

# THE GARDENER

*Newsletter of the Bowie-Crofton Garden Club*



*The aims of the Bowie-Crofton Garden Club shall be to promote interest in and develop skills in gardening through cooperation, joint efforts, and good fellowship.*

## January 2010

### Next Monthly Meeting By Neil Potash

The next meeting of the Bowie-Crofton Garden Club is on Tuesday, January 26, 2010 at 7:30pm in the Bowie Community Center at the corner of Route 450 & Stoneybrook Drive. Bert GF Shankman will be speaking and demonstrating his photographic floral art. The presentation is entitled "Flowers Contain the Essence of Life". The show consists of 20-25 timed stills of common flowers opening and reaching their zenith. He was invited to a World Wide Show in Fusion, China this December to present his show. Bert has won many awards and has acted as a judge in shows all over the world. What a show! I've already seen it and I am excited. Samples of his photographic art and Bert's resume are on this web this website: <http://www.cameraflora.com>

Here is an article about Bert:

### The Saturday Leaning Post

**A Monthly Newsletter of the Metropolitan Washington Garden Club\***

*A Club for Serious Gardeners... and Those Who Just Love Gardening*

Established in 1946 as "The Men's Garden Club of Montgomery County.

**NEXT MEETING: Wednesday, September 2 at 8:00 PM**

**SPEAKER: Bert GF Shankman, Artist/Photographer.** Bert is one of our own; he has been a member of our garden club for years. His special expertise is in photographing flowers. In fact, he has earned an international reputation for his pictures of flowers.

Bert has participated in juried photo competitions locally in Maryland, DC, and Virginia, as well as in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and states as far away as Georgia, Texas, Colorado and New Mexico. He received *Honorable Mention* for one of his unique flower photographs in the "2003 National Juried Photography Competition" in New York. Fortunately, Bert lives in nearby Olney, MD.

In his current *Catalogue Raisonne of Flowers, as of May 27, 2009*, Bert lists the following varieties on his web site ([www.cameraflora.com](http://www.cameraflora.com)):

Daffodil, Dogwood, Dandelion, Sunflower, Tulip, Calla Lily, Sage, Moonflower, Helenium, Carnation, Gallardia, Poppy, Spiderwort, Magnolia, Zinnia, St. John's Wort, Marigold, Clematis, Japanese Tree Peony, Herbaceous Peony, Camellia, Pansy, Honeysuckle, Fuschia, Thistle, Hydrangea... and others as I think of them.'

Our garden club members have a great variety of interests. Some of us like to plant shrubs and trees while others like small groupings or large displays of their favorite flowers. Rock gardens and carefully placed statuary are particular favorites too. Then there are those of us who take great pride in growing fruits and vegetables. [There is plenty of room in our club to accommodate all such interests.]

In Bert Shankman's case, it is his unique skill as a photographer combined with his deep appreciation for flowers that makes his work so special and so widely acclaimed.

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## Presidents Comments

by *Jesse Terres*

As I sit here with my furnace driving up my gas bill (I pity those with electric heat), wondering if warming of the earth has come to an end, thinking how happy the polar bears must be, and knowing I can't even go to Florida to get away from the cold, I at least have my stack of recently received garden catalogs to browse through to keep me busy. The days are getting longer, about 36 minutes longer than in December. And pretty soon I'll be starting tomato plants for our sale. Come on spring!

Leafing through one of the early catalogs I immediately stumbled upon a cucumber, Diva, that I had great success with last year. I planted three seeds early in a large flowerpot. All three came up, and those three plants kept our neighbor and us in cucumbers throughout the summer. I didn't see a cucumber beetle all summer on those plants and they have a high yield level because the all-female flowers don't require pollen to set fruit. The best part was my wife did not have any after-taste from them.

I also had good luck again growing a winter squash called Gold Nugget. The year before I found the squash to have great taste early on and by January and February was even better, including the one I just had for lunch.

One of the tomatoes I grew last year, new to me, was Virginia Sweets. A large gold-red bicolor tomato with great taste not only making great tomato sandwiches but excellent to slip into any sandwich. All were unusually large; one thick slice per sandwich was enough. However, they were very juicy and the juice frequently ran down my chin. That just made them taste better. Virginia Sweets is a sure thing in my garden again this year, as well as German Johnson and several others. Bud Kerr called recently to tell me how much he and his friends enjoyed German Johnson. I promised him I'd grow them again this year. Burpee's Sweet Seedless was a disappointment, but not all that bad tasting. It just wasn't all that prolific. On the other hand Burpee's Delicious was delicious. Even Harold Moline once told me that. I'll grow some of those for our sale too. Like Bud said, "Once they turn red they all taste good." When it comes to tomatoes I just can't control myself. It's a serious problem I have.

