



George Landis Arboretum

NEWSLETTER

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Part of gardening...the winter-time part...is anticipation.

THE SPRING BULB GARDEN

Started twenty-five years ago, the Spring Bulb Garden is the oldest of the arboretum's specialized gardens. It is built on a south slope with a stone wall behind which gives some shelter from north and west winds. It has no natural rock outcrop, but the space has been set with glacial boulders of all sizes from the till left on the arboretum land by a glacial moraine some 13,000 years ago. These are set so that rain water on them drains backward into the soil above, and their south bases make choice spots for tender bulbs which nestle against them and send their roots in beneath them.

Most of the bulbs in the garden come from Asia Minor or central Asia, the Pamir Mountain area, and it is remarkable not only that so many of them are hardy in our severe climate, but that being here, they keep their original blossoming dates. This is the joy of a spring bulb garden, that one can have flowers in blossom a month before any native plant except skunk cabbage is in blossom. If there is a warm sunny day in early March and the snow has melted away from a yard

square space in the Spring Bulb Garden, by noon a dozen or more flowers will have opened there, and equally marvelous, more than a dozen bees will have found those flowers and be crawling into them for the nectar.

Depending upon an early or a late spring, the first climax of bloom in the garden will vary from the middle of March to the first of April. Our earliest record is of a *Crocus tomassinianus* in blossom on February 26. The very earliest flowering actually is from plants that are too rampant to be allowed in the Spring Bulb Garden but are planted on the south sides of the stone walls behind the garden or near it. These are the various snowdrops, which will blossom with their lower leaves still buried in snow, and Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*), which will cover these spots with a blanket of their larger buttercup-colored flowers, and have now self-sown in quantity.

In the garden itself, the first climax of blossom is from the species crocus (the large flowered developed varieties come about two weeks later), the squills (*Scilla*), and the *chionodoxas* and *puschkinia* (allied to the *scillas*) have shown their ability to hold their own against weather and enemies, and have multiplied in the garden so that one can dig nowhere in the garden without stirring up a half dozen of their tiny bulbs and have self-sown throughout the grassy sections near the garden.

The crocus are not so enduring. Rodents are their worst enemies, particularly chipmunks. And anyone who plans a spring bulb garden must at the beginning make a decision: Do I want a spring bulb garden, or do I want chipmunks? You cannot have both. Any healthy chipmunk near the garden will spend his days digging up crocus bulbs (evidently spotted by smell) and carrying them away to some winter storage nest. He will scatter a few on the lawn, but deplete those in the garden. We keep the chipmunk population down by rifle and by a small Have-a-Heart trap. Over the years certain crocus species have proven most enduring here. *Crocus tomassinianus*, *C. vernus*, the various forms of *C. chrysanthus*, and particularly a late-comer here, *C. dalmaticus*, with larger lavender flowers, which has self-sown inside and outside of its established places. The crocus, with flowers running from violent yellow to almost red-purple, offer the most variety of color in the early garden.

Red is the color most lacking among the early flowering bulbs. The species tulips offer it, and they are the gems of the garden, small plants with usually a rosette of narrow leaves curling over the ground, and a small or large tulip flower on a stem not over six inches tall. The best of them are *Tulipa montana*, *T. linifolia*, *T. maximowiczii* (all bright red), and *T. puchella violacea* (violet crimson). We used to have a form of *T. kaufmanniana* called 'Scarlet elegans', not more than eight inches tall and brilliant red, but rodents cleaned out our supply one winter or summer, and now we can find no source to get it again. Chipmunks unfortunately love tulips even more than crocus, and in spite of a constant battle, the species tulips have to be replaced every few years.

There are other gems of the early spring bulb garden, particularly the tiny members of the *Narcissus*

genus. The best of these is *Narcissus asturiensis*, with tiny trumpets shaped exactly like a 'King Alfred' daffodil, on a stem four inches high. It used to be called *N. minimus*, a perfect name, but the botanists in their flurry of name changing of the past forty years have renamed it. Many catalogues will still list it under the old name. Then there are the little ones with cyclamen-shaped flowers. Rodents do not bother any of the narcissus, but the small ones are all slightly tender in our climate, and eventually new ones have to be put in as the older ones winter kill. The ordinary Grape hyacinth (*Muscari boryoides*) is a rampant weed and should not be allowed in any garden of choice small plants, but *M. ciliatum*, formerly called *Hyacinthus ciliatus*, is a little beauty, not more than five inches tall, blossoming with the snowdrops. And then there are the bulbous iris, *Iris dandfordiae*, bright yellow, but tender, and *I. reticulata* in various shades of blue, and dependable.

