



THE HORT REPORT

NEWSLETTER OF THE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF MARYLAND, INC. | MAY 2017

CAPITAL GARDENS:

Dedicated Gardeners & Creative Spaces in Annapolis

Five splendid gardens of Annapolis—ranging from cottage gardens to a Zen retreat—will be on display Sunday, June 4, on the Horticultural Society of Maryland's annual tour. The tour, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., will happen rain or shine.

HSM members are admitted free with a current membership card. Non-member tickets cost \$35 if purchased by June 3, either online (www.mdhorticulture.org) or at these locations: Kingsdene Nurseries, Monkton, The Perennial Farm, Glen Arm, Green Fields Nursery, Baltimore, Clark's Ace Hardware, Ellicott City, and Graul's Markets in Annapolis, Cape St. Claire, Ruxton, Mays Chapel and Hereford. On the day of the tour, non-member tickets will cost \$40 and will be available at the first garden, 356 Broadview Lane, Annapolis 21401.

Detailed descriptions of the gardens are available in the tour booklet that accompanies this newsletter.

PHOTOS: Ann Betten



COMING HSM EVENTS

TOMATO LECTURE/HANDS-ON WORKSHOP

SATURDAY, MAY 6, 2017

1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Cylburn Arboretum Greenhouse Classroom
Craig LeHoullier, author of *Epic Tomatoes*.
Members \$25, Non-members \$35.

ANNUAL GARDEN TOUR

SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2017

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Gardens of Annapolis. See details on page 1.

GARDENS OF JAPAN TRIP

OCTOBER 15 through 27, 2017

Co-sponsored by HSM and Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland's Gardenholics Tours
Details: HSM website or contact Karen Offutt,
410-771-4799 or karenoffutt1@gmail.com

LECTURE SERIES

Tuesday, MAY 9, 7:30 p.m.

C. COLSTON BURRELL

*Obsession and Exploitation:
A Cultural History of Trilliums*

Tuesday, SEPTEMBER 12, 7:30 p.m.

KELLY D. NORRIS

Planting for the Future

Tuesday, OCTOBER 10, 7:30 p.m.

ELLEN ECKER OGDEN

The Art of Growing Food

Tuesday, NOVEMBER 14, 7:30 p.m.

DOUGLAS TALLAMY

Restoring Nature's Relationships at Home

Tuesday, DECEMBER 12, 7:30 p.m.

HOLLY SHIMIZU

Great Gardens of Japan

*For more information, visit
www.mdhorticulture.org*

Lectures are held in the Vollmer Center auditorium at Cylburn Arboretum, 4915 Greenspring Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21209. Members are required to show a current membership card for admission to lectures. Guests of members also receive free admission.

HSM Honor Roll

We thank the following volunteers (members as well as non-members) who have supported the Society's programs in recent months.

For the PPA/HSM Winter Seminar: Janet Draper, Mary Jo Sherrod, coordinators; Sally Barker, Helene Clapperton, Catherine Cook, Jennifer Forrence, Crystal Patterson and Paula Simon

For the Plant Forum: Nancy Blois, Paula Campos, Helene Clapperton, Catherine Cook, Jennifer Forrence, Michael O'Rourke, Nancy Raskin, Mary Jo Sherrod, Lenel Srochi-Meyerhoff, Donna Watts and Bill Yonkers; and Pat Sherman, Maya Kosok and Melanie Ruckle, presenters

For the Maryland Home and Garden Show: Peter Bieneman, Catherine Cook, and Pat Sherman; Nancy Raskin, award presentation

For the Garden Tour Committee: Nancy Raskin, chair; Ann Betten, Nancy Blois, Anne Gossett, Nancy Grabowski, Donna Imhoff, Tanya Jones and Crystal Patterson

For the Sponsorship Program: Sally Barker

For the Program Committee: Paula Simon, chair; Nancy Blois, Helene Clapperton, Muffin Evander and Mary Jo Sherrod

For Meetings Hospitality: Nancy Blois, Jennifer Forrence, Pat Sherman and Donna Watts

For the Plant Raffle: Nancy MicKey

For the Communications Team: Pat Cieslak, telephone messages; Helene Clapperton, webmaster; Carla Hackley, Facebook manager; Nancy Raskin, event coordinator; Alex Cook, Catherine Cook and Mary Jo Sherrod, December mailing

