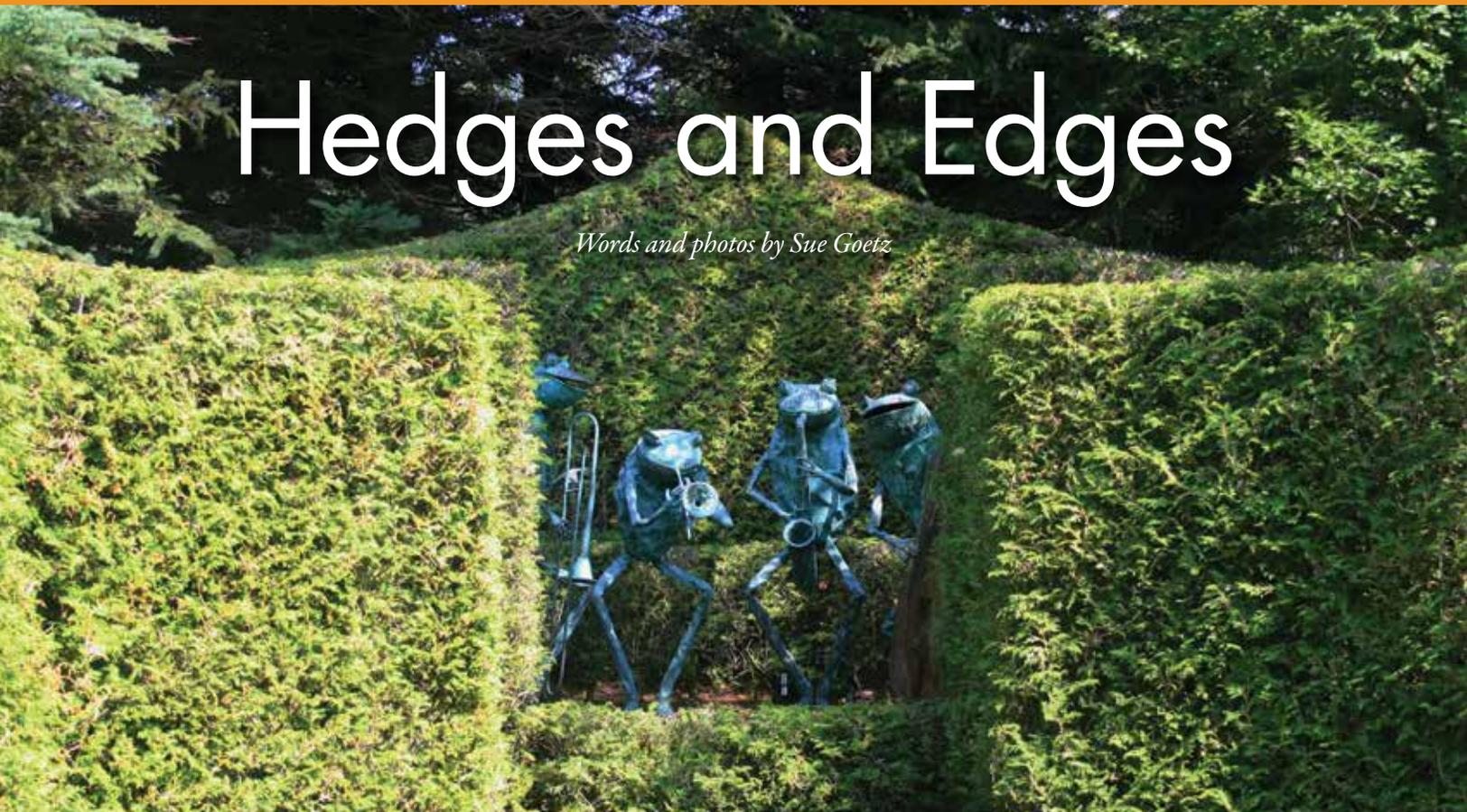
No one should go through autumn without experiencing the enticing apricot fragrance of *Osmanthus x fortunei*. This large growing shrub is a hybrid between the tender *Osmanthus fragrans* and the hardy *Osmanthus heterophyllus*. The result is a tough, hardy evergreen that can be grown in full sun to dappled shade and is one of the first of the intensely scented plants for autumn season.

