Massachusetts Horticultural Society

Leaflet

A MASSACHUSETTS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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An Evening with Adrian Bloom

It is an occasion to see one of the most stunning gardens on Cape Cod. It is the chance to spend an evening talking with one of the great plantsmen of our time. And, it is the opportunity to support a very worthwhile cause.

On Thursday, September 23, the consummate landscaper Paul Miskovsky will open his Falmouth garden for an evening of conversation with one of the legends of the horticultural world, Adrian Bloom. Bloom, as you probably know, is associated with Blooms of Bressingham, which has introduced some of the world's most talked-about perennials. Many of those introductions can be seen at the Bloom-designed 46,000-square-foot Bressingham Garden at Elm Bank.

Paul Miskovsky's garden is his statement as a landscaper and is a masterpiece of design and visual delight. Its centerpiece is a 90-foot-long waterfall that cascades down a densely planted hillside. The ever-changing garden draws on Paul's extensive horticultural knowledge to incorporate unusual botanical specimens and intriguing juxtapositions of form, sound and color. The garden will be at its peak in late September.

You will be able to explore the garden and talk with Adrian Bloom while enjoying wine, cocktails and hors d'oeurves. All proceeds from the evening benefit the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

Tickets, which are tax-deductible, are $150 per person.

You can make a reservation for the evening by making a reservation online or by calling 617-933-4995.

Mark Your Calendar for the 2010 Symposium for the 'Serious Home Gardener'

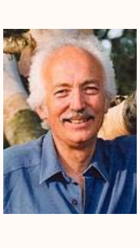
On Wednesday, September 22, MassHort and the Perennial Plant Association are teaming up to offer a day-long seminar titled, '*Exploring Design, Plant Selection, and Maintenance of the Mixed Border*'. Some of the best writers and creative plantsmen in the business will be here, and you're invited to listen, learn and ask questions.

The speakers include Adrian Bloom (of Blooms of Bressingham); Kirk Brown, national director for the Garden Writers Association; Kerry Mendez, author of *The Ultimate Gardener's Top Ten Lists*; Laura Deeter, professor at the Agricultural Technical Institute (ATI), The Ohio State University; Roy Diblik, co-owner of Northwind Perennial Farm located in Burlington, Wisconsin; and Brent Heath, co-owner with his wife, Becky, of Brent and Becky's Bulbs.

Here's what you can look forward to:

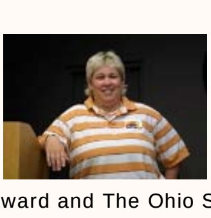
Kerry Mendez will show you the tricks of the trade for having the WOW factor in your garden month after month with smart plant selection, design tips, and surefire maintenance shortcuts. And because it will be low maintenance, you will finally be able to 'ease' back in the 'easy' chair. Kerry is a "passionate perennialist" with more than 20 years of hands-on experience. As a garden consultant, designer, writer, teacher and lecturer, Kerry advocates low-maintenance garden and landscape design that includes perennials, ornamental grasses, flowering shrubs, bulbs, and no-fuss annuals. Her first book, *The Ultimate Gardener's Top Ten Lists*, was published this year.

Brent Heath will illustrate the best of the best – the right bulbs for the right spots. He will show how to combine bulbs, perennials, annuals, ground covers and flowering shrubs to create just the feeling you want to generate four seasons of color in your garden. He is a third generation bulb grower and co-owner with his wife, Becky, of Brent and Becky's Bulbs, a wholesale/retail mail-order flower bulb catalog and web site business, provides numerous types of bulbs to botanical gardens, cities, universities, and garden centers. Brent and Becky have co-authored *Daffodils for American Gardens* and *Tulips for North American Gardens*. They have received many honors for popularizing and promoting flower bulbs and for their commitment to high standards of excellence.