In the December 23rd issue of the Washington Post was an article "U.S. wants farmers to use coal waste." The article says, "The federal government is encouraging farmers to spread a chalky waste from coal-fired power plants on their fields to loosen and fertilize soil . . . a whitish, calcium-rich, material known as flue gas desulfurization gypsum, or FGD gypsum." Reminds me of when I was a young teenager. We heated with coal and I was the fellow who spread the coal ash over our garden area and it did no harm. Everything grew very well, particularly the tomatoes. The community I lived in had a sewage system that drained into a very large cesspool. In the spring my dad and I would pull up the tomato plants that sprouted around the edge of the cesspool and plant them in our garden. Those seeds are tough. As I recall most of the tomatoes were the Roma types.

I use a lot of gypsum in my gardening areas. It does seem to break down the hard clumps of subsoil, adds sulfur, and increases the soil's calcium level. The calcium helps prevent blossom end rot of tomatoes. Interesting that it doesn't seem to affect the soil's pH level. Soil pH is a topic for discussion in our next newsletter.

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## Meeting Minutes, November 24, 2009

The Tuesday, November 24<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bowie Crofton Garden Club was held at the Bowie City Hall.

Jesse Terres, President, called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Jesse made a correction to the minutes that he submitted for the October 27<sup>th</sup> meeting since the Secretary was absent from the meeting. Jesse changed the word "atheistically" received to "enthusiastically" received.

Rich Dodson also added a correction to Jesse's October minutes. Rich said that raising the scholarship to \$1,000.00 was not "unanimously approved" as stated in the minutes since Rich gave a dissenting vote.

### Committee Reports:

**Membership Committee** – The acting V.P. for Membership, Rose Arslanian, was absent so couldn't provide a report. Brian Swetnam is the new 2<sup>nd</sup> VP, Membership. Congratulations, Brian!

**Hospitality Committee** – Barbara Eberstein is the Hospitality Chair. The Christmas party is set for December 6<sup>th</sup> at 4pm at St. Matthew's Church.

**Treasurer Report** – Karin Banta submitted her resignation. Kudos to Karin for a job well done. Karin has been a very dedicated treasurer.

### Programs

Neil Potash introduced the speaker, Lee Barber who spoke on Worm Composting. Lee is a Master Gardener and an ecologist by training. Lee gave a very thorough as well as entertaining talk on worm composting. He provided an excellent six page handout on Vermicomposting Basics by The Cultured Worm. Lee provided his email address and anyone can contact Lee to ask questions regarding his topic. His address is [leebarber@verizon.net](mailto:leebarber@verizon.net)

**Field Trips** – The new Field Trip Chair is Karen Anadol. Karen is the replacement for Ellen Brous who resigned from the position. Welcome, Karen!

**Sunshine** – Barbara Eberstein reminded everyone to inform her of anyone's illness etc., so she can send them a card.

**Plant Sale** – Barbara Eberstein volunteered to be the new Plant Sale Chair. Thanks, Barbara!

**Road Clean-Up** – Linda Snow reminded everyone of the next road clean up on March 13, 2010 and thanked those members and friends who showed up at the November 7 clean up.

**New Business** –

A new member was introduced. Welcome, Cheryl Diallo!! Cheryl is also a Master Gardener.

Nancy Harding and her husband were present. Nancy is a scholarship recipient from the University of MD and said she was appreciative of our BCGC scholarship.

Door prizes were awarded, and donated plants and items were given away. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Kathleen Beres, Secretary

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## **Spotlight on Conifers!**

Contributed by *Kathleen Beres*

Conifers provide the garden with a rich range of colors, shapes, and textures year-round, and are especially striking during the winter. Come to a "Talk and Tour" of our extensive conifer collection with our horticulturist, Mariya Navazio, who will guide you through this diverse and fascinating group of plants. For more information on conifers, see our webpage on the Gotelli Collection, <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/conifer.html>

### **Talk and Tour: Perfect Conifers for Urban Gardens and Containers**

January 16, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm, Auditorium and Grounds

Conifers provide striking color and form in your small garden or container during the winter. The diversity of colors range from green to gold to blue, and forms include spreading, weeping, and upright. Learn which ones are perfect for your landscape's size and style. Rain date: January 17. Fee: \$12 (\$10 FONA)

Registration required at <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/registration.html>.

