

Leaflet

A MASSACHUSETTS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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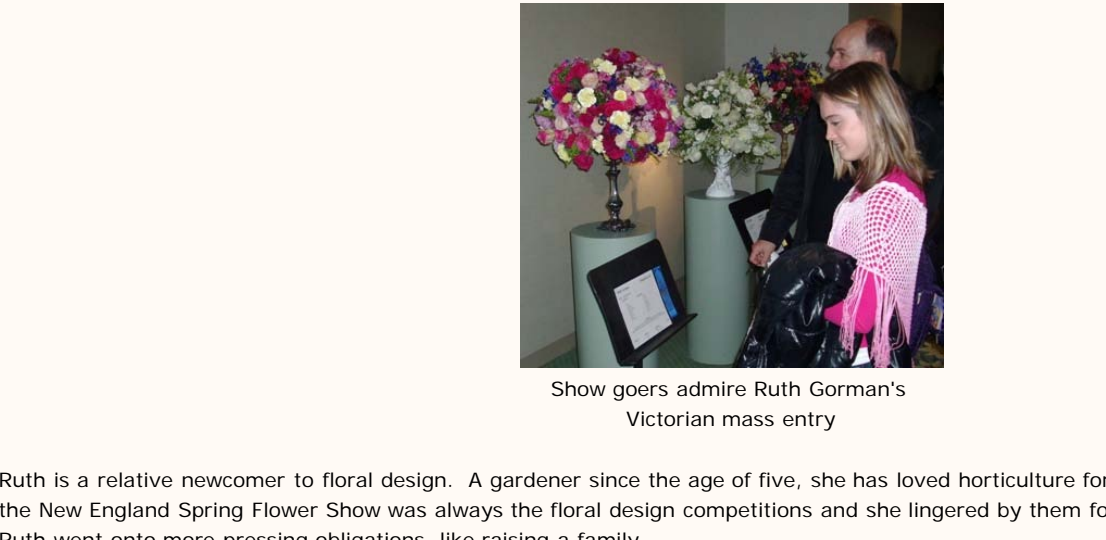
Pictures at an Exhibition: The 2010 Boston Flower & Garden Show

It was a perfect week for a flower show in New England: cold and raw with intermittent mornsoons. Inside the Seaport World Trade Center, though, it was shirtsleeve weather with the smell of lilacs and orchids in the air.

The 2010 Boston Flower & Garden Show was a wonderful mix of sights and scents. You could drop in to hear world-class experts on horticultural subjects or stop for hand-thrown pots. You could sit on a bench and watch a display of exotic birds or ask an enthusiast about the best way to root a bromeliad.

There were times (mornings and early afternoons) when the press of humanity was so great it could take several minutes to get close to a display. In the evenings, though, the crowds thinned to very manageable numbers (a hint for 2011).

If you didn't go, you missed a terrific show. If you did go, here are a few souvenir photos showing both the quiet times and the pandemonium.

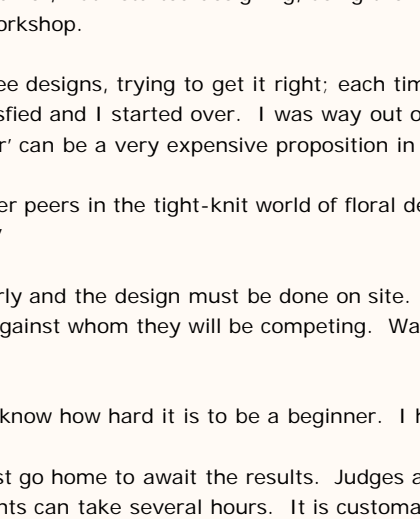


The Path to a Blue Ribbon

Anyone who thinks that the world of floral design is closed to newcomers - or believes that unless you start young, you'll never succeed - needs to talk to Ruth Gorman.

If you were at the Boston Flower & Garden Show last week and stopped in to see the stunning floral design competition in the Ballroom, one grouping stood out for its universal appeal: four displays of elegant Victorian-era designs. All four were glorious re-creations of an era in which color and bloom choice had meanings lost on most modern viewers.