From his long experience on both sides of the Atlantic, **Adrian Bloom** will highlight plants of great value for gardeners. He particularly believes there is much in the phrase, "less is more" that can apply to the early or beginner gardener, and will develop his theme through twelve specially selected perennials and grasses for year-round interest. Adrian is president of Blooms Nurseries Ltd, Norfolk, England. Through frequent visits and lectures, as an international presenter for the PBS Victory Garden shows, and as an author or co-author of beautifully illustrated gardening books he has personally introduced many American gardeners to unique varieties of perennials. His most recent publication is *Bloom's Best Perennials and Grasses: Expert Plant Choices and Dramatic Combinations for Year Round Gardens*. Elm Bank visitors will be well-acquainted with his work through the 46,000-square-foot Bressingham Garden.

Roy Diblik's thoughtful way to design perennial plantings welcomes fresh contemporary styles and plant diversity integrated with responsible maintenance concerns. Using a selection of regionally dependable perennials, endless natural plant patterns can be constructed, each relating to time and cost to maintain. Collectively, he calls that process, *Perennial Plant Communities: the Know Maintenance Approach.* Roy has been growing plants for more than 25 years. Recently, Roy was the plant purchasing coordinator for the Lurie Garden in Chicago's Millennium Park, growing 11,000 of the plants at Northwind. Roy is co-owner of Wisconsin-based Northwind Perennial Farm and has been growing traditional and native perennials since 1978. His garden designs emphasize plant relationships to maintenance strategies and costs.



The day's final speaker will be Dr. Laura Deeter whose lecture is entitled *Bringing Your Perennials Up Right*. Are you the parents of unruly toddlers, aggressive or lazy teenagers, or are your babies closer to middle age and just aren't the same anymore? Perhaps they simply aren't living up to their full potential. Learn how to make your perennial babies work for you! Laura will provide a fun and lively romp through perennial maintenance. She is a professor at the Agricultural Technical Institute (ATI) of Ohio State University and has been awarded the ATI Distinguished Teaching Award and The Ohio State University Alumni Award for Distinguishing Teaching, the Perennial Plant Association Academic Award, and the American Horticultural Society Teaching Award.

Also speaking will be Kirk Brown, of the award winning Joanne Kostecky Garden Design, Inc., Allentown, Pennsylvania. Kirk is a national director for the Garden Writers Association and as is judge of major exhibits for the Philadelphia Flower Show.'

Registration

Registration Fee: $95/person before September 14. $110/person after September 14.
This price includes lunch.

SIGN UP NOW!

You may register online or call 614-771-8431 if you have questions.

You may also download the program and mail-in registration form.

Wednesday Evenings at Elm Bank Will Resume in October

How do you know when you're doing something right? When the crowds keep getting larger week after week and people come back… with their friends.

The seven-session summer edition of 'Wednesday Evenings at Elm Bank' ended August 25 but, by popular demand, MassHort will offer an autumn session built around four topics relevant to fall gardening.

Laura Eisener gives her presentation on shade gardening

The series kicks of **October 6** with **Preparing the Garden for Winter**. We'll discuss how best to clean up the garden, what to prune and what to divide. Do you keep watering the garden? Do you mulch it? On October 13, we tackle Fall Lawn Care. Renewing, re-doing and rejuvenating a lawn after a long, hot New England summer is a time-honored tradition but, too often, it's done improperly. To rake or not to rake those leaves? Add lime? Come and listen to an expert.

On **October 20**, it's **Everything You Need to Know About Bulbs**. From late October until the ground freezes is the right time to plant the bulbs that will enliven next spring. We'll discuss how to select them, how to plant them, and how to design a garden around bulbs.

We've thrown the topic of the October 27th talk open to the MassHort membership. The topic that gets the most suggestions will be the one we present. Tell us what topic you would like to see covered and Email us your suggestion.

Each session will start at 6:30 p.m. and concludes at 8 p.m. or when the last question has been answered. Sessions are $8 for members, $10 for non-members. Refreshments are served.

