



In This Issue...

This Newsletter, an occasional publication prepared by members of the Meadow Lakes Resident Forum Grounds Committee, is intended to help residents understand and enjoy the natural features of our remarkable grounds. In our seventh issue, we look back over 2010 with a report by Arboretum Director Joe

Greipp, who also writes about ancient tree species, flowering shrubs, and this year's severe drought. There are features on lupines, the community vegetable garden, houseplants, and a new experiment in garden design. We have a report on bird sightings, and naturalist Kathy Easton

writes about the robin. Creative work includes wonderful poems by Pat Roberts, Harriet Ringel, and Judith Hawk, who leads our poetry group. There are fine photos by Anne Benenson and Anne Benedict. Enjoy!
Gloria Merker, Co-Chair Grounds Committee

Lupines in the Meadow

Although the drought this summer was unkind to our meadow, the excessive moisture of last winter encouraged the blossoming of flowers in the spring and early summer. This year, the lupines flowered especially well.

The wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*) is in the pea family, and so the individual lavender-blue florets on the flower stalks resemble pea blossoms in form. Hybrids have been developed for the perennial garden that are taller and more stately than the original form and these, in turn, have escaped back into the wild.

Lupines can be hard to establish, but they like our meadow if conditions are right, and look very nice



together with the daisies. They are short-lived perennials, flowering the second year after seeding. The leaves at the base are very attractive fan-like palmettes; in the meadow,

however, they are obscured by the thick undergrowth and the tall spires are the best part.

Gloria Merker

Photo, Anne Benenson

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"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

Warren Buffett

The Arboretum Corner

ANCIENT TREE SPECIES IN THE ARBORETUM

The word “ancient” can have two different meanings when we speak of the trees at Meadow Lakes. An ancient tree can be one which has been growing for a very long time, or it can mean a tree whose lineage stretches far back on an evolutionary scale. This article will focus on the latter.

One tree species you may already know to have a very ancient lineage is the Maidenhair Tree (*Ginkgo biloba*). This tree is dioecious, meaning that individual trees are either male or female. Most of the trees at Meadow Lakes have both reproductive organs on the same plant. Ginkgoes don't reach sexual maturity until they are thirty to forty years old. The female trees release the seed, which has been used for centuries as an herbal supplement to enhance memory. Unfortunately, the seed is enclosed in a fruit which has a putrid odor, not unlike dog waste. This is the reason named cultivars are almost always male.

Genetically speaking, ginkgoes are more closely related to pine trees than to trees like oaks. They have unique,

fan-shaped leaves that turn striking shades of gold in the fall. They usually drop their leaves all at once, not uncommonly in one day. The trees are very tolerant of urban conditions such as small, compacted root zones, salt, air pollution, and reflected heat. The twigs are stout and the trees can look awkward when they are young, but they grow into more graceful, large shade trees. A Ginkgo is planted next to the large American Elm in the Guest House parking circle; there is another, much younger tree between Perimeter Rd. and building 49. They are recognizable from a distance because of their open branching habit.

Another very old tree species, sometimes called the “Living Fossil” is the Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*). This tree is the sole surviving species in this genus – a rarity. Fossilized seeds have been found in many area of North America, but most living today are direct descendants of trees discovered growing in China in 1945. Dawn Redwoods are one of three tree species falling under the common name “Redwood”. All three grow well on the west coast where they have access to regular, light rain and deep fertile soil. The Dawn Redwoods we

have at Meadow Lakes are interesting because they are deciduous conifers – meaning they lose their leaves every fall, yet they bear cones. Larches and the Bald Cypressess growing along our waterways also share this distinction.

