

Volume 4, Issue 2: "So much happening we may never go back to two pages"

It's Our 20th Anniversary!

This issue of the *Garden Quarterly* completes the reflections of Horticulture faculty involved with the garden over the past two decades. This issue features Dr. Alex Niemiera's musings on one of his all-time favorite plants in the garden. Alex has been teaching the Woody Plant Materials courses for more than 15 years—utilizing the garden's specimens to torture, er, teach our students how to know their bark from their buds!



1st Annual Garden Gala a Success!

Holly Scoggins, Director

Wow! Our first annual garden party at the Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech was a tremendous success. More than 120 guests enjoyed perfect weather as they roamed the garden and perused the silent auction. The garden looked wonderful thanks to the hard work of Stephanie Huckestein, our garden interns, and our Monday evening volunteers. Add to that the floral arranging and decorating talents of David Pippin, assisted by Dawn Lerch, and the garden was absolutely eye-popping!

The bar stayed busy as festively dressed garden helpers circulated with delicious hors d'oeuvres. The jazz guitar duo "Theka and Lerch" (Giergii Theka and Mark Lerch) provided lively music to accompany the evening. Silent auction items ran the gamut from football tickets and original art to unusual plants. Special guests on hand included Peggy and Marshall Hahn and their family, Charles and Janet Steger, CALS Dean Sharron Quisenberry and her husband Larry, and other VT and community dignitaries.

double, even triple, in attendance next year!"

The evening was made possible by the enthusiasm and hard work of many people. Special "gala" thanks go out to:

- Peggy Lee Hahn, Gala Honorary Chair.
- Diane Sutphin, Gala Sponsorship Chair, whose energy and enthusiasm for the Gala persuaded many Green Industry folks to be a part of this special evening.
- Linda Fielder, Gala Silent Auction Chair.
- Dawn Lerch, Janet Steger, Diane Sutphin, and Elissa Steeves, our Gala Advisory Committee.
- David Pippin, floral designer for the Gala.
- Scott Rapier, Greenhouse manager and moral support.
- Stephanie Huckestein - tireless Head Horticulturist
- Our garden interns, student workers, departmental staff, and volunteers who made the garden look great and helped run the event.
- Our gala sponsors and silent auction item donors.

And last but not least, **OUR GALA GUESTS!**

Your show of support for this fledgling event was outstanding and made all the hard work worthwhile. Please feel free to send an email (hollysco@vt.edu) or give me a call (540-231-5783) with your feedback and suggestions!

With the generosity of our sponsors from across the state, the expenses associated with running the gala were completely covered; all ticket sales and silent auction proceeds are going straight into our operations fund.

Gold Sponsors

Mike Hildebrand, James River Nurseries, Ashland Va.

Charlie Parkerson, Lancaster Farms, Suffolk, Va.

Silver Sponsors

Aztec Rental, Blacksburg, Va.

Wayne Sawyer, Bennett's Creek Nursery, Suffolk, Va.

(continued next page)



Lynn Brammer and Paul Hlusko peruse a collection of perennials at the silent auction (photo L. Greiner).

As I chatted with guests, two things were repeated throughout the evening: 1) "This is great! The "burgs" needed a garden gala." and 2) "I can't wait to tell my friends/family about this for next year." As Dean Quisenberry exclaimed in her welcoming remarks "We expect this gala to

Garden Gala a Success! (continued from page 1)

Silver Sponsors (continued)

Claudia Swanson, Dirty Hands Garden Center, Powhatan, Va.

David O. Pippin, Inc., Richmond, Va.

Greg Miller, Willow Springs Tree Farms, Radford, Va.

Bronze Sponsors

Lin Diacont III, Lin's Landscaping Service,
Mechanicsville, Va.

Jeff Minnich, Jeff Minnich Garden Design, Arlington, Va.

Dawn and Gary Lerch, Midlothian, Va.

More photographs from the gala are displayed on our web site (www.hort.vt.edu/vthg).



Marshall and Peggy Hahn contemplate bidding on a weeping white pine, donated by Thomas Hollow Nursery. (photo: L. Greiner)



Fabrice Teulon, Debra Salvador, Jocelyn Nowak and Jerzy Nowak enjoy a chat. (photo: L. Greiner)



Gala guests enjoy the specially-decorated garden—floral displays by David Pippin. (photo: M.T. Kiernan)

Summer 2005 Garden Interns

Welcome to **Allison Cyrus** and **Jeff Burr**, our student interns for the summer. They've had to hit the ground running as they helped prepare for the Gala. Our interns are involved in nearly every aspect of running the garden—from growing plants to leading garden tours.

Allison is from Appomattox. She has experience in floral design and plans to work in the greenhouse production area of horticulture. She's active in both the Hort Club and Pi Alpha Xi Honor Society. American Plant Food Company Garden Center and Nursery of Bethesda, Md. has generously sponsored Allison's internship.

Jeff is a non-traditional student, having discovered Horticulture a bit later in life, but all appearances indicate he's enjoying every minute of it. A life-long Blacksburg resident, Jeff is the M. Evan Gardener Intern and Turf King this year.



