

Leaflet

A MASSACHUSETTS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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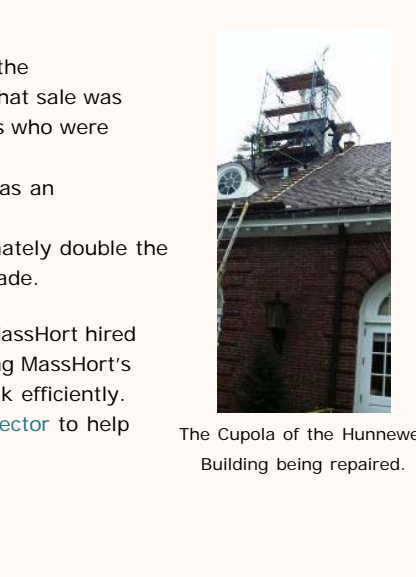
Leaflet - May 2010

A New Spring – and a Fresh Beginning – for MassHort

Organizations, like people, sometimes get a fresh start. They seldom get that new beginning through luck but, rather, through exceptionally hard work. Frequently, there are many people who help to make it possible.

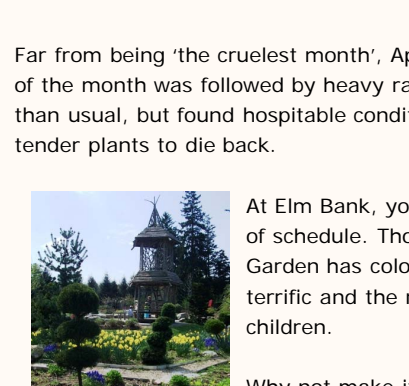
That is the case of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society which, on March 31, effectively was able to recover from a financial hole that had stymied the Society for at least the past two years.

In 2008 the Society's condition was, in a word, bleak. The New England Spring Flower Show, though a crowd-pleasing success, had been a financial disaster. A large, full-time staff lacked leadership or a coherent mission. Unpaid bills were put in drawers. In June of that year, all but five of the Society's staff members were let go.



MassHort employees Charlie Harris and Ryan Hunt plant some of the 3500 pansies that brighten Elm Bank this spring.

It could have been the end of the Society and most critics wrote off the organization. But a small group of trustees, volunteers and employees refused to admit defeat. Instead, they began laying the groundwork for a renewal. In some cases they reached into their own pockets to fund vital projects. In others, they used their contacts to secure the pro bono services of professionals. In all cases, they began spending long hours doing whatever needed to be done.



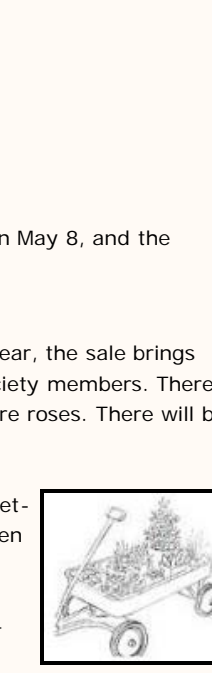
Volunteers from the American Rhododendron Society get the Alan Payton Garden ready for its season.

Glimpes of what a renewed MassHort would be capable of emerged over the course of 2009. "Wednesday Evenings at Elm Bank" brought gardening-basics speakers on a weekly basis. "A Day of Gardening Inspiration" brought some of the industry giants to speak at a packed house. The Festival of Trees introduced several thousand residents to the treasure in their back yard. And that was just a sampling.

All through this period, the gardens that are at the core of Elm Bank were cared for by a miniscule staff and a cadre of volunteers. Garden clubs, plant society members and, especially, Master Gardeners spent thousands of hours caring for the gardens and nurturing the plants that went into them. Without those volunteers, there would have been no gardens in 2009 and certainly none worth visiting in 2010.

