

Old and New Favorites at Brandywine Cottage

by David L. Culp

IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE that twenty years have passed since my partner and I started making a garden here at Brandywine Cottage. Our garden never ceases to be rewarding. That is not to say that it is without challenges. Perhaps the easiest part is putting in the garden; maintaining and refining the garden is both the challenge and the fun. Time and space limitations only up the ante. If you could do it all at once, would you really want to?

I am a plantsman first and, as one, I enjoy watching plants grow and express themselves. As a garden maker/designer, I enjoy playing with colors and textures to achieve the desired effect. It is always an interesting tight rope to walk—plantsmanship vs. designer, but I wouldn't have it any other way. I am always refining the picture, whether editing out plants or (more likely in my case) adding plants. This becomes tricky as the garden fills in. Making selections for the garden becomes more rigorous with time. However, I do not look at this as a negative. Instead, I select plants that work with me, those that exhibit a general willingness to live in the location I have chosen, and those that are adapted to their environment. Aside from giving a sense of place, this is one of the important lessons the native plant movement teaches us.

Plants that look good even under stress are plants I tend to want more of. This is particularly evident considering

I began this article on a 100° day which followed a winter that had four feet of snow. With our Mid-Atlantic weather extremes, it's important to take note of those plants that perform well, instead of concentrating on the plants that have died.

Another group of plants of particular interest to me are those that have an off-peak bloom time. They add further interest by extending the garden seasons. Among the plants that I am still planting and want more of after twenty years are many of my familiar favorites. They have earned a place in my heart and garden. Perhaps you are familiar with some of these plants, or perhaps it is time to take a second look. You may find a forgotten favorite or find that "special one" to add to the garden.

Galanthus

Surely there is always room for minor bulbs. For me, galanthus are major players in the garden. Some species such as *Galanthus reginae-olgae* start blooming in October, and if you add other species and cultivars, you can have galanthus blooming from fall through spring. These plants are an indispensable

feature in the winter garden, their main bloom time coming before hellebores in March. Both plants are perfect cures for chlorophyll withdrawal in the late winter.

I am currently adding cultivars with yellow markings and yellow ovaries. *Galanthus* 'Ecusson d'Or' (Shield of Gold) is a good example. A nivalis form, it blooms a little later in the galanthus blooming season. *Galanthus* 'Spindlestone Surprise' is a good grower for me which is a definite plus when it comes to the yellow-marked Sandersii Group. I sometimes have difficulty with this group. Of course, I would recommend the *Galanthus* 'David L. Culp', a tall plant with well-formed flowers and refined markings. It, too, is a strong grower. I am dividing and planting more of this one, you can be sure. The yellow-marked galanthus are especially useful when making color



Green hillside at Brandywine Cottage.

photo ©Diane Mattis

combinations in the garden. The yellow markings repeat other yellows found in the garden at this time of year, such as *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea', mahonia flowers, early daffodils, yellow-berried hollies, and yellow-flowered hellebores. Yellow is useful any time of the year—not only is it cheerful, but it also can provide a pleasing contrast. I am always interested in adding new forms of galanthus and try to make selections based on flower form, distinct markings, and foliage that does not hide the flower. I like the flower presented well above the foliage—contorted oddities are not my cup of tea.

Hellebores

I am still planting hellebores. I consider them the ultimate shade plant. Hellebores' strongest features are their season of bloom and the variety of flower colors available. An additional bonus is that no slug or deer repellent is needed.

I keep a lookout for new colors—good clear colors that catch my eye or that add accents to existing plants are important characteristics. When I find a color I like, I add more to enlarge the color drift. You need both accent plants and color drifts to keep your collection interesting. Recent introductions of *Helleborus argutifolius* x *H. niger* hybrids are very popular. These hybrids have large outward-facing flowers and are great performers in winter pots and containers.

Vertical Elements

Verticals are an important key element in the shade garden. Mother Nature has given us many bold shapes for shade—wide-leaved hostas and hellebores, along with lacey ferns, are the first two textures many think of as shade garden features. The challenge is always to find vertical or grass-like shapes to add to your combinations. All three textures are needed.