For the December 2016 issue of THE HORT REPORT: John Fitzpatrick and Leigh Barnes, contributors; Melanie Ruckle and Paula Simon, photographs; Joel Cohen and John Fitzpatrick, proofreaders

2017 Home & Garden Show Award Winner

International Landscaping & Design, based in Baltimore and Centreville, won the Horticultural Society of Maryland's award for the most effective and practical use of plants at the spring 2017 Home & Garden Show. In the photo, note the yellow flowers of *Packera aurea* (Golden Ragwort) in the foreground, with *Aronia arbutifolia* 'Autumn Magic' (Red Chokeberry) on the left and *Vaccinium corymbosum* (Highbush Blueberry) on the right. Soft green moss creates a lovely border for the stacked stone water feature.



PHOTO: Ashley Kidner

Rhus aromatica, Fragrant Sumac

By Harry Merritt

R*hus aromatica*, known as Fragrant Sumac, is an attractive, low-maintenance shrub that has gained a following among gardeners interested in plants native to the eastern United States. Fragrant Sumac is native to a broad area of North America, from western Quebec west to northern Michigan and Illinois, south through the eastern states to Georgia, Louisiana, and west to California and Oregon. It is also found in parts of Mexico.



Its native habitat is open upland woods, rocky bluffs and even barren rock. It prefers average moist but well-drained soil, but tolerates a wide variety of conditions, including drought. It does not like very wet clay. It will grow in full sun, part shade and, perhaps less happily, shade. It can have some common plant problems—powdery mildew, leaf spot, scale—but overall is a vigorous and sturdy grower.

I discovered Fragrant Sumac in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's *Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping: Chesapeake Bay Watershed*, my *vade mecum* as I plunged, a decade ago, into the study and acquisition of plants native to this area. Fragrant Sumac held special appeal because of its "high wildlife value." Its yellow, catkin-like flowers in springtime provide nectar for butterflies. Its fuzzy, wine-red berries, which appear on the female shrubs, are food for songbirds. It also has a pleasant citrus-like scent.

First I planted Fragrant Sumac, then tried its more compact, better known cultivar, 'Gro-low.' Both work well as groundcover, will help prevent soil erosion and will add three-season interest to the garden. But Fragrant Sumac can grow to six feet tall and sometimes taller. 'Gro-low,' meanwhile, stays a more manageable two to three feet in height. (Cutting 'Gro-low' to the ground is recommended every few years.)

Both varieties will spread, six to 10 feet wide, forming thickets that will block out weeds. Woody plants expert Michael A. Dirr, in his *Encyclopedia of Trees and Shrubs*, praises Fragrant Sumac as a worthy groundcover but notes that it "produces suckers and will create a tangled, almost impenetrable mass of stems and leaves." This tangle can become a perfect trap for gum wrappers and other windborne trash, gardeners beware.

Drifts of Fragrant Sumac are especially appealing in the

fall, when the glossy green leaves turn to orange and red and sometimes purple. Once the leaves are gone, though, there's not much in the way of "winter interest."

About the leaves: They bear a striking resemblance to those of the dreaded *Toxicodendron radicans*, or Poison Ivy, but Fragrant Sumac is not poisonous.

A profile of Fragrant Sumac in Cornell University's "Deciduous Woody Groundcovers" says that the shrub is "suspected

to be allelopathic," that its roots "may exude compounds that inhibit germination and/or are toxic to other plants." If this is true, you could not prove it by me.

We had a large bare spot in a bed alongside where our swimming pool used to be. I had planted *Lobelia cardinalis* (Cardinal Flower) there a year or two earlier with meager results. I thought I had lost the Lobelia for good. The Fragrant Sumac flourished there—and so did the Lobelia, which to my shock emerged in profuse, bold red glory amidst, beside and behind the sumac. Only later did I read that Fragrant Sumac was a recommended pairing for Lobelia. (No, I can't remember the source.)

PLANT FACTS: *Rhus aromatica*

Common Names: Fragrant Sumac

Hardiness: USDA Zones 3 to 9

Family: Anacardiaceae (Cashew Family), native to a broad swath of North America

Size: 3 to 6 feet tall, 'Gro-low' cultivar, 2 to 3 feet. Spreads 6 to 10 feet.

