



## GARDENCOMM

Garden Communicators International



National Federation of Press Women  
2019 National Award Newsletter,  
*On the QT*

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The best seats in the house are in the rock garden, surrounded by plants.

COURTESY MARTY ROSS

## A Garden that Delights

BY MARTY ROSS



After long and successful careers making gardens for other people, Linda and Bill Pinkham turned the tables on traditional Tidewater gardening in their own backyard, a gracious, 6-acre

The Pinkhams are propagating plants that will be for sale to GardenComm visitors. There will be daylilies, hydrangeas, and, Bill says, "unusual things – odds and ends that most plant nerds like."

property on the James River near Norfolk, Virginia. You'll find some fine specimen boxwoods here, hallmarks of Virginia landscaping—but the foundation of this garden is a dizzying, kaleidoscopic collection of trees, shrubs, perennials, vines and tropical plants.

The Pinkhams' garden is one of the inspiring, photo-ready properties GardenComm members will visit during our symposium in Williamsburg in August. When you get there, jump off the bus and have fun—that's what's really going on in this plant- and art-filled garden.

Since they turned from their careers to the nearly full-time hobby of their own garden in the mid-1990s, "Collecting plants has been our main focus," Bill Pinkham says, "There are so many new

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Red Dirt Ramblings  
**Shelley Cramm** (2021 R-South)  
Garden in Delight

##### REGION 6

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**Anne Reeves** (2020 R-North)  
Moment of Delight  
**Jacqueline Soule** (2020 R-South)  
Gardening with Soule  
**Chris Sabbarese** (2021 R-South)  
Corona

##### REGION 7

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gardening-enjoyed.com  
**Andrea Whitely** (2020 R)  
Andrea Whitely Garden Consultant  
**Rob Howard** (2021 R)  
The Hamilton Spectator

## GardenComm – A Strong Community



Happy March. I want to start my note by thanking **Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp**, **Maria Zampini**, the ExComm and all the volunteers for their patience and guidance during the last few months. You have helped me learn about GardenComm, entrusting me along the way. I have quickly figured out that you are an amazing and passionate group of people.

I also want to thank the fabulous GardenComm staff team: Jenn Perrone, James Cafiero, Monica Saunders, Jim Anderson, Crystal Goodremote Rankin and Jennifer Kingsbury. It is a pleasure to work with you each day. Your knowledge and desire to make GardenComm the best it can be is appreciated and does not go unnoticed.

After just a few weeks on the job, it was wonderful to hear about the connections made at the winter industry events like MANTS, TPIE and more. I was impressed by the tireless efforts and passion of the volunteers. You are what makes GardenComm special and the place providing opportunities for education, recognition, career development and a forum for wide-ranging interactions and collaborations for professionals in the field of gardening communication, fulfilling the mission of the organization.

### SENSE OF COMMUNITY

In the spirit of giving back and stepping up, I want to appeal to your sense of community, personal and professional growth. I'm happy to share that the call for officer and director board positions is underway for GardenComm.

Are you ready to elevate your participation on the National or Regional level as a Director, committee chair or committee member? Your engagement will result in career development, network expansion, leadership improvement and the ability to impact positive change and growth within the organization.

While prepping this note, it didn't take me long before my curiosity kicked in to find out what inspired previous and current presidents to take their engagement to a higher level. So, I asked some of them about their inspiration, learnings, and advice and just for fun what their top garden industry prediction for 2020 or the next decade is. Here are some of their answers:

### FROM PRESIDENT JO ELLEN MEYERS SHARP

#### Who, if anyone, or what inspired you to want to lead the organization?

Probably **Bill Aldrich**, who was President when I joined. He worked at the *Chicago Tribune*. He was a photographer. The newspaper connection is probably what did it. **Debra Prinzing** was inspiring. She established several procedures that professionalized our organization, such as evaluations of executive directors, working on and negotiating the management contract with ECI. Then **Kirk Brown** because of his organization of the change in management companies and the establishment of the procedures, scope of work and all other aspects of the search.

#### What advice would you give to someone interested in becoming president?

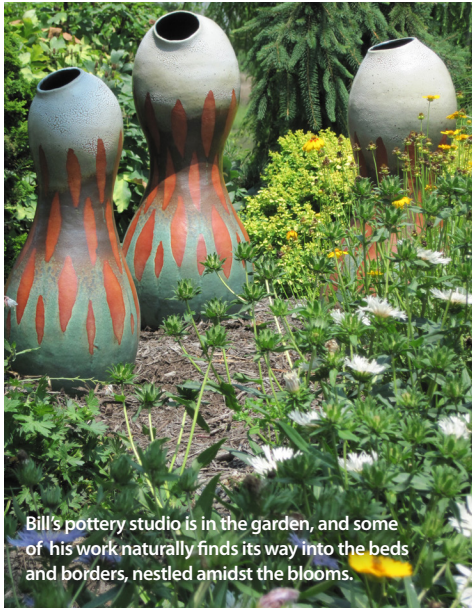
Involve yourself in as much of GardenComm as possible. Serve on committees. Run for board positions. Share ideas and best practices that you have experience with or knowledge of that will help us thrive.

#### What is your top garden industry prediction for 2020 or the next decade?

Houseplants are going to be huge again this year.

– Continues on page 4





plants coming out, you can hardly keep up with them." But they both try mightily, testing their carefully designed garden's capacity for weird, wonderful, variegated, fastigiate, weeping, clambering, colorful, unusual and unique treasures.

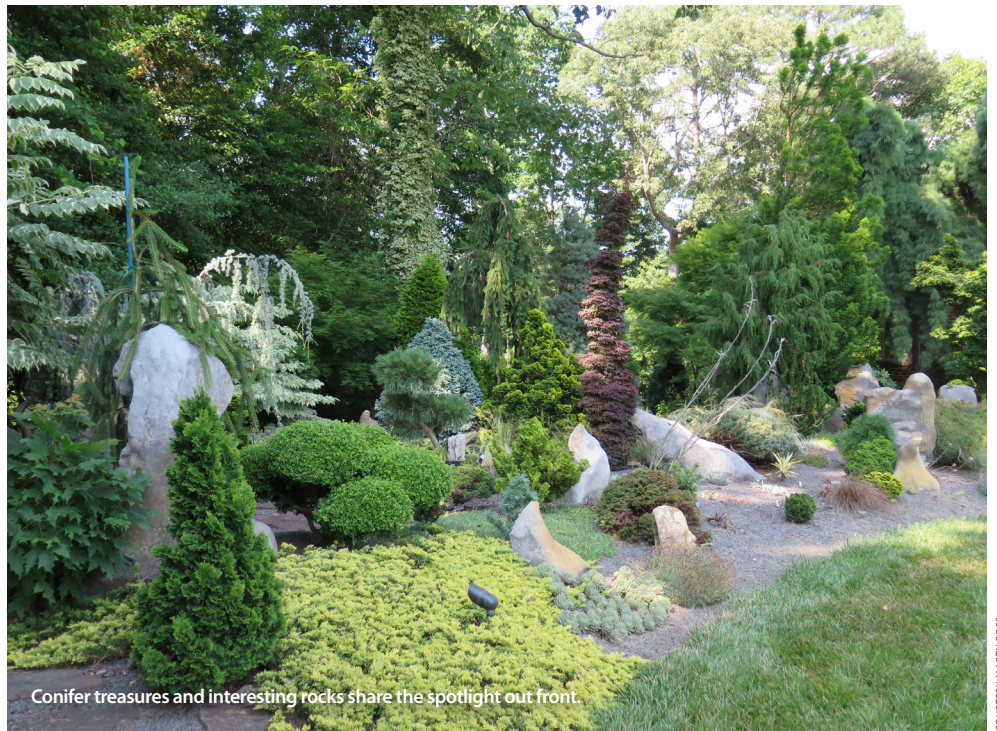
### PERENNIAL FAVORITES

Linda is a daylily collector and hybridizer, with a dozen introductions to her credit. She also loves hostas, hellebores, reblooming iris and many other perennials. Bill especially loves woody plants, but admits that the garden may not have room—at least at the moment—for more trees.