Three events in the first three months of this year have helped secure the Society's future:

- First, a sale of a small selection of rare books allowed MassHort to fund a financial settlement with the prepurchase of people and organizations that still had outstanding claims against the Society. That sale was made all the more successful because of the forbearance of many of MassHort's long-time vendors who were willing to work with the Society through its financial difficulties.
- Second, MassHort's participation in the Paragon Group's Boston Flower & Garden Show in March was an unqualified horticultural and financial success. It points the way to future collaborations.
- Third, and perhaps most heartening for the future, membership at April 1 stood at 5600, approximately double the figure of six months earlier and a return to the levels MassHort enjoyed over much of the last decade.

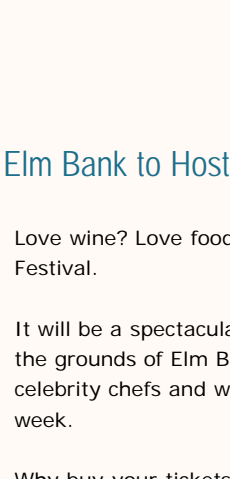


The Cupola of the Hunnewell Building being repaired.

There is more to be done and you will read and hear about it in the coming months. Late last year, MassHort hired Peter Sigrist as the Society's Business Manager. Peter has worked diligently and professionally to bring MassHort's financial and accounting systems into compliance and handle the day-to-day tasks of running Elm Bank efficiently. With an equilibrium restored thanks to Peter's skills, there is now a search on for a new Executive Director to help implement the Society's mission, guide its staff and, frankly, raise additional funds.

Five Reasons to be at Elm Bank Today

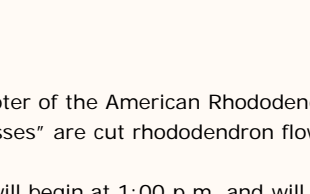
Far from being the cruelest month, April was a 'wow' for gardens in eastern Massachusetts. An unseasonal blast of warmth at the beginning of the month was followed by heavy rains, then two weeks of cool weather. The result was that plants popped out of the ground more quickly than usual, but found hospitable conditions to hold their blooms. Best of all, there were no late-season freezes to cause buds to freeze or tender plants to die back.



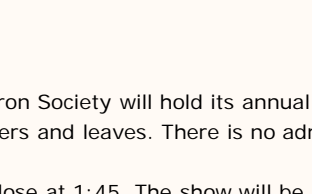
At Elm Bank, you can still find hillsides carpeted with daffodils while the Rhododendron Garden is fully two weeks ahead of schedule. Thousands of just-planted pansies are blooming prolifically with abundant moisture and the Bressingham Garden has colorful treats around every bend. The Italianate Garden is being planted ahead of schedule and looks terrific and the newly refurbished Bag Red Chair is newly ensconced in a corner of Weezie's Garden and it's filled with children.

Why not make it a day to enjoy a garden? Yes, there will be color all season long but, right now, the mid-spring show is on early display. New England doesn't get any better than this.

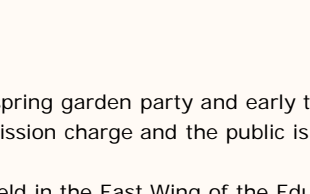
Here are some more images from Elm Bank this spring.



At the end of April, the Bressingham Garden was already ablaze with color.



The majestic Alan Payton Rhododendron Garden has bloomed two weeks ahead of schedule.



The Nearett Garden Club's daffodil and native plant garden is in full bloom this week.

Two Major Plant Sales Set for May at Elm Bank

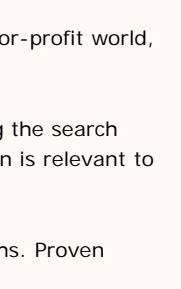
Mark the second and fourth Saturday's in May for two of the season's premier gardeners' events: the Herb Society sale on May 8, and the Society Row plant sale on May 22. Both are at Elm Bank, both are free.



The Herb of the Year for 2010, is Oregano (Anthriscum graveolens)

The **Herb Society Sale on Saturday, May 8** will be held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Now in its 30th year, the sale brings together growers of every conceivable variety of herbal plants, most from the gardens of Herb Society members. There are special collections of heirloom herbs and vegetables as well as specialty plants such as miniature roses. There will be free tomato plants for children.