One display, though, bore the prized, blue, first-place ribbon, and it belonged to Ms. Gorman.



Show goers admire Ruth Gorman's Victorian mass entry

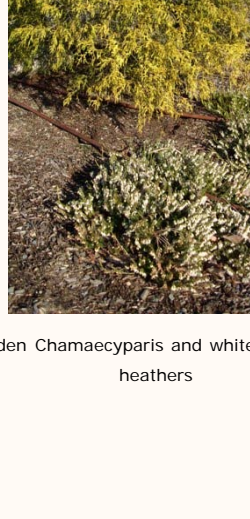
Ruth is a relative newcomer to floral design. A gardener since the age of five, she has loved horticulture for decades. But her favorite part of the New England Spring Flower Show was always the floral design competitions and she lingered by them for hours. But life intervened and Ruth went onto more pressing obligations, like raising a family.

Then, beginning four years ago, a series of floral designers did presentations at the Hopkinton Garden Club where Ruth is a member. Those old feelings stirred.

"My sister is an artist," Ruth explains. "She has always spoken of how her art allowed her to both express herself in a way she felt comfortable, as well as to put herself out there where the public could critique her."

Ruth pondered her options. And then she enrolled in the Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts' Flower Show School. Two years later, she has completed the four required courses and is just a few steps away from becoming an accredited flower show judge.

"In taking Flower Show School I realized how little I knew," Ruth says. "I don't consider myself an especially creative person. But I try." She promptly entered four shows.



Ruth Gorman

Ruth won her first blue ribbon last summer in the "table setting for two" class of a standard flower show held at Elm Bank. That emboldened her to sign up for a place in Design Division 1. To better understand Victorian design, she took a one-day DCFM workshop on the subject conducted by Dolores Ahearn, an acknowledged master and enthusiast of that design type.

Ruth's design started with a quest for the perfect container. She had nothing suitable at home but, ten trips to antiques stores later, she held a pair of silver candlesticks manufactured in New Bedford in 1880. "Dolores stressed that without the right container, there could never be a true Victorian creation," Ruth says.

With the right container, Ruth started designing, using the knowledge gained in Flower Show School and the Victorian design workshop.

"I put together three designs, trying to get it right: each time using fresh floral material," she says. "Each time, I was dissatisfied and I started over. I was way out of my comfort zone." It should be noted that a Victorian design uses a lot of flowers. "Starting over" can be a very expensive proposition in the floral design world.

Ruth drew on advice from friends and, especially, her peers in the tight-knit world of floral design. "They were immensely supportive," Ruth recalls. "They kept telling me to trust my instincts."

At a standard flower show, exhibitors start work early and the design must be done on site. At this show, start time was 5:30 a.m. and, until everyone arrives to start work, they have no idea against whom they will be competing. Was Ruth nervous when she saw who was working on the other pedestals?

"No," she says. "This is an embracing group. They know how hard it is to be a beginner. I had nothing but encouragement."

Exhibitors must be finished by 8:30 after which most go home to await the results. Judges are sequestered until after the last designer has left and judging decisions and the writing up of comments can take several hours. It is customary for the chairman of the show to call the winners in each class.

"I was shocked and thrilled when I got the call," Ruth recalls. "I still can't quite believe what happened."

But Ruth is already gearing up for her next challenges. She has signed up for the Judges' Council show and the Barnstable County Fair. And, maybe, the Newport Flower Show.

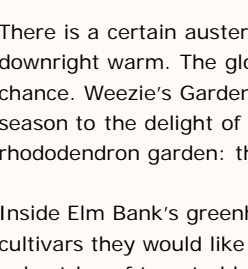
Not bad for a beginner.