To accommodate their ambitious garden dreams, the couple redesigned the available space on their property, adding gracious and intriguing twists, turns and loops, enclosing a formal garden and laying out sweeping beds that trace the contours of a bluff overlooking the James River. They brought in boulders, established an ambitious rock garden, built a pond and filled the entire property with exceedingly choice plants of every description.

### ART IN THE GARDEN

For their own garden's design, the Pinkhams could indulge themselves in ideas that wouldn't necessarily click with most clients. They accented each ambitious bed and border with Bill's imaginative pottery, made in his studio on the property, and with art purchased on their travels. Their designs for each area have evolved over the years, as more and more of the lawn continues to be carved out to make room for beds to accommodate their ever-growing collections.



Big, bold statements catch your eye everywhere you turn, but the garden is also rich in tiny plant treasures and detailed personal touches. Large dish gardens, each as thoughtfully planted as a landscape, are filled with cacti, succulents, dwarf conifers and tropical specimen plants. Pots hung on a stone wall contain the couple's collection of bromeliads. Special oriental plants flourish in a shade garden enclosed by a low, decorative bamboo fence.

Linda's daylily collection—hundreds of varieties—sparkles throughout the garden. Daylilies lean into the sun from a cheerful flowerbed near the back of the house. Her seedling collection has its own spot, too, but most of the daylilies mingle with other perennial plants, a colorful hard-working element of the garden's charm.

### CREVICE EXPERIMENT

One of the newest additions to the Pinkhams' property is a crevice garden, built after Linda and Bill connected with Panayoti Kelaidis, the curator of Denver Botanic Gardens and a rock garden expert. "Try these in Virginia," Kelaidis suggested. The plants struggled, but the concept proved hardy. Linda and Bill are re-filling the crevices with their own interpretation of appropriate rock garden plants for our area.

This garden is not a secret. Linda and Bill have opened their property twice for Virginia's Historic Garden Week, and have welcomed members of the American Camellia Society, the American Rhododendron Society and daylily enthusiasts, including the American Hemerocallis Society in 2017. Their annual



open day for friends from the area is more than a summer garden party; it's garden-family reunion. "We love to share the garden," Linda says.

It's a garden of great beauty in an incomparable setting, created by two nimble-minded, expert, eternally curious plant fanatics with modern sensibilities. Their very personal garden is full of ideas to take back home and to share with gardeners and readers everywhere. 🌿

**Marty Ross** is an award-winning freelance garden journalist, syndicated columnist and contributing editor for *Better Homes & Gardens* and *Country Gardens*. She is a GardenComm Fellow and lives in Tidewater, Virginia.



# Upcoming GardenComm EVENTS

ALL TIMES LOCAL

Please share info with colleagues, friends and family interested in these topics.

## Connect (& More): GardenComm @ PHS Philadelphia Flower Show 2020

5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m., March 4

## GardenComm @ Canada Blooms 2020

8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., March 14

## GardenComm Webinar Series: So You'd Like To Be on Radio, with C.L. Fornari

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m., March 26

## Music City in Bloom in Nashville, Tennessee

7:15 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., April 30



Kelly Norris and Lisa Eldred Steinkopf sign their books amid speaker duties at iLandscape at the Renaissance Schaumburg (Illinois) Convention Center.

PHOTO COURTESY JESSICA WALLISER

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE MARLA SCHRAGER

—Executive Director's Message, continued from page 2

### FROM KIRK BROWN, PRESIDENT 2015-2017

***What was the most rewarding thing that happened during your presidency or as a result of your presidency?***

I found an incredible network of professionals who shared my vision and mission. I grew a personal industry based on historic gardening figures and crafted a national speaking presence. I got to meet more people. I joined other non-profit associations and grew my network even more. I saw that most of the problems facing GWA were the same problems facing all of the other associations. It's hard not to want to give hard-earned advice to help others in their mission/vision searches. But I refrain.

***What are the three most important lessons you learned from your experience?***

1. Good change comes through building consensus — you also end up with life-long friends.
2. No one should ever consider themselves bigger than the association. "Off with their heads!"
3. You can impact an industry by building a single bridge. Associations in the green industry will/can save the world. They are to be preserved at all costs.

***What is your top garden industry prediction for 2020 or the next decade?***

In ten years, 75% of the existing industry associations and related groups will be gone. There is no saving those who will not change. With the rapid shrinkage, there will be an increasing need for those who exist to make up strategic partnerships that allow the survivors to thrive in reduced circumstances.

### FROM LARRY HODGSON, PRESIDENT, 2013-2015

***Who, if anyone, or what inspired you to want to lead the organization? Did you have a goal of being president or did that happen organically? And if so, how?***

I did not intend being President. I had been a National Director for two terms and was thinking of going back to being a Regional Director. Anne-Marie Van Nest, a Past President and a good friend, asked if I would run for Treasurer and I ended up winning. Then, as the tradition of the time went, I moved up to Vice-president and President. I had always been interested in helping GWA (now GardenComm), so hoped I was being useful in that way.

***What advice would you give to someone interested in becoming president?***

Bring a lot of enthusiasm and determination.

***What is your top garden industry prediction for 2020 or the next decade?***

Gardening will continue to thrive, now that younger people are getting involved. But paid opportunities remain limited in the field of gardening communication and I still see a decade of struggle for those trying to make a living there.

I hope this has inspired you in some way to activate with GardenComm on any level. You can submit a self-nomination or recommend people whom you know will demonstrate the energy and innovative spirit we need to build on our momentum.

The deadline is Tuesday, March 31, 2020. You can find the duties and responsibilities as well as the application [here](#). 🌱

All the best,

Marla Schrager, CAE  
[mschrager@kellencompany.com](mailto:mschrager@kellencompany.com)



# Springing into the Busy Season



Soon it will be spring, embraced for its sense of renewal and the affirmation of a gardener's hope and faith. We have faith the spring bulbs we planted last fall or many falls ago will emerge.

We hope our perennials survived winter, and will leaf out and bloom.

Spring is when many of us start our heavy work season. We're hustling plants in garden centers; drawing landscape or garden designs; working landscape crews; taking on seasonal writing, blogging, editing or photography assignments; researching new plants; speaking or teaching; potting up containers; marketing or shipping new products.

Our lives are like roller coasters between now and into the third quarter. Somewhere along the way, we need to take a breather, where we step aside (as best we can) from our duties and refresh ourselves.

GardenComm has just the answer. About halfway through our busy time comes three

days in Colonial Williamsburg, August 10-13. There, we'll meet up with members of our GardenComm family, immerse ourselves in education programs, pitch our best ideas to editors and tour one-of-a-kind private gardens.

Williamsburg offers plenty of activities for more than garden communicators. Families with children can visit Busch Gardens. History buffs can explore the tidal basin and the early roots of our country.

For members, the conference embodies the spirit of renewal we get from the energy of our colleagues, the sharing of stories, learning about new products and plants and going home with more ideas than we can possibly execute. #GardenComm2020 is the renewal of our spirit. 🌱

Jo Ellen  
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## GardenComm's Blog

Want to learn more about GardenComm or do you have an interesting, timely topic to share with other members of GardenComm? Check out the [GardenComm blog](#) for weekly features by members. If you'd like to contribute a post, please contact Carol Michel at [indygardener@gmail.com](mailto:indygardener@gmail.com)



Nearly 100 GardenComm members attended MANTS over three days in January. Sixty enjoyed breakfast sponsored by MANTS.



Marianne Willburn and Denise Schreiber get framed at a Tropical Plant International Expo exhibit in January. About 10 GardenComm members took advantage of the invitation to TPIE arranged by Sylvia Gordon and the Florida Nursery and Landscape Association.

# Best-Selling Author Kathryn Aalto Reminds Members They Have a Powerful Voice



I want to walk with Kathryn Aalto to the North Pole. Not the real North Pole, but the fabled one that Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh discovered on their “expotition.” This journey,

which Kathryn took her readers on through Pooh’s Hundred Acre Wood, has put her on the literary map. In her *New York Times* best-selling book, *Natural World of Winnie-the-Pooh: A Walk Through the Forest that Inspired the Hundred Acre Wood* (Timber Press, 2015), Kathryn explores England’s Ashdown Forest, which according to its website, is mostly heathland, one of the rarest habitats in England.