Festival of Trees Will Glow at Elm Bank Starting November 20

If you have a business or are part of an organization that wants to show itself off in a festive and colorful way, then you ought to be getting in touch with Joyce Bakshi. Joyce is heading up MassHort's second edition of the area's newest holiday tradition: the Festival of Trees at Elm Bank. Slated to run this year from November 20 through December 4, it's an event intended to kick off the holiday season in a special way: by giving families an opportunity to see delightfully decorated holiday trees in a festive environment.

Businesses, individual sponsors and organizations provide the trees. There is no 'entry fee' for supplying one. Joyce, chair of the Festival of Trees Committee, says she has firm commitments for more than 50 trees this year. The tallest will be more than ten feet high; the shortest just two feet. In addition to their beauty, many of the trees are also stocked with gift certificates and merchandise. For those who doubt their tree-decorating touch, the Committee has a cadre of volunteers with significant design experience.

Wellesley Hills interior decorator Susan Dearborn prepares her teddy-bear-themed tree

The Santa Snowman tree and its winner

At the Red Sox Tree

What do you get if you supply a tree? "Exposure," Joyce says. "Lots and lots of exposure. Plus the opportunity to do a good deed for a worthy organization." The event drew several thousand visitors in 2009 and many left asking the anxious question, "Will you be back next year?" Some exhibitors found themselves pictured in newspapers, others on television.

The setting for all of this will be the beautiful Carriage House on the Elm Bank Reservation, which itself will also be decorated for the season with wreaths and swags. There will be hayrides to take children around the property.

"It's the holidays without the pressure," Joyce says. "It's a wonderful location for an event like this, with thousands of lights in the rafters and a soft glow around the room. It's an inviting venue, one that says, 'come, enjoy, linger'."

"This is the kind of event you can bring the kids to, and then come back with the in-laws," Joyce says. "Many of the people who came last year told us it was one of the best experiences a family can have this holiday season."

For full details concerning hours and how to supply a tree, click here or visit www.MassHortFestivalofTrees.org.

Healthy Lawns - Part 2

by Betty Sanders
Healthy Lawns – Part 2 of 2 parts

Every lawn is different so no single set of rules will work for everyone. But here are ten steps that will improve the health of your lawn, help reduce your maintenance costs and, ultimately, the amount of time spent working on your lawn:

1. **Mow High.** Most lawn services mow at 2 to 2 1/2 inches. They (or you) should mow at 3 inches or even 3 ½ inches to maintain a healthy, low-maintenance lawn. Grass roots underground mirror the shoots on top. The shorter you mow, the smaller the root systems. Small root systems leave your lawn more vulnerable to drought, disease and invasive weeds. Longer grass helps cool the soil surface, reducing water loss and decreasing competition from warm-season weeds, such as crabgrass.

2. **Leave Clippings Behind.** Contrary to popular belief, clippings do not cause thatch. If you follow the rule of cutting no more than one-third of the blade when you mow, clippings will quickly dry out and work their way down to the soil surface where earthworms will help break them down. Mulching mowers chop clippings finely to speed the process. Clippings also return nutrients to the soil, so you need to fertilize less often. They help cool the soil and prevent evaporation.

3. **Keep Your Blade Sharp.** Try to cut a ripe tomato with a dull knife and you get a mess. Cut a lawn with a dull blade and you tear the grass. The ragged edges are an opening for disease, and they allow water to evaporate putting the grass under more stress. A few swipes with your sharpening tool once a month means a healthier lawn.

4. **Don't Fertilize Too Early or Too Often**. First, test your soil to see if fertilizer is needed. UMass Extension soil lab offers low cost testing. Applied too early, spring fertilizations can harm the lawn by promoting top growth at the expense of the roots stressed by winter damage. The best time to fertilize is when daytime temperatures are consistently below 50 degrees, usually November. The grass blades will not green up, but the roots will take up food and grow. Do not use organic fertilizers at this time because they need warm soil and microbial action to release nitrogen.

The second best time to fertilize is Memorial Day to feed the lawn for summer, or Labor Day to help a lawn recover from a tough summer. But keep the results of your soil test in mind--too much fertilizer will weaken your lawn and pollute the environment.