Spring Comes - Slowly - to Elm Bank

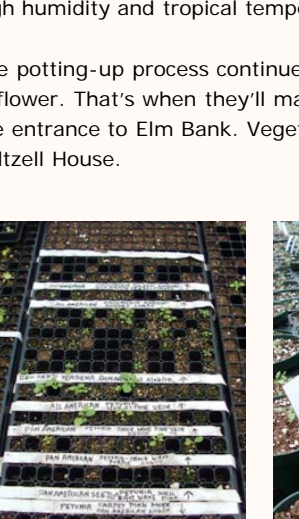
For at least four months of the year, much of New England is an inhospitable place for garden lovers. But beginning in mid-March - late-season snowfalls notwithstanding - the careful walker can see wonderful changes in the landscape. Heaths and heathers bloom to capture the interest of the season's first insects. Hamamelis Virginiana, better known as Witch Hazel and either the last bloomer of fall or first bloomer of spring, depending on your point of view, bursts forth in its yellow glory. Golden Chamaecyparis that, in a few months, will be lost behind showier perennials, are striking in both their color and form. Hellebores flower prolifically even on sub-freezing days.



Witch Hazel



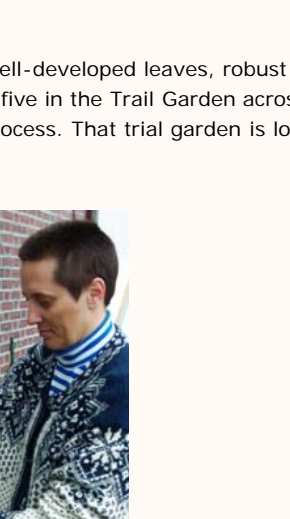
These photos were taken in mid- and late March at several gardens around Elm Bank. It all goes to show you that beauty is there for the viewing. All you have to know is where to look! Come see for yourself.



Golden Chamaecyparis and white-blooming heathers



Heaths in Bressingham Garden mid-March 2010



Strollers enjoy an early spring day in Weezie's Garden

Getting Ready for the Summer of 2010

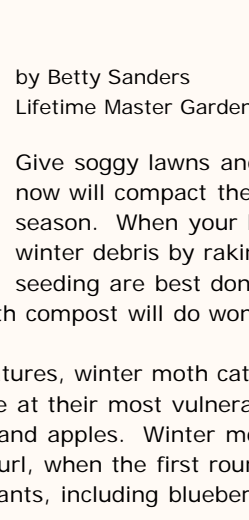
There is a certain austere beauty to Elm Bank at the beginning of spring. Days can be wet and chilly or - like the first weekend of April - downright warm. The glory of the gardens won't be evident until early May but the rewards are already there for those willing to take a chance. Weezie's Garden contained but a single family at noon on a recent weekday, yet there was as much to explore as at the height of the season to the delight of a young girl. The Bressingham Garden was coming alive but not a soul was in sight. The buds were swelling in the rhododendron garden: they did so in complete privacy.

Inside Elm Bank's greenhouses, though, the summer of 2010 is already taking shape. Months ago, seed companies delivered samples of the cultivars they would like to see grown in Elm Bank's All America Trial Garden. These seeds were sown by the thousands on large trays with only strips of tape to identify the source. As tenuous leaf and root systems develop, volunteers - and especially skilled Master Gardener volunteers - take the resulting plugs and put them into slightly larger containers where they'll be pampered for the next several months in high humidity and tropical temperatures.

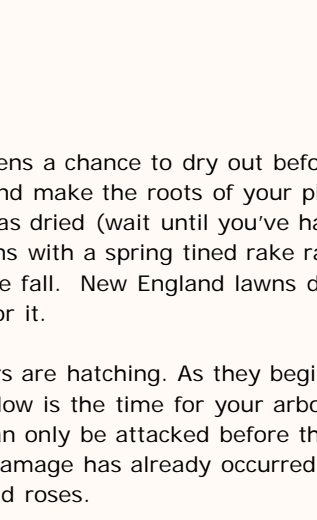
The potting-up process continues until June, when the plants have healthy, well-developed leaves, robust root systems, and are likely already in flower. That's when they'll make their public debut, being placed in rows of five in the Trail Garden across from the Education Building near the entrance to Elm Bank. Vegetable seeds for 2010 undergo a comparable process. That trial garden is located just beyond the Cheney-Balzell House.