The landscape of Kathryn’s own youth greatly influenced her interest in writing and gardening. She recalls her childhood in a small town in California’s Central Valley as idyllic—making mud pies and gardening alongside her father, a local ag teacher and garden designer. But it was when naturalist and writer John Muir crossed her path as a student at University of California, Berkeley, that she took a deeper interest in the region. Muir had walked across the Central Valley when grizzlies still roamed free, a very different place from the agriculture powerhouse it had become. Kathryn began to ask questions: “When did the Central Valley change? Who made it change and how did it happen?”

## WRITING TEACHES ABOUT THE NATURAL WORLD

Soon, Kathryn’s interests branched from journalism to literature. “I didn’t want to be just a reporter. I was really interested in learning about the natural world through writing and I was really reacting to the personal essay.” She moved with her future partner, Rolf Aalto, to Seattle and earned her masters in creative non-fiction, which in her words combined all of her interests. “I have one foot in nature and the other in culture.” She and her husband lived on and restored a wild salmon-spawning stream on a 20-acre farm while raising their three children. She described her time there as “the best 15 years of my life.”



In 2007 her husband was offered a teaching position in England and the family moved to Exeter, located in the far southwest of the country, which Kathryn described as looking like Telletubby Land.

“England fits into the bottom half of California. It fundamentally changed how I saw myself as a gardener and how I saw American gardeners,” she said. On their second day in the country, Kathryn started walking some of the ancient public footpaths that crisscross the countryside. She got a sense from these well-worn, sunken paths overhung with ancient trees, that we are very much in a manmade landscape.

## STUDIED GARDEN DESIGN AND HISTORY

In two years, Katherine completed her diploma in garden design, as well as a degree

in garden history. The experience informed how she sees both writing and garden planning. “An essay has a circular narrative, it’s personal, conversational. In my garden designs I also like to create a sense of the journey.” Katherine has long taught at the university level, but in 2018, together with farmer and best-selling author James Rebanks, she also created The Rural Writing Institute, an unusual mix of aspiring adult writers, located on Rebanks’ sheep farm in the north of England.

For Katherine, research is essential for her writing as well as her garden designs. She enjoys researching to tap into the *Genius Loci* or “sense of place,” an important concept that she defines as “a layer of memories, history, and emotion that is an invisible stratum over the physical landscape.”

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Her favorite gardens are billowy, full plantings right up against architectural ruins, very much in the tradition of Vita Sackville-West, one of her gardening heroines, “just because she was such a gender bending maverick!” Sackville-West follows a long tradition of women writers, many of whom had to write and publish anonymously. Katherine reminded me that into the early 20th century, women were not allowed to walk alone without male chaperones and putting your real name to your book would almost always result in scandal.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR POWER

Kathryn features some of these women in her new book, *Writing Wild: Women Poets, Ramblers, and Mavericks Who Shape How We See the Natural World* (Timber Press, due out in April). These women remind us that writing about the natural world is women’s work.

“We used to have a much different relationship with the natural world. We need to step back and remember that we used to conceive of the world as a mother.” This dovetails with her advice to fellow garden writers on the future of our profession and our role as communicators. “Understand the power of your personal voice and the power of the personal essay. Gardeners have a really important role in responding to climate change and have a wonderful opportunity to be educators to the general public about science. There will always be a need for non-fiction writing to convey information.”

Kathryn’s own style is to first make people comfortable so that they are open to ideas that might invite change behavior. She believes it’s no secret. “Be approachable and it will make your subject matter less threatening. I like to craft scenes and bring people into my world and then convey the information via beautiful, visually rich presentations so that they feel like they are on a walk with me.”

I am ready to admit that, like Pooh Bear, I’m ready to follow this Christopher Robin on walks anywhere... as long as we have enough time and Hunny. To connect with and learn more about Kathryn, you can find her at [www.kathrynaalto.com](http://www.kathrynaalto.com). 🌱

Carmen DeVito is a principal of Groundworks in Brooklyn, New York, and co-host of the GardenComm Media Award winning *We Dig Plants* on [HeritageRadioNetwork.org](http://HeritageRadioNetwork.org).

# Welcome NEW GARDENCOMM MEMBERS

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Thanks to these GardenComm members for helping to grow the organization in this year. For every new member you bring in, you'll save \$20 on your 2021 membership dues.

### ONE MEMBER

KARY ARIMOTO-MERCER  
NATALIE CARMOLI  
CARMEN DEVITO  
C.L. FORNARI  
HELEN NEWLING LAWSON  
KIM ROMAN  
ERIN SCHANEN  
LAWRENCE SHERK  
DAVID WARD

# Managing Sustainable Watering Systems— There's an App for That



Research and consumer education through garden centers, popular lawn and garden magazines, podcasts and sources, such as Cooperative Extension services, have done wonders

for raising awareness about what irrigation means and what's important about water for our plants.

Additionally, with rainfall increasing with climate fluctuations, we need to boost awareness about run-off resulting from torrential rains and irrigation. Rain – or irrigation water – sometimes falls faster than it can be absorbed by the soil. That runoff is pure waste as far as plant health or soil conditions are concerned.

Learning about infiltration rates – how water fills in gaps in the soil – has meant that gardeners must understand their soil drainage. For instance: Sandier soils are considered well drained while dense clay soils are poorly drained. As gardeners learn more about watering needs, the knowledge base is built on understanding what the soil needs rather than what the plants need. That switch in viewpoint, from plant needs to soil needs, will help increase water-saving measures in our gardens, parks and for our lawns.

## THE VALUE OF WATER

Water has long been a serious issue, as Ben Franklin's observation showed, "When the well is dry, we'll know the worth of water." Managing water sustainably was certainly on my mind when I was on the post-conference GardenComm bus tour in Salt Lake City. One of the first stops on the road trip was an eye-opening presentation about sustainability and irrigation water management at Orbit Irrigation Products headquarters in North Salt Lake City.

Brad Wardle opened the informative session by telling how each of Orbit's innovators is a garden enthusiast, since they grew up playing in lawn sprinklers. Wardle went on to introduce the Orbit product, which most excited the group, demonstrating the B-hyve smart watering controller with its associated app for your phone or computer. "Orbit's innova-



tion with this irrigation system was designed to gamify the interactive watering system," Wardle said. That thought resonated throughout the demonstration to the GardenComm visitors, showing the importance of watering not only in zones of your lawn or garden area, but watering at specific times and for an effective duration – when data show that watering is truly needed. Now gardeners can monitor their gardens from inside their homes, from their vacation locations or when old-fashioned manual readjustment and visual monitoring isn't possible.

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## SMART WATERING

This new way of managing watering systems by interacting with apps is key for a sustainable approach. A smart controller is ideal for people who want to have firsthand knowledge and decision-making capability based on data about their specific property and its micro-zones.

GardenComm attendees were reminded that any lawn or garden has several micro-zones. Those delineated areas are key to understanding the ways water use is monitored, with records of numbers of gallons

– Continues on page 9



used by the hour and historical records for future analysis.

Why is this type of product so exciting for the gardener concerned about the issues of sustainability in gardens or lawns? Water use is on everyone's mind – and water depletion by extraneous irrigation is a real climate *faux pas*. We've all driven past a property where the irrigation was going full force during a rainstorm, simply because the system was programmed to do so. Years ago, we may have chuckled, and commented that it looked silly. Nowadays, we are dismayed by the wasted water.

### ATTENTION TO SOIL NEEDS

Simply put, water when the soil needs it. University of Vermont Emeritus Professor Leonard Perry, respected for 25 years of "Perry's Perennial Pages" on the Internet, has helped spread that concept. Perry diligently educates gardeners that "the rate of application should not greatly exceed the infiltration rate of the soil." There are many resources available from products to help conserve water to articles and workshops on sustainability and effectively using water on our plants.