Carex, especially native species like *Carex pensylvanica*, *C. plantaginea*, and *C. flaccosperma* are forgiving of dry situations in the garden

once established. *C. pensylvanica*, with its fine hair-like texture, seems to be the most drought tolerant once it is established and spreads into a sizable clump. One is almost tempted to comb it.

Carex plantaginea with its pleated leaves gives an added texture to plantings. It is also semi-evergreen which gives another season of interest. Both *C. flaccosperma* and *C. laxiculmis* 'Bunny Blue' offer a glaucous, gray-blue color note to contrast or complement other shade plants in your garden. Gray is such a good color to lighten up dark-shaded areas.

Every year I find more uses for *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens'. I would place it in my top ten favorite plants because of its multi-season use alone. Its "ever purple," almost black, foliage can be used in a variety of situations. Because of its texture and color, I always seem to be adding more of this plant, or creating new combinations with it. It's also a good bridge color, uniting other brighter colors, and it mimics the patterns of light and shadow on the forest floor. Colors, other than green, add to the excitement level of the shade garden.

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola' was the Perennial Plant Association's Plant of the Year in 2009, a well deserved accolade. Its graceful texture and arching mounded habit is beautiful as a specimen or in drifts. *H. macra* 'Aureomarginata' with its yellow variegation sparks up the shade. *H. macra* 'All Gold' is, as its name suggests, all gold. It will grow in full sun as well as part shade. Both cultivars are easy to use with yellow or yellow-variegated shade plants. Slightly larger *H. macra* 'Albovariegata' (syn.

H. 'Albo-striata') is a good companion for plants with white or cream variegations. The species *H. macra* is equally beautiful in an understated kind of way. With the same arching habit indicative of the species and its darker green foliage, it is even more serene and looks great in a mass in a more formal setting, or as an edging plant. Recent introductions of *H. macra*, such as 'Beni Kaze', 'Nicolas', and 'Naomi' give us a red color note to use. I especially like 'Beni Kaze' (Japanese for red wind) because it shows color earlier. 'Nicolas' and 'Naomi' show red only late in the season in my garden.

Hydrangeas

I have used hydrangeas even before living here at the Cottage. These old-fashioned plants have recently enjoyed a renewed interest and popularity. They bloom in late June through July and some into August. The first flush comes after the roses and becomes a dominant feature after other plants are taking a breather from the spring rush. Flowers that age gracefully can extend the show even longer. It was a nice surprise for me when I found *H. quercifolia* to be drought tolerant. Three plants became fifteen and then I added more cultivars—that is usually how it works for me. If one performs well, I know that it adapted to my site, and more are added.

Hydrangea serrata is one of my favorites because it blooms on new wood. This can prove to be invaluable



Assorted Hellebore Flowers

photo ©Diane Mattis

after a cold winter. Its lace-cap blossom is more delicate in form and serves as a foil against the heavier shaped *H. macrophylla*. I grow them both in the garden and

use them as container plants as well, especially the less hardy forms.

There are many species, cultivar variations, and combinations of colors of hydrangea.

H. macrophylla 'Ayesha' has delicate, cup-shaped individual flowers, forming striking flower heads. Like many other hydrangeas, its color saturation may depend on your soil's pH.

Trees

I suppose if some evil force made me select just one tree, I would choose a stewartia—any stewartia would do. They are among my favorite trees. I appreciate them for their winter bark and exquisite flowers in late to early summer. The added bonus of great fall foliage color gives us four seasons of interest.

Comparatively speaking, stewartias are not large trees and thus adaptable to many spaces. This year



Native Dogwoods.

I added *S. rostrata*, a Chinese species, which is early to bloom, similar to our native *Stewartia ovata*, but much easier to grow.

