

the GAZETTE

BIRCHWOOD GARDEN CLUB

www.birchwoodgardenclub.org

CHARTERED 1931

November Topic: Weed Control

Submitted by Tamara Hall

The Birchwood Garden Club will hold its November 2016 meeting on Wednesday, November 2 at 7:00 p.m. in the Whatcom Museum of History and Art. Ladd Smith from In Harmony will be presenting a new strategy for weed control.

Do you feel frustrated by what seems to be an endless weeding chore? Do you have weed buckets staged around your yard for a continuous weeding operation? Do you weed your garden in sections? Do you find that as you complete the last section you must start the cycle all over again?

If the answer is yes to any of the above, maybe it is time to explore a different approach. Ladd Smith from In Harmony will be presenting a new strategy for weed control that will make the task of weeding much easier.

This strategy might just be the ticket to reducing the endless weeding cycle and have more time for garden enjoyment. Alas, I cannot divulge any more details...you have to come with an open mind and expect a liberating experience.

Pansies for Winter Color

October is absolutely a great time to plant pansies. Despite their name, pansies are some of the toughest annual, cool-season color plants and should be planted in everyone's garden and landscape.

There is a huge range of colors and styles. Flowers with dark blotches are thought of as more traditional pansies, but for pure



color, there are selections called clear that do not have the blotch. A nice feature of the clear-colored flowers is that the throat of each has a small yellow eye.

When massed together, as pansies were meant to be planted, they create an impressive, colorful landscape carpet. Look for plants with

strong stems that will hold the flowers above the foliage, allowing the petals to flutter in the slightest breeze.

As with all annual color, bed preparation is the key to landscape success. Always work a little compost into the soil before planting, and be sure to allow for plenty of drainage moisture. Feed with a water-soluble fertilizer, even during the winter months.

Pansies may be the perfect winter-flowering annual, as the plants can freeze solid and thaw with little damage. In response to the cold temperature, the leaves will be tinged purple. Of course, the flowers will be nipped back, but once it gets a little warmer, the flowering will rev up again.

Pansies give nonstop color to get you through the winter months. Buying pansies now will give you the best selection. In a month, your pansies will be pansying and ready for the months of the real cool weather.

Did You Know?

Washington officially designated the coast rhododendron (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) as the state flower in 1959, though it was actually selected as the state flower in 1892 by the women of Washington for the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Archibald Menzies first found this shrub in 1792 when he and George Vancouver landed near present day Port Discovery.



Also called Pacific rhododendron, the coast rhododendron is a broadleaf evergreen rhododendron species native to western North America.

The flowers of coast rhododendron are pink to rose-purple, and are rarely white, 1-2 inches long with 5 wavy-margined petals united to form a broadly bell-shaped corolla. Flower clusters are terminal and may contain 20 or more blooms. Coast rhododendron flowers bloom May-June.

Coast rhododendron is less popular for decorative landscaping than many other rhododendron species that are easier to grow and have a more pleasing appearance. Coast rhododendron shrubs can be scraggly and the flowers are often much less impressive than those of its relatives.

Welcome New Members

We are pleased to introduce two new members who joined Birchwood Garden Club this month.

Kathy Reed and Alta Toler

WELCOME

Snacks

This month's meeting snacks will be provided by Tina Swanson and Lillian Nelson

Thank You

Easy Landscaping Tips

As we move into the cooler days of fall, it is a good time to stroll through the garden and take notes of what worked and what didn't. Make those design plans now for that great garden next spring. Following are some easy principles for landscape planning.

First, relax. It is your garden. Do what looks pleasing and functional to you. There is a tremendous amount of information on landscape design in books, on the internet—but, ultimately you are the judge of what works for you. Use the resources only to guide you in your decisions.

Put plants with opposite texture, shape, and form next to each other. Contrasting plants tend to “show off” each other. One classic example, is combining the upright, spiky forms of ornamentals grasses with a plant like ‘Autumn Joy’ sedum.

Remember massing of the same plant is more effective than a single species here another species there, unless you are using one plant as a specimen or focal point. Masses or groups consisting of odd numbers are more interesting than even numbers.

Group like colors of the same species together for a bolder effect than mixing a lot of different colors together—that is not to say you can't mix up colors if that is what you prefer! If you like that look, which is more the ‘cottage garden’ look try to edge the planting with the same plant or hardscape to tie it all together and give some continuity. For example, a low edging of boxwood would work great.

Pay attention to which plants retain good foliage throughout the season, and use them. This will build an interesting framework of foliage, so you won't notice so much the plants that look ratty and scraggly after they bloom.