We can even look at Sandra Postel's book, *Pillar of Sand: Can the Irrigation Miracle Last*, which describes how frequently irrigation-based civilizations fail. Trying to control water and build cities on irrigated lands has led to water scarcity and battles among neighboring factions for water rights. This historic theme has been repeated for more than 6,000 years, with documented challenges for water uses, both recreationally in public parks, and with formal uses for agriculture. From the macro-view in this book to the micro-view of today's sustainability improving with proper garden watering practices, water as a sustainable resource will be central to the coming decade in all facets of the horticulture industry and gardener's lives. 🌱

This topic is of particular interest to **Cris Blackstone** since she is the Education Coordinator for the New Hampshire Landscape Association and co-host of *The Environmental Hour* on Portsmouth, New Hampshire's, WSCA-FM 106.1 Radio.



## New Products Win Green Thumb Awards

The best new ornamental plants, garden products and edible plants have won the prestigious [2020 Green Thumb Awards](#) presented by the Direct Gardening Association. Honored in the Ornamental Seeds, Bulbs and Plants division were European Beech InstantHedge from Instant-Hedge and Clematis 'Lady Kyoko' from Spring Hill Nurseries.

Honored in the Gardening Tools and Accessories division were Garden Tutor Online Course and Kit from Botaniworld and the Vertex Wall Trellis from Gardener's Supply Company. Honored in the Edible Plants division were KangaRhu Rhubarb from Gurneys Seed and Treasure Island Sweet Potatoes from Concept Plants.

Winners of the 2020 Green Thumb Awards were chosen by an independent panel of garden writers and editors. The winning products were selected based on their uniqueness, technological innovation, ability to solve a gardening problem or provide a gardening opportunity and potential appeal to gardeners.

The Green Thumb Awards recognize outstanding new garden products available by mail or online. The awards are sponsored by the Direct Gardening Association (DGA), a non-profit association of companies that sell garden products directly to consumers via catalogs and websites.

## New Lychnis Introduced

Christine Kelleher presents the newest introduction to [Rozanne and Friends](#) variety offering for 2020, *Lychnis flos-cuculi* 'Petit Henri'. The perennial performs from spring into autumn with masses of petite, white, pollinator-friendly flowers. Perfect for borders, informal gardens, containers, butterfly gardens and as cut flowers—fresh or dried.



PHOTO COURTESY ROZANNE AND FRIENDS

## NICH Infographics Available

The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture (NICH) has introduced five infographics that highlight the importance of landscape plants in conserving and protecting the environment. The infographics spotlight relevant facts from more than 30 sources.

"They point to ways that #PlantsDoThat, from enhancing pollinator conservation, protecting our water resources, defending against wildfires, maintaining soil health and generally improving our quality of life," the organization said.

Each infographic was developed by NICH committee members specializing in the topic area and familiar with the research that most impacts consumers. Garden communicators and others are welcome to [use the infographics](#) to further their business and educational efforts. Please use hashtag #PlantsDoThat when posting them online.

"These are facts that many people may intuitively know, but by putting the information in a succinct, visual format that ties the information together, it opens the opportunity for action. These infographics could not be more appropriately timed as a growing concern for our environment has impacted all facets of consumer life," says Lauren Garcia Chance, NICH Environmental Committee chair.

[The National Initiative for Consumer Horticulture](#) is a consortium of industry leaders who promote the benefits and value of horticulture. NICH brings together academia, government, industry and nonprofits to cultivate the growth and development of a healthy world through landscapes, gardens and plants—indoors and out.

# Noelle Johnson: A California Girl in a Phoenix Garden



There are some people that you meet in life to whom you are immediately drawn.

The energy they emit is like sunshine on a cloudy day, so positive that you just want to be in their space and allow

even a teeny bit of their *joie de vivre* to rub off on you. That's how I felt the first time I met **Noelle Johnson**. Noelle has been a member of GardenComm for the past five years. We first met at the Pasadena, California, conference in 2015, where we were both newbies to the organization. Since 2015, Noelle has changed her business model and grown her brand, identifying a special niche market and applying her special skills to the Southwest USA market.

Noelle describes the three things that she values most about her GardenComm membership:

- Connecting with fellow garden communicators, allowing her to build amazing relationships and making business connections with fellow members from Region 6
- Meeting and working with vendors at the Annual Conference, promoting their products to her followers
- The educational opportunities, which allowed her to learn more about our industry and how best to communicate her message of gardening to people in the Southwest

## NEWS SKILLS FOR NEW SURROUNDINGS

Many of us live and apply our skills to places where we did not grow up, which means adopting a whole new skill set. Noelle was born in California and now resides in Phoenix; gardening in a desert landscape is very different from Los Angeles. Noelle shares that she misses a few things about California, "The almost perfect weather year-round in Southern California, where I grew up. There is a saying that all you have to do to grow a plant in California is to drop it in a hole and it will grow beautifully with little attention. This isn't really true, but it is easier to grow plants there than many areas of the country that have more extreme weather conditions."

As a garden consultant, Noelle is highly qualified. She's a horticulturist with a BS in Plant Biology and a concentration in Urban Horti-



culture. She's also a certified arborist. She has worked as a horticulturist for more than 21 years. In addition to her GardenComm membership, Noelle is a professional member of ISA (the International Society of Arboriculture) and the Western Chapter of Arborists.

She began her foray into the world of horticulture working on golf courses in the landscape area, but she's quick to say, "Not the grass." She has also worked in corporate life as a landscape designer.

## BLOGGING OPENED DOORS

Noelle's life as a writer began when she started her blog, *Ramblings from a Desert Garden*, and life as her alter ego began. The purpose of writing [her blog](#) was "to help people learn how to have a beautiful garden that thrives in a hot, dry climate." At the time, she said, "I had no idea what opportunities would open up for me." The Southwestern region of the U.S. is often overlooked in traditional garden media, despite having over 20% of the population. So over time magazines and other editors contacted her to

write for both print and online publications, as AZ Plant Lady.

To date, Noelle has written for *Birds & Blooms*, *Houzz*, *Phoenix Home & Garden*, *Troy-Bilt*, and *Water Use It Wisely*, among other publications. She has been on National Public Radio, PBS, local lifestyle programs and the Associated Press. She teaches very popular classes at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix and speaks at events around the Southwest.

Noelle has been a speaker at #GardenComm2019 and #GardenComm 2018 and has volunteered on a number of committees since joining, including the Program Committee, which oversees the educational portion of the annual conference. Her favorite GardenComm conference was in Buffalo, New York, not only for the gardens, but also where SW Gardening was born in response to the presentation "Make Local Lucrative." Four GardenComm members (**Ann McCormick, Jacqueline Soule, Teresa Odle** and I) began the regional blog, [Southwest](#)

– Continues on page 11



**Gardening** in the year following and it has been a fun and successful collaboration,” she said.

### RESHAPING HER BUSINESS

Noelle is always looking to grow her business and says her journey began in 2009, when she decided to start her own business as a landscape consultant. Now she can assist desert dwellers in learning to create, grow and maintain a garden that will bring them joy for years to come. The business as it stood was fairly lucrative, but her services were in such demand that she faced burn out.

So, she took a brave step and increased her prices and scaled down what she offered in order to keep that part of her business to a manageable level. In 2018, she decided to create online learning opportunities so that she could help more people who struggle with gardening in the desert. In Fall 2018, she debuted her online membership program through which she offers live group coaching via Facebook Live and other forms of exclusive garden content. Early this year, she launched her first online course, Desert Gardening 101, where students go through a two-month curriculum learning how to garden in the desert.

“Roses have been my favorite flower since I was a child and would explore our little rose garden in Los Angeles with my dad. I’ve had roses ever since and they grow surprisingly well in the desert garden,” she said.

Most of us have a gardening mentor and Noelle said that hers was Carl Johnson (1926-2010), who was the founder of Johnson, Johnson and Roy (known as JJR), a world-renowned landscape architecture firm in the Midwest, and a professor at the University of Michigan. She met Carl, who had retired to Arizona, when they were both tasked to work on a small landscape design project. Noelle was a new horticulturist who had little experience with landscape design but knew plants well.

At the age of 75, Carl was still active and would fly around the world to consult with major landscape projects. He was a passionate and patient teacher to her and she learned so much about design from him. “I was blessed to have had a rich and wonderful friendship with him until his passing,” she said. 🌱

**Andrea Whitely** is a Region 7 Director from Perth, Australia, where she owns and operates a garden design and maintenance company.