Dawn Redwoods look similar to the Bald Cypressess, but a close inspection reveals the differences. The foliage of Dawn Redwoods is said to be opposite, that is, the leaves (needles) appear opposite leaves on the other side of the twig. Bald Cypressess, which are more common at Meadow Lakes, have leaves which alternate down each stem. They are known for their “knees”, which protrude out of the ground or water under established trees. The knees are thought to provide a means of gas exchange for the roots, since the trees commonly grow on inundated sites. There are Dawn Redwoods planted in the basin between the Guest House and cottage 78; another, smaller specimen is outside the door to corridor 5. Bald Cypressess can be found around Teardrop and Schank's Lakes. Both species have good fall color and interesting fruit.

Joe Greipp



Ginkgo



Dawn Redwood

Favorite Shrubs

The use of shrubs is important in any landscape. While tall trees are best at anchoring the landscape, mature shrubbery produces a more evolved, well heeled appearance. Annual and perennial flowers may provide the more immediate impact of bright color, but they are shorter lived and require much more maintenance. Shrubs with attractive colors, shapes, and textures can provide a well maintained look at a fraction of the cost and effort of other plants. Here are a few of the shrub species that residents have especially enjoyed.

Many have asked about the Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) “Red Rocket” planted in the new fern garden across the corridor from the Meeting Room. Although a number of



Crapemyrtles have been planted in the Arboretum, this one has garnered the most attention, most likely because of its prominent location and bright red flower color. Crapemyrtles are a southern plant with long lasting blooms and exfoliating bark. They are usually multi-stemmed and can be grown as large shrubs or small trees. As its name suggests, Red Rocket is known for its fast growth and cherry red flowers; even the new foliage emerges with a reddish color. Look for a white flowered variety, “Natchez”, inside the gate at the pool; it develops very handsome bark with age and is fragrant. A pink variety is located at the Wellness Path between the pool and the Meeting Room. There are also thirteen different varieties of Crapemyrtle between the back hallway of B and C wings in Healthcare and the employee parking lot. These varieties have a wide range of size, shape, and color, but when in

bloom, none can match Red Rocket.

Another shrub which has become very popular in the last few years is Glossy Abelia (*Abelia grandiflora*). It ranges in size from small to medium, and has small, glossy leaves and



slender, arching branches. Some varieties have variegated foliage. In a very cold winter it can be killed back to heartier stems, but in our area it usually requires only light protection from winter winds. Abelias are also known for their extended blooming periods – some seem to bloom all summer long. Their flowers are trumpet-shaped, usually white with a pink or rose center, and are very delicate. While you can’t help but notice the floral displays of forsythia in early spring, you really have to be close to appreciate Abelia flowers. Look for them planted along the corridor between buildings 28 and 29, behind the Guest House patio, and in the fern garden across from the Meeting Room.

Early in the spring, several residents asked about the shrub *Fothergilla gardenia*. This deciduous shrub has spikes of white flowers in the spring and very good fall color. The *Fothergilla* has been named a Pennsylvania Horticultural Society plant of the year. A variety we have introduced here is called “Mount



Airy”; it has a blue green leaf color and a full growth habit. Look for sweeps of this shrub in the large beds at the main entrance to Meadow Lakes and around building 16.

Another shrub we have found very successful is Virginia Sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), which is native to our area. It also has spikes of white flowers in



the spring, and has long lasting, deep red fall color. It tends to send up sprouts from its roots, which is good for soil stabilization and creates a massed effect. This quality can be very attractive, but can be too informal for some uses. Some trusted varieties are Henry’s Garnet, Little Henry, and Merlot. Look for sweeps of this plant in the large beds next to the guard shack and to the left of the porte cochere.

Joe Greipp



Fothergilla fall color

THE DROUGHT AND OUR TREES

2010 started out very wet, with record breaking snow followed by a wet early spring, leaving our water reservoirs with more reserves than usual. Then things changed. June started out hot and dry. It was so dry that most people didn't seem to notice the heat because we lacked the usual humidity. Plants, however, dry out very quickly when the sun is shining and the breeze is dry. This condition forces the plants to pull as much moisture from the soil as possible.

