

Gardeners of the Crooked Billet Newsletter

January/February 2009

Barb Rosenzweig, Editor

January/February Garden Maintenance:

- Relax, stay warm, and dream of spring.
- If you have a nice day and want an early start, you can cut back grasses and other perennials, whose leaves are no longer green, to about 1" from the base.

Mark Your Calendars:

February 7 Club Meeting, 10:00 a.m. to noon: Workshop "Let's Get Crafty, Plant Sale Objects D'art," Church Hall. Bring a bag lunch.

March 1-8: Philadelphia Flower Show, Pennsylvania Convention Center, Philadelphia, PA

March 12 Club Meeting, 7 p.m.: "Schools of Floral Design" Cheryl Wilks.

Bring your recipe for a "Kid's Favorite." Hostesses: Doris Simons and Gerry Flynn

April 9 Club Meeting, 7 p.m.: "Rainforests" Ruth Pfeffer. Mini Flower Show: "Topiary/Bonsai."

Bring your recipe for "Six Ingredients or Less." Hostesses: Kris Bryfogle and Barbara Drumheller

Stapling Party: We joined together to staple our club's informational flyers to seed packets generously donated by Burpee. These were distributed by our members along the parade route during the 48th Annual Hatboro Holiday Parade held Sunday, November 23rd, 2008.



(Clockwise from the left bottom) Nancy Hennessy, Julie Bird, Margie Pitrone, Carol Brunner, Mae Steere, Barb Rosenzweig, Heather Tomlinson, Kathy Watkins, Janet Ford, and Ingrid Reinert.

Our club president, **Margie Pitrone**, described the event: "The Gardeners of Crooked Billet hit the pavement and marched in the 2008 Hatboro Holiday Parade! Our parade unit consisted of a motley crew included Margie Pitrone, Dave Hower, Maria Bongarzone and her daughter, Lee Bergiven (Mae's daughter), her dog, and her daughter and friends, Mae Steere, Janet Ford and her two dogs, Glenice Smith, Julie Bird and her family, Heather Tomlinson and her dog Max. We had two red wagons and one was loaded with toys for Toys for Tots. We also handed out close to 500 club flyers and seed packets!"

Photos below are courtesy of Ingrid Reinert.



Succulents: **Necita Van Basselearre** was our featured speaker at the November meeting. Her expertise evident, she entertained us with descriptions of unusual species found around the world, accompanied by slides from her many travels.



Julie Bird: Necita was not only witty, but quite informative. Her anecdotes alone made the speech.

Mae Steere: I am in awe of this woman who can stand up there - give a presentation without notes and be interesting to boot!! I can understand why she chose to focus on succulents, because of her travels. And that's another thing - to think she is still considering returning to Africa, as she could not visit Madagascar the last time there because of their political upheaval!! I am truly jealous of this woman. She was great!

Kathy Watkins: I was impressed with the many varieties she brought. I've never tried to raise anything but a jade plant and even that was struggling to survive. She did peak my interest and I might look at finding a different variety to try.

Barb's note: To prevent water loss on succulents, some plants have thorns, which are modified leaves, some have very hairy coverings (see below and Google "Old Man Cactus," where I got these, for more neat examples), and some have a thick, waxy coating on both stems and leaves.



Winter Gardening Joys - Flowers and Fruit

Guest Contributor: Jenny Carey

Below is Painswick in the Cotswolds, where there are so many snowdrops it looks like snow. The upside-down view is of one of the double snowdrops. There are a series called the *Greatorex* Doubles named after the British plant breeder. He named them after the female characters in Shakespeare's plays. I have *Ophelia*, *Jaquenetta*, *Desdemona* and *Cordelia*.

I have had some snowdrops out since November, not a usual occurrence, but some of the *G. elwesii* just could not wait until spring. Normally I have a few out in January, a few others in February, and then by just after the Flower Show (approximately March 11th) the more unusual ones start. It is about a month later than my Dad's in England (Cotswolds).



In *G nivalis* 'Sharlockii' (above left) the spathe above the flower is divided in two and it looks like bunny ears. *G n* 'Blewbury Tart' is a funny upward facing flower- either love it or hate it - 'hoping to have it flower this year for the first time. Photos by the way are all from England- so I only have one bulb!



Above, *G woronowii*/ OR *G ikariae*- I have been sold the bulbs under both names- very green leaves- comes out later. Even from the snowdrop books, I can't decide. Above right, *G plicatus*- note the pleated leaf- is also the parent of *G. plicatus* 'Augustus' that my husband Gus loves- again with pleated leaves- the flower is sort of tear drop shaped and a little dumpy. Below, *G* 'Limetree', a single hybrid snowdrop - rather like 'Atkinsii'- is quite delicate and elegant.