These three genera are a great start to expanding the pleasure of our gardens in autumn and winter. They represent some of the best in the way of fragrance and most are easy to grow. A great place to find many of these plants is in the Joe Witt Winter Garden at the Washington Park Arboretum. Along with these you will get many other ideas to add a little spice to the garden during the gray days ahead. ☺

Richie Steffen is NHS President and Director/Curator of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden.

Hedges and Edges

Words and photos by Sue Goetz



Thuja hedge at Les Quatre Vents, Quebec, Canada

IS A HEDGE IN YOUR FUTURE? Best described as a formation of plants that outline a space or distinguish boundaries, hedges are like the lines of a coloring book. They draw lines, frame a view or take one away, act as a living fence or provide privacy; these are all the things a hedge can do for a landscape.

When designing a landscape, look at ways a hedge can frame and define. It can guide focus to another space or it can hide an unpleasant view. It can be low growing and frame a walkway or be used as a background canvas to show off a specimen tree or piece of art. A hedge can also reduce visual clutter by defining and simplifying a busy space.

Beyond what a hedge does to a landscape is the decision of what plants to use. Showy foliage and flowering plants will create a focal point, whereas a solid color will create a backdrop. Design choices are many and range from plants that are scented, flowering, native, coniferous or leafy. The choice of plants for a hedge can also create a style. Style can also depend on the type of maintenance. Tightly clipped boxwood, *Buxus sempervirens*, or Japanese holly, *Ilex crenata*, have an English formal garden feel. These same shrubs, without clipping, have a looser branching and less formal feel.

Planning and planting are important for a successful hedge. Two of the biggest failures of hedges are lack of ground preparation and skimping on the number of plants. Large gaps between plants never quite fill in to create strong lines and poor soil can be a hedge's ultimate demise. Spend time on ground prep and the money for the appropriate quantity of plants. Some good advice from British gardeners, who have hedge planting down to a science, is to start with small plants. It may not look like much of a hedge for a few years, but it creates a good dense and bushy hedge all the way to the ground. If the goal is instant gratification, look for mature plants that are healthy around the base of the plant, not too woody or showing bare spots. This is particularly valuable advice for leafy evergreens such as *Ceanothus* and *Escallonia*. Plants should be placed close together at the beginning as this will form a dense hedge with no gaps. Based on the variety, low, slow and moderate growers will be planted at 12 to 24 inches apart while larger, fast-growing shrubs at about 36 inches.

Take good care to maintain a hedge properly, most hedges don't thrive on neglect. Formal hedges need regular clipping to keep up the neat appearance. Some can be high maintenance like English laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*). Informal hedges will benefit from an annual trim to promote fresh new growth and tidiness. Clip

hedges to be broader at the base than the top, this will promote even growth by allowing light towards the bottom. When pruning natives, pinch out the new growing tips in early spring. Pacific wax myrtle (*Morella californica* syn. *Myrica californica*) does well with this method.

Overall, the best advice for a good-looking hedge for longevity is choose the right plant variety for the needs and conditions, proper planting and spacing, pruning and watering to help them establish.

Ground prep and planting tips for successful hedges:

- Mark an outline of the hedge using string or a garden hose to create a strong visual line to follow. Remove all grass and weeds and dig in good organic compost to mix with the existing soil. This will improve drainage and add natural nutrition that the plants can readily take up.
- After the ground is prepared, dig a hole at least twice as wide and deep as the plant's container. When creating a long hedge, digging a trench along the planting line will be faster and provide better root growth.
- Always check the plant positioning before covering the root ball with soil. Check the line and depth of the plants as they sit side by side to make sure they are even and lined up correctly.
- Once the hole is filled, gently tamp the soil. Do this just enough to get rid of any air pockets and secure the plants, not compact it. Water the newly planted hedge, and make sure that further watering is consistent to help the plants establish, especially through any dry periods. Top dress with a generous layer of mulch to discourage weeds and water loss on the soil surface; however, do not allow mulch to build up at the base of the plants.