When a tree experiences drought, one of its first reactions is to allow absorbing roots to shut down and atrophy. The tree begins to slow down its metabolic processes to conserve water. As the water content in the leaves, which makes them rigid, decreases, the leaves wilt downward, increasing pressure on the small pores on the underside, closing them to prevent the loss of water vapor. Internally, the tree is in a constant state of reallocating resources. Normally, the flow of water in most trees is caused by photosynthesis, drawing water up the tree. As water becomes scarce and photosynthesis slows, a tree redirects its resources in ways to best protect its survival. On the whole, evergreen trees are more efficient at this process than deciduous trees.

As drought conditions worsen, some trees begin to selectively shut off

leaves, twigs, or branches. This was especially true this year of our Maples, Ashes, Dogwoods, and Tuliptrees. These parts which were aborted, however, were not dropped. When a tree drops leaves, it has to exert energy to form an abscission (detachment) layer between itself and the leaves. Because the trees were so stressed, they saved energy by allowing these obsolete parts to remain on the stems (which can become sites of future infection or infestation). This shows how desperate the trees were.

Trees with established, healthy root systems are best able to tolerate these conditions. The roots not only act to support the tree and absorb water and nutrients, they also store energy in the form of nutrient reserves, allowing them to form new buds, leaves, and roots in spite of short term stresses.

Unfortunately, of the ten hottest summers in New Jersey since 1895, eight have occurred since 1999. While trees can tolerate short periods of heat and drought, repeated exposures severely decrease their vigor, leaving them susceptible to disease and insect infestation. This is the reason we lost the majestic Sugar Maple on Etra Rd. this summer. For trees whose native range lies further north, the past decade has been very traumatic.

The best thing to do for these trees is to water them during the drought, which we were able to do for some of our most valuable specimens. You would never fertilize a stressed tree, though, since that would force new growth and shoot elongation, which would put further demand on the limited water supply. When rain finally came in the fall, the trees were able to divert much of their resources to strengthening their buds for next year. The last few weeks of useful leaf life were used for photosynthesis to manufacture and store energy for rebuilding. Once the window for new growth closed for the season, we were able to fertilize our more prized trees, to ensure the needed nutrients are available in the soil. We'll also work to rebuild some of the organic material in the soil which was lost to the drought. We'll continue to monitor for pests and diseases. The aftereffects of this drought will last for several years.

I believe the trees provide a feeling of tranquility and belonging to people who visit and live at Meadow Lakes. When you are out walking and see some of our largest trees, please take a minute to appreciate what it must have taken for them to remain in the same place for such a long time, despite all the adverse environmental conditions and trauma caused by humans.

Joe Greipp

A WALK THRU MEADOW LAKES

Sunlight filters thru maple and oaks
Shielding winding paths for walkers
Leisurely looking for treasured trees.

A massive chestnut blocks the way
Its branches loaded with food for Man
Its leaves providing shelter for those who stray.

Exploring grounds left as nature planned
Walkers amble on graded pathways
Delighted to find trees unspoiled by Man.

Harriet B. Ringel, November 4, 2010

Meadow Lakes Forum Grounds Committee

Co-Chairs: Irwin Merker and Gloria Merker
Committee Members: Bonnie Ahrens, Anne Benenson,
Barbara Curtis, Gretchen Hull, Florine Hunt, Audrey Jasper,
Pat Kendall, Helen Mackenzie, Gloria Mineo, Elizabeth Turley,
Elizabeth Wadsworth

Arboretum Sub-Committee: Bonnie Ahrens, Helen Mackenzie,
Gloria Merker, Irwin Merker

This issue of the Newsletter was designed and produced by
Irwin Merker

Nature Poems, by Pat Roberts

I AM GRATEFUL

for two tulip poplars,
towering above all trees,
their lobe-leafed branches
arched above my walkway,
their invisible roots
dirt-packed, spreading underground.
Venerable spruces, a row of them,
their blue-needled limbs holding cones,
hide a neighbor's house.
Close by, hemlocks stand guard,
shading rooms, supporting bird nests.
Maples await their change of color.