Guest Contributor: Irene Borgogno

Berries in my garden disappear rather quickly, devoured by appreciative squirrels and birds. An inventory on this wet December morning offered a menu of seven items. The most prominent berry display was from the evergreen hollies, which seem to be particularly prolific this year. There's a curved row of Nellie R. Stevens near the street which is weighed down with the crop, below left. On the right below, the deciduous hollies, or winterberry, were not as prolific. It was my fault; I did not water faithfully during the summer.



The same explanation applies for the nandina, in which I could find only one remaining raceme. However, several skeletal remains indicated prior sprays of berries, already stripped by foragers. One other bearer of red berries, the Japanese barberry, still had a few bright fruit remaining, but I doubt they will be there much longer.



And the last dregs of the purple beauty berry were evidence of heavy feasting. It is unusual for me to have any of these berries left this late in the season. There used to be a privet hedge on the property line with my neighbor, but he was tired of pruning it and I was tired of the shade it cast, so it came out 3 years ago, but a volunteer near the end of my driveway is now bearing lovely black berries.



One last black berry could be found by looking close to the ground: the fruit of the loriope. I don't know if all loriope bear black berries. The foliage on this variety, obtained many years ago as a small and unidentified division from a friend, is also mostly black.



I expect that everything will be stripped bare in a few more weeks. The squirrels will then have to rely on their hoards of nuts. The birds will have to rely on the bounty of bird feeders.

Barb Rosenzweig: Even in the dead of winter, we can count on the lovely flowers of the Snowdrops (below, which bloom from November through January), as well as the colorful fruits of Winterberry (middle row) and Euonymus japonicas (bottom three).





Evergreen Hollies for Winter Interest from Jenny Rose Carey, Director of the Landscape Arboretum at Temple University Ambler "In Bloom" Newsletter - December 2008.

This month, we will discuss the larger evergreen hollies that are grown as trees or large shrubs. Next month, we will discuss the smaller evergreen hollies that can provide great winter structure in the garden.

Our native evergreen American Holly, Ilex opaca, (PHS Gold Medal Plant 2001), can grow to about 45', but is most often seen as a smaller tree, as it grows quite slowly. The female produces red berries (or drupes) that are attractive to birds. My large tree may sometimes hold many of the berries until early spring when one day a huge flock of robins descends and with much flapping and twittering proceeds to strip the berries off the tree. The May/ June flowers are small, white and insignificant but have a very sweet, haunting fragrance that wafts on the breeze. As with the deciduous hollies, do remember that to set fruit there must be a male holly nearby. If you have a small garden and there are other hollies in your neighborhood you may be fine. Often people do not know where the male holly is that is pollinating their female plant. One way to find out if you need to add a male is just to plant and see if you get berries. There are many cultivars and selections of American Holly to choose from. Many that are available are unnamed, but it is worth seeking a known cultivar that maybe has better foliage or fruit set. The leaf of American Hollies is a dull green in color, and some of the cultivars have better looking leaves. Suggested cultivars that you may find are 'Old Heavy Berry', Miss Helen and Jersey Princess. If you prefer yellow berries look for Ilex opaca xanthocarpa. One of the best American Hollies, on campus, is to be seen at the top of the hill on the student walkway from the parking lot, opposite Cottage Hall.

The English Holly, Ilex aquifolium, is also evergreen. The main difference between this holly and its American cousin is that it has a more glossy leaf. Again the female has usually red berries and needs a pollinator. This is slightly less cold hardy, so in Zone 6 plant in a sheltered position. There are many cultivars available including the much desired variegated leaf varieties (often sold just as Ilex aquifolium 'Variegata') that are cut and used for indoor decorations and arrangements. In Europe, holly was brought into the house at this time of year, to ward off evil during the 12 days of Christmas.

Below: American Holly- *Ilex opaca*. Note the dull green leaves and at far right, one of the leaves has holly leaf miner- shown as a squiggle on the leaf. *Ilex* 'Nellie R. Stevens' is the photo on the right.



Evergreen hollies will grow in shade or sun, but are more full, lush and berried with more sun. They will grow in a variety of different soils as long as they are not waterlogged. Some protection from excessive wind is necessary to prevent winter damage to the foliage. Hollies do seem to be able to tolerate some urban air pollution. I would also suggest planting a small holly rather than a larger one. Hollies resent root disturbance and take some time to recover from transplanting once established. Small holly plants are also good for making a formal or informal hedge. Hedges are pruned in August to allow the berries to remain on the plant, and to allow the setting of the buds for next year's flowers. Evergreen hollies can be pruned as a simple topiary; most common forms would be a lollipop or a pyramid. If pruning trees or large shrubs, December is a great time because the cuttings can be used to make a holly and mixed evergreen wreath, or to decorate the mantelpiece and table. A British custom is to put a sprig of holly on top of Plum pudding (also known as Christmas pudding, made with dried fruit). The holly is taken off before the pudding is doused with brandy and set alight!