Plan for a focal point each month. Make it fun! Your focal points can be striking in color or outrageous in shape and form. Focal points should be in places of high visibility, catch and hold the eye. Examples would be by the front door, at the entrance to the driveway. An example of an easy focal point for the fall would be a large pumpkin by the front door planted with pansies or other blooming small plants and an ornamental grass or interesting branches to give it some height.

Plant of the Month: *Symphoricarpos*

Spend any time in the woods in Western Washington and you will probably encounter our native Snowberry, *Symphoricarpos albus*. This deciduous shrub is also becoming a familiar sight in many urban parks, natural areas, and home landscapes, as it is an easy-going, carefree native shrub.



In spring, Snowberry is fairly unassuming with its small, round-to-oval green leaves and sometimes rather twiggy stature. But it catches more attention when it flowers: Though the blossoms are tiny (less than a half-inch) pinkish-white tubes, they are abundant enough during their long bloom period of late spring to late summer to catch the eye of passers-by and hummingbirds alike.

But it is in autumn when Snowberry's namesake is realized. The stems are covered with stark white berries that persist after leaf drop and make for an especially interesting and attractive shrub in the

winter garden. A cultivar, Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*), has the same growth pattern as the *albus*, but produces large pink berries.

Birds are attracted to the berries, but it is also true that the Snowberry's fruit is not their first favorite choice -- so that means the shrub can be an attractive feature in the garden through the winter and also then available food for birds in the leaner times of late winter. Especially when in leaf, Snowberry is a protected hiding place for small birds, as they're able to maneuver through the branches in spaces too small for predators.

Snowberry can grow in sun or part shade, in moist, dry, even poor soils and is good for USDA hardiness zones 2-7. Planted on a slope, it can help prevent erosion, spreading by thick underground rhizomes. It is easy to transplant with its fibrous, shallow root system. Snowberry grows from 3-6 feet tall and about 3 feet wide. It can spread and colonize an area to form a dense thicket, but is easily controlled through pruning.

Snowberry makes an attractive garden plant that provides great winter interest in the landscape with the advantages of being low-maintenance and bird friendly. Be aware that there is a minor toxicity to humans associated with *Symphoricarpos* berries—not at all considered dangerous or deadly, but can cause degrees of stomach upset, so not for snacking by humans.

Plant Hardiness Zones

Knowing your garden's hardiness zone will help you when choosing the right plants that are appropriate for your garden. Reputable nurseries in our area make the task easier by stocking plants suitable for our zone.

Many plant tags list a range, such as Zone 5 to 7. In general, the lower number tells you a plant's tolerance to low temperatures without protection. In warm climates, the upper number indicates a plant's ability to endure the stress of drought or extreme heat.

Keep in mind that your garden is likely to have pockets where the temperatures are warmer or cooler than the general zone for your area. A south-facing wall might elevate temperatures; an exposed spot at the base of a slope might capture cool air and lower the temperature.

The USDA has developed a plant hardiness zone scale used as the standard across the nation. Their website includes a map of hardiness zones and a link through which you can find the plant zone for your specific area. www.planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/



Vice President Ann Holland substituted tonight for President Judy Boxx and welcomed 31 members to the meeting. Minutes of the September meeting were approved.

Kathy Sparks gave the Treasurer's report.

The BGC has gained 11 new members since June of this year.

We've received two thank you letters for donations made this past month to both the Bellingham Food Bank and to the Public Library.

Old Business:

Judy Boxx, Ann Holland and Dianne Gerhard met with the library director to discuss difficulties watering the library gardens. The library and Parks and Recreation Department are looking into ways to solve the issues. The Parks and Recreation department has discovered that the soaker hoses are plugged or cracked and need to be replaced. Since they will be working to replace them this month, the fall cleanup of the gardens is going to be scheduled for some time in November.

Membership dues are due now and being accepted by either Kathy Sparks or Judy Lewis.

Elisabeth Bays has agreed to review this past years treasury bookkeeping for the Birchwood Garden Club.

Tamara Hall invited everyone to come and help themselves to some Asian pears in her yard.

The speaker for tonight's meeting was Dianne Gaine Van Noort from Van Noort Bulbs, Ltd. who spoke about spring bulbs.

Thank you to Dianne Gerhard and Ann Holland for our snacks tonight and to Sheri and Russ Lambert for our coffee.

The Birchwood Garden Club (BGC) is open to everyone in Whatcom and Skagit Counties who supports the objectives of the organization. BGC meets the first Wednesday of each month from September thru May. Annual membership is \$10 for an individual, \$15 for a family, due in September. Membership applications are available from the website: www.birchwoodgardenclub.org.

The Birchwood Garden Club Gazette is published monthly, September thru May, by the BGC. Articles, inquiries, letters to the editor, or other comments should be directed to the Editors, Ken and Stephanie Salzman, at the above address or via e-mail to: sasalzman@comcast.net

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