My garden of trees, rooted through decades,
taken for granted, stand tall
while today, down the road
by a twist of strong wind
giants, upright last night,
lie flattened,
their branches sprawled
across highway and homes,
massive roots exposed to gawking passersby,
like me, shocked
grateful for having been spared
nature's vengeance, accepting my luck,
yet wondering "How come?"

October 2000

THE WIND ADVISORY

There was no way
the young Sunset Maple,
a centerpiece of my grounds,
a source of daily joy,
could have heard or understood
the strong Wind Advisory issued
by the National Weather Service.

Ever a spirit-lifter
the sprightly maple,
Its limbs encased with
stunning, shining red-gold leaves
stood tall
as nearby trees, their foliage shed,
seemed sad and listless.

Not so now—
the sweeping winds defrocked
the glistening maple
of all but one survivor—
one curly leaf clings
to its lower branch
defying any warning,
giving me hope.

November 2010

VOLUNTEERS

As in previous years, resident volunteers have made a significant contribution to the community. The much-appreciated volunteers for various activities during 2010 are listed below.

The Greenhouse: Barbara Curtis, Ruth Greenfeder, Helene Hemmendinger, Florine Hunt, Audrey Jasper, Jean Kelly, Pat Kendall, Helen Mackenzie, Edythe Masten, Gloria Merker, Lea and Harvey Meyer, Gloria Mineo, Trudy Salzer, Ann Shipper, Jim Tegen, Elizabeth Turley, Elizabeth Wadsworth.

Sunshine Alley, watering geraniums and other plants: Ruth Greenfeder, Jean Hanst, Audrey Jasper, Helen Mackenzie, Gloria Merker, Trudy Salzer. Gloria Mineo tended geraniums in her garden during the summer.

The Tree Nursery, watering and mulching: Irwin and Gloria Merker, Elizabeth Wadsworth.

Photography: Anne Benedict, Anne Benenson, Jane Brewer.

Flower Tubs, planting and watering: Anne Benenson, Frank Elliott, Gloria Merker, Lea and Harvey Meyer, Isabel Sefton.

Willow Garden, deadheading: Ann Shipper.

CARING FOR YOUR HOUSEPLANTS

After the last of the autumn leaves have been cleared away, and when we finally tire of the winter landscape, no matter how beautiful it is, we turn to houseplants for the comfort of greenery and a little color. Even a few plants, if well chosen, can make an attractive display. Here are a few suggestions that may help to keep your plant display healthy and attractive.

Don't overwater your plants. Overwatering is the most common cause of failure, but there is a simple way to know whether or not to water a plant. Touch the surface of the soil. If the soil is dry, water the plant until the water just begins to drain into the saucer from the hole in the bottom of the pot. If the surface of the soil is moist, **don't water** the plant, even if you have to rap yourself on the knuckles to prevent it. Think of yourself as a bartender and the plant as a customer who has had enough.

Feed your plants. Would you like to live on just water and no food? If you don't have any plant food on hand, suitable products are available in the plant and flower sections of local supermarkets. Miracle-Gro all-purpose plant food is widely available. You can feed your plants once a month or follow what we do in the greenhouse. There, we always use water that contains a tiny amount of fertilizer, so that the plants are fed a little at a time but constantly. We mix a scant one-eighth teaspoon of plant food into a gallon of water. A half-gallon container, which is easier to handle, with proportionately less fertilizer, could be kept under your sink, ready for use. In this way, you won't have to remember when you last fed your plants.

