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Summer 2015

Gardening in Partnership with Nature, Practically Speaking

by Larry Weaner

ometimes the art and science of gardening is less about what you plant and more about what you do with growth that already exists—or perhaps, better stated, might exist based on seeds lying dormant in the soil. This approach, when executed with an understanding of site conditions and knowledge of how plant communities evolve and change, can be effective across scales, whether in a small low-maintenance garden or a large, multi-acre natural area.

One of my most instructive experiences in this regard occurred on a property in northwest Connecticut. My landscape design firm, which specializes in creating and managing natural landscapes for public and private properties throughout the east coast, was hired to address invasive brambles and vines dom-



Larry Weaner has been creating native landscapes throughout the eastern United States since 1977. His award-winning firm, Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, in Glenside, Penn., has a national reputation for combining ecological restoration with the traditions of fine garden design.

inating the woodlands. Over a two-year period, this unwanted growth was eliminated, including both the mature plants and any seedlings that materialized once the parent plants were removed. Purging the seed bank of unwanted vegetation proved critical to enabling consequent emerging native growth to thrive. It was also key to our ability to guide the site through the processes of ecological succession, the phenomenon whereby

vegetation on a site changes from fastgrowing short-lived species to slower developing but longer-lived species.

In removing the unwanted brambles and vines, we had taken the herbaceous ground layer in this Connecticut woodland back to an early successional state conducive to the emergence of fast-growing, short-lived species, what are sometimes called pioneers. Predictably, following the removal of unwanted growth, a pioneer species emerged, in this case,



Sweeping drifts of white snakeroot (Eurybia divaricata) emerged in this Connecticut woodland following removal of invasive brambles and vines. The snakeroot, a short-lived, early succession native species, was filling an ecological niche in time. (Photo: L. Weaner)

white snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*, formerly Eupatorium rugosum), a common woodland wildflower found throughout eastern and central North America. Given the extent of the disturbed conditions we had created in removing brambles and vines, the snakeroot burst forth in large, pure stands—a stunning sea of pure white flowers underneath the canopy of existing oaks, maples, and other hardwoods. It was a breathtaking scene in late summer and early fall.

Pioneer species that colonize quickly following a disturbance tend to be non-competitive, short-lived players. This was certainly the case with white snakeroot. Ecologically speaking, removal of the vines and brambles had constituted a disturbance, and white snakeroot was now doing its job, filling a short-term ecological niche in time.

While this sea of white snakeroot was stunning, it represented only a moment in time. Within two years, the snakeroot was largely displaced by slower-growing but longer-lived species whose seeds had (continued on page 4)

Horticulture Icon: Dr. Michael J. Dirr Visits Connecticut

See story on page 5

Michael J. Dirr, PhD. gives member Ellen Bender an ID on H. serrata she brought to VanWilgen's.







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Send Membership Information & Direct General Questions To: Bonnie Penders Office Administrator 2433 Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067

Membership Dues:

1	
Individual	\$49
Family	\$69
Senior Individual (65+)	\$44
Senior Family (65+)	\$64
\$30 under 30 years	\$30
Student (full time with valid ID)	FREE
Horticultural Business Member	\$70
Organizations	\$80

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Horticultural Happenings & Announcements

Happenings are listed on a space-available basis. To see a more extensive Happenings listing for Sept., please go to the CHS website: www.cthort.org and click on Programs & Events. To submit events, email the listing to news@cthort.org. Deadline for the September issue is August 10.

Wednesday, August 5 The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Annual Plant Science Day. 9:30 am-4:00 pm Lockwood Farm, 890 Evergreen Avenue, Hamden. Plant Science Day usually attracts about 800 to 1,000 attendees and gives the public an opportunity to discuss current research topics with scientists, explore the research farm and listen to informative talks. Their goals are to promote agriculture and forestry, protect the environment, and ensure safe foods. This year will be their 105th Plant Science Day. Station scientists will present short talks on internal decay in trees and its role in the carbon cycle, microbiology in climate models, and tracking ticks and tick-associated diseases in Connecticut. For more information go to WWW. CT.GOV/CAES.

