

Volume 4, Issue 3 "Everyone must take time to sit and watch the leaves turn." - Elizabeth Lawrence

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Groundbreaking for the Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion: Construction Begins!

After months of design amendments, state approvals, and contract negotiations, we were thrilled to hold a groundbreaking ceremony the morning of August 2, 2005, to celebrate the beginning of construction of the Peggy Lee Hahn Pavilion. Sharron Quisenberry, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, served as the Master of Ceremonies and the CALS Development Office helped with the planning of the ceremony.

The new building, slated for completion in March, 2006, will span 2,300 sq ft and serve as a multi-purpose special events and educational facility. Peggy Lee Hahn and Dr. T. Marshall Hahn, her husband and

Virginia Tech president emeritus, pledged a \$1 million estate gift and \$475,000 in start-up funds for the expansion of the garden. On hand to enjoy and participate in the ceremony included the Hahns and many of their family members; faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Horticulture; CALS and VT administrators, Physical Plant personnel, and others involved in the project. Dr. Hahn summed up his feelings on the matter at the groundbreaking ceremony, stating "Peggy's passion is Virginia Tech and flowers, and my passion is Peggy".

Mr. Preston Andrews of Alta Vista was the first to contribute to the Phase II garden expansion effort, with the construction of the Jane Andrews Memorial Stream Garden in 2002. The Master Plan for Phase II also includes a meadow garden, terrace garden, and home horticulture demonstrations. These projects will require additional funding and are wonderful naming opportunities. As with nearly every feature of the existing garden, students will be heavily involved in the planning and construction of future garden elements.

Architect's renderings of the Pavilion are available on our web site www.hort.vt.edu/vthg.

I'm happy to report that as this issue of the Garden Quarterly goes to "press" (i.e. my printer), the site has been graded and the foundation slab has been poured. Right on schedule! - H.S.



Mrs. Hahn is no stranger to a shovel! Pictured at the groundbreaking ceremony (from left to right): Lynn Eichhorn, Assistant Director of Physical Plant; Sharron Quisenberry, Dean of CALS; T. Marshall Hahn; Peggy Lee Hahn; Holly Scoggins, Horticulture faculty and garden director, Donald Harwood, pavilion architect; and Russell Boyd, Campus Renovations. Photo credit: Lori Greiner.

Pollen, Schmollen...

- Holly "Don't Get Me Started" Scoggins

Some visitors to the garden simply want a quick explanation of what's where, and then time to wander around, free from fact-filled faculty. Unfortunately for a recent tour member, I was within earshot. "Surely that's not goldenrod..." her voice trailed off as she backed away from the perennial border. And that's all it takes for me to launch into my *schpeil*.

Let's clear up a tragic misunderstanding: goldenrod is getting a bum rap. Every autumn, it is blamed for sneezing, watery eyes, gross hacking, and other hay fever symptoms. Though a given individual may be allergic to most any plant, including goldenrod, ragweed is the true culprit in this annual fall festival of phlegm.

Ragweed (*Ambrosia* species; how inappropriately named) is ranked the number one plant allergen in late summer and fall, according to Pollen.com. This innocuous-looking little green plant, no showy flower petals, quietly produces enormous quantities of @#S% pollen that wreaks havoc on your mucous membranes. Ragweed and goldenrod favor the same environs—sunny fence-rows, roadsides, open fields, and woodland edges—and the two are usually found in close proximity to each other. Goldenrod flowers just happen to be flamboyantly visible.

Picture a pollen grain as the vehicle of the male gamete, out cruising for a female gamete to hook up with. Each ragweed pollen grain is about 25 µm [micrometers] in diameter e.g. really tiny, easily airborne, and practically unavoidable (just think of those disappointed male gametes that end up in your nose). The much-maligned goldenrod pollen is heavier, stickier, and most importantly, insect-distributed - not airborne. This fabulous native plant supplies loads of late-season chow to visiting bees and butterflies.

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Goldenrod is the common name of the genus *Solidago*. We have no fewer than 30 species spread over the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic. A few of the more common are *S. canadensis*, *S. gigantea*, and *S. altissima*, and *S. rugosa*. How to tell the difference? Don't ask. Another interesting fact (I'm chock full of 'em) about Goldenrod is that they



The author swoons over a sea of *Solidago* 'Fireworks' at the Chicago Botanic Garden (my nose is red because it's cold).

spread not only by seeds but by underground stems called rhizomes. One plant can be surrounded by thousands of clones. An entire field of goldenrod can be genetically identical with the original plant being more than one hundred years old

For the landscape, my favorite cultivar is *Solidago rugosa* 'Fireworks'. True to its name, fall brings an explosion of thin arching stems smothered in gold (this is what caught the eye of our unwary garden visitor). Once the flowers are done, it lends an architectural presence to the winter landscape, complementing ornamental grasses and other perennials. And though goldenrod makes a great cut flower, both growers and florists have had an uphill battle trying to assure customers as to their sinus safety ("Nothing Says 'I Love You' like Goldenrod").