For more details, go to: <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/events.html>

### **Talk and Tour: Conifers: Where in the World Did That Come From?**

February 6, 1:00 pm-3:00 pm, Auditorium and Grounds

Some gardeners see the more outlandish conifers and wonder where they could possibly have come from. Take a tour of the Gotelli Collection of Dwarf and Slow-Growing Conifers with the arboretum's conifer expert who will focus on the origins of these plants and emphasize those that are native to North America. Rain date February 7. Fee: \$12 (\$10 FONA)

Registration required at <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/registration.html>.

For more details, go to: <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Education/events.html>

Horticulture Education Programs, U.S. National Arboretum, 3501 New York Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20002, 202-245-5898

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## **Membership**

Note: Since the resignation of the V.P. of Membership, Lynne Snyder, Don Sminkey is maintaining the membership database, and Brian Swetnam is now the new V.P. for Membership. All changes to the membership list should be sent to Don at [gardener@bcgardenclub](mailto:gardener@bcgardenclub) with a copy to Brian at

bswetnam@live.com. Here are the latest membership statistics, including the new members: Total families with paid dues for 2009--2010: 77. Of these 77 families, there are 25 spouses for a total membership of 102.

## Treasurer's Report

January 2010

By *Karin Banta*

Starting Balance/Checkbook	<b>\$2,199.43</b>
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<b><u>Expenses</u></b>	
Crofton Printing/	
November Newsletter	\$38.27
Rose Arslanian/ Stamps	\$17.60
Barbara Eberstein, X-mas Party Expenses	\$150.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$205.87</b>

<b><u>Deposits</u></b>	
<b>Membership</b>	\$23.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$23.00</b>
Checkbook Balance	<b>\$2,016.56</b>
<b>AVAILABLE FUNDS</b>	<b>\$2,016.56</b>

## Horticultural Myths

### Compost tea: Examining the science behind the claims



Linda Chalker-Scott, Ph.D., Extension Horticulturist and Associate Professor, Puyallup Research and Extension Center, Washington

**W**SU Master Gardeners are often asked about compost tea (and other products) but may not have ready access to objective information. This column is dedicated to those hardworking volunteers who want the current

best science on products and practices so that they can continue to learn and inform others.

What is compost tea? The historical manufacture and use of compost leachates and extracts is a straightforward, centuries-old practice. Plant and animal wastes were

placed into a permeable bag and held in a bucket of water until the water turned black. (It's easy to see how the analogy to tea emerged.)

*This information is presented as factual, and when combined with the imagery of nurturing an ailing garden with a cup of tea, proves irresistible to many people.*

Both indoor and outdoor plants could be watered with this solution which contained nutrients and microbes. More recently, the process has been adapted for the compost tea market. One can buy a compost tea brewer, or purchase readymade teas at nursery and garden centers.

The original method of compost extraction was passive: it did not require an energy input. This method produces anaerobic or nonaerated compost tea whose principal components are anaerobic microbes and nutrients.

In contrast, compost tea brewers require an energy input in the form of an aerator. This constantly oxygenated mixture forms aerated compost tea, which contains aerobic microbes and nutrients. [Aerated tea will become Nonaerated if aeration stops; likewise, Nonaerated tea will be converted into aerated tea if aerated.]

Nonaerated teas have been around for a long time and were originally used as a liquid fertilizer. Sales literature for aerated teas and compost tea brewers states that aerated tea will produce “lush foliage,” “beautiful blooms,” “delicious fruits and vegetables,” and “thick, green turf” while keeping “garden plants, turf, and crops free of disease.” This information is presented as factual, and when combined with the imagery of nurturing an ailing garden with a cup of tea, proves irresistible to many people.

### **Does compost tea work?**

This is a complicated question that can only be answered by reviewing the scientific literature on Nonaerated and aerated teas. Scientific literature is the body of information that has been peer-reviewed and is often geared to an academic audience. Extension publications are also in this category, since they are peer-reviewed but target a more general audience. When an article appears in a peer-reviewed journal or book, it means the methods, results, and conclusions were found to be scientifically valid by objective outside experts.

Other information sources include gray and popular literature, neither of which is peer-reviewed and primarily focus on professional and general audiences, respectively. (*MasterGardener* magazine, for instance, would fall into

this category.) These resources can be valuable as well, but the objectivity and credibility of the information need to be assessed (see sidebar). For the purposes of this article, only those results reported in the scientific literature are reviewed.

Scientific research on compost tea has focused most commonly on foliar disease control. As of this writing, there have been 34 papers published on the efficacy of Nonaerated tea on disease control. Often, good results are found under laboratory conditions though field results are more variable. There appears to be a trend for Nonaerated teas to reduce the incidence, but not the severity, of foliar diseases.