The spring bulb garden has one other climax of blossoming, between mid-April and the first of May, with the somewhat taller and not-too-rampant tulips like *Tulipa tarda*, *T. acuminata*, and *T. hageri* (a fine one with copper colored flowers), the taller and also not-too-rampant grape hyacinths, and the smaller developed narcissus, of which the pure white 'Thalia' with clustered flowers on each stem, has been most successful. Also, there is now the taller Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*) with white flowers green tipped. But by now the native woodlot flowers are beginning to blossom, and forsythia and shad, and the Spring Bulb Garden has had its season and is no longer the center of interest.

It would be foolish to say that a spring bulb garden is easy to take care of, or cheap to maintain if labor must be hired. It has to

be weeded carefully in spring and fall, and at least three times during the summer. Chickweed, oxalis, and all crawling weeds are invasive, not to mention dandelions. In the fall it must be covered with a good mulch of leaves, held down against winter winds by reasonably heavy brush, and in a section where deer are rampant, as here, it must in the fall have a sheep fence erected around it to prevent grazing it all off in early spring.

For display, the summer season is also a problem. All of these early spring bulbs must ripen their foliage after blossoming to gather strength for next year's flowering. From mid-May until mid-June the garden will be unsightly, and will remain so all summer with nothing but bare ground or weeds, unless something is done to cover it. Low annuals can be planted, but this is time consuming. We have solved the problem with California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*). Once established in the garden, these self-sow from year to year, seedlings appearing about mid-May, blossom luxuriantly through June and early July, are then cut back almost to the root, and send up stems for another period of blossom in late summer and early fall, until the fall crocus are up and ready to take over.

Often in past years, as labor prices have so rapidly increased over income from investments, we have been tempted to give up the Spring Bulb Garden; too much work, too expensive. And then comes a mid-April and we walk by it, with snow still in lingering banks on the near hills, and the garden one mass of flowers, and the garden stays. - Fred Lape



BITS AND PIECES

The arboretum has been awarded a \$3,700 Natural Heritage Trust grant. Approximately \$3,100 has been designated for barn renovation, and \$600 for the rock garden.

The Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Program (ZBGA) originated in 1976 through an appropriation from the state legislature. It is a program of the Natural Heritage Trust, a public benefit corporation, and is administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The ZBGA program provides the stimulus to develop educational, cultural and recreational programs interpreting our natural heritage as well as lifeline support for eligible institutions.

Public or not-for-profit organizations which own, house, and care for living or systematically organized collections of objects of natural origin, and which primarily provide such services to the general public on a regular and predictable basis are eligible for funding through the ZBGA program.



A soil and water conservation study of the Landis Arboretum was completed recently by the Schoharie County Soil and Water Conservation District. The report provides soil survey information useful to future arboretum development and to arboretum maintenance. Assessments of slope grades, water capacity, and permeability are included in the report, in addition to general land management recommendations.

FROM THE FRIENDS

Hal Bieber recently narrated the arboretum's slide presentation, "Through the Year at the Landis Arboretum" for the Greenville Men's Garden Club at Lange's Restaurant, Cairo, NY. Immediate benefits from Hal's efforts include a \$30 donation to the Friends, and \$50 in supplies or plant material for the arboretum from Story's Nursery, Freehold, NY. (Anyone wishing to use the slide program for his organization should phone Mrs. Richard Law, 463-5256. There is no charge for use of the program.) And, too, Hal spent an October Saturday helping to put up winter deer fences in the arboretum.

Note cards printed with the arboretum oak logo will soon be available for sale, \$2.50 for 10 cards with envelopes.

Barn clean-out is far from complete, forcing postponement of an auction.



FROM THE TRUSTEES

Merrill Bousman would welcome suggestions for the arboretum 1983 lecture-tour program. If you are interested in hearing about a particular topic, or if you can volunteer to present a program, or if you know someone who can, phone Mrs. Bousman (864-5656) now. The Calendar of Events is assembled for distribution in early Spring.