It is a magical time of the year when dogwoods and redbuds, the signature understory trees of the East Coast, are in bloom. Few moments can surpass it. I knew I could indulge my passion for them because they were

growing wild on my property, and were adapted naturally to the site.

It is great fun to seek out new color gradations of the redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) flowers which come in many shades from magenta to pink. *C. canadensis* 'Appalachian Red' is the closest to a red-flowered form that we have at this time. It is clearly a different shade but not a 'stop sign' red, and it fits nicely into the overall colors of the garden.

The flower color being a given, I have been adding cercis with colored foliage. *Cercis canadensis* 'Ace of Hearts' with its yellow foliage brightens up my mixed border and repeats the yellow color at a tree-height plane. Variegated forms such as *C. canadensis*



A Relaxing Garden Setting.

'Floating Clouds' are on the acquisition list. 'Floating Clouds' is much more scorch resistant than *C. canadensis* 'Silver Cloud' and has the same classic magenta pink flowers. *C. canadensis* 'JNJ' (The Rising Sun™) has yellow to peach foliage on its new growth and was the talk of the Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association (PANTS) Show this year. Its overall effect is that of a tri-colored tree.

Dogwoods (*Cornus florida*) are not long-lived, compared to oaks, and tend to get the disease anthracnose. Whenever *C. florida* needs to be replaced, I replant with the anthracnose-resistant selections 'Appalachian Spring' or 'Jean's Appalachian Snow'. It's up to us to replant with improved selections.

After the redbuds and dogwoods, what next?

Chionanthus virginicus answers that question quite nicely. I felt I was in good company when

I read that this native tree was one of Thomas Jefferson's favorites. Many garden visitors comment on its wonderful fragrance when they walk by it in bloom. This year I planted *C. virginicus* 'White Knight', a new introduction from Manor View Farms in Maryland, selected by Alan Jones. It is a male clone and flowers at a very early age—perfect for those of us who don't want to wait.

Asters

Aster (*star* in Latin) is indeed the star of autumn offering showy displays as other plants begin to decline. Sited at the edge of woods or in a border, they are tough, drought tolerant, and combine well with most garden plants, especially effective with grasses. Choose shorter, bushier varieties that require no staking or pinching back. David offers some of his favorites.

I am always adding more asters to my aster border and am especially fond of *Symphotrichum laevis* 'Blue Bird' and *Symphotrichum oblongifolium*, but any that prove to be more disease resistant and require less maintenance will do. The fragrant asters like *S. oblongifolium* seem to be more rabbit and deer resistant. They also seed a bit, but that suits me fine in the thin, dry soil where I have planted them. *S. oblongifolium* 'October Skies', a strong compact mound, and *S. oblongifolium* 'Raydon's Favorite', taller with large blue-purple, densely packed flowers, are the stalwarts among them.

Heat-tolerant Perennials

Echinaceas are wildly popular today, and we are faced with an ever-growing number of new ones each year. As mentioned earlier, I am writing this while under a heat advisory, temperatures reaching 90–100°F. My list of plants that do not seem to suffer from heat and drought is an important one. Besides the obvious succulents, the list contains many native plants.

Of special note are the echinaceas. This is not exactly a love note concerning this genus. The ones that perform I plant with glee—they are workhorses in the garden. However, I do struggle with some. New does not always equal garden worthy. The orange-flowered forms and the deep purples are the ones that currently interest me. Oh, how fickle gardeners can be with color! I am still on the ‘holy grail’ quest for the best orange flower. I have learned the hard way that until you grow a plant you don’t know it. A special thank you to Mt. Cuba Center for its research of this genus.* I concur that some of their top-rated selections like *E. purpurea* ‘Pica Bella’, *E. purpurea* ‘Elbrook’ (Elton Knight), and *E. Pixie Meadowbrite™* are among the best performers in my garden. *E. Pixie Meadowbrite™* is the first tri-species hybrid, a very floriferous compact selection with a large reddish-brown cone, making it a showy standout in the garden.