### Cavano Hires Marketing Director

**Wendy Brister** was recently hired as marketing director at Cavano's Perennials Inc. In her new position, Wendy will be available for speaking engagements throughout the Mid-Atlantic and East Coast regions on various topics related to plants and garden design. She also will create educational opportunities for landscape contractors and designers, oversee additions and maintenance to the company's display gardens.



### Soule Presents Herb Webinar

**Jacqueline Soule** will offer an online live webinar March 25 through the [Herb Society of America](#).

The topic is “Herbs of Southwestern Missions” and covers native and introduced herbs still grown and used in modern times. The webinar is free to HSA members and \$5 for nonmembers.

### California Legislature Honors Brian

The California Legislature Assembly honored author, newspaper columnist, and radio personality **Cynthia Brian** for 20 years of volunteer service in making a difference for the world as the Executive Director of Be the Star You Are! Through [Be the Star You Are!](#), she has launched several successful disaster relief programs.

### Christopher Adds Podcast

**Thomas Christopher** has added a [podcast](#) to his weekly environmental gardening radio program, *Growing Greener*, on WESU 88.1 FM.

### Ammons Joins ACRT

**Anelle Ammons** is a senior forestry specialist with ACRT, which does third party vegetation management for utility companies.

### Members Head to California Spring Trials

**Diane Blazek** and **Gail Pabst** will travel the [California Spring Trials](#) again with four garden communicators from March 27 to April 1. Follow the hashtag #NGBPlantNerds or #CASpringTrials for a sneak peek at all the new varieties for 2021.

### Washington Gardener Hits 15th Year

[Washington Gardener](#) magazine, the publication for the Mid-Atlantic and greater Washington, D.C., region, celebrates its 15th anniversary in March. Editor and publisher **Kathy Jentz** launched the magazine; its first issue was March-April 2005. Special events and surprises are planned throughout spring, culminating in a fabulous Summer Solstice celebration in June. You are all invited!



### Kirsh Launches Jewelry Line

With much anticipation, [Jan Kirsh Studio](#) is set to release a brand new line of jewelry, modeled after the artist's renowned, larger-than-life fruit and vegetable sculptures, in April. “Each piece has been meticulously designed to represent my sculpture on a smaller scale, with innovative 3D printing technology,” Jan said. This jewelry will capture the hearts of a multigenerational environmentally friendly community.

### AHS launches mobile site

The American Horticultural Society has launched a mobile-friendly website. The URL is still <https://ahsgardening.org>, but visitors will notice a new look & feel. For more info: <https://ahsgardening.org/about-us/news-press/ahs-unveils-new-mobile-friendly-website/>. Thanks to our Corporate Member Corona Tools, we also have a new podcast on “Growing Edibles in Containers” moderated by our own **David Ellis** and featuring **Charlie Nardozi**. The podcast can be found at <https://ahs-gardening.org/podcasts>.

# Mike Lizotte: I Love Seeds



**Mike Lizotte**, also known as The Seed Man, is not your typical plantsman. His workday starts off in the gym and then he analyzes sales numbers. "This may consist of daily, weekly and monthly results, making sure I like what I see and if not, identifying what might not be working," and if it needs to be addressed.

"You would be very surprised how competitive the 'gardening' industry has become and then when you add in the Amazon impact, it really has forced you to step up your game," said Mike, owner and managing partner of American Meadows Inc., and High Country Gardens in Vermont.

He started working at American Meadows in Shelburne, Vermont, during his freshman year of high school. "My first job was helping unload a large seed shipment," he said. "I must have done something right, as they asked me to come back and the rest, as they say, is history. I've had one (real) job my entire life!"

## KNEW SEEDS BEFORE FLOWERS

He picked up the business in reverse. "I learned the seed part first and what the flower actually looked like secondly," Mike said. "You could lay 100 varieties of seed on a table and I could tell you what each variety was from seed, but I had no idea what the flower looked like. I would stay after my shift and make my way out to our test gardens and learn what the flowers looked like, which is the total opposite of how most people will learn about flowers. I love the seeds."

He grew up in the industry and has relationship with seed vendors that go back 25 years. "It's such a great group of people, and a rather unique dynamic in the fact that we all seem to get along very, very well. It's always interesting bringing someone to a trade event and we all go out for drinks or dinner and I tell them that although these are my vendors, they are also competitors, but we all seem to get along and have a great time," Mike said.

## ACTIVE IN TRADE GROUPS

He attends several industry trade shows each year to keep up on the latest trends and network with his peers. "With our industry con-



PHOTO COURTESY MIKE LIZOTTE

stantly changing and our company continuing to grow, there is never a dull moment and I always have to adapt in hopes of creating the most productive work environment as possible, he said.

Mike is a board member of the National Garden Bureau and president of the Home Garden Seed Association. American Meadows is also a member of the Perennial Plant Association and past member of the Direct Gardening Association.

Supporting his alma mater and giving back is important to him. "I graduated from the University of Vermont in 1997 and continue to work closely with the university, donating planting material each year that Mark Starrett (associate professor of horticulture) and his students plant all over campus. I was awarded the Outstanding Alumni Award from the College of Agriculture and Life Science in 2018 for this and other work that I've done through the years. It's been very rewarding to give back in a not-so-traditional way," he said.

## BEST DECISION WAS TO ATTEND GWA

"I first heard about the GWA (now GardenComm) back in 2015, as we were looking for help expanding our content," Mike said. "We made the decision to attend the conference in Pasadena, California, as an exhibitor and it was one of the best decisions we could have ever made. The connections we made and the network of professionals we were able to reach paid for itself 10 times over. We've worked with dozens of writers and bought hundreds of photos. We've exhibited at every show ever since along with sponsoring various events, and it's a show that I look forward to attending every year!"

The one common misunderstanding that Mike asks fellow garden communicators to help him dispel is that seeds magically go bad once the clock strikes midnight from the date on the seed packet.

"This couldn't be farther from the truth," he said. "Yes, the germination rates will lower over

– Continues on page 13



time, but I always tell people, if they can get old seed, plant it. Most that do are pleasantly surprised at how well it grows. And they probably saved money doing so. Seeds are incredible in the fact that some varieties can stay viable for many, many, many years, so if you ever come across old, outdated seed packets, I always encourage anyone to buy and plant them. In most cases you won't be disappointed!"

#### FOR THE LOVE OF ZINNIAS

In his own garden, his favorite plants to grow from seed are zinnias. "I'm always experimenting with the latest varieties and colors," Mike said. "My daughter Sadie, who just turned 9, loves zinnias as well, and helps in the garden all summer. I also continue to expand my pollinator gardens with native perennials. Although they may take longer to establish from seed, it's well worth the wait and a lot more economical in most cases when compared to buying 1-gallon plants from the big box. I'm always tinkering with my veggie garden. Although I wouldn't consider myself an expert, there's no better feeling than picking fresh vegetables every day and my neighbors really enjoying looking at what's growing every season."

When he is not out in the garden or at his seed business, Mike enjoys traveling with the family in the summer months, and he is an avid fisherman. In the winter months, he referees college ice hockey on Friday and Saturday nights and coaches his daughter's hockey team.

In-between his business and family commitments, Mike found time to write *Mini Meadows*. Storey Publishing released the book February 2019 to glowing reviews.

Asked to predict the future of the seed industry and home gardening, Mike said, "I certainly think the trends are healthy, with a greater awareness to supporting pollinators, planting natives and growing your own food. There's a lot to be excited about." 🌱

**Kathy Jentz** is the editor and publisher of *Washington Gardener* magazine. A lifelong gardener, Kathy believes that growing plants should be stress-free and enjoyable. Her philosophy is inspiration over perspiration. She is GardenComm Region 2 National Director. She can be reached at [KathyJentz@gmail.com](mailto:KathyJentz@gmail.com) or [WashingtonGardener.com](http://WashingtonGardener.com).

## IN MEMORIAM

### JOHN HOWARD STAUB III (JACK)

February 5, 1951 – January 22, 2020



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB CARDILLO

**Rob Cardillo** took this photo when he first met Jack at Hortulus Farm while on an assignment in 1998 with **James Augustus Baggett**, then editor of *Country Living Gardener*.