Our Nootka Cedar – A Tough Beauty

- by Dr. Alex Niemiera

In my opinion, the Nootka Cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) is one of the most spectacular plants in the Hahn Horticulture Garden. This 25 foot tall striking beauty with graceful weeping branches stands proudly in the front center of the Garden. “She” was donated by Mr. Jim Monroe of Greenbrier Nurseries in the late 1980s. Originally, she was planted in the rear of the Garden and here starts the story of how this conifer was on death’s door step.

In about 1999, the 14 foot tall tree was in the shade of the trident maple alee. To prevent her from either being straggly or even dying from the lack of sunlight, a 48-inch mechanical tree spade moved her to its current location in the fall. By the way, a 48-inch soil ball weighs about 2,000 lbs! I chose not to stake her; certainly no wind could topple such a heavy weight. However, one very blustery January day, 75 mile per hour winds slammed the Nootka Cedar on her side. I was in shock. I felt guilty for not staking and despondent for potentially causing the death of this beauty. With the help of several beefy guys and a winch, we repositioned her and gave her a proper staking. The following spring she showed some branch dieback but she persevered. She’s as tough as she is beautiful.

“One very blustery January day, 75 mile per hour winds slammed the Nootka Cedar on her side. I was in shock.”

Nootka Cedar, also known as Alaska Cedar, Alaska Yellow Cedar, Yellow Cypress, is not a true cedar nor a true cypress. Belonging to the genus *Chamaecyparis*, it

is more correctly called a falsecypress. Or at least that used to be true. Botanists have very recently (2004) renamed this species as *Callitropsis nootkatensis*, hmmm...

This species is native to coastal regions from Alaska south to northern California and is commonly found in mountainous regions with very challenging environments. The “Nootka” part of its name is derived from the word *Nuu-chah-nulth* which refers to the name of a tribe and the location in the very early days of Vancouver Island, British Columbia and was the place where this species was first discovered.

This tree’s weeping habit allows it to shed snow loads, a trait which explains why it can be found in areas prone to avalanches. The tree can get 100 feet tall and live for more than 2000 years.

Native peoples used this species in many ways; the yellow wood for canoe paddles and ceremonial masks, the bark for clothing and weaving, and the foliage for medicinal cures for arthritis, rheumatism, and swelling (i.e., a very generic Advil). The Kwakwaka’wakw tribe used the branch tips to make a tea to treat insanity. Today the lumber of this tree is highly prized, quite expensive, and used for exterior siding, shingles, decking, and cabinetry. The hand rails on the deck around the lower pond of the Jane Andrews Memorial Stream Garden are made from Nootka Cypress.

So, I have now revealed a brief history of our graceful beauty in the Hahn Horticulture Garden. Please visit her and thank her for being as tough as she is beautiful. Now, where did I leave my cup of Nootka Cedar tea?

Dr. Alex Niemiera, Associate Professor and Woody Plants Curator, was Garden Director from 1999 to 2002. He has been teaching the Woody Plant Materials courses (among others) for more than 15 years —utilizing garden and campus specimens to teach our students the best in trees and shrubs.



Our gal “Nootka” (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) towers above the dwarf conifer bed. (photo: A.X. Niemiera)



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Head Horticulturist: Stephanie Huckestein
Woody Plant Curator: Dr. Alex Niemiera

Time to Renew! The *Friends of the Garden* membership program continues to grow with nearly 100 members last year. Consider the benefits: discounts at educational programs and plant sales; free admission to over 100 botanic gardens around the country, compliments of our reciprocal membership with the American Horticulture Society; and the good feeling that comes from helping support the Hort Garden! Return the enclosed form to the VT Development office; more forms online at www.hort.vt.edu/vthg.

On Not Having Fences

— Holly Scoggins

A trio of *Brunnera siberica* 'Jack Frost' - reduced to a duo. A rare and expensive Japanese Maple yanked from a display bed. An unusual *Alocasia* liberated from its terra-cotta planter. All taken from the Hahn Horticulture Garden over the last three months. I must say, our thief has good taste in plants.

Plant theft from botanical gardens does, unfortunately, occur—every garden has had a rash of removals at some point. One of the most widely-publicized was the theft of thirty rare and irreplaceable cycads from Fairchild Tropical Garden, Coral Gables, Florida (all cycads are considered endangered). Thieves took the plants during a mandatory evacuation as Hurricane Frances passed over southern Florida on September 9th, 2004. Even with a hefty reward offered, the Fairchild

cycad heist has yet to be solved.

We often invite visitors to take a pinch of this coleus or a clump of that sedum. What gardener doesn't love to spread the word about their favorites? Dr. Alex Niemiera was so enamored of *Acer palmatum* 'Autumn Moon', seen on a recent trip to the West Coast, that he special-ordered one from an Oregon nursery for display in the garden.

Several area nurseries have generously donated woody and herbaceous plants to the garden in the interest of educating our students and promoting new varieties. Garden volunteers will bring a clump of something that has performed well for them to add to

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our collection. I routinely pick up cool new plants during my travels. But what donor wants his or her gift to the garden removed to someone else's home?

One of the nicest things about our campus garden is that the grounds can be wandered on to, from any direction, at any time of the day (and due to the proximity of undergrad dormitories and football parking, I'm sure there have been night wanderings that I really don't want to know about). No fences equals no security. But fences can be climbed; see the Fairchild incident.

And a note to our perpetrator, just in case you read the newsletter: you'd better not let me catch you in the act. Hell hath no fury like a six-foot-tall, red-haired garden director toting a shovel.