5. **Water, Carefully if at all.** Healthy New England lawns seldom need supplemental water. It is natural for lawns to go dormant during the worst heat of summer. Only during a prolonged drought should you considering watering. Lawns recover quickly from dormancy but improper watering makes grass susceptible disease and insects. If you must water, give the grass one inch a week. The best way to water is to do it all at once, applied slowly enough that it all soaks in and does not run off. Repeated shallow watering promote shallow roots which are readily burned on hot days.

6. **Choose the right seed.** Buying cheap seed to start or renovate a lawn is a recipe for disaster. Cheap seed mixes often contain too much annual grass (which dies over the winter) or even weed seeds. The right seed will to use depend on whether your lawn is in sun or shade, if it is mainly looked at or used regularly for play or entertaining, and finally how much effort you want to put into maintaining it. When reseeding thin or damaged areas of your lawn, make certain you use the same mixture that covers the rest of the area so it doesn't look like a patch.

Consider adding clover seed to the mix. It will naturally add nitrogen to the soil, stays green under dry conditions and need less mowing than grass.

7. **Aerate.** Often, when you see areas of weeds in a lawn, it is because the soil is compacted. Weeds can thrive where grass cannot. Compaction occurs because of heavy lawn use, car parking or even certain soil types. Check your lawn by testing it with a screwdriver. If you can push it in easily to a depth of 6 inches around the lawn, you do not need to aerate. Aeration with a mechanical aerator (shoe spikes are useless) allows water, oxygen and nutrients to reach down into the soil. After an aeration, grass roots rapidly grow deeper, thatch is broken down by increased beneficial microbial activity while water or nutrient runoff reduced.

8. **Manage Lawn Insects.** It is usually unnecessary and ineffective to treat a lawn for insects. For example, you need to remove a one square foot of sod and count more than ten beetle grubs before using a grub control product. At ten or fewer beetles per square foot, they just don't do enough damage to justify using toxic chemicals on your lawn. Apply grub control in August or early September when the grubs are small enough to be controlled. Applications in the spring are nearly useless. Water the grub control in thoroughly or it will not get to the zone where they feed. If you never watered your lawn this summer, most of the grubs present probably died because they need moisture to survive.

9. **Manage Lawn Weeds.** Hand digging is your first line of defense. If you remove one dandelion in the spring before it spreads its seeds, you've prevented 40 more from sprouting. Look for the conditions that are favoring weeds—compacted soil (aerate), too much fertilizer (don't fertilize), too much shade (consider a moss lawn or a shade garden), low growing weeds (mow high and shade them out).

If you decide you must use an herbicide, try spot treating, rather than a broad application. Choose a product specific to your problem. Apply when it is neither windy nor too hot to avoid vaporized material from affecting other plants. Never apply when rain is predicted or while irrigating: it will be washed away before it can do the job.

10. **Add Compost.** The best amendment to your lawn is just a quarter inch of compost raked over your lawn at any time of the year. After the first rain or two it will disappear into the ground, adding nutrients as well as bacteria and fungi that improve the health of the soil and of your lawn. These microscopic life forms are the difference between dead dirt and healthy soil. You can make your own compost from kitchen scraps and the clean plant material in your garden. Check the MA DEP site for more information.

Help! My Trees Are Dying! (I Think)

There are dead leaves on my deck and sidewalk, my lawn and driveway. It's too early, what's wrong with my trees?

The good news is your trees are probably going to be okay. The bad news is they have been badly stressed by our very hot, very dry summer. Dropping leaves allow the trees to save moisture. Some trees drop leaves in the summer because, in a wet spring, they made too many to support through the hotter months. Insects could be attacking a few leaves, killing them. And, squirrels are notorious for girdling small end branches for the sap, resulting in a small clusters of leaves falling to the ground.

Dead leaves from a water-stressed ash tree cover a caryx Ice Dance still in its summer glory.