Ilex crenata 'Convexa' hedge around knot garden, Gig Harbor, Wash.



Yew hedge at Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent, England



Box hedge around vegetable garden, Tacoma, Wash

Plant choices for hedging are endless. Start by choosing varieties based on the finished look to be achieved (focal point, flowering, backdrop), growing conditions (shade, hot sun, windy, seaside), specific functional needs (privacy, hide electrical boxes, property line demarcation) and how much maintenance and watering is needed.

Leafy: *Berberis* × *gladwynensis* 'William Penn' (William Penn barberry), *Cotoneaster lacteus* (milkflower cotoneaster), *Escallonia*, *Ligustrum japonicum* (wax-leaf privet), *Ilex crenata* 'Convexa' (Japanese holly), *Lonicera nitida* (box honeysuckle), *Morella californica* (Pacific wax myrtle), *Prunus laurocerasus* 'Schipkaensis' (Schipka English laurel), *Viburnum tinus*

Fragrant: *Choysia ternata* (Mexican orange), *Daphne*, *Osmanthus delavayi*

Flowering: *Abelia* × *grandiflora*, *Camellia*, *Ceanothus* (California lilac), *Forsythia*, *Ribes sanguineum* (flowering current), *Rosa* 'Hansa'

Shady: *Aucuba*, *Leucothoe*, *Sarcococca confusa* (dwarf sweet box), *Taxus* (yew)

Low (under 3 feet): *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa' (dwarf boxwood), *Hebe* 'Emerald Gem', *Ilex crenata* 'Green Island' (Japanese holly), *Sarcococca hookeriana* var. *humilis* (sweet box)

High (over 8 feet): *Arbutus unedo* (strawberry tree), *Prunus laurocerasus* (English laurel), × *Cupressocyparis leylandii* (Leyland cypress), *Thuja occidentalis* 'Degroot's Spire' (columnar arborvitae), *Thuja plicata* 'Atrovirens' (Atrovirens western red cedar), *Thuja plicata* 'Hogan' (Hogan western red cedar) ♡

Sue Goetz is a garden designer, speaker, author, and NHS board member. www.thecreativegardener.com

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LITERARY NOTES

from the Miller Library

by Brian Thompson

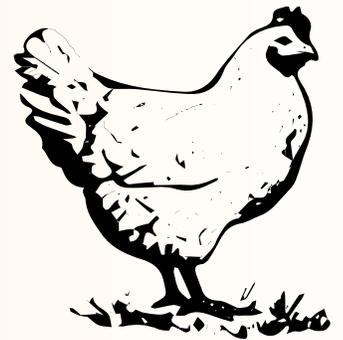
I DO NOT SHARE MY GARDEN WITH CHICKENS. I never have, and likely never will. Deep in my memory are the horrors of being chased by turkeys on my grandparents' farm when I was 4 or 5 years old. In my child's mind, I was equally wary of smaller fowl.

Oddly, books about chickens fascinate me. The Miller Library has several on starting a small flock in your backyard, mostly by regional authors. I enjoyed reading them all, but here are my favorites.

Robert and Hannah Litt of Portland wrote *A Chicken in Every Yard*, published in 2011. They regard their chickens as pets to pamper and keep safe – they only eat their eggs. This book will tell you how to do the same.

On a visit to the island of Kauai in Hawai'i, the Litt family discovered that chickens have naturalized and do quite well looking after themselves. This led to a new book, *The New Rules of the Roost* (2018) that incorporates some of this avian independence. Now the setting for their home flock is "more dynamic, so that our chickens can safely forage for food and scratch around, but when and where we want them to."