Saturday, August 8 Early Bird Sale at Natureworks, Northford, CT 7-9 am Coffee and a free \$5 gift card, towards any purchase of \$20 or more, for those who shop before 9 am. Elderberry Syrup with Terri Cusson 9:30-10:30 am Elderberry shrubs (Sambucus canadensis) are a great native plant with many uses. Join us as we welcome Terri Cusson a Master Gardener, and current Co-President of the CT Herb Association. In this handson workshop she will guide us through the process of making Elderberry syrup. Participants will also take home a jar of infused honey. Please call to pre-register \$25 fee. 203-484-2748

Wednesday, August 12 Coastal Maine Botanical Garden: Fergus Garrett: Great Dixter House and Garden - A Historic Paradise in the 21st Century. 2pm – 5 pm, Education Center. Fergus Garrett will talk about the past, present and future of Great Dixter House and Garden in Northiam, East Sussex, England. He will describe Nathaniel and Daisy Lloyd's family life at Great Dixter at the beginning of the 20th century, and their son Christopher Lloyd's extraordinary plantsmanship. Lloyd created the world-famous Great Dixter gardens - in Fergus's stewardship since 1992 as Headgardener. Fergus will show the tradition, continuum and the constant change of Great Dixter Gardens, keeping Christopher Lloyd's credo of never standing still, alive. Free for Member Adult. \$25.00 for Non-Member Adult. Registration required.

Saturday, August 22 Garden Summer School at Natureworks, Northford, CT 9:30-10:30 am This "talk" will be conducted as a walk while we wander through the teaching gardens at Natureworks with owner Nancy DuBrule-Clemente. Join us for a conversational, but in-depth exploration of Nancy's notes on what's happening in the gardens. Top Ten Things to make with a Tomato 11:30-12:30 Join the Natureworkers and Nancy for an afternoon of tomato tasting! That's right, we want you to bring in your favorite tomato creations. Whether you have the perfect sauce recipe to share, or a fresh bowl of gazpacho, we want you to come on by. Don't miss this delicious event! Please call to pre-register, free. 203-484-2748

Directions to the Connecticut Horticultural Society Office & Library

From the south: take I-91 North to Exit 23 West Street, Rocky Hill. Take a right at the end of the exit. At the fourth traffic light, take a left onto Route 99 (Main Street). The office is located at 2433 Main Street in the Prestige Office building, a short distance on your left.

From the north: take I-91 South, take Exit 23. At the end of the ramp, go left onto West Street. Follow the previous directions.

From I-84: take Route 9 to Exit 20 and I-91 North. Follow the directions above.

Save the date: Sept. 17, 2015 5:30-8:30: Evergreen Heaven: The Artist and The Expert with CHS



Garden of Chrissie D'Esopo: photo credit: Deanne Fortnam

ifted artist, gardener extraordinaire Chrissie D'Esopo will host Tom Cox, past president, American Conifer Society, to her garden for an exclusive members only fundraiser for CHS.

Mr. Cox is a frequent lecturer on the subject of conifers and other woody plants and is a member of the prestigious International Dendrology Society as well as Botanic Gardens Conservation International.

In 1990, when he and wife Evelyn purchased an undeveloped 13-acre parcel in Canton, Georgia, the Cox Arboretum and Gardens was started. Over the ensuing 24 years, this has evolved into one of the premiere collections of woody

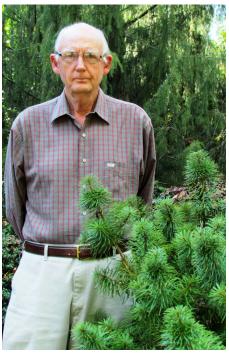
Save the Date: February 6, 2016 CHS Symposium

- Ken Druse
- Nancy DuBrule
- Dan Furman

All day event: Speakers workshop, silent auction and lots of vendors. Mark Twain House and Museum, Hartford, CT. taxa in the Southeastern U.S. In 2002 and again in 2014, the arboretum was the host site for the American Conifer Society's national meeting and is now a frequent stop for gardening enthusiasts as well as those involved in serious plant study. He is a pioneer in the evaluation of conifers for adaptability in the Southeast and is recognized as one of the leading authorities on growing conifers in the region. The arboretum received full accreditation in 2012 and is now a site for the preservation of rare and endangered plants from around the world.