In comparison, there have been seven papers published on aerated teas and disease control. Again, there was some success with fungal control in Petri dishes

*Clearly, the science is not strong for aerated tea use on crop plants, much less on lawns, shrubs, and trees.*

in the lab (1 paper), but less consistency in greenhouse conditions (3 papers). Two field-based studies report that aerated teas were not only ineffective in preventing foliar pathogens, they exacerbated disease organisms in both apples and potatoes. Clearly, the science is not strong for aerated tea use on crop plants, much less on lawns, shrubs, and trees.

### **Why isn't there more scientific research on compost tea?**

While a number of universities are investigating the effect of aerated teas on disease control, few studies have been published. To understand why, let's quickly review what is needed for a scientific experiment:

- **Controls:** For every plant that is treated with compost tea, another needs to be treated with water.
- **Replicates:** To obtain statistically valid data, each treatment needs to be replicated. In controlled environments such as laboratories, there can be as few as three replicates. For more variable environments, such as greenhouses, there may be ten replicates. In a field situation—the real world—20 replicates is not uncommon.
- **Repetition:** To verify the results from the first trial, the experiment should be repeated. In general, three repetitions are considered the minimum.

Compost teas are highly variable in their microbial and nutrient content from batch to batch. This translates to high variation within data sets and often leads to inconclusive results.

Unfortunately, these results are often not published *even though they are as important as positive outcomes*. In other words, if a particular treatment doesn't work well under controlled experimental conditions, it's unlikely to work consistently anywhere else.

In addition to the published results discussed earlier, there are university reports of ongoing research that I've briefly summarized.

### **Can WSU Master Gardeners recommend compost tea use?**

The short answer is no. Because WSU Master Gardeners are volunteer educators who rely on science-based information, they cannot recommend a practice or product that lacks a legitimate scientific basis. Furthermore, it is illegal to sell unregistered substances for use as pesticides. There are no compost tea products registered as pesticides with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Neither WSU Master Gardener volunteers nor Web sites may encourage the use of compost tea as a pesticide.

### **If compost tea doesn't do anything, then how can it hurt to apply it?**

"While the scientific evidence is certainly lacking for aerated compost tea activity in disease control, there is a serious, documented concern with these types of compost teas," says Dr. William R. Schneider, a research scientist in the Biopesticides & Pollution Prevention Division (Office of Pesticide Programs) of the Environmental Protection Agency.

He continues, "It is very difficult to do a microbial pesticide risk assessment on a mixture of unidentified

microorganisms that could easily contain human and nontarget organism pathogens."

Indeed, this risk is significant in aerated teas that have been "enhanced" with molasses, kelp, and other high-nutrient additives. Such aerated teas have been documented through scientific research to contain *E. coli* and *Salmonella* populations, both of which are human pathogens. The recent deaths due to *E. coli*-contaminated spinach illustrates how dangerous compost tea applications can be, particularly on food crops.

### **What are alternatives to compost tea?**

Rather than spending time and money leaching materials out of compost, why not use the intact compost as part of an organic mulch layer? There is substantial evidence in the scientific literature that organic mulch benefits gardens and landscape by:

- Improving soil moisture
- Reducing soil erosion and compaction
- Maintaining optimal soil temperatures
- Increasing soil nutrition
- Improving plant establishment and growth
- Reducing weeds
- Reducing disease
- Reducing pesticide use

These last two points are particularly germane to our discussion. Organic mulch has been shown to suppress disease biologically, chemically, and physically through competition, chemical inhibition, and reduced pathogen dispersal, respectively. While compost alone may not be sufficient for a landscape mulch, it can be an important component.

Furthermore, mulched landscapes are usually more aesthetically appealing and of greater economic and environmental benefit as they require fewer additions of fertilizers and pesticides. Best of all, this management plan is based on objective plant and soil sciences, not wishful thinking.

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## **Holiday Dinner**

By *Gaye Williams*

Happy New Year to you and yours! The annual holiday dinner, held on 6 Dec. 2009 at St. Matthew's Church, was a big success. Thanks to all who helped the hospitality committee set up, entertain, cook, and clean-up after. Lots of delicious, low-calorie, low fat food was consumed. Unfortunately, Santa couldn't attend, however his elves distributed lovely gifts to lucky guests. See you at the January 26th meeting, which will be held at the Bowie Community Center, not the Bowie City Hall.

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**From the Editor**

Donald Sminkey

All members of the Garden Club are welcome to write an article on a gardening-related subject. Please send via e-mail to:

gardener@bcgardenclub.org. Include "B-CGC" or "Garden Club" in the subject heading; or mail to: Donald Sminkey, 508 Otway Road, Wake Forest, NC 27587

**Deadline, February issue: Feb. 8, 2010**

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