Culture: Sun to part shade, average moist soil

REFERENCES:

Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping: Chesapeake Bay Watershed, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

"Deciduous Woody Groundcovers," Cornell University Department of Horticulture, cornell.edu

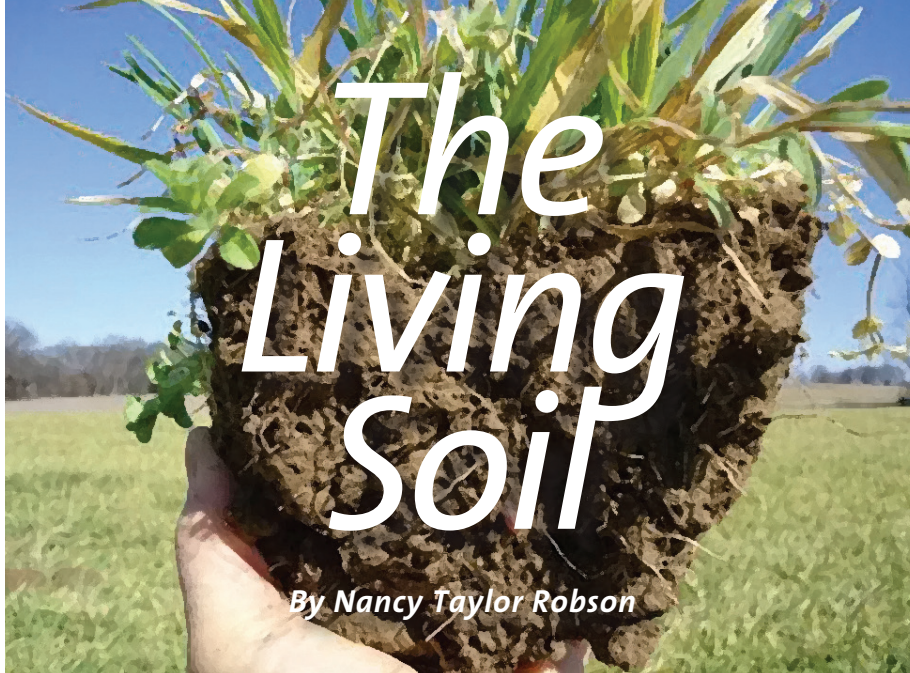
Michael A. Dirr, *Encyclopedia of Trees and Shrubs* (Timber Press)

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, wildflower.org

Missouri Botanical Garden, missouribotanicalgarden.org

Harry Merritt, editor of *The Hort Report*, is a Baltimore County Master Gardener.

PHOTO: Bruce Marlin



The Living Soil

By Nancy Taylor Robson

We pave it, drive on it, abuse it, haul it away and for the most part take it completely for granted.

“Soil isn’t sexy,” says Dr. David Lindbo, agronomist at North Carolina State University. “But ... without soil we’d be hungry, homeless and naked.”

Soil sustains the plants we eat and (unless we’re vegetarians) the plants much of our food eats. It produces the raw materials for the clothes on our backs and the homes we live in. It supplies many of the pharmaceuticals we depend on: streptomycin, for example, and cyclosporine, which helps to keep transplant patients from rejecting the implanted organ. It sequesters carbon and filters (and when it’s healthy, purifies) the water we drink.

“Soil is the kidneys of the earth,” says Lindbo.

There are thousands of different types of soil—hundreds in Maryland alone. Sassafras Loam is one that is at least passingly familiar to Marylanders.

“When soils are described, they are usually named after a local feature, a river or mountain,” says Dr. Ray R. Weil, soil scientist at University of Maryland College Park, “though that soil can be found in many other places. Sassafras Loam, for example, occurs in Maryland, New Jersey and Delaware.”

Soil is a dynamic mix of four components: mineral solids, organic solids, liquids and gases.

“It’s got all the things in it that are on earth,” says Dr. Patricia M. Steinhilber, program coordinator for the University of Maryland’s Agricultural Nutrient Management Program.

The mineral solids—sands, silts and clays—are derived from rocks and classified by particle size. Sands are between .05 and 2 millimeters, silts are .002 to .005mm

and clays are less than .002 mm in size. The proportional mix of these elements determines soil texture.