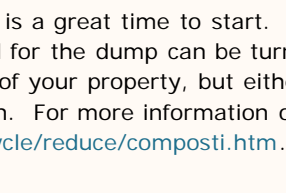
The annual **Society Row Plant Sale**, held this year on **Saturday, May 22**, is one of the major get-togethers of the horticultural community. The day-long sale features thousands of perennials, fifteen regional plant societies, garden tours, and the Master Gardener Help Desk. For the second year, MassHort will offer stunning annuals and perennials from its own greenhouses. MHS Members are invited to a "Members Only" hour from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. General public hours will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



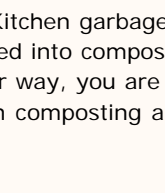
The sale is an opportunity to purchase premium and unusual plants directly from growers and from specialty nurseries that are seldom open to the public. It's your chance to ask experts about the care and cultivation of the plants in your yard, and to add that one-of-a-kind specimen to be a centerpiece of your own landscape.

A sampling of the plant societies and other groups represented at the sale are the American Conifer Society, American Hosta Society, International Cactus & Succulent Society, Danila Society, Farmers Markets Federation of Massachusetts, Hobby Greenhouse and Indoor Gardeners, Holly Society, Lilac Society, Miniature Plant Society, Natick Community Organic Farm, Carnivorous Plant Society, Herb Society, Daylily Society, and the Rose Society.

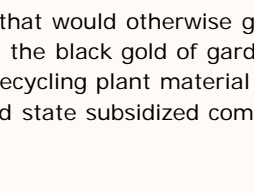
Below is a slide show of last year's Society Row Plant Sale.



The Society Row Plant Sale is always a great plant shopping opportunity.



Trustee and well-known landscaper Paul Meakovsky offers plant selection advice at the Society Row Plant Sale.

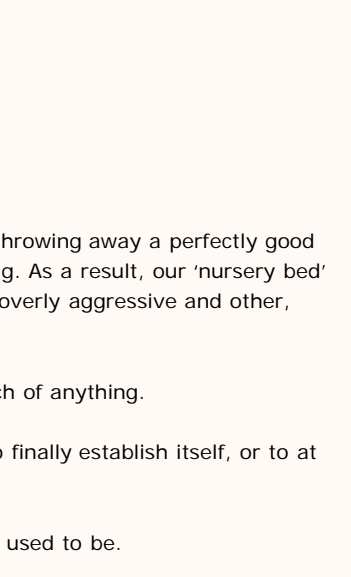


Trustee Joe Kunkel and Master Gardener Lori Waresmith offer plant advice at the Society Row Plant Sale.

Elm Bank to Host Wine Festival in September

Love wine? Love food? Love gardens? Mark your calendar for Sunday, September 19, 2010 at Elm Bank as MassHort hosts its first Wine Festival.

It will be a spectacular full day of wine tasting, superb food, a wine auction and garden tours, all held on the grounds of Elm Bank. There will be more than a hundred wines to taste, a Champagne brunch, celebrity chefs and wine experts. A full schedule will be posted to the MassHort website within the next week.



Why buy your tickets now? Because by signing up now, you can save \$10 to \$20 off the price of a Grand Tasting ticket (\$80 per person versus \$90 for later registration, and \$155 per couple versus \$175). Space for the Champagne Brunch will be strictly limited and you don't want to miss out.

Grand Tasting tickets will include guided garden tours, the Champagne brunch, wine tastings, and entry to the wine auction and sale.

Please contact MassHort at 617-933-4995 to register.

Short Takes

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society will hold its annual spring garden party and early truss show at Elm Bank on Sunday, May 2. "Trusses" are cut rhododendron flowers and leaves. There is no admission charge and the public is invited to the event.

Registration of trusses will begin at 1:00 p.m. and will close at 1:45. The show will be held in the East Wing of the Education Building, opposite the All-America Trial Garden. The Garden Party begins at 1:30PM.