Jack Staub of Wrightstown, Pennsylvania, and Manalapan, Florida lost his valiant battle with AL amyloidosis on January 22. The horticultural world lost another inspired garden writer and designer.

Jack was a man of many talents. He was an actor, an advertising executive, playwright, gourmet cook and lecturer. Thirty years ago, he and his partner, Renny Reynolds, transformed a 100-acre, run-down, Pennsylvania Dutch dairy farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, into Hortulus Farm, a horticultural destination widely featured in gardening and travel magazines. Although a great student of garden design, Jack's real passion was his stylish vegetable gardens with their angular beds and novel trellises that became home to a wide collection of heirlooms.

Jack was the author of seven gardening books including *Private Edens*, which was acclaimed by *The New York Times* as the top-rated gardening book of 2016. Just published, *Chasing Eden*, written by Jack and Renny with photography by **Rob Cardillo**, chronicles their 40 years of creating

imaginative landscapes at Hortulus Farm. It is a brilliant history of the farm and its gardens with horticultural teachings from which to learn – part memoir, part design manual and all beautiful. He and Renny have lectured extensively across the country and around the globe. Said Rob Cardillo, who also was the photographer for *Private Edens*, "Witty, eloquent, sharp-eyed and smart as a whip, Jack made friends everywhere he went. I will miss his generous smile and irreverent sense of humor."

Jack is survived by his partner of 41 years, Renny Reynolds, his father, John Howard Staub II, and five siblings. He is also survived by his three dogs: Bandit, Sadie and Parker. His wishes are to have a celebration of his life at Hortulus Farm in the springtime when it is in its full glory. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Hortulus Farm Foundation in Jack's memory, 60 Thompson Mill Road, Wrightstown, PA 18940.

— Cathy Wilkinson Barash from *The New York Times* and Rob Cardillo.



Through March 4, **Eva Monheim** (Region 2) will demonstrate how to use Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Gold Medal Plants on the floor of the Philadelphia Flower Show in conjunction with her new book.

**Patrick Ryan** (Region 6), education specialist at Alaska Botanical Garden <https://www.alas-kabg.org>, will give talks at its Lunch and Learn events. The topics: "Landscaping with Native Plants - Jewels of the North," "Wildflowers of the Alaska Botanical Garden," "Weeds and Wildflowers," "Growing Plants from Seed," "Contain Yourself."

**Sharee Solow** (Region 2) has returned from Japan and the first glimpse of her trip "Autumn In Japan" will be Thursday, March 5, at the Scott Arboretum, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. She is also open to more speaking requests, such as her well-received talk on the Taikan Bonsai Exhibit recently given at the Pennsylvania Bonsai Society.

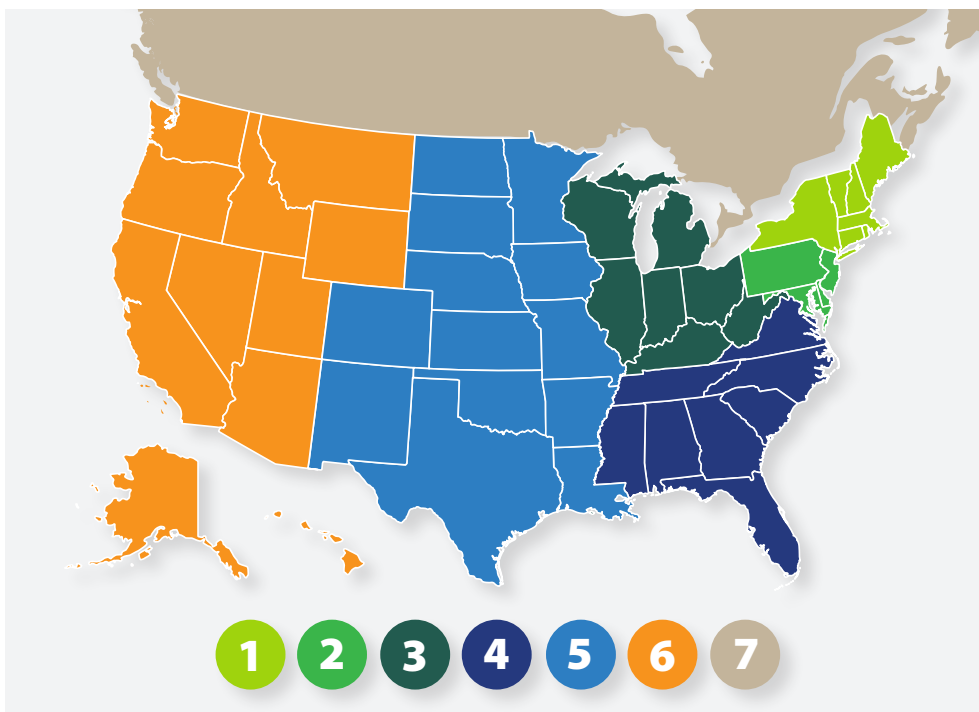
**Natalie Carmolli** (Region 3) presents "Cool, Compact Shrubs for Tight Spaces," at the 2020 West Michigan Home and Garden Show, [showspan.com/WMH/](http://showspan.com/WMH/) 2 p.m. Friday, March 6, at the DeVos Convention Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Margie Grace** (Region 6) will present "Demand More from Your Garden: Multi-tasking Landscape Elements and Hard-working Plants" at the Southern Spring Home and Garden Show in Charlotte, North Carolina, March 6.

Join **Jodi Torpey** for two of her most popular gardening programs at the Pennington County Master Gardeners' annual Spring Fever gardening conference, March 7, Rapid City, South Dakota. For event details, contact [Jodi@WesternGardener.com](mailto:Jodi@WesternGardener.com).

**Tara Nolan** (Region 7) will speak about topics from her new book, *Gardening Your Front Yard*, at the T.B. Costain/SC Johnson Community Centre, Brantford, Ontario, March 9 as part of the city's Gardening Seminar series. On March 13, she will speak at Canada Blooms, which bills itself as "the nation's largest show of its kind."

**Natalie Carmolli** (Region 3) presents "Honey, Who Shrunk the Shrubs?" at the 2020 Magnolia Plantation gardening symposium, Saturday, March 14. More information about Magnolia Plantation & Gardens can be found at [www.magnoliaplantation.com/](http://www.magnoliaplantation.com/).



On March 14, **Dan Benarcik** (Region 2) will speak at the New Zealand Gardens Trust National Conference in Palmerston North, New Zealand, where he is also giving a session demonstrating container design.

Ever been to two days of nothing but books, book authors, book publishers and all things bookish? The Tucson Festival of Books is USA's third largest and 2020 promises to be better than ever. **Jacqueline Soule** (Region 6) will present her new book, *Savor Southwest Honey*, in the tent devoted to the Science of Food, March 14-15. Free admission. More at <https://tucsonfestivalofbooks.org/>.

**Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp** (Region 3) will present two programs at the 12th annual Growing Great Gardens At Wayne County Community College District, Taylor, Michigan, March 14. She'll talk about "Where the Wild Things Are" and "Growing with Life's Changes." On March 15 and 22, she'll conduct four "Spring Container Wars" with audience members at the Indiana Flower and Patio Show at the Indiana State Fairgrounds, Indianapolis.

On March 15, **Bobbie Schwartz** (Region 3) will present "Nurturing Nature: Using Site-Specific Plants" to the Allen County Master Gardeners Seminar in Lima, Ohio.

**Carol Michel** (Region 3) will present on March 16, 17 and 18 at the Indiana Flower and Patio Show in Indianapolis. Her topics: "Eat Your Garden: How to Grow Vegetables in Indiana"

and "Plan for a Great 2020 and Garden: What To Do and When To Do It." For more information, visit <https://indianaflowerandpatioshow.com>

**Diane Blazek** (Region 3) will speak at the Chicago Flower and Garden Show, Wednesday, March 18. At 10:30 a.m., on Garden Stage 1 and again at noon. She'll talk about new, All-America Selections winning varieties and about National Garden Bureau's Year of featured crops. <https://chicagoflower.com/get-growing-series/>

**Tony Spencer** (Region 7) will appear at Canada Blooms in Toronto, March 19.

On March 21, **Bobbie Schwartz** (Region 3) will speak about "Garden Renovation" at the Rotary Botanical Garden, Janesville, Wisconsin. On March 28, she will speak at the Gardens at Gantz Farm Spring Symposium, Grove City, Ohio, about "Summer and Fall Bulbs: An Extra Dimension for the Landscape."