“The topsoil of what is essentially a layer cake is the top six to 10 inches,” explains Weil. “That top layer may consist of different textures, which we usually think of as ‘feel,’ but texture really tells us how much clay and sand a gardener might find.”

Fine-particled clay produces a dense texture; silt is smooth like talcum powder, while sand is gritty. The various mixes of the three affect how the soil behaves. Predominantly sandy soils, which have large pore spaces that let water drain quickly and evaporate easily, are more vulnerable to drought. Predominantly clay soils, which are sticky when wet and have much tighter pore spaces, retain water for long periods of time, and can promote root rot (or dry out and create a hard pan). Silty soils don’t hold together well and can wash away easily.

Loam, a term for soil that is roughly equal proportions of sand, silt and clay, is what most gardeners hope for in their growing spaces since that mix provides both moisture retention and drainage.

“Loam behaves in a way that is influenced by sand, silt and clay,” says Weil. “It’s a little smooth [silt], a little sticky [clay] and it also has sand, which makes it drain faster.”

While a handful of soil may look and feel like a solid, there is a surprising amount of pore space in the clump.

“In any given volume of soil, up to half of its volume could be taken up by pore space with either water or air,” notes Jon Traunfeld, director of University of Maryland Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources.

In addition to the mineral solids in soil, there are organic solids—biomass (worms, insects, fungi, yeasts, molds,

bacteria and other microorganisms), residues and by-products (decomposing plants and decomposing creatures, as well as worm castings and other animal waste) and humus, which is the final, digested product of this cycle of birth, life and death. Although organic solids usually comprise a relatively small percentage (estimated to be between 2 and 5 percent) in a given volume of soil, the richness of this ecology is mind-boggling.

“There are more microorganisms living in a single teaspoon of healthy soil than people living on the face of the earth,” says Dean Cowherd, assistant state soil scientist at USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Annapolis.

Not surprisingly, the way we treat soil affects this complex ecology.

“The activities of organisms living on and in the soil significantly influence the characteristics of soils,” says Dr. Joe McAuliffe, director of research at Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, Arizona, and an ecologist specializing in soils.

Historically, we’ve not treated soil well. Some estimate that between 60 to 80 percent of the U.S. topsoil is gone (thanks, Dust Bowl), and while not totally irredeemable, it regenerates at a glacial pace.

“It takes anywhere from a hundred to thousands of years to create an inch of topsoil,” says Lindbo. “It’s definitely NOT a renewable resource —it’s much less renewable than trees or plants because it takes so long to form.”

The Soil Science Society of America, the Global Soil Partnership and others declared 2015 the International Year of Soils to raise awareness and promote the sustainability of our planet’s critical soil resources.

“Everything we do to the soil affects that ecosystem, and we need to manage it accordingly,” says Lindbo.

Fortunately, we can manage it well, but it helps to understand (and appreciate) what we’re managing. Testing the soil for pH and PKN (phosphorous, potassium, nitrogen), something farmers and gardeners have long known to do, is a beginning. Many test facilities also show the percentage of organic matter in samples. If your vegetable or flower garden is more than 10 by 10 feet overall, prepare several samples, including some from areas where things are doing poorly. Let the testing lab know what is already there or what you plan to plant in each space so they can best advise what, if anything, to do.

“Also, read what the lab provides to you,” advises Cowherd. “Some labs specialize more in one thing than another.”

In addition to pH and chemical testing, there is a low-tech, relatively low-cost kit that measures how healthy and alive the soil is.

“We have a meter that will measure the amount of carbon dioxide that is being emitted from the soil,” says Cowherd. Carbon dioxide indicates living organisms. The kit is available from Woods End Laboratories in Mount Vernon, Maine.

Adding organic material increases microbial life. It also enhances the microbial build-it-and-they-will-come effect that takes place in good soil management and conservation practices, which include preventing soil erosion, compaction and pollution. Cowherd also recommends keeping the soil covered with crops that provide protection of the top layer and microbial nourishment in root systems.

“We don’t want that land to be bare, because when the sun comes out, it fries the microorganisms,” Cowherd explains.