Watch for bugs. It is much better to catch insect infestations early. The three most common problems are mealybug, whitefly, and scale. **Mealybugs** show up as white cottony masses, especially in the leaf axils. If there are only a few, you can remove them with a Q-tip dipped in alcohol or liquid detergent, but if the infestation is serious, it may be best to discard the plant, to avoid infecting others. **Whiteflies** are tiny white flying insects; you can control them with a houseplant spray. In the greenhouse we use yellow sticky traps, which work well on the same principle as fly-paper, but are unattractive in the home. **Scale** insects are the toughest to control. The sign that your plant has scale is their sticky secretion on the leaves, called honeydew. The adult insects are little brown ovals. Their hard shells make them impervious to spray. The immature, "naked" insects can be controlled with a spray, but they are so tiny as to be nearly invisible. You might try removing and discarding sticky leaves, especially if you see adult scale insects on them, and then spraying the rest of the plant. The infestation often returns, however, in which case you may wish to discard the plant. Ferns are especially susceptible to scale.

A good general way to help avoid insect infestations is to give your plants a nice bath now and then. If the plant is small enough, wrap the pot in a plastic bag, covering the soil. Then take the plant to a deep laundry room sink and, grasping the bag firmly around the base of the plant, wash the leaves gently but thoroughly under the tap with lukewarm water. Or, you can fill the sink and swish the leaves through the water. Plants that are too big for this treatment will enjoy a nice sponge bath.

Choose your plants carefully. If you put a fern in a sunny window and forget to water it, it will die. If you treat a succulent the same way, however, it will be fine, because it likes a sunny and dry environment, while the fern needs shade and moisture. So first consider the conditions in your apartment and your own personality, and then select plants that will be suitable. Before you buy a plant, be sure to read the label, which will tell you the plant's temperature, light and watering needs.

Flowering plants are very tempting, but most, such as cyclamens, orchids, azaleas, or gardenias, are sold as gift plants that are meant to bloom for a short time. They may not look very attractive without their flowers and are difficult to bring into bloom again. For this reason, it is best to concentrate on foliage plants with colorful leaves or interesting shapes and textures, perhaps with a flowering plant for an occasional focal point among the others. Then you will still have a good display when the flowering plant is finished. Plant breeders have recently developed handsome foliage plants that are also easy to care for. Some examples are the crotons, peperomias, dracaenas, and calatheas, which you can find in local stores. Walmart often has a nice selection, as does Home Depot (inside the store, not in the outdoor garden center). The angel-wing begonias available at our plant sales every May have pretty spotted leaves and clusters of pink flowers as a bonus, if you can give them some sun. Also at our next May plant sale will be pots containing interesting arrangements of succulents of varying shapes, such as hens-and-chicks, Spanish thyme, or haworthia. These plants are virtually indestructible. Dark green jade plant is another tough succulent, and can be very attractive beside the contrasting feathery, light green leaves of asparagus fern. You can be creative in your choice of plants.

Gloria Merker



DON 'T OVERWATER!!



FEED YOUR PLANTS!!

BIRD NEWS

Each year we report sightings of migratory birds that stop at Meadow Lakes to rest and feed. One of our resident birders, Paul Taylor, who has compiled an impressive list of sightings just from his living room windows in building 19, this year reported a golden-crowned kinglet seen feeding in a spruce tree in mid-October. This really tiny bird, only about four inches long, is olive green in color, with a yellow cap and white eyebrows. About the same time, Florine Hunt reported a common redpoll, seen perched on a balcony in building 16. The redpoll's distinguishing marks are a red cap and a black chin. It is also a very small bird, less than a sparrow in size, but with somewhat similar white-streaked brown coloring. Not surprisingly, campus locations nearest the wooded areas have more bird visitors on their way south for the winter, because birds prefer large stretches of woodland, which promise food and shelter.

Another October "drop-in" was a beautiful great egret, spotted from the covered bridge by Gloria Merker and Lea Meyer. It flew down the length of Schank's Lake, stopping twice on the shore, but not staying to feed. The egret is pure white, similar to our familiar great blue herons in form, but somewhat smaller in length and wing-span. A few days earlier, residents who went on the trip to the Brigantine wildlife sanctuary saw hundreds of these egrets; this bird seems to have been separated from its flock.