Richard Southwick, Professor of Plant Science, SUNY Cobleskill, has been elected Associate Director of the Landis Arboretum, with duties to begin immediately.

Robert Clark, newly elected Vice-President of the Trustees, will serve as liaison between the arboretum Trustees and Friends. Mr. Clark lives in Meredith, New Hampshire.



COLLECTOR'S LAMENT

From GARDEN OF TREES AND SHRUBS, Fred Lape, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1965.

"Wherever I go, I am always on the alert for unusual varieties of native flora. The North American hemlock, *Tsuga canadensis*, is a particular favorite of mine, and I have collected as many variants of it as I could find. In the process I have learned that such variants are not isolated sports, but extreme developments of a type characteristic of a certain locality. There is, for instance, a section of forest along the last few miles of the Schoharie before it enters the Mohawk where the hemlocks all have needles that are short and thin. All my short-leaved specimens have come from this section. The best one I ever found was growing in the middle of a clay bank near the top of a 300-foot cliff. I crawled down the bank at some risk to get it. At the time

the tree was perhaps a foot and a half high, and its needles were the tiniest I have ever seen on a hemlock, not more than a quarter of an inch long and almost as thin as wires. Unfortunately this was in the autumn, and in the early days of my collecting. I put my find into the open ground, and by the next spring it was dead. I am sure that today I could have saved it. I still regard its loss as one of the worst the Arboretum has had.

"At about the same time, high among the mountains of the upper Schoharie, I was delighted to find a hemlock with yellow-tipped needles, a rarity among hemlocks. The tree was already head-high, and I decided to wait until spring, when transplanting would be less of a risk. Having carefully fixed the location in my memory, the next spring I climbed the mountain with pick and shovel. When I approached the spot I did not see the tree. I thought at first that my memory had been faulty. Then I looked more carefully. I had come to the right place. Where the hemlock had been was a stub. Somebody, that winter, had cut it for a Christmas tree."



STATEWIDE ARBORETUM

The following has been reprinted, with permission, from THE AVANT GARDENER, October 1, 1981.

A unique approach to the concept of an arboretum has been pioneered in Nebraska and is attracting nationwide attention.

The idea of a statewide system of educational plant collections was conceived more than ten years ago by private citizens and University of Nebraska personnel. Today the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum has 25 "affiliate sites" - about half on college or university campuses, but also including municipal parks, historic sites such as Arbor Ledge (estate of J. Sterling Morton, founder of Arbor Day), state recreation areas, natural areas, even the Nebraska State Fairgrounds and a private golf course which has created public arboretum trails.

The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum was incorporated in 1978 as a nonprofit organization (George B. Briggs, Director; 112 Forestry Sciences Laboratory, East Campus, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE 68583). When an affiliate site is proposed to the NSA executive board, it is evaluated by the Director and a site selection committee, and if suitable, a curator is appointed and a local governing authority set up to be responsible for development and funding. Thereafter, the NSA provides assistance in all areas of the site's development and educational programs. All plants must be labelled, brochures, tours and other public activities set up. The NSA distributes promising plants and keeps records of their performance.

The arboretum network is proving effective not only in providing gardening information and promoting gardening throughout the state, but also making possible evaluation of plants in all the climatic areas of the state.



FOR YOUR LIBRARY

"A Farm and Village Boyhood" by Fred Lape, Syracuse University Press, 1980. - "This book is the autobiography of the author down to his eighteenth year, but more especially it is concerned with the structure and personalities of a small turnpike village, Esperance, New York, and its surrounding farm folk - character profiles Fred Lape draws with humor, earthiness, and economy but without any nostalgic patina.

"The importance of the work lies in the remarkably detailed and intimate picture of domestic life just above the rural subsistence level. It is a bonanza for the student of social history, folk life, or domestic economy....

"This is the story - seldom told - of hundreds of New York State villages, and one well told here. It is a pleasure to read, bringing back...sights and smells, events and embarrassments long forgotten." - From the Foreword, Louis C. Jones.

A GIFT SUGGESTION

A friend of yours might like to become a Friend. This Christmas give a gift membership in the Landis Arboretum. Make your check payable to the George Landis Arboretum, and mail it to the arboretum in Esperance, NY, 12066. You may be a Friend for \$10-25, a Sponsor for \$25-50, a Supporting Member for \$50-100, or a Patron for \$100 or more - and it is tax deductible. We appreciate your support.



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