The beginning of the 2010 All American Trial Garden



Step 2 of the 2010 All American Trial Garden - plugs get potted



Master Gardener Sonja Johanson transfers a plug of an artichoke that will become part of the vegetable trial garden this summer

Coming Events



50s Sock Hop at Elm Bank

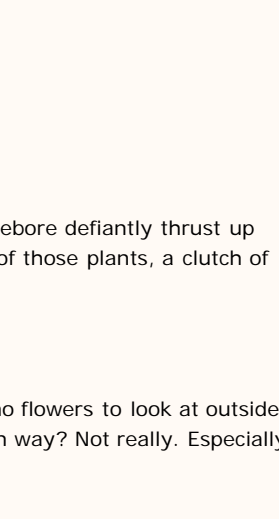
Got an urge to put on your dancing shoes? Care to do it for a worthy cause? On Saturday evening, April 24, the Hunnewell building will rock to the tunes of the 1950s as a benefit for the Elm Bank Antique Auto Show (which, in turn, benefits MassHort). Tickets are \$10, couples are \$15. The dance starts at 7 p.m. and runs to midnight. You can get further information here.

30th annual Garden Heritage and Herb Plant Sale at Elm Bank

On May 8, the New England Unit of the Herb Society of America will hold its 30th annual Garden Heritage and Herb Plant Sale at Elm Bank. This is a terrific opportunity to find rare and unusual herbs, many grown in Society members' gardens. All children get free chocolate mint plants: experts will be on hand to lend advice. Event proceeds support the Herb Society's educational programs including the Teaching Herb Garden at Elm Bank. Free admission and parking; you can get more information here.

MassHort and Society Row Plant Sale

On May 22th, 2010 we will hold the MassHort and Society Row Plant Sale featuring thousands of perennials, fifteen local plant societies, children's activities, garden tours, plant demo stage and the Master Gardener Help Desk. We are excited to have a day when the public really can "Ask the Experts" as you can add to your collection of rare and unusual plants sold by the growers themselves. Read more.



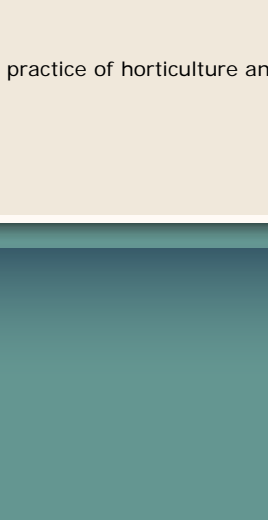
April Horticultural Hints



by Betty Sanders
Lifetime Master Gardener

Give soggy lawns and gardens a chance to dry out before you begin working them. Walking on them now will compact the soil and make the roots of your plants work much harder throughout the growing season. When your lawn has dried (wait until you've had 4-5 days of sunny weather), remove any winter debris by raking lawns with a spring lined rake rather than a rigid, plastic one. Fertilizing and seeding are best done in the fall. New England lawns do well without a spring fertilization, but a thin (1/4 inch) topdressing with compost will do wonders for it.

With the warmer temperatures, winter moth caterpillars are hatching. As they begin their climb to the swollen leaf buds they are at their most vulnerable. Now is the time for your arborist to spray trees such as oaks, maples, birches and apples. Winter moths can only be attacked before they hide in the leaf buds or after the leaf buds unfurl, when the first round of damage has already occurred. Winter moths will then move on to other plants, including blueberries and roses.



In the gardens, any remaining perennial tops from last year should be cut off and removed before new growth begins. Perennials and bulbs can be fertilized with a small amount of fertilizer applied around--not on--the plants. A thin top dressing of compost will enrich the soil, but resist the temptation to apply mulch now. Later on (say, in May), those 2 to 3 inches of mulch will keep down weeds and dress up your garden. Right now, all the mulch will do is slow down your garden now acting as a blanket to keep the cold in the soil.

