

Academy Garden Club Times

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

September 2026

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HORTICULTURAL COLUMN

Strategies for Climate Change

By Harriet Wetstone

I worried a lot about my garden this summer: that it would be too hot, that the Asian jumping worms would leave my plants starving for nutrients, that there wouldn't be enough rain. etc. The reality is that some things did really well, and others struggled, just as always.

No parsley grew at all, the usually luxuriant sorrel barely survived, and my nasturtiums never took off, but kale and beans and basil and oregano were doing fine. My shrubs seem to have grown more than usual, so much pruning ahead! And my beloved hostas were fine and bloomed wonderfully, great stalks of fragrant white blooms and others of brilliant purple.

I am wondering how all of your gardens did, and I am searching for ways in which we can find time to share more about our gardens with each other. We are, after all, a Garden Club!

One of the topics I researched for us this month is which perennials are going to thrive in the probably hotter and dryer summers to come. It feels like we lucked out this summer in having only one major heatwave, and yet the sun feels stronger. I find so many plants wilt almost every sunny afternoon. Leaves wilt to protect from too much heat - too much sun can cause wilting as well as too little moisture.

It is fascinating the way plants protect themselves from sun, how leaf cells (stomata) that open to eat light, i.e. photosynthesis, close to protect themselves which works well so long as it is for only brief times.

Some plants actually flip over their leaves to protect their stomata from strong sun! The problem is that needing to protect themselves also reduces their capacity for photosynthesis, and also reduces uptake of nutrients and stunts growing and flowering.

But - there are perennials appropriate for our zone that thrive in strong sun and tolerate drought and keep on flowering. Examples of very familiar plants include black eyed susans, catnip, echinacea, lavender, Russian sage, sedum, and yarrow.



(plants that thrive in sun and drought)

These are plants that either minimize water loss or maximize water uptake or both. For example, smaller leaves or deeply divided leaves reduce the amount of surface exposed to the sun and minimize moisture loss through transpiration.

Transpiration is the absorption of water through the root system and transporting it upward through the plant and releasing it through the leaves as water vapor. Plants with waxy coatings such as some begonias, or with dense hairs on their leaves and stems such as dusty miller, or with really thick leaves such as autumn joy sedum, also protect against moisture loss through their leaves.

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(Sedum, another example of sun/drought thriver)

Plants with deep tap roots maximize finding water in dry environments. Carrots, radishes, dandelions, comfrey, and echinacea are all examples of plants with deep taproots.

What about withstanding strong sun and heat? Lighter leaf colors are important, also the waxy or hairy leaves protect against sun and heat, silvery foliage (Russian sage, for example, or catnip) protect as well.



(hairy leaf which is one way leaves protect against moisture loss and heat)

And clearly, we the gardeners can help protect against moisture loss with mulching, with fewer, but longer waterings early in the morning and in the evening so that the watering doesn't evaporate. But we all know that periods of drought also bring on watering bans. All the more reason to look to drought resisting and sun loving plants!

I want to put in a plug for a book I am finding fascinating. It is *The Light Eaters* by Zoe Schlanger. It is a look into the unseen world of plant intelligence and offers an astounding look at how plants strategize and problem solve their way to survival. It's in paperback, widely available, I got it through Libby and then bought it because I wanted to do more than read it once!

I am looking forward to our September potluck!

But I am also looking ahead to our October meeting with a workshop on making potpourri. Plants for potpourri include any well scented plant - herbs, roses, scented geraniums.

But also included are bright colored flower petals that add visual pleasure to the pleasure of scent. For me, it is lots of mint, basil, thyme, rosemary, lemon verbena, and scented geraniums.

I want to remind you all to gather your plant materials now, while they are still vibrant and healthy. You want to gather plants on a dry day, in the morning after the dew has dried.

For flowering plants, cut them just as they open, slightly before full bloom. Fully open flowers drop their petals when drying.

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For herbs, and this may be too late, it is best to harvest before they flower for the best leaf aroma.

Take generous cuttings, six to ten inches for easier bunching and hanging (if that's the way you dry).

Shake off any dust or garden debris, but don't wash them, added moisture can lead to mold. Remove lower or damaged leaves.

You can dry plant material in a dehydrator, of course, but also by hanging bunches upside down, or even in your oven at its lowest setting with the door open for a few hours (check on them often).

See you soon!!

Harriet