Roses Redux

I recently returned from a tour of France at the height of rose time. It renewed my love affair with this plant. I have been growing roses my entire gardening life. We grow more than twenty cultivars here at the cottage. Long ago, I decided they were just too beautiful to live without. I have a special fondness for the old varieties such as ‘Madame Hardy’, ‘Sombreuil’, and the old Bourbon rose ‘Souvenir



Vertical Elements in the Garden.

photo ©Diane Mattis

de la Malmaison’. Roses with a high petal count or singles are preferred, but disease resistance is a must when making a selection.

There are countless old shrub roses and climbers that have good disease resistance. I recommend doing a little research before making a



photo ©Diane Mattis

Containers

selection. The internet provides lots of information on this subject. The long list I made while away was narrowed down to ‘Zigeunerknabe’ (Gypsy Boy), ‘Ghislaine de Feligonde’, and Uetersener Kloesterrose®. With all of the varieties available, there are even roses for part shade. I suspect my wish

list of roses will continue to grow. New disease resistant roses, such as the Knock Out®, ‘Carefree’, and Hasslefree® series from a new generation of breeders, have given rose lovers a new lease on life, and brought many more gardeners to roses who previously avoided them.

Shade Perennials

I am always on the lookout for a new part-shade plant. Bowman’s root, *Gillenia trifoliata* ‘Pink Profusion’

(syn. *Porteranthus trifolius* ‘Pink Profusion’), has rapidly gone from a trial plant to wide use in my garden. It has light pink flowers in mid to late spring and, at 24", is shorter than the straight species allowing a new range of possible combinations. It requires moist shade initially, but once established, will tolerate dry conditions. I have underplanted taller polygonatum with ‘Pink Profusion’ for contrast; both plants have great fall color, again adding another season of interest. *G. trifoliata* ‘Pink Profusion’ is a Mt. Cuba Center introduction. Difficult to propagate, it will be, and should be, more deservedly used in the future now that we have broken the tissue culture code.

Dry Shade

When asked for a plant for dry shade, my first answer is epimedium. Their

Stay informed. Subscribe to the HPS Upcoming Events e-mail by sending an e-mail request to info@hardyplant.org. Insert ‘Upcoming Events’ in the subject line.

Classified Ads

The HPS/MAG Newsletter accepts garden-related classified ads. The cost is \$3 per line (approximately 40 characters or spaces per line), with a minimum of \$20 per ad. For more information, contact Barbara Bricks, 610-388-0428, bcubed32@aol.com.

The newsletter is published bi-monthly, in Jan, Mar, May, July, Sept, and Nov. Copy deadlines are one month before the issue date: Dec 1 (for Jan), Feb 1 (for Mar), April 1 (for May), June 1 (for July), Aug 1 (for Sept), and Oct 1 (for Nov). HPS/MAG adheres to one-time use; all other rights are retained by the author.

We welcome all contributions. Contact Barbara Bricks, 32 Elmwood Dr, Kennett Square, PA 19348. 610-388-0428. bcubed32@aol.com.

primary strength is beautiful evergreen to semi-evergreen foliage; Mother Nature has given us an added bonus with the flowers. The wide range of color choices now available give those with design tendencies more to play with. Their unusual flower form is a welcome alternative to composites. While I find the flowers alluring, it is the foliage color that now excites me! It adds



photo ©Diane Mantis

Foliage Textures

yet another dimension to the plant. *Epimedium grandiflorum* var. *violaceum* 'Bronze Maiden'; *E. g.* var. *higoense* 'Confetti'; *E. pinnatum* ssp. *colchicum* 'Thunderbolt'; *E. zhushanense*; *E. macrosepalum* 'Sweet Rachel'; and *E. sagittatum* 'Warlord' are all on my radar screen to find at the Hardy Plant Society Fall Plant sale!

Thankfully, my list of favorites goes on and on. *Myrica cerifera* 'Soleil' with its gold foliage is being trialed and I am making room for *Mukdenia rossii* 'Karasuba', a new groundcover for shade with wand-like flowers in spring and red tones to its foliage in fall. A shipment of antique bearded iris arrived today. It is one more plant, one more combination to make that keeps me going.

