

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

JANUARY 2018

Tuesday, January 9, 2018
Lenox Academy Building – 7 pm

Program: **HOUSEPLANTS IN WINTER**

Speaker: Anne Dunham

Refreshments Hostesses: Janice Brandisi and
Theresa Terry Michney

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HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

Yes, we are having a meeting in January!! Can you imagine? With the Program Committee, I tried to decide which months are the worst for weather. Well, you just can't tell anymore! Should we not have a meeting in January or February? Why not just do both?

The topics each month are going to cheer you up. We'll talk about the care of houseplants this month, and next month the topic is roses. This is just what we need, a bit of greening up in the cold darkness of winter.

It is nice to come together and meet. There is warmth in our camaraderie and a bright spot in the month. Speaking of brightness, keep in mind that every day is becoming just a little bit longer at this time of year! So, ladies, we are on the upswing of the year!

I am looking forward to seeing everyone!

Warmly,

Anne

Anne Gannon
President

HORTICULTURAL COLUMN

By Harriet Wetstone

Lucky me, I was invited for lunch by a good friend whose home is on an idyllic hilltop in Vermont. The dining room table sits in front of double French doors and overlooks a generous open deck, snowy field and icy pond just beyond.

My friend and I were not the only ones enjoying lunch. The table on the deck was strewn with birdseed and overrun with feasting cardinals and blue jays, nuthatches and woodpeckers, black capped chickadees, and many more.



Cardinal in snow

It amazes me that there were no squirrels and, according to my friend, never any bears even though she fed birds all the yearlong. And, here in Lenox, I don't dare put out birdseed! So I got to thinking, what can I feed birds that won't also send an invitation to bears and other unwanted beasties?

Winter is cold and always too dark too soon, but the winter garden is still the place for birds, providing berries and branches, lingering fruit, and a marvelous diversity of seedheads and shelter.

It wasn't hard to find a great, long list of shrubs that provide berries for birds even with vetting the list for invasives such as American Bittersweet (*Celastrus Scandens*), or Barberry (*Berberis* species), red fruit, and, of course, Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

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Some of my favorites on that list include: American Cranberrybush Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) which grows 8 to 10 feet tall and wide and has an abundance of tart red berries which stay until late winter; the Chokeberrys, red and black (*Aronia arbutifolia* and *Aronia melanocarpa*), and Sumac (*Rhus* species) with its red fruit, and, of course, Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

But not only shrubs provide for birds. I love coneflowers (*Echinacea*), and have always left the seedheads to self sow. It turns out that the seedheads of the traditional purple coneflower are very good food for birds (but not the seeds of the newfangled hybrids). Globe Thistle also provides good seedheads for birds, and is said to be a nice alternative to the nyjar thistle you find in bird seed mixes. Sedum plants can also be left standing for winter interest, and pretty much all types of seed eaters will enjoy their seeds. Black-Eyed Susans, Zinnias, Rudebekia, and, of course, Sunflowers, also go on this list - although only until they get covered over by snow!



Seedheads of rudbeckia fulgida



Winter grass and bird

Perhaps it is the grasses that provide the most wonderful seedheads which are enjoyed by all the seed eating birds. The genus *Miscanthus* includes approximately 20 species. The name comes from the Greek *mischos* meaning 'stalk' and *Anthos* meaning 'flowers'. Perhaps the best for the Northeast is Chinese maiden grass, *Miscanthus sinensis* which produces huge plummy silvery flower heads that erupt from fountain-like clumps of arching leaves. Those ripening blooms gleam in the slanting winter light glowing most brightly when backlit by the sun. Fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides*) is another favorite, instantly recognizable by its large foxtail-like flower heads. Grasses are wonderful for the birds, but also exquisite against the snow!

Sigh, I still wish I could have a bird feeder!

(Many thanks to fafard.com; www.thespruce.com; www.gardeningknowhow.com; www.allaboutbirds.org)