Last call to prune fall flowering shrubs. Prune spring blooming trees and shrubs after the flowers are finished. Wait to prune off brown areas on evergreens. They often will replace the needles that have suffered winter kill without pruning. A light scratch with your fingernail on the branch will show green if the wood is still alive.

Ready, set, SOW--It's time for those who grow their own to start seeds of the hot weather crops such as tomatoes and peppers. If you don't have grow lights, place seed trays in south facing windows. A little extra heat, especially from the bottom of the container will speed germination and growth. Do not allow the soil to dry out. Thin crowded seedlings so the remainder will grow stronger and healthier. When the soil dries out enough to be workable--that is when it crumbles after being squeezed in your hand--you can plant peas, radishes, beets, spinach and lettuce. These cool weather crops can withstand some cold nights as long as the soil isn't soggy and they get daytime sun.

Now is a good time to plant trees and shrubs. Remember to think "saucer" instead of teacup when digging. The hole should be no deeper than the root ball and three times as wide. When the tree or shrub is planted, the soil should be at the same level on the trunk as it was before.

Don't be tempted by buying annuals yet. They're already flooding the markets but few beyond pansies are likely to survive the cold weather we in New England will see in April. Favorites such as geraniums and tomato seedlings will be stunted or killed by the chilly nights still to come. There will still be plenty of choices when it's truly annual planting time in New England, and that's not until mid to late May.

Getting Excited About the Little Things



by Neal Sanders
Leaflet Contributor

The snow had not even completely melted outside my front door a few weeks back when a hellebore defiantly thrust up first one flower, then two. Now, there are several hellebores blooming prolifically. Next to one of those plants, a clutch of tiny tete-a-tete daffodils preen in the afternoon light.

Welcome to early spring in New England, when we get excited about the little things.

Oops is a feast and famine region. From the end of October until the day that first hellebore emerged, there were no flowers to look at outside my window. The world was largely brown: a brown lawn, brown oak leaves and brown tree trunks. Pretty in its own way? Not really. Especially when you see this unchanging landscape day after day.

Two months from now, there will be so much color that even the most jaded among us will be overwhelmed. From late spring through the changing of the leaves is our time to feast on the palette given us by Mother Nature.

Now - the beginning of April - is when we see the first hints of what is to come. There is a bed at the front of my property. It's called 'Manhattan' because its shape is somewhat reminiscent of that island. Driving by, there's little to attract the eye but, on foot, the site is abuzz with activity. Hundreds of crocus have bloomed purple and the short perennial blue grasses and yellow-striped yuccas have un-flattened themselves and now look more dignified. This bed will be royal purple with hyacinths in a few weeks and, already, the dark green leaves of those perennials are showing their spikes. One the western edge of Manhattan, alliums have sent up shoots to capture sunlight. To the rear of the bed, daffodils are in bloom and, in front of them, the early daylily greens have appeared from nowhere, a pale green fuzz that grows an inch a day.

All this from one bed.



Tete-a-tete's and hellebores

In another bed, the lime-green emergent flower stalks of three alien-spotted petasites (bog rhubarb) have appeared, seemingly overnight. In a month, their shiny, yellow-spotted leaves will share this space with an entire rogue's gallery of damp-ground-loving plants. For now, these six-in-high sentinels are all that mark the site.

These are the signs that winter is in full retreat. I've been around here long enough to know that we don't get through April unscathed: that sometime between now and when the lilacs bloom, there will likely be at one more snowfall. But I'm taking great pleasure in these small harbingers of more colorful days ahead.

Neal Sanders is a frequent contributor to the Leaflet. We encourage you to read his contributions to our In the Gardens Blog where he focuses on interesting cultivars that can found in the Elm Bank gardens. Neal's first novel, **Murder Imperfect**, has been published. You can learn more about it here or order it through Amazon.com.

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About the Massachusetts Horticultural Society



Founded in 1829, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society is dedicated to encouraging the science and practice of horticulture and developing the public's enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of plants and the environment.