The last sighting reported this year, in early November, is also the most exciting. Florine Hunt spotted an immature bald eagle from her apartment windows. It sat for two hours in a tree in the area between building 16 and the end of building 9, where a stream flows into Teardrop Lake. It takes four years for the bald eagle to develop its characteristic adult plumage, with a white head and tail. This bird, although very large, was only in its second year, with a dark grayish back, mottled whitish breast, yellow feet, and a flat head. Florine reports that a few weeks later the bird returned for a shorter visit, this time perching on a tree just a few yards from her kitchen window. Although eagles nest in the area, in the past they were seen only rarely at Meadow Lakes. Now that their numbers are gradually increasing, we may hope to see them more often.



Although these occasional visitors are so exciting, the focus of our attention is naturally on the nesting birds that are our fellow residents at Meadow Lakes. Among the most prominent is the American robin. Kathy Easton, the inspiring naturalist who guides our bird walks on and off the Meadow Lakes campus, has published articles on individual bird species in the Master Gardeners Newsletter. Just below you will find a reprint of her article on the robin. In future issues, we hope to print her articles on other species as well.

Gloria Merker

The American Robin

The declination of the sun, the scent of warm earth on moist days, a glimpse of a bat one mild evening, soft hues of swollen tree buds, and the clear, cheery song of the American robin in our backyards herald the advent of spring.

The American robin (*Turdus migratorius*) is North America's largest, most abundant, and most widespread thrush.

(*Turdus* is Latin for thrush and *migratorius* for wanderer or wandering.) The English colonists named the bird "robin" because its coloration resembles the robin redbreast of England. The English robin, however, is in the flycatcher family and not closely related to the American robin.



In 1841, Audubon wrote about the great flocks of robins in berry-loaded trees whose "presence is productive of a sort of jubilee among the gunners...They are fat and juicy, and afford excellent eating." Enormous numbers of birds were shot in the southern states. The spraying of DDT in the 1950's led to another slaughter of robins. The leaves of elm trees, sprayed to control beetles carrying Dutch Elm Disease, were eventually processed by earthworms, then devoured by robins, leading to death or reproductive failure. This was a sad lesson on the potentially lethal impact of DDT on birds.

Although the robin is a well known backyard bird and classic harbinger of spring, the robin is also a common winter resident. They congregate in large roaming flocks during the fall and winter, and in general do not wander far from their breeding area. Spring migration begins in February and

continues through May. They closely follow an average daily temperature of 37 degrees F. Most New Jersey birds are on territory by early April, when males can be seen fighting with each other and their reflected images in windows and shiny car parts.

The American robin's diet of invertebrates and fruit includes earthworms, beetles, weevils, grasshoppers, cicadas, ants, termites, cutworms and other caterpillars, bayberries, grapes, mistletoe berries, and pokeberries. Young are fed insects. Robins produce two to three broods a year, but only a fraction of fledged young make it to the next year. Birds are known to have lived to the age of 14 years, but the entire population turns over, on average, every six years. The domestic cat is the most destructive enemy of the birds that nest around our homes.

Robins select a perch to sing from, returning to it through the season to fill the yard with musical, liquid phrases. Often the first to wake, a chorus of robins caroling "cheerily, cheery" just before first light, and again at evening twilight, is welcome reassurance that spring is not silent.

Kathy Easton, About Birds, March 2009

Photo by Anne Benedict

References: *Encyclopedia of North American Birds* – Terres; *Life histories of North American Thrushes, Kinglets and their Allies* – Bent; *The Birder's Handbook* – Ehrlich, Dobkin, Wheye; www.birds.cornell.edu

THE COMMUNITY VEGETABLE GARDEN

For all the abundant land occupied by Meadow Lakes, we have been unable to find a suitable spot on the campus for a community vegetable garden. It would be nice to have one, because residents' gardens are often too shady for vegetables. An open, sunny location with good drainage and a nearby water tap is needed, but one of these requirements was always absent.



This summer, Stacey Judge, the Community Life Enrichment Coordinator for Springpoint, had the idea of reserving a plot for Meadow Lakes residents at the Hightstown community vegetable garden, which is located on Bank Street, in the park next to the water treatment plant. Stacey and Arboretum Director Joe Greipp put a notice on the bulletin board for residents to try this experimental project.