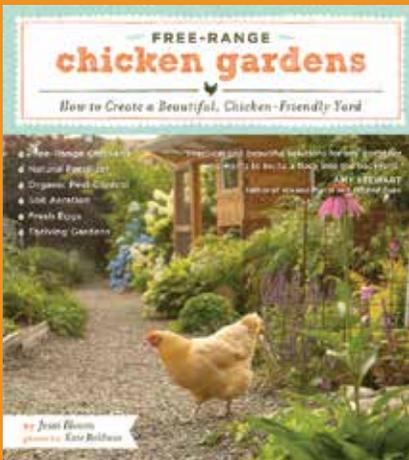
How does all this work with the garden? Very well, if you consider the hens as part of the family – it just takes a lot of compromise and ingenuity. A book that more deeply addresses these issues is *Free-Range Chicken Gardens* by Jessi Bloom of Seattle.



Here are specific guidelines for the design of a chicken compatible landscape. How to protect prize plants while still giving your flock the opportunity to roam and find a more natural diet. As a gardener, you are encouraged to try plant selections that will nourish your hens, or shelter them from predators or weather. The advantages can work both ways. Some plants will screen your chicken run, or even give off fragrance to mask odors.

Bloom recognizes this doesn't work for everyone. "If your garden must be perfect...then you might not want chickens free ranging." Or do like me, and just read about chickens in the Miller Library! 🐔

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



The Garden Curmudgeon

Editor's Note: For those who may not remember, or are more recent members of NHS, several years ago Garden Notes received anonymous articles expressing the unrestrained views of the Original Garden Curmudgeon, henceforth referred to as the OGC. The laser focus of the OGC to call out deficient garden practices and poorly behaved gardeners was near legionary. Once the OGC either felt unburdened or that their attempts were futile retirement was eminent and the mantle of writing was soon taken up by another, simply referred to as the Garden Curmudgeon (the GC).

For the GC a skepticism, generally reserved for politicians and conspiracy theorists, was turned onto the horticultural community and resulted in a series of keen observations that exposed the flaws and excesses of gardening and those that obsess over it. The GC eventually retired as well. Whether it was by choice or by aneurism of holding their tongue during the proclamation of some snooty know-it-all gardener, we shall never know.

Recently, the GC was drawn out of retirement and the following correspondence was received at the editor's office.

Low Maintenance Gardening

"Low Maintenance" is not a thing.

I garden. Granted, my garden may be more high maintenance than most, but every gardener I know spends time gardening. If you want a garden, you need to garden, period.

As part of my business I do garden consultations, and if the first thing the customer asks for is low maintenance, I just walk away. I know the rest of the conversation will go something like, "I'm too busy and don't have much time to spend doing anything in the yard, but I want it to look really nice." Really nice comes with a price. You need to spend time in the garden or hire someone who will.

A few weeks ago, someone posted a picture of a property in the city with a house that was recently remodeled, and the "garden" was touted as low maintenance. It was about 15 feet wide and 40 feet long. The whole area had been graveled with concrete pavers going to the front door. Along the fence at about 10-foot intervals were single clumps of some sort of large grass. That was it. Really! Now, I've heard of minimalism, but this is crazy. I've traveled to Japan and have seen wonderful, simple gardens, but this isn't it. This is an exercise in laziness. It will also probably end up being high maintenance because someone is going to have to weed all that gravel space which is ripe for weeds. I did save the picture so that when someone asks me about low maintenance I can show it to them and ask them if this is what they had in mind.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm all for making life as easy as pos-

sible. I like to use good horticultural practices to cut down on excessive work later, like mulching. I also try and group plants together for light and water needs to eliminate having to spend time doing too much watering. Let's face it, as I write this, it is the middle of August and we have had less than an inch of rain since the end of April. I don't know anyone who hasn't been spending more time at the end of a hose than they would like. That time alone is probably more than what these "low maintenance" people might like to spend for the whole year. Even native plants in this year's conditions need help.

Now, I do have a few suggestions. I had a friend who thought his ideal garden would be all spring ephemerals. He put the emphasis on that and once spring was over he spent the rest of the year in other people's gardens. I bet if you planned it right, you could get together with three other neighbors and each just pick a season and share.

Finally, I guess if you really want a no maintenance garden you could just accept the fact that maybe you're better suited for condo life. Find a condo situated close to, and preferably overlooking, a public park or garden. For the low cost of a membership you could wander the garden anytime at your leisure while someone else maintains it.