Pests and diseases on evergreen hollies are minimal. The leaves may be disfigured by the tunneling of the holly leaf miner (caused by an insect related to flies), that burrows between the upper and lower leaf surfaces. These disfigured leaves can be picked off and thrown in the trash. Deer do not seem to prefer to eat the evergreen hollies, but I have had problems this year with rabbits gnawing at the lower limbs. I have fenced in the base of the plant with a ring of chicken wire until the holly grows.

Below left, Oakleaf Holly in the Winter Garden (with fallen Zelkova leaves). Abundant berries cling to the branches of this English Holly- *Ilex aquifolium*, below right. According to an old wives' tale, more berries mean a harder winter- what will our winter bring this year?



Other evergreen holly hybrids that you may want to consider for your garden:-

Ilex 'Nellie R. Stevens'- See this holly behind the Administration building. This is a commonly available holly that will grow to a small tree in size. It is widely grown as it is self fertile and will bear orange red colored berries even without a male pollinator. If clipped, Nellie will provide a dense screen.

Ilex 'Oakleaf' is found in the Arboretum in the Albright Winter Garden, by the upper path. This holly is one of the relatively new Red Hybrid Hollies. This holly has large leaves that resemble an oak leaf. The form of the plant will be a tall pyramid about eight feet wide.

Ilex x 'Lydia Morris' is situated behind the Administration building. Look for a holly with very spiny foliage and leaves tightly clustered along the stems. This holly is named after Lydia Morris who was, with her brother John Morris, the owner of the estate in Chestnut Hill that is now the Morris Arboretum.

Our Gardeners' Corner:

Margie Pitrone had quite an unusual educational experience. "Last October, I looked over my deck down at the pond and noticed my snake [featured in the September 2008 Newsletter] draped over my rose. I don't know how he managed it, I always get pricked when pruning this 'fairy' rose. Anyway, I noticed how much he had grown and took some pictures. He spent most of the day on the rose.

"Later that day, I noticed he made his way down by the pond and had his tail in the water. While watching, I noticed that the tail moved, but it looked odd because the other part of his body hanging in the water didn't move. It almost appeared that the snake was in two pieces. So I got down real close to have a look, about 6 inches away. As soon as I got near enough though, I was startled and I jumped back because what I saw was shocking...there were two heads!!!

"After further study I realized that I had two snakes! One was slightly smaller...maybe a female? My husband made a cute comment...he said, 'that's why the snake was on the rose...he took his new girlfriend out for a romantic day. What better place then to drape across a rose.'

"I researched garter snakes and learned that they do mate this time of year and by next spring the snake will produce anywhere from 12-40 babies...yikes! John is a little skeptical about having all these snakes squirming around, but my research states that not all the babies make it. They get eaten or move on to start there own life. Anyway, I think it's neat to witness!"



Holiday Luncheon and Floral Design Program: What a delightful afternoon! The designer, Bo Peters, shared her tips and suggestions for recycling materials in her work.



Carol Brunner: Bo said, "Keep a florescent orange pinny in the trunk, so you can stop along the road to clip branches. You'll look official and no one will question you if you are wearing the pinny." I am contemplating a stealth run on some evergreen branches right now. Do I drive around and search for an isolated spot that can spare a few branches or do I go to Produce Junction???

Wanda Wilcke: Bo was great and gave me some good ideas, one of which was pasting all the holly leaves on the cone to make the trees.





Janet Ford: My favorite tip from Bo was how short she cut her flowers so that more water can reach the bloom, that way making it last longer and bloom faster. Also, she encouraged us not to be afraid to think outside the box. I really did enjoy that demo!

Barb Rosenzweig: For me, Bo's best tip was that olive oil gets pine and Douglas fir sap off of your hands! Another suggestion that she had was to place the oasis higher than the rim of the container so that you can poke plants in there that will cascade down. Lastly, she told us to place a piece of old stocking over the tines of a frog before putting your plant material into it. When it is time to remove the debris, you simply lift up on the stocking, making cleanup between the tines a snap.



Left to far right: Margie Pitrone, Wanda Wilcke, Betsy Lukeshides, Florence Steinbach, MaryAnn Binns, Doris Simon, Lois Keil, Grace Beatty, Kathie Watkins, Carol Brunner



Left to far right: Sheila Carne, Patricia Heisler, Ingrid Reinert, Julie Bird, Glenice Smith, Janet Ford, Betty Sykes, Margie Szymanski, Carol Golder, Cynthia Fraser, Mary Brandley-Hull



Carol and Kathie



Ingrid, Carol, Barb, Betsy, Wanda

Holiday Library Decorations: Margie Pitrone noted that "For the Union Library of Hatboro, Janet Ford, Kathie Watkins and Mae Steere made the wreath, while Mae and her husband Bill hung it and put a lovely pine garland around the door frame. Janet made the swag for over the door and she and Heather Tomlinson hung it up before the tree lighting ceremony. Great job!"

Winter Wonderland: Photos by Barb Rosenzweig taken 12/21/08.





**Happy Gardening,
Barb**