Many of us are familiar with the extraordinary and colorfully flamboyant Avon garden of Chrissie D'Esopo. For years she was a gracious fundraiser for charitable causes raising over \$175,000. Inspired by garden visits in the Pacific northwest, CD has developed a growing interest in conifers. The 3 acres behind her house is punctuated with spirals and weepers and feathery shapes of the evergreen kind. Not that this is new, but true to form Chrissie takes it to a whole other level. "When designing the hill garden, I try to treat it as if it were a painting," she says. "I look out there at the hill and I try to get a good mix of the yellows, greens, blues, deep greens and reds." "I try to have a contrast of color and texture. It's the exact same thing I do with my painting." Come see! Our Thursday Sept. 17

evening event includes time to wander the D'Esopo landscape; enjoy a talk by Tom Cox then dine with The Artist and The Expert. Members only: \$55 (dinner and beverages included).



Tom Cox

CHS Program Meeting: Sept. 10, 2015 2nd Thurs. of Sept.

GMOS: FACT and FICTION,

CHS vice-president Barry Avery leads a discussion to help us make an educated decision about where to stand on the matter.

Our meetings are open to members and non-members alike, with a \$10 donation requested from non-members. We look forward to seeing you!

Date: Thursday, Sept. 10, 2015

Time: 7:30 p.m. (6:45 p.m. for socializing, browsing CHS library books, raffle items and travel fliers, and asking plant questions)

Location: Emanuel Synagogue, 160 Mohegan Dr., West Hartford, Conn.

Natives, from page 1

also germinated following our bramble and vine removal. These species included a number of native but rather aggressive goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) along with scattered Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides), white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*), and wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*). What happened?

Natural process—succession—was marching on. The components of a native plant community were evolving. But where was this community headed?

The answer lay not in the broad sweeps of white snakeroot, a dominant player early on following our disturbance actions, but in the ground layer underneath, where small seedlings of slower growing, more competitive plants were preparing to form the next wave. And in our Connecticut woodland, the emerging goldenrod stood poised to play a major role.

Succession – was marching on. The components of a native plant community were evolving. But where was this community headed?

Was this a good thing or a bad thing? And if a bad thing what could be done about it? Some goldenrod species are well-behaved plants with beautiful flowers welcome in any garden or wild landscape. But some can be coarse and aggressive, and among these were species with the potential to dominate the herbaceous layer in the Connecticut woodland. My preference would have been to skip over this successional stage and move on to a more diverse, aesthetically refined flora that ordinarily comes later in ecological succession. I was not prepared, however, to kill the goldenrod over such large expanses in the hopes that the desired plants would in fact take over. There was no guarantee this would occur, or that the massive kill-off would not create another disturbance inviting the return of opportunistic invasive vines and brambles. Regardless, treating all that goldenrod would have required a prohibitive amount of work and risked

harming emerging non-target vegetation.

Alternatively, what would have happened if I did nothing? The plants I desired, the wild geranium and others, might have emerged eventually, favored by the reduced sunlight penetrating to the woodland floor as the trees grew larger, but this would likely take many years. Allowing that process to play out, letting the goldenrod run free in the meantime, was definitely an option as a somewhat monotonous carpet of goldenrod was much better

than the weedy mess we started with. But we wanted to aim higher.

The plan we finally adopted abandoned an all-or-nothing scheme in favor

of an incremental, mixed strategy developed with an eye toward our final goal of a diverse native woodland. This involved locating the desired, albeit small, scattered, geranium-aster-fern

patches and removing the goldenrod growing within and adjacent to these patches. We also periodically cut any pure or monotypic goldenrod stands in between the patches of desired growth.