In early June, Stacey, Lea and Harvey Meyer, Jim Tegen, Irwin and Gloria Merker, and former Director of Dining Services Juan Ceballos, each took a portion of the plot and put out plants and seeds. We mostly grew tomatoes, but there were also peppers, eggplants, and basil, and Stacey tried watermelons and carrots as well. Outside the fenced garden are several large raised planters, and into one of these the Meyers put extra tomato plants, and into another went begonias and geraniums left over from our spring plant sale, just to add some color.

The soil was wonderful – I had become so used to the stony clay at Meadow Lakes that I nearly fell over when the spade sunk into soft topsoil nearly a foot deep. In July, Joe provided a bale of mulch hay that Mary Jane Stout had acquired from a local farmer (in the photo you can see us spreading it) to help hold in moisture and discourage the growth of weeds. The tomatoes especially were delicious, and at one point the Meyers' abundant crop allowed us to bring some to St. Anthony's church in Hightstown for the community's food pantry. We had no bugs and did not have to spray. The only real problem was the extended drought, which meant more visits to the garden for watering than we had anticipated.

It was really nice to meet the Hightstown residents who participated in the garden project. I had expected to see mainly other seniors, but there were also younger people, including a young mother who brought her small child to "help" her.

During the communal cleanup of the garden in early November, we learned that the plot would be available to Meadow Lakes again next summer, if residents wish to use it. If you are interested, watch the bulletin board in the auditorium for an announcement next spring.

Gloria Merker

Photo by Anne Benenson

APPLES

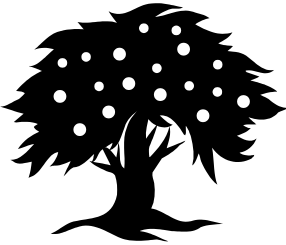
When gods get hungry
They roam old orchards
Looking for yellow pears
Or apples bruised
From the fall.

Sins ripen in the October sun.

When you bite into a Honey
Crisp, or pine for Pink Ladies,
Or whine for Winesaps,
Remember, gods are jealous.

Apples are apples until they aren't.

Judith Hawk



SHRUBS, TUBS, AND GARDEN MAINTENANCE

Each spring at Meadow Lakes, residents' hearts lightly turn to thoughts of gardens. While some people are active gardeners, others prefer to order the purchase and installation of flowering plants by our staff. The results can be excellent, but the process of servicing, within a short span of time, the sixty to seventy residents who place such work orders, can be frustrating for the people who must wait for their plants, not to mention utterly exhausting for our staff.

More and more, however, residents are noticing how attractive flowering shrubs can be as colorful points of interest in the landscape. Shrubs are certainly less labor intensive to care for than flower beds, which we tend to rely on for color in our gardens. While it is true that annuals are the best source of bright color lasting through the whole growing season, we can control the amount of maintenance they require by grouping them in containers rather than setting them into the ground. For an in-ground planting, the soil first has to be turned over, either with a spade or roto-tiller, and then soil amendments have to be added to our heavy clay. After the planting is up and growing, the bed has to be weeded.

For greater satisfaction, a possible solution is to plan your garden to include a combination of flowering shrubs, bulbs, and annuals planted not in the ground but in pre-planted containers. These would be prepared in the greenhouse with the help of resident volunteers, before the rush of outdoor planting begins. These pre-planted containers would then be delivered to your gardens in a timely fashion. Judging from the average costs to residents who order in-ground plantings of annuals, the containers should be less expensive. The community as a whole would also benefit because the labor required by in-ground annual planting would be saved.

As an experiment, next spring about twenty containers of various shapes and sizes will be pre-planted with annuals that grow well here, and if residents like them, the number will increase in subsequent years. If you are interested in participating in this experiment, watch for announcements and further details in the early spring.