While we're at it, pine pollen is just as often falsely implicated. It covers your car, deck, or cat with a thick yellow coating - it is the most obvious pollen, therefore it must be blamed. But just like goldenrod, pine pollen grains are no more allergenic than snorting a gnat up your nose. Maple pollen is much less apparent but copious amounts are produced and are highly allergenic. So condemn not the most visible for your sneezing! Plant more goldenrod! And bless you.

Putting the Perennial Garden to Bed

- Stephanie Huckestein

As sad as it is, it will soon be time to put our gardens to bed for the winter. The average frost date in our area is October 15, and we usually have a good freeze by the beginning of November. To extend your garden, you can cover plants to protect them from frost, but once we have a freeze, it is time to give in and fess up that winter is on the way. As the gardening season is closing down, there is plenty to do to prepare your perennial gardens for a long winter's nap.

Many perennials that have exceeded their space, diminished in flowering, or have dead centers that can be divided in the fall. In general, spring-flowering plants are best divided in fall (and fall-flowering plants divided in spring). It is best if divisions are done in September, provided we have enough moisture (which certainly was not the case this year with zilch rainfall in September!)

When cleaning up the perennial garden for the season, it is a good idea to cut back any plants that were affected with insect/disease problems during the season. Spider mites or powdery mildew will over-winter in dead plant debris and likely result in the same problem next season. Large fallen leaves should also be removed from the bed. Some perennials will simply turn black after a freeze and must be cut back.

There are many perennials that can add winter interest to the garden. Some of my favorites are ornamental grasses, *Rudbeckia*, and *Sedum x 'Autumn Joy.'* Imagine an herbaceous border that is completely cut back for the winter – absolutely nothing there – BORING! Even if it's brown, I want SOMETHING to look at! Many perennials also have seedheads that provide valuable food for birds in the winter months. Then there are the late-risers in spring that take forever to come up. I don't cut back plants such as *Plumbago (Ceratostigma plumbaginoides)* so that I remember in spring that it is there – it sometimes doesn't come up until mid-June! I like to leave as much interest as I can. If it looks really bad, I cut it back, if not I leave it until it does.

Some plants that you should NOT cut back in fall include woody species such as *Buddleia*, *Artemesia*, and *Lavandula*. Since pruning stimulates new (not acclimated) shoots to break, these woody perennial plants fare best if cut back in early spring.

One of my favorite gardening books is *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust. An interesting tidbit I read is that plants that are marginally hardy, or do not reliably come back, are

"Imagine an herbaceous border that is completely cut back for the winter – absolutely nothing there – BORING!"

best kept unpruned for the winter. The dead foliage will help insulate the crown of the plant through winter. Any newly planted perennials which are prone to heaving (coming out of the soil) by the freeze/thaw cycle should be mulched after the first freeze. Straw, evergreen boughs, shredded leaves, or bark mulch are good for winter protection.

Winter interest in the garden is a personal preference. Some may find the brown stems unsightly, but I do enjoy them – especially when snow covers stems and seed heads - beautiful! Enjoy the rest this winter and plan for the most exciting time of year - SPRING!

Stephanie is the Head Horticulturist at the Hahn Horticulture Garden and has strong opinions about perennial maintenance (among many, many other things.)



Stephanie prunes back some ironweed (*Vernonia altissima*) that is past its prime in the Spectrum Border.



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If you'd rather not receive this publication, feel free to contact us by phone or email.

Fall Festival: The 3rd annual Fall Festival will be held Saturday, October 22, at the garden, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The Hort Club sponsors this afternoon of old-fashioned fun, with other student organizations pitching in. It's a real hoot! Activities include pumpkin painting, arts and crafts, a bake sale, moon bounce, and the ever-popular "perennial toss." Costumes are encouraged—the afternoon is topped off by a 2:00 p.m. parade of costumed characters with prizes for all who participate. Call the Garden for more information.

The Winter Seminar Series: The lineup of seminars and hands-on workshops is taking shape. The winter Garden Quarterly will include a roster and sign-up sheet. Class listings and descriptions will also be posted on our web site.

Garden Gala: June 17, 2006. Mark your calendar now—you don't want to miss this evening of fun!

Friends of the Garden: It's not too late to join our Friends of the Garden membership program (or renew)! One of the benefits of membership is the Reciprocal Gardens network. The number of Reciprocal Gardens that will accept our membership card for free admission and gift shop discounts continues to grow...don't forget to take it with you when traveling.

Outstanding destinations in this American Horticulture Society program include the Holden Arboretum, Kirkland, Ohio; Tower Hill Botanic Garden, near Boston; Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden; Fairchild Tropical Garden near Miami (take me with you); and the venerable New York Botanical Garden, nestled in the Bronx. For the most up-to-date listing of AHS Reciprocal Gardens, look on our website under "get involved" or go directly to www.ahs.org/events/reciprocal_events.htm. Help the Garden and be a part of something special!

"Youth is like spring, an over-praised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes.
Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits."

- Samuel Butler