Cover crops like Hairy Vetch (*Vicia villosa*), Yellow Sweet Clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) and others can also benefit pollinators. Daikon radish (*Raphanus sativus*), which Weil has been instrumental in introducing as a cover crop, positively affects soil tilth and health by aerating the soil with its long root, which also brings nitrogen up from deeper in the ground. Additionally, we can eat daikon, including its turnip-green tops. Win-win.

SOURCES

Soil test kits are available from Penn State’s Agricultural Analytical Services Laboratory, 814-863-0841, <http://agsc.psu.edu/aasl/soil-testing>

To test soil health, visit:

Woods End Laboratories, <https://woodsend.org>

Soil Science Society of America, <https://www.soils.org>,
USDA Web Soil Survey

References:

Phil Nauta, *Building Soils Naturally: Innovative Methods for Organic Gardeners* (Acres USA)

Elizabeth P. Stell, *Secrets to Great Soil: A Grower’s Guide to Composting, Mulching, and Creating Healthy, Fertile Soil for Your Garden and Lawn* (Storey’s Gardening Skills)

Ray R. Weil & Nyle C. Brady, *Elements of the Nature and Properties of Soils* (Pearson)

University of Maryland Master Gardener Handbook
<http://extension.umd.edu/mg/maryland-master-gardener-handbook>

Nancy Taylor Robson, a Master Gardener, is a longtime garden writer and the author of two novels. She lives in Galena on the Eastern Shore.

The Perennial Farm: Growing with the Times

By Harry Merritt

On Saturdays from April through October, but especially in springtime, cars fill the parking lot of The Perennial Farm, on the outskirts of Glen Arm in Baltimore County.

What lures these many customers is not BOGO sales of *Heuchera villosa* 'Autumn Bride,' or specials on *Festuca glauca* 'Elijah Blue.' It's plants, well-tended plants, hundreds of thousands of them, more than 1,200 varieties. Twenty versions of Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea* and *Echinacea x purpurea*); 21 of Hellebores (*Helleborus*), 24 of Iris. Ornamental grasses, ferns, flowering shrubs and vines galore and an increasing number of plants native to Maryland. There are Treadwell plants that make resilient ground covers, and Deer-Leerious Plants "that deer don't like to eat."

The Perennial Farm, in business since 1980, is the master work of Rick Watson, who said he "got the 'plant bug'" as a teenager laboring in his father's garden center, a fixture on York Road for many years. (Watson's closed in 2016 but the family still owns Watson's Fireplace & Patio next door.)

Rick Watson got a degree in horticulture at the University of Maryland College Park. For about three years he worked for Kurt Bluemel, the plantsman renowned for introducing many ornamental grasses and perennials to the trade. "I was there when he first started the nursery," Watson said in a March interview. "He knew my Dad and that's kind of how I got my job."

Watson and Ken Fowler started a landscaping business called Exterior Design Inc. In those days, Watson said, "the normal perennial" used in installations came in a one-quart container—smaller than what Watson thought a project needed. "We began [growing perennials in] two gallons to get a bigger impact on our landscape jobs," he said. "It was a perfect time to introduce bigger sizes."

Larger containers proved to be a hit with garden centers and other landscapers, enough so that Watson focused on growing the plants (Exterior Design Nursery) while Fowler did the landscaping. In 1998, however, Fowler was killed in a motorcycle accident. Watson closed the landscaping business and renamed the nursery The Perennial Farm.



Rick Watson, right, pauses for a photo with wife Gail and their son Tom.

The nursery started on 3 ½ acres. Today it comprises more than 60 acres, with 67 greenhouses, heated and unheated, plus some 40 outside growing areas. It ships plants as far north as Maine, as far south as North Carolina, as far west as Ohio. At peak times of year, The Perennial Farm ships 40,000 to 50,000 plants a day, Watson said.

"We're doing a lot of 'contract grow,'" Watson said, producing plants ready for a specific date for various state, local and federal projects such as shoreline restoration and bioswale.

Deer and their consumption of garden plants are a chronic concern throughout the Perennial Farm delivery area. To help its customers assess deer resistance, the nursery devised Deer-Leerious Plants. A plant marked #1 "Not Eatin' This" means "you can be highly confident that deer will not eat this plant, unless they are starving." A #2 "Can't Stand This" means "you can be strongly confident that deer will not eat this plant—they are simply not interested." And #3 "Not Likin' This" indicates deer "do not like this plant—they will almost always pass it by."