Come to think of it, that's not a bad idea. It's going to be 90°F again today and the rest of the week; so, either I can go out and water or maybe just check the condo listings. ☺

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Great Plant Picks Spotlight

Words by Holly Zipp & Images by Richie Steffen (unless otherwise noted)

An Ode to FOTHERGILLA

Fothergilla gardenii

EVERY TIME YOU CHOOSE A PLANT FOR YOUR GARDEN it means, ostensibly, there is a little less precious space for the next. For this reason, when it comes to deciding which deciduous shrub to choose amongst a myriad of options, consider how well it carries from season to season. From this perspective, the genus *Fothergilla* couldn't be more useful. *Fothergilla gardenii*

and *Fothergilla* 'Mt. Airy' are two excellent Great Plant Picks selections.

This durable, multi-stemmed shrub has leaves that are dark green and scalloped, and leathery with a certain roughness. Mature specimens have a beautiful, twiggy and mounded form, with each



Fothergilla gardenii – Great Plant Picks

branch zig zagging individually. A member of the Hamamelidaceae family, the various species and cultivars range in ultimate size from a diminutive 3 feet in height and spread to a more substantial 8 feet in height and spread.

This may sound like a dramatic overstatement for what is generally an unheralded shrub, but *Fothergilla* is a calendar of visual delights. Every season has its “*Fothergilla* moment.” Before the leaves push out in spring, the plant is profusely covered with charming and lightly scented, white bottle-brush flowers that announce the growing season. In summer, with its companionable shade of green and appealing mounded form, it’s a beautiful foil for other plants. In texture, it is a great companion to contrast with conifers, and its medium size makes it a good com-



Fothergilla gardenii, *Corydalis quantmeyeriana* ‘Chocolate Stars’

ponent for a larger garden tableau. Likewise, its overall form is simple enough to warrant its repetition throughout a landscape, fulfilling that all important element of design. In autumn, its fall color begins with splotches of purple and flames out in shades of dayglo orange, fire engine red and deep wine. When sited in the sun, these shades of fall color are a show-stopping marvel, and each autumn it is a surprise to behold how much vivid color can festoon one plant. *Fothergilla*’s winter charm is more subtle. It is the rounded, tidy form, shaped by innumerable twiggy branches that pleases the eye when color has departed, and structure takes center stage.

At the Miller Garden, we have several varieties of *Fothergilla* growing in a variety of garden settings, which underscores the plant’s



Fothergilla 'Mt. Airy'

adaptability and long life. Some specimens in the Garden have been growing for many years in a hot and dry setting, subjected to the reflected heat of asphalt, while others are growing happily tucked into shady rockeries.

Besides its adaptability to a range of sites, *Fothergilla* is a satisfying plant to garden with. Due to its multi-stemmed habit and amenability to pruning, it's a plant that can be shaped within a landscape over time. For example, it can be treated as a cut back shrub periodically. At the Garden, we have several specimens that are quite large and beautifully shaped. They consist of fewer, but substantial stems, each branching repeatedly to form an intricate mound. The creation of this shape begins with cutting the shrub to the ground. Over time, the shape described above is created



Fothergilla 'Mt. Airy' –
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with annual thinning and pruning of the remaining stems so that they will branch. Recreating a mature and elegant shape is a process that requires winter pruning over several years, but it is well worth the effort for its effect in the garden.

The two GPP selections were selected not only for their multiple season of interest, but also for their adaptability to the urban landscape. *Fothergilla gardenii* is a small compact shrub reaching about 3 to 4 feet tall in ten years. 'Mount Airy' is a hybrid between *F. gardenii* and *F. major* capturing the best qualities of its parents with compact growth and brilliant fall color maturing to 5 to 6 feet tall. ☺

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In order to make it through spring, the gardener needs courage and strength. But ah, the fall! It's the time for leisurely gardening, for pottering about in the warm sun, in the cool golden air. No bugs, no perspiration, no frenzy.

— Elisabeth Sheldon, *Time and the Gardener* (2003)

Autumn Containers
Photo by Richie Steffen