These strategic interventions achieved three sought-after results. First, removing the goldenrod from amidst desirable growth reduced the goldenrod's ability to compete with our preferred vegetation, allowing these patches to form dense, goldenrod- and weed-suppressive cover; reducing the goldenrod's competitiveness also allowed the wild geranium and other desired plants to produce more seed. Secondly, removing goldenrod encircling any geranium-aster-fern patches enhanced the outward expansion of these patches, through both spreading roots and top growth and the favoring of emerging seedlings. As they were colonized by the geranium, asters, and ferns, these managed expansion zones were further extended. The third treat-



Several years later, the white snakeroot was largely gone from the woodland understory, replaced by longer-lived, slower-growing species, like this Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides). A series of simple management procedures guided the understory through this process such that no vegetation was ever planted.

ment – periodically mowing or string trimming any pure goldenrod stands in between patches of desirable growth – further depleted the strength of existing goldenrod by starving the roots. Cuttings were timed to prevent the goldenrod from setting any seed, further reducing its competitive ability at one of the most energy intensive points in its life cycle.

Over time, as the remaining goldenrod masses weakened and began to shrink due to the managed expansion of the geranium-aster-fern matrix, it was time to attack and remove the goldenrod altogether, thus completing the conversion process. Incidentally, while our plan focused on the herbaceous understory, any seedlings from native woody growth in the canopy and subcanopy benefited from the phased reduction in goldenrod, thereby helping to ensure the future of these vegetative layers in the woodland.

During this multi-year, managed conversion from weeds to a diverse woodland understory, we planted nothing; nature did all that. Yet our influence on the landscape was dramatic despite relatively minimal effort and expense. Gardening in partnership with nature is a phrase with which I have long been familiar. Yet being a skeptical sort, I never paid much attention to this saying because in practical terms I never really understood what it meant. Due to experiences like this, now I think I do.

Hydrangea Day & Dr. Dirr Draw Gardeners to VanWilgens

loudy skies threatened to dampen the guest crowd at Van Wilgens Garden Center in North Branford, CT, a few July Saturdays ago. It did not matter to the nearly 300 people who were treated to breakfast, raffles and an engaging talk plus booksigning as part of the Hydrangea Day celebration. It was clear that when famous plantsman, Michael J. Dirr, PhD. comes to talk, gardeners come to listen. More than a dozen CHS-ers who saw the post on our website were counted in the throng.

Famously known for his tome Dirr's Encyclopedia of Trees and Woody Plants, Dr. Dirr is also the 'father' of the best selling Endless Summer hydrangea. Since it was Hydrangea Day at VanWilgens, Dirr told the story of its development. In over eight years of hybridizing he, Jeff Beasley and Mark Griffith (partners in PII: Plant Introductions, Inc.) selected plants for disease resistance, reliability, long-lasting, repeat blooms on new or old wood. Once the genetics were perfected, it was Dirr who came up with the name on a long airplane ride and jotted it down - endless summer - for later use. It befits the product that according to

DIRR on HYDRANGEA

- Your H. does not bloom?: over fertilized with nitrogen?; too little sun?; pruned the old growth flower buds?; cold killed flower buds? New cultivars like Endless Summer are "remontant" meaning they bloom on new and old wood eliminating cold issue.
- Color: Aluminum is key. The pH of the soil (medium) either solubilizes Al ions or creates insoluble precipitates (high pH) that cannot be absorbed. Plants grown in bark, regardless of pH (low), do not turn blue because there is no (minimal) Al ions in the substrate. Majority will be pink.
- Pruning; less is more. Cut off old flowers. Prune oldest wood for air circulation. Prune macrophylla only to shape.
- In this climate make sure to winter mulch with something like pine straw.



Members Gary Johnson, Nancy B, & Nancy Johnson with Bailey Director of Marketing Ryan McEnaney (Photo: E. Bender)