"We're trying to give the customer the complete package in deer-resistant plants," Watson said.

With help from Dr. Allan Armitage, the noted horticulturist, The Perennial Farm offers Treadwell plants—perennials



The Black-Eyed Susans of the Perennial Farm sign are a familiar sight on Glen Arm Road.



A colorful display of perennials and ornamental grasses near the parking lot.



The Perennial Farm's elaborate watering system gets water to hundreds of thousands of plants.



A group tours one of The Perennial Farm's 67 greenhouses.

“hand-selected by landscape experts for their climate, foot-traffic and landscape durability.” The Treadwell program has its own web site—TreadwellPlants.com, one of four Perennial Farm sites. (The others are PerennialFarm.com, GrowingForyou.com and WhatsNative.com.)

Plants native to the Mid-Atlantic and New England are an increasing focus for The Perennial Farm, Watson said. The nursery has published a guide, *What's Native*, prepared by Nancy MicKey with an introduction by Armitage.

The Perennial Farm has 75 employees but it remains a family business. Rick Watson's wife, Gail, “has been with the business since Day 1,” he said. “She does the books.” Daughter Katie is with human resources. Son Tom is brands manager. Having worked on the Treadwell and Deer-Leerious programs, he is now promoting ThePerennialFarm.com marketplace, a venture into e-commerce.

The business is 99 percent wholesale, Watson said.

What about those Saturday hours for people who aren't in the trade? “We've been open on Saturdays for at least 25 years,” Watson said.

“We're on a pretty major street,” he said, referring to Glen Arm Road, “and people can see we're a big nursery.”

THE PERENNIAL FARM

12017 Glen Arm Road, Glen Arm, MD 21057

Business hours (trade): Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturdays, March through October, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Open to the public: Saturday, April through October, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (10% discount with current HSM membership card)

Telephone: 410-592-6106 or 1-800-567-9913

Email: info@perennialfarm.com

PHOTOS: Courtesy of The Perennial Farm

2017 PPA/HSM Winter Seminar

Thank you to our presenters, sponsors and volunteers for making this another great event!



Clockwise from top left: Eager attendees Eida Schwartz, Susan and Bill Yonkers, queuing up at registration; our illustrious presenters beaming with joy for a job well done [left to right: John Magee, Carrie Preston, Chris Fehlhaber, Shannon Currey and Jeff Epping]; our dynamic duo chairpersons, Janet Draper and Mary Jo Sherrod; PPA founder, Dr. Stephen M. Still with daughter, Stephanie Stockton; attendees enjoying breaktime in the sponsors room; the first presenter speaking to a full house at the Sheppard Pratt Conference Center. PHOTOS: Paula A. Simon and Stephanie Stockton

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MEMBERSHIP

For information about membership or to join, visit the society's website: www.mdhorticulture.org or telephone Catherine Cook at 410-821-5561.

Benefits of Membership

Newsletters and membership directory; admission to the spring and fall lectures and the annual garden tour; and discounts on workshops, trips and special events.

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Mailing address:
 P.O. Box 4213
 Lutherville, MD 21093-4214
 Telephone: 410-821-5561

www.mdhorticulture.org

The Horticultural Society of Maryland, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) educational organization.

Welcome New Members!

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 Melanie Ruckle
 Gayle W. Stark

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 Lois Tuwiner
 Anne Van Allen
 Kathleen Wales
 Karen Wilson

The 2017 Baltimore City Masters Gardener interns were given complimentary memberships. They include:
 Melissa Beatty
 Kathleen Breen

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 Sarah Chapin
 Ellie Chetelat
 Peter Chianchiano
 Carol Clark
 Matt Dalgetty
 Christopher Davis
 Danielle Franks
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 Shonda Gaylord
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 Jeanne McStay
 Julia Nadeau
 Kari Nye
 Renee Parks
 Anita Robinson
 Laura Saunders
 Leah Strapec
 Shannon Winston



JEAN WORTHLEY, 1925-2017

Jean Worthley, a well-known Maryland naturalist and a former president of the Horticultural Society of Maryland, died April 10, as this issue of THE HORT REPORT was in its final stages of preparation.

A remembrance of Mrs. Worthley will appear in the September issue.