While some dead leaves in late August doesn't mean the tree is dying, it may well indicate that your tree could use some help. They need water. Newly planted (that is, within the past three years) trees should have been watered in July and August. Even established trees can be killed by an extended drought. In the third week of August we had four glorious days of soaking rains, accumulating five inches in many spots. This week we may be brushed by a hurricane. But don't assume Mother Nature's going to do all the work for you. If we do not get at least two inches of rain each week in September and October, water your trees, slowly and deeply.

Start by removing any vegetation, including lawn within three feet of the base of trees or shrubs. Mulch with two inches of shredded bark or other organic material to reduce water evaporation. Do not pile mulch against the bark. One of the best ways is a tree gator – a heavy-duty plastic bag that holds from ten to 50 gallons of water. Fill it from a hose and then let it slowly release the water into the tree's root zone over several hours. A low-tech but effective technique is to punch several holes in the bottom of a five gallon bucket. Fill with water and let it work. Refill when empty to give the tree at least ten to twenty gallons a week. You can even water by turning the hose to a very slow trickle and leaving it on. To prevent the water from running off, first build a mulch or soil dam around the tree, about three feet in diameter. Just don't forget to turn the water off after two or three hours.

Do not fertilize stressed plants. Promoting growth in the fall is a poor idea. It will not have time to harden off and will probably die over the winter. Fertilize trees and shrubs in the spring when water is plentiful. Adding a one to two inch top dressing of compost to the area under the trees or shrubs will benefit them now and in the spring.

Finally, prune out any dead, damaged or diseased branches now. During the winter or early spring months you can selectively thin out dense branches to reduce the load on the tree.

September Horticultural Hints

by Betty Sanders
Lifetime Master Gardener

Summer vacation is ending for your houseplants. While it is still very warm outside, houseplants need to begin the transition back into your home. Any that have spent the summer outdoors should be brought onto a porch or deck where they receive less daylight, a step to help them acclimate to the lower light level in your home. Plants that have been in contact with the ground should be repotted to ensure worms, ants or pests are not tagging along. Check for any obvious signs of insects on the leaves, stems and top of the soil. A strong spritz from the garden hose followed by spray of insecticidal soap can help to keep aphids mites and others from causing a big problem indoors.

If your houseplants spent the summer out of doors, now is the time to start their autumn reentry

Once you make the move indoors, don't despair if your plants drop a few leaves. The drier air and lower light levels mean the plant cannot support all the foliage it did outdoors. Many plants will replace the leaves after they have readapted.

It's a great time to take cuttings from some tender favorites such as begonia, coleus and geranium. Cut a 4-inch tip of the plant, remove the largest leaves, dip in rooting hormone and place in wet sand or a perlite/peat moss mixture. Keep this growing medium wet until a gentle tug proves that roots are in place. Then, transplant to a small pot and you have a new houseplant. In a southern window you may even get blooms.

Finally, start thinking about the Amateur Horticulture competition at the 2011 Flower Show. Last year's schedule is still available (click here). Even March looks bright with a shiny ribbon on your plant!

Planting for fall / winter It's been a long hot summer and the last thing some of us are thinking is planting at this time of year. But it might be a good idea to reconsider. We can see where our garden needs a boost. It is easy to plan a spring and summer garden; harder to think ahead to where we need color or structure for the fall and winter months. Nurseries are full of plants that can offer exactly that, and they're likely on sale.

I am not a fan of chrysanthemums for fall. The colors are too brassy, the plants too short lived. I leave annuals in place until they are killed by frosts (usually the same time that the mums would be killed) and supplement them with perennials that will provide color throughout the winter. Heuchera are wonderful plants that show off their colorful leaves year round (when not buried under snow). Those not watered may have suffered this summer, but cutting back dead leaves will lead to fresh replacements. In shady areas, plant epimediums, which keep their greenery throughout the winter and add flowers to the shade in the spring.

And don't forget trees and shrubs. It is not too late to plant as long as you water consistently until the ground freezes in December. Trees add not just height but also interesting bark and structure after the leaves are gone. Evergreens add priceless greens, blues and yellows to the winter landscape. Shrubs provide offer color, bark, berries and shelter for the birds.