Dirr has pushed hydrangea serratas from the nursery benches while creating a new standard for what we look for in every hydrangea we buy. During his talk the doctor, using actual shrubs, distinguished hydrangeaceae macrophylla: big leaf or mopheads; aborescens: smooth leaf or wild - (best known by 'Annabelle'); quercifolia: oakleaf; paniculata: having conical shaped flower panicles on new wood. A new favorite for MJD, of course comes from the ES collection: Bloom Struck. It features red-purple stems, dark green almost waxy leaves with red petioles and red veins, which give great contrast to other garden shrubs, perennials and annuals. An expert panel included pros from Van Wilgens and Bailey Nurseries. A 100+ year old Minnesota grower Bailey, owns PII as of January 2015. After getting their most challenging questions like - why doesn't my hydrangea bloom – answered, attendees wondered aloud what next the breeders would be up to. Assuring us he was sworn to secrecy, Dirr said he won't be working with 'stinkers' - the plants that won't make the cut for any one of many problems the old hydrangeas have. H. Nigra, a personal favorite of this writer might only contribute its black stems to the breeders gene pool...because according to Dirr it lurks with the stinkers.

The forum of questions ended with raffles for a dozen baskets of Bloom Struck hydrangea with fertilizer, pruners and the starter soil. Winners included four CHS members (see Ellen B at right).



Ellen Bender with winning hydrangea basket



Nancy Brennick with Michael J. Dirr, PhD. (Photo: E. Bender)

It was a great day of learning and luck. Be sure and read our Horticultural Happenings on the web and we'll see you next time out and about with CHS-ers.

—Nancy Brennick

FALL Day Trips & Fabulous Holiday Adventure

- ♦ Wednesday, September 2, 2015 we're off to the Pioneer Valley –
- Amelia's Garden
- Tavern Restaurant
- Stanley Park
- Mums at Meadow View Farms

At Stanley Park view the five-acre Arboretumand all it has to offer: the Asian Garden, All-America Rose Garden, Herb Garden, Woodland Wildflower Garden and the Wildlife Sanctuary. We will have a PRIVATE, BEHIND-THE-SCENES greenhouse and garden tour with a head gardener. Amelia's Garden is a 1.3 acre memorial park where we get another personal tour this day. Lunch is at The Tavern Restaurant. Located in a former post office built in 1910, the interior 20 foot ceilings along with arched windows add to the ambience of this century old building now eatery. On the way home we stop at Meadow View Farms. This is THE place to buy chrysanthemums. Bring your plant markers and we'll load up the bus! Member: \$82. Nonmember: \$92. See web for more detail.





Innisfree Garden

♦ Wednesday, October 14, 2015 Millbrook NY: Innisfree Garden

Recognized as one of the "world's ten best gardens," and a powerful icon of mid-twentieth century design. Innisfree merges the essence of Modernist ideas with traditional Chinese and Japanese garden design principles in a form that evolved through subtle handling of the



Beacon Hill

landscape and slow manipulation of its ecology. The result is a sublime composition of rock, water, wood, and sky achieved with remarkable economy and grace. We'll enjoy a private, guided tour of this distinctive American stroll garden. Lunch is at Millbrook Café a family owned and operated culinary destination. Millbrook Vineyards and Winery will give us an informative guided tour of the winery where we'll receive an insider's view of the winemaking process. Each tour concludes with a wine tasting of five Millbrook wines as well as a Tuscan olive oil sampling with wine crackers. All guests will receive a complimentary souvenir glass as a thank you for our visit. Members \$110. Non-members \$115. See more details- lunch selection and timing: cthort.org.

♦ Monday, December 7, 2015 House Tour of Beacon Hill

The gas lamp posts that line the streets are decked with garlands of greenery and

red bows. Historic homes and shop doors are adorned with wreaths, while window boxes are brim full of fragrant evergreens. Step into three privately owned homes decorated to express each owner's personal style and holiday traditions. The residents will be there to greet you and share the history of each home.

Home of one of the largest decorated trees in the city of Boston (a giant balsam fir from Halifax), the Prudential Center will be our lunch stop to eat (on own) and explore some of the unique shops in time for the Holidays. Our last stop is Oakwood Farm Christmas Barn, in Spencer, MA: a large display features vintage ornaments, as well as plenty of unique farm-made wreaths and centerpieces for sale.

We'll finish our day with our annual CHS Christmas Party. Cheers!

PLEASE NOTE: This daytrip will require a good amount of walking through the Beacon Hill neighborhood. Member \$99. Non-members \$109. See timing and more detail: cthort.org

Congratulations to member and past CHS secretary, Cheryl Fox. For "outstanding service at the club level" Cheryl was awarded the America Hemerocallis Society Region 4 Service Award. Cheryl who now serves as CDS secretary, is well known for her outstanding daylilies. Well done, Cheryl.