**Carol Michel** (Region 3) will be signing her books of gardening humor at the Johnson County Public Library Author Fair, March 21 at the Clark Pleasant library branch in Whiteland, Indiana. For more information, contact Carol directly at [indygardener@gmail.com](mailto:indygardener@gmail.com)

**Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp** (Region 3) will speak about her writing career at the Woman's Press Club of Indiana, March 21, in Indianapolis.

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**Eva Monheim** (Region 2) will do a talk on her new book, *Shrubs & Hedges*, followed by a book signing, March 22 at Primex Garden Center, 435 W. Glenside Avenue, Glenside, Pennsylvania.

On March 22, **Dan Benarcek** (Region 2) will present “Foliage First, Boom without the Bloom” to the Connecticut Master Gardeners in New London, Connecticut.

**Margie Grace** (Region 6) will present “Demand More from Your Garden: Multi-tasking Landscape Elements and Hard-Working Plants” at the Providence Hospital Foundation’s Festival of Flowers in Mobile, Alabama, March 26. She also will speak at the APLD International Design Conference in Chicago in July.

At Longwood Gardens, Wayne, Pennsylvania, **Dan Benarcek** (Region 2) will lead a workshop “Branches All Around” on March 29.

GardenComm Gold and two-time Silver Media Award winner **Tony Spencer** (Region 7) of The New Perennialist is speaking this winter at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond, Virginia, followed by a trip out west for a talk to the Vancouver (B.C.) Master Gardeners Conference on March 29.

On April 8, **Dan Benarcek** (Region 2) will speak on “Containers, Pots with a Purpose” at Ladew Topiary Gardens, Monkton, Maryland.

On April 9, **Sharee Solow** will present “New Perennials for 2020” to the Old York Road Garden Club, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

**Bobbie Schwartz** (Region 3) will speak about “The Artful Garden” and “Painting with Perennials: A Landscape Artist’s Perspective,” at the Syracuse, New York, Garden Club, Saturday, April 25.

**Carol Michel** (Region 3) speaks about “Garden Tools Beyond the Hoe,” April 27 at the Garden Club of Indiana’s 89th annual state convention, Richmond, Indiana on. For more information, visit <https://www.gardenclubofindiana.org>

#### Items submitted by:

**Sally Cunningham** (Region 1), **Teri Speight** (Region 2), **Diane Blazek** (Region 3), **Helen Lawson** (Region 4), **Bill Johnson** (Region 5), **Chris Sabbarese** (Region 6), **Andrea Whitely** (Region 7)

## REGIONAL EVENTS

On March 5, enjoy “Wine in the Woods” at Lockerly Arboretum in Milledgeville, Georgia, beginning at 5 p.m. Admission: \$10, members; \$15, nonmembers and \$5 for the special guest group, animal welfare workers. The event is a unique way for people to experience a particular location or collection on the property at their leisure. Rose Hill, an antebellum mansion on the property, is also open for tours that evening. Additional information at [www.lockerly.org](http://www.lockerly.org).

March 7, the Guilford Horticultural Society celebrates its 35th Symposium, *All You Need to Know*, at the Paul J Ciener Botanical Garden, 215 S. Main St., Kernersville, North Carolina. Three speakers from Region 4 will be at the podium: **Carol Reese**, **Shannon Currey** and **Pam Beck**.

Square Foot Gardening Certified Instructor **Kim Roman** will present “An Introduction to Square Foot Gardening” for the [Mid-Atlantic Homeowners Expo](#) at 2 p.m., at the following venues:

- March 7, Chase Center on the Riverfront, Wilmington, Delaware
- March 21, Ten Oaks Ballroom, Clarksville, Maryland
- March 28, APG Federal Credit Union Arena@ Harford Community College, Bel Air, Maryland
- April 4, Benfield Sports Center, Millersville, Maryland

**Chanticleer** invites you to visit this spring. Garden admission is free for GardenComm members. Opening Day is Wednesday, April 1. House & Garden Tours occur at 11 a.m. every Friday and Saturday, and are complimentary for GardenComm members. Chanticleer will host **David Culp** to present on his book, *A Year at Brandywine Cottage* at 2 p.m., Sunday, April 26 Radnor Memorial Library in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

Lockerly Arboretum in Milledgeville, Georgia, will hold its annual plant sale, April 17-18. Proceeds will be used to purchase and install educational plant signage on the grounds. Hours and directions are available at [www.lockerly.org](http://www.lockerly.org).

**Wendy Brister** invites GardenComm members and the community to Spring Retail Weekends at Cavano’s Perennials Inc., 6845 Sunshine Ave., Kingsville, Maryland. The nursery will be open to the public 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., April 11, 18 and 25. Facebook will have more information regarding themed days and speaker lineup.

The American Public Gardens Association presents the 2020 National Public Gardens Week, Friday, May 8 through Sunday, May 17. Throughout the week, many of our nation’s public gardens emphasize their importance and impact as community resources and catalysts for change and resilience by encouraging the general public to visit, engage, donate and volunteer. [Register your garden here](#) and stay up to date with National Public Gardens week by using the hashtag #NationalPublicGardensWeek on social media.

## A Reliable Resource for Garden Communicators

Founded in 1922, the **American Horticultural Society (AHS)** connects people with plants, and garden communicators with reliable information and valuable opportunities.

#### AHS member benefits include:

- Our well-respected bimonthly magazine, **THE AMERICAN GARDENER**, which is read and contributed to by leading garden writers
- Special admission privileges/discounts at over 320 participating gardens nationwide via our AHS Reciprocal Admissions Program
- Discounted admission to AHS programming, including our annual Great American Gardeners Award and Book Award ceremony & banquet
- The reward of knowing you’re supporting AHS’s mission to promote the people-plant connection and environmental stewardship



Join now: [www.ahsgardening.org/join](http://www.ahsgardening.org/join)

# Customer Service: Small Actions Make Big Impact



Two women gave me top-notch customer service over the last few weeks. The first was at Staples, where I was looking for a replacement battery for my portable phone. The saleswoman walked me to the aisle and right to the section where the batteries hung from hooks. At Whole Foods, I was on the hunt for Dubliner cheese. I asked the woman at the cheese counter and she walked out and took me to the refrigerated case with Kerrygold's Dubliner cheese.

What these women did was take the customer directly to what was being sought. I think about this and how I am with customers at the garden center, where I am a part-time, seasonal worker.

When a customer comes in looking for May Night salvia, I take her directly to the benches, showing her the ones in quarts and the ones in gallons. Garden chemicals are in aisle 17 inside the hardware store that is attached to the garden center. Rather than send the customer there, I walk her to the aisle and help her select the right product for the job. I even demonstrate how to read the labels to determine if the product will control the issue.



## **SULLIVAN HARDWARE AND GARDEN, INDIANAPOLIS**

**Pat Sullivan**, a GardenComm member and owner of the garden center where I work part time, says, "One should

never kick the can down the road. When a customer inquires about a special order, an out of stock item, a complex question or whatever the customer needs, solve the issue." Saying things like "It's probably not in yet," "Oh, they should be here next week," or "Check with the people up front; they should know," give a terrible impression. "Passing off customers can make them feel unwanted and many times will lead to complaints down the road. I don't know how many customers I've dealt with over the years that start the complaint with, 'I've been here (pick a number) times and keep getting a different story.' My second and much simpler customer service tip is: Speak to every customer you encounter."



## **AGROCHIC.COM, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

Customer service is the area of her writing, education and ag consulting business that **Perla Sofia Curbelo Santiago** likes the most. The owner and

founder of [Agrochic.com](http://Agrochic.com) said her No. 1 tip is, "Be available to your customers and potential clients. Offer a contact email or number through your website, and respond to questions or comments as soon as possible. In social media, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, acknowledge someone's inquiry as soon as possible, and if you promise to expand on the answer, do it. People do remember these details, and I always treat my customers as I would like to be treated."