The final two sessions of Miss Gina's Weezie's Spring Story Hour are Friday, April 30 and May 7. Sessions start at 10 a.m. and are held, weather permitting, in the stone circle in Weezie's Garden. Children of all ages (and their adult friends) are invited to hear Miss Gina's stories and partake of the "Weezie's Walkabout" that follows. If the weather is inclement, the event moves indoors to the Education Building.

If you didn't get to the Boston Flower & Garden Show in March, you're now welcome to take a visual tour of that event on MassHort's website. Click here to see hundreds of photos of the event.

Help Wanted



The Massachusetts Horticultural Society is looking for an Executive Director. Someone who knows the not-for-profit world, who has vision, and leadership skills. And, preferably, a passion for growing things.

"It's a terrific opportunity for the right person," says Jeanne Leszczynski, a MassHort trustee who is heading the search committee. "The organization's prospects are bright, it serves a distinctive role in the region, and its mission is relevant to the twenty-first century. We're looking for a leader who can build on a superb base."

The right person is likely working in the non-profit world right now, though the search committee will consider other strengths. Proven management, planning and fund-raising skills are all crucial elements of the candidate's résumé.

"We held off on this search until we were more certain about the future," Jeanne says. "Given the events of the first few months of the year, we have considerable confidence both that we can attract strong candidates and that we can offer an exciting opportunity to the right individual."

If you know someone whom you think would be a candidate, please see the [extended Job description](#).

Elm Bank on Chronicle Friday Evening

Ah, Route 16. It starts at the Atlantic Ocean and ends at a lake with jaw-droppingly-unpronounceable name. Along the way, it passes by the front door of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. On Friday evening at 7:30, WCVB Channel 5's Chronicle newsmagazine will take viewers on a visual journey along this historic highway. One of their prominent stops will be at Elm Bank, where they'll tour the gardens.



Filming for the segment was done the week of April 20. We hope you'll mark the program on your calendar.

May Horticultural Hints



by Betty Sanders
Lifetime Master Gardener

Warm weather has arrived on schedule with May, but remember most annuals and favorite vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers and squash need warm soil as well as warm air. Resist the temptation to buy them now or to put any seedlings outside. The last frost date in eastern Massachusetts is May 30.

Everything seemed to arrive early this season, magnolias bloomed with forsythia, tulips while the crocus were still here. This means now is the time to prune back spring blooming shrubs and trees. Removing the oldest wood and crossing branches will make a stronger and healthier plant for the next year. As soon as the lilacs finish their bloom, add them to your to-do list. But don't cut down the foliage of bulbs. It needs to naturally ripen (turn yellow) in order to put energy back in the bulb for next year's flowers.

Wood ash from fireplaces (but not charcoal fires!) makes a wonderful soil additive. Use it more sparingly than lime to sweeten acidic soil around lilacs. Work it in into the soil in the vegetable garden before planting root crops such as beets, carrots, or radishes.

Get an early start protecting your hostas, strawberries and many flowering perennials from slugs and snails. Products containing iron phosphite are deadly to slugs, but not to pets or the environments. After eating these products, snails will stop feeding but not die immediately. Do not kill or remove the sick slugs. On occasion they are eaten by fellow slugs and the iron will kill the cannibal as well.

If you've never composted, now is a great time to start. Kitchen garbage that would otherwise go down the disposal and garden trimmings that would be bagged for the dump can be turned into compost, the black gold of gardening. You can use a fancy composter or a pile at the back of your property, but either way, you are recycling plant material back into your soil, reducing trash and improving your garden. For more information on composting and state subsidized composters, check the recycling website www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/compostil.htm.

Weed, weed, weed because weeds pulled now will not produce seeds to bedevil you throughout the summer. Two to four inches of mulch, carefully kept from touching plants stems and tree trunks, will keep most new weeds from germinating while allowing water and air to percolate through. Think twice before using colored mulches. The coloring is often used to disguise old wood from unidentified sources. You are safest with a bark chip mulch produced locally.