Mohonk Mountain Christmas!

Join us Friday through Sunday, December 11th-13th, for this memorable weekend adventure: Overnight at the spectacular Mohonk Mountain House; a walk thru Eleanor Roosevelt's Val-Kill Mansion and Holiday Garden Center Shopping.

- **Day 1:** Time to depart on our annual holiday getaway!
- On the way to our resort getaway, a guided tour in Hyde Park, NY: *Eleanor Roosevelt's Val-Kill Mansion* in all of its holiday splendor. This is the only National Historic site dedicated to a first lady. As Eleanor has said "The greatest thing I have learned is how good it is to come home again." This simple statement expresses her love for the modest house she called Val-Kill. Come and be part of the entire Roosevelt Experience at Val-Kill.
- We arrive at the Mohonk Mountain House in time for Tea. The resort is all decked out for the holidays! A Victorian Castle on Lake Mohonk in New Paltz, NY., this resort has been voted #1 resort spa in Conde Nast Traveler. After our wonderful Dinner at the resort enjoy some of the included activities...holiday concert, open skating or just stroll the surroundings.



Mohonk Mountain

- Day 2: Today is your day to enjoy the resort! Start off with the included breakfast. Then try to choose from many included activities to partake in, for example: Bird Walk, Visit the Barn Museum, Holiday Craft Workshop, Nature Hike, Victorian Trim-A-Tree, Holiday Cookie Decorating demonstration, skating and so much more! Try the spa (additional) or just relax. Don't forget to leave time (and room) for the afternoon Tea and Cookies before another great included dinner.
- Evening entertainment tonight could include movies or jazz music and dancing.
- Day 3: After our included breakfast, enjoy some of the last few hours at the resort before we begin to head for home. Depart the resort for our Annual Tradition of stopping at a Garden Center for those last minute holiday swags, poinsettia and more. We always have our 'Motorcoach Holiday Party!' and CHS gift for all.

Three Ways to Renew Your Membership

- Pay via secure internet link directly through our Intuit QuickBooks account. All members for whom we have email addresses will receive an electronic notice from our treasurer, Ken Stubenrauch, which invites you to easily pay via EFT (electronic funds transfer from your bank account to the CHS bank account) or credit card. When you choose this option, we save time and money by automatically processing payments and forms that have been done previously by hand.
- Pay at the September meeting with cash, check or credit card. We will have our own credit card processor available swiper for this preference.
- Pay by mail using a check and your renewal form. See cthort.org.

Our goal is to have our renewals complete by the end of September and update all membership preferences by the end of October.

BECOME A SUSTAINING Member

Your donation above basic dues makes our educational offerings even stronger.

• Dream Designer \$500

• Plant Expert \$250

• Garden Builder \$125

See our website for more details.



CHS Calendar at a Glance

Aug. 10 – Deadline September newsletter/web submissions

Sept. 8 – Deadline October newsletter/web submissions

Sept. 10 – Program Meeting

*Changed to 2nd Thurs.: GMOs:
Facts and Fiction

Sept. 17 – Evergreen Heaven: Fundraiser in Avon

Sept. 25 – Plant Sale & Auction, TAC Center, Vernon

The CHS Newsletter is printed on recycled paper with soya ink.

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meeting moments

• Artist Robert Adzema surprised us with his amazing abstract sundials. His installations all over the world are mathematically and geometrically correct with each being calibrated for exact location. We will never look at sundials the same!



(left) Tom Christopher, Program Chair. with June speaker Artist Robert Adzema, Jane Harris (right)

• No June CHS meeting is complete without ice cream. This year WHOLE FOODS, Bishops Corner donated all the ice cream for the social. We are grateful for their generosity. *We are most thankful to Fran Schoell for her dutiful hospitality in all her years of chairing this event. Thanks Franny!

Dated Material * Please Rush



Ben Nichols signs a 'thank you' poster for Whole Foods' ice cream donation.