## **THE PERSONAL GARDEN COACH, RENTON, WASHINGTON**

**Christina Salwitz** said listening is key to any satisfactory relationship with a client. "Try to hear what's not

being said (a practiced skill of reading between the lines.) Find the things the customer didn't say that allow us to surprise and delight."

Christina's example, "A customer wants to have a tree removed, create a new rose bed and install a few focal-point container designs. When we pull up for the estimate meeting, the first thing we see is the customer hand-watering her old containers and weeding an out-of-control area. Then they proceed to complain about their nosy neighbors for the first 15 minutes."

"Give the customer solutions," she said. Take down the tree and create the rose bed and install new containers. Tell the customer you know what it's like to have neighbors peering into the garden and mention there are fabulous hedge options, if they are open to that.

Provide a separate bid for weeding and general maintenance and the value of professional pruning techniques. Suggest efficient and timesaving drip lines for the new pots. Remind the customer that with an irrigation system, they have more time to enjoy their garden rather than slaving in it.



## **NOELLE JOHNSON LANDSCAPE CONSULTING AND AZ PLANT LADY, PHOENIX**

Listening is also at the top of the list of good customer service for **Noelle Johnson**,

a horticulturist, blogger and landscape consultant. "It is vitally important to take time and really listen to what your client wants. Often, the temptation is to tell them what you think they need or should want. This does your client a disservice and will leave them unsatisfied with your services," she said.

"Upon entering a client's garden, I may have definite ideas of how I think it should be designed. However, what the client has in mind may be quite different. So before I begin telling them my vision, I need to sit and hear what their goals are. They may often be very different from what my vision is. From then on, my goal is to guide them toward their goal by pointing out any obstacles and making suggestions that go along with what they want," Noelle said.

## **OTHER TIPS:**

- Avoid excuses. You never want to tell a customer that you've been really busy, which implies with another customer. The message is "I've been too busy with Customer 1 to do your work." Of course, you can apologize for missing a deadline, but don't give any excuse. This takes practice because our natural inclination is to say "I'm sorry I'm late with this, but I've been really busy." Just say "I'm sorry I'm late. Here's how I will make it up."
- Of course, if something terrible happens, such as an accident, severe illness or death of family member, let your clients know.
- Keep the client informed. If you've had to order plants for a job and they haven't yet arrived, let the customer know, especially if the job was scheduled to start.
- Be respectful of the client's time. We all hate to have taken time off work to wait for a repair man or the cable guy who doesn't show up or shows up late. 🌱

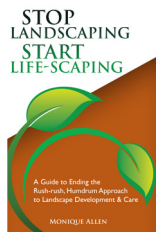
**Jo Ellen Meyers Sharp** is President of GardenComm and editor of *On the QT*.



# HOT OFF the press

## MONIQUE ALLEN

*Stop Landscaping, Start Life-Scaping: A Guide to Ending the Rush-rush, Humdrum Approach to Landscape Development & Care*  
Ingram Sparks  
250 pages, \$24.95, paperback  
To be published: March 23, 2020



Monique Allen sheds light on how to transform landscapes into powerful places that can recharge our batteries, uplift our souls and delight our senses. In her book, the landscape designer and developer explains how to imagine, build and

care for these spaces to be integral experience-makers in our lives. With more than 35 years of experience, Monique shares stories, frank examples and dozens of practical tips that will guide you through the process of creating an outdoor environment that is fulfilling and an extension of yourself. Detailing various concepts, including why systems-thinking is important to your success, how to picture your plan and assemble your construction team, why long-term care strategies must be an up-front consideration and how to become a loving partner and steward of your land, Monique shows how your landscape is your connection to nature and ultimately the lifeline to inner peace and the well-being of our communities.

## DARRYL CHENG

*The New Plant Parent: Develop Your Green Thumb and Care for Your Houseplant Family*  
Abrams Image  
208 pages, \$16.89, paperback  
To be published: March 19, 2020



For indoor gardeners everywhere, **Darryl Cheng** offers a new way to grow healthy houseplants. He teaches the art of understanding a plant's needs and giving it a home with the right

balance of light, water and nutrients. The indoor gardener will be far less of a passive follower of rules for the care of each species and much more of a confident, active grower, relying on observation and insight after reading his book. And in the process, the plant owner becomes a plant lover, bonded to these beautiful living things by a simple love and appreciation of nature. *The New Plant Parent* covers all of the basics of growing

houseplants, from finding the right light, to everyday care like watering and fertilizing, to containers and recommended species. Darryl's friendly tone, personal stories and accessible photographs fill his book with the same generous spirit that has made @houseplant-journal, his Instagram account, a popular source of advice and inspiration for thousands of indoor gardeners.

## MARGIE GRACE

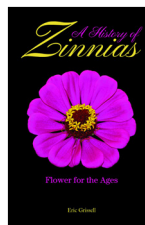
*Private Gardens of Santa Barbara: The Art of Outdoor Living*  
Gibbs Smith  
256 pages, \$50, hardcover  
To be published: March 3, 2020



Twice named International Landscape Designer of the Year, **Margie Grace** has more than 35 years in the landscape design-build profession. She is the founding principal of Grace Design Associates, Inc., Santa Barbara, California. Her book features 18 exquisite residential gardens from throughout the Santa Barbara region, known as the American Riviera. Ideal for garden enthusiasts, lifestyle devotees, designers, photographers and landscape professionals, *Private Gardens of Santa Barbara* showcases 190 stunning images of gardens and homes, shot by landscape photographer Holly Lepere.

## ERIC GRISELL

*A History of Zinnias: Flower for the Ages*  
Purdue University Press  
\$27.99, 270 pages, hardcover  
To be published: March 15, 2020



*A History of Zinnias* brings forward the fascinating adventure of zinnias and the spirit of civilization. With colorful illustrations, Eric Grissell's book is a cultural and horticultural history documenting the development of garden zinnias, one of the top 10 garden annuals grown in the United States today. The deep and exciting history of garden zinnias pieces together a tale involving Aztecs, Spanish conquistadors, people of faith, people of medicine, explorers, scientists, writers, botanists, painters and gardeners. The trail leads from the halls of Montezuma to a cliff-diving prime minister; from Handel,

Mozart and Rossini to Gilbert and Sullivan; from a little-known confession by Benjamin Franklin to a controversy raised by Charles Darwin; from Emily Dickinson, who writes of death and zinnias, to a 20-year-old woman who writes of reanimated corpses and from a scissor-wielding septuagenarian who painted with bits of paper to Clementine Hunter, known as the Black Grandma Moses, who painted zinnias and inspired the opera *Zinnia*. Zinnias are far more than just a flower. They represent the constant exploration of humankind's quest for beauty and innovation.

## MATT MATTUS

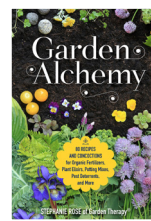
*Mastering the Art of Flower Gardening: A Gardener's Guide to Growing Flowers from Today's Favorites to Unusual Varieties*  
Cool Springs Press  
240 pages, \$30, hardcover  
To be published: March 10, 2020



Gorgeously illustrated, with hundreds of lush photographs, **Matt Mattus** sets you up for success by providing everything you need to know about starting seeds, soil, sowing, hardening off, transplanting and growing on. It's all based on his decades of first-hand experience; every variety or species presented is one that he has personally tried and grown. There are tips for growing more than 100 annuals from seed, along with and many summer bulbs, vines like wisteria and even blooming shrubs like lilacs. Every flower includes detailed information based on Matt's experience, going beyond the information typically available on the seed packet or a nursery tag.

## STEPHANIE ROSE

*Garden Alchemy*  
Cool Springs Press  
128 pages, \$22.99  
Published February 18, 2020



*Garden Alchemy* features 80 recipes and concoctions for organic fertilizers, plant elixirs, potting mixes, pest deterrents and more. **Stephanie Rose** provides a hands-on guide for do-it-yourself gardeners who want to turn their garden into gold using natural recipes and herbal concoctions to beautify your garden, using organic methods that regenerate your soil and revitalize your plants. By following the processes that are closest to nature, it brings the gardener in sync with the garden, allowing plants to thrive with less effort and less cost. 🌿