In your vegetable garden, floating row covers can keep pests out. The spun material allows sunlight and water through while excluding bugs that might otherwise diminish your crop. On cool nights, the cover provides another 2 to 3 degrees of retained heat, perhaps enough to keep your crop from being stunted by the cold air.

When working outside, use sunscreen to protect your skin and mosquito repellents to avoid feeding that pest. Check for ticks after working outdoors to avoid Lyme disease. Removing standing water from empty containers, old tires or any place else standing water can accumulate to eliminate breeding sites. In water features, fish will eat mosquito larvae. If you don't have fish, use mosquito dunks. Regularly clean out bird baths and replace the water.

Lawns should be mowed at three inches to shade out new weeds and keep grass roots cooler throughout the summer. It is too late now to apply crabgrass preventer. It has already germinated. If you find you have broad leaf weeds, spot treat rather than broadcasting weed killers over the entire lawn. Frequent applications of herbicides (such as weed killers and crabgrass preventer) and pesticides will make the soil in your lawn and garden less fertile by killing off the microbes necessary for healthy plant growth.

The Wisteria that Was



by Neal Sanders
Leaflet Contributor

I am continually accused by my wife of being too sentimental about plants. I can't see throwing away a perfectly good clump of *Hemerocallis* just because it is being displaced by something more eye-catching. As a result, our 'nursery bed' overflows with azaleas that become scraggly from too little sun, perennials that became overly aggressive and other, ragtag cultivars that outgrew their homes or failed to thrive where originally planted.

My wife has no such qualms. "Compost it," is her serene, all-purpose advice for what to do with too much of anything.

And so we have tug-of-wars over plants. I'm forever pleading for another season for a given forlorn plant to finally establish itself, or to at least find another, more suitable location. Betty turns a gimlet eye to my softheartedness.

Which is why, when I came back from running an errand the other day, I found a stump where the wisteria used to be.

Wisteria is, of course, a vine. But with proper nurturing and staking it can be turned into a tree, or at least a tree-shaped vine. We planted the wisteria circa 2003 and, for six years, it stood in a grassy area.

Well, most of the time it 'stood'.

In two memorable, back-to-back storms a few years back, the wisteria was blown over. We staked it after the first storm, a summer nor'easter. Two weeks later, a drenching monsoon from the southwest flattened it yet again in the opposite direction.

The Wisteria in its prime... and in bloom

Thereafter, the wisteria acquired an unflattering crutch in the form of a six-foot-high green metal stake.

Whether a function of that storm or some other malady, the wisteria failed to bloom the following spring. It put out dozens of ten-foot-long tendrils and a profusion of leaves, but nothing pretty to look at. Ditto the next year. I was, however, always of the opinion that all it needed was some tender loving care.

Last summer, the 150 square-foot section of lawn in which the wisteria stood was converted into a shrub bed. An andromeda, grown too large for its site as a foundation planting, was moved in. An area nursery had a terrific sale on miniature *Kalmia* (mountain laurel). Two low-growing *Ilex* rescued years earlier from the town library where they had been salted to near extinction by overly-diligent town employees found a permanent home. Some fifty hostas from multiple sources rounded out the new bed.

Betty began eyeing the non-producing wisteria, noting that it 'didn't fit' and that its 'scale was wrong'. I began my defense of the imperiled vine. "Give it another year."

The decision was made moot by a pruning saw.

We dug out the stump and, in its place, a third *Ilex*, the most damaged of the three rescued shrubs but now fully healed, went into its spot.

Betty is, of course, correct. The wisteria was a failed experiment which ought to have ended years earlier. It was only my whining that kept it in place. Now, the vine and its stump lie alongside an *amalanchar* (shadbush) that never successfully transplanted, awaiting a dump run.

The great plantsman Allan Armitage says, "If you're not killing plants, you're not gardening." Maybe there ought to be a corollary axiom: if you leave a plant in place just because it's there, you're also not gardening.

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 be found in the Elm Bank gardens. Neal's first novel, Murderer in Perfect, 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.