Gloria Merker

The Landscaping Department, 2010

The 2010 season will go down in memory as one of the most difficult to manage because of the unusual extremes of weather. There were six significant snow events during the winter. We began measuring the snow in feet rather than inches. Piles of snow would melt during the day and freeze at night, causing slip hazards which had to be dealt with daily. Our staff performed most of the work, and we called in supplemental labor only when we couldn't keep up. Our snow removal staff consisted of Mary Jane Stout, Alexander Covington, Mike Magee, Heather and Cassie Dollard, Donald Stout, Mark Capak and Mike Blaney. These employees worked tirelessly through the night to clear snow and ice from all roads, parking lots, and sidewalks. I cannot speak highly enough of their efforts during the winter of 2010. We were commended not only by residents, their families, and staff, but also by members of the outside community, and we hope to continue to provide you with the best possible response to such emergency situations.

The winter's wrath gave way to a wet spring, prohibiting access to many of the snow damaged evergreens. When the soil finally dried, the drought set in, with no significant rainfall until the middle of September. Trees, shrubs, and turf were stressed, sometimes to the point of expiration. Newer plantings were hardest hit and supplemental watering was the key to maintaining them. There is another article in this issue concerning the effects of the drought on our trees. We lost roughly twelve acres of turf, which was reseeded by our landscape contractor in exchange for not mowing during the driest periods.

Some seasons prove to be better for blooms than others, and this varies from species to species. This season was outstanding for the blossoming of Yellowwood (*Cladrastis lutea*) and Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). Both trees are native, but not commonly found in unmanaged lands. Redbuds are small trees which have become very popular in the nursery trade; they have purple flowers borne along slender, arching branches in the early spring. The Yellowwood is a mid-sized tree with smooth, steel gray bark like that of a beech. It seldom flowers well, perhaps every four to six years, but when it does it puts on a show. Its fragrant white flowers are borne in long, pendulous panicles. You may have noticed the fine specimen next to the porte cochere, between the concierge area and the bank.

Although the fern garden (the new garden across the corridor from the Meeting Room) was installed in the fall of 2009, it really didn't start to fill in until this season. Many residents have been intrigued by the succession of blooms and seasonal interest here. Snowdrops and other early spring bulbs were thoroughly enjoyed, but the showstopper this summer was the Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*). The variety "Red Rocket" grows quickly, yielding masses of long lasting cherry red flowers. Also interesting in this area are the fall blooming Camellias, Sedum "Autumn Joy", and a variegated Glossy Abelia.

This year, we also replaced a failing garden between building 27 and the croquet courts, an area which gets a lot of summer traffic. Overgrown junipers growing here were covered with Japanese Honeysuckle, an invasive vine that damaged the junipers to a point from which they could not recover. These plants were removed and replaced with Meserve Hollies, Knockout Roses, Gardenias, Fothergillas, Abelias, Sedum, and a little pink Crapemyrtle.

We continue to build relationships with the outside community. Tours of the Arboretum have been given to garden clubs and the New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association. These groups have provided very favorable feedback about the Meadow Lakes landscape.

Several years ago, a Girl Scout designed and installed the garden beds around Dayroom 20. This year, her younger sister Claire designed and installed new raised planters in the B and C wing Healthcare courtyards. Three were newly built and two were refurbished. She also designed and built the new planter boxes on the columns of the pergola in the C wing courtyard. Claire and her father raised all of the money for the new construction and worked tirelessly to complete the project. By the time you read this, she should already have earned her Golden Award, which is similar to a Boy Scout's Eagle Scout Award.

We have begun planning for the coming winter's snow and ice, and readying the equipment. Let's hope the coming winter and the next growing season will be kinder to us than 2010.

Joe Greipp



Sources and credits: Drawings on page 6 from Lynn and Joel Rapp, *Mother Earth's Hassle-Free Indoor Plant Book*, drawings by Marvin Rubin; drawing of immature eagle on page 7 from *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, 2000; photos of shrubs on page 3 are from the internet.