Don't rake! Take a look at the forest floor: it is covered with leaves. They provide the only nutrients that the native trees get. They are the mulch that protects the roots and new seedlings. Traditionally, we rake to remove leaves that would otherwise smother our lawn over the winter. But with a mulching mower you eliminate one time consuming chore. Always mow your lawn using a mulching blade on your mower. This returns finely cut grass clippings to the lawn. In the autumn, the same blade will chop leaves into small pieces. These pieces will not mat. Instead, they'll break down over the winter, returning the nutrients to the soil in the process. In October, if the leaves are particularly thick, you may have to go over an area twice, but this is still substantially less work than raking.

In flower beds and under trees and shrubs, leaves can remain for the winter to help protect the roots and crowns of your plants. Cleaning them out is a spring chore.

Mushrooms in the lawn? After a horribly dry summer, we had 4 days of rain in late August and await a hurricane this week. The result may be the sudden appearance of mushrooms of all sorts in your lawn. If the sight of mushrooms sends you looking for a cure… stop. Those mushrooms are a sign of organic material decomposing under your lawn, which is a good thing. While I strongly advise against eating them unless you are an experienced mycologist, enjoy their unusual shapes and colors. And, if they bother you, just kick them over.

Hurricanes I Have Known

by Neal Sanders
Leaflet Contributor

In the 1986 film, '*Crocodile Dundee*', Mick Dundee and his girlfriend walk the streets of New York at night when they are accosted by a would-be mugger, who brandishes a switchblade and demands Mick's wallet. His girlfriend urges Mick to give up his wallet and says, 'He's got a knife!" Mick chuckles and says, "That's not a knife." He pulls out his Bowie knife, suitable for skinning crocodiles. "Now *that's* a knife." The mugger runs away.

I have to confess I feel the same about New England hurricanes. Having grown up in south Florida, I was witness to some of the nastiest storms ever to cross the Atlantic. Fifty years ago this week, Hurricane Donna slammed into the Florida Keys with 150-plus-mile-per-hour winds, meandered its way up through the Everglades, stalled, then emerged at Daytona Beach and went on to wreak havoc up and down the East Coast.

Because of its erratic path, Miami was battered by *sustained* 120-mile-per-hour winds for more 12 hours. We emerged from our house to find half a dozen large trees snapped off a few feet off the ground and the leaves stripped from those that still stood. Our street was impassable for a week because the canopy of tall, brittle Australian pines that lined it had turned the thoroughfare into a giant plank road. And, when the trees fell, the above-ground power lines came down with them. Oh, and the storm dropped a foot of rain. To paraphrase Mick Dundee, now *that's* a hurricane.

By the time hurricanes reach New England, they are fast-moving storms that, however powerful, don't linger long enough to deliver widespread wind damage (storm surges are another, much more serious matter). Yes, I have seen the photos of the beach homes either destroyed or left precariously perched on eroded dunes. But the operative work is *beach*, and there are a set of well-recognized dangers to building on a beach or a barrier island.

The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 is in a category by itself. It made a bee-line across the Atlantic and made no other landfall until it pushed a storm surge into Falmouth and New Bedford that left those communities under eight feet of water. Seventy-two years later, it is still the standard against which northeastern hurricanes are measured.

We went through Hurricane Gloria in 1985 when we lived in Medfield. Gloria, you may recall, came up through the center of Long Island, then central Connecticut. We lost a few pines. More importantly, we lost power for five days (and vowed never again to live on a street with above-ground power lines). As hurricanes go, though, it was a dud. It blew in after dark and by the following morning, the sun was out. I can think of half a dozen nor'easters that did more damage to our landscape.

As this is written, Hurricane Earl is on course to pass east of Nantucket and brush the Cape with hurricane-force winds. The dirty little secret of hurricanes is that their greatest force is in their northeast quadrant meaning that, absent a major course correction, we on the mainland will see some gusty winds and an inch of two of much-needed rain.

Come to think about it, after living through Donna, Earl is my kind of hurricane.

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.

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