*For downloadable PDFs of the Mt. Cuba Center trials of coneflowers and asters, go to www.mtcubacenter.com.



David Culp has been creating the gardens of Brandywine Cottage with partner Michael Aldefer for more than 20 years. David is a well-known gardener, past president of the Hardy Plant Society, an internationally known hellebore hybridizer, and a sales representative

and new plant researcher for Sunny Border Nurseries, Inc. He lectures throughout the United States; contributes articles to a variety of horticulture magazines including *Fine Gardening* and *Horticulture*; has appeared on numerous TV garden shows, including *MGTV* and *Martha Stewart Living*; and is an instructor at *Longwood Gardens*. David currently is writing a book about the joys and lessons learned creating the gardens of *Brandywine Cottage*, to be published by *Timber Press* in 2012. Go to www.DavidL.Culp.com to view more photos of the gardens and the *Brandywine Hybrids™* hellebores. "Hellebores, a special exhibit of paintings and drawings by *Adrian Martinez* inspired by *Brandywine Cottage*," opens October 1 at *Sunset Hill Fine Arts Gallery*, West Chester, PA, 610-692-0374, www.adrianmartinez.com.

Ed Note: HPS will tour Brandywine Cottage gardens in Spring 2011. Look for details in the January HPS newsletter. Also, for a color edition of this feature article, go to the HPS web site, www.hardyplant.org.

Plant Sources

- Garden Vision Epimediums
www.home.earthlink.net/~darrellpro
- Sugarbush Native Plants
www.sugarbushnursery.com
- Yellow Springs Native Plant Farm
www.yellowspringsfarm.com
- Rare Find Nursery
www.rarefindnursery.com

Healthy Gardening

President's Message by Kay Johns

PRIOR TO A RECENT MINOR KNEE PROBLEM, I never realized how very important the health of our joints is. I have been gardening in the same manner for forty years and felt very comfortable with my method. I am a kneeler and a crawler in the garden. After demonstrating to my physical therapist the positions that I am usually in when gardening, I was surprised to see how unhappy he was. It seems I was breaking every rule in the book and putting tremendous strain on my knees and ankles. The following are suggestions that I gleaned from my therapist and from research.

Poor Posture

Poor gardening posture contributes to the discomfort we often feel after long periods of gardening. Therefore, it is extremely important to stretch and limber up a little before starting. It is also a good idea to stretch and change positions approximately every 20 minutes. Avoid kneeling, squatting, and bending from the waist. A gardening

seat that reverses to become a stool is a good investment. If you must kneel, it is far better to use this as a kneeler since it is well padded, which softens the impact on the knees, and is raised from the ground a few inches. Also, it is far better to kneel on one knee only. This cuts down on the physical stress. Many of the seats have arms on the kneeler which can be helpful when standing up from a kneeling position.

When lifting heavy loads, bend at the knees and not the waist. The same applies when lowering heavy objects to the ground. Use the entire body when turning and do not twist. Always use good posture when standing and sitting. Use wheelbarrows and carts to move heavy items. Keep hips and shoulders aligned when raking and shoveling. Do not pivot at the waist.

Tool Selection

Tool selection is also important for pain-free gardening. Ratchet pruners require far

less strength to use. Soft grips on tools help reduce repetitive motion injuries. Long-handled tools save the back. Look for tools labeled "ergonomic." It is also important to wear shoes with proper support.

Raised Beds

If you have problems with your knees and/or back and are creating new beds, make them raised and high enough for easy access from a seated position.

Not So Fast

Pace yourself; Rome was not built in a day and neither will your garden be. Take time to stop and smell the roses. As gardeners, we often become so involved in the process, that we forget to sit back and look at what we have accomplished. A few good stretches to end a gardening session and a nice hot shower always help the aches and pains! Gardeners are a hardy bunch—remember, it is not just the plants that are hardy in the Hardy Plant Society!