

May 23, 2014

Dear Vine Liner,

For this issue of Vine Line, I asked several people to pick a favorite from their backyard and share with us.

But before we get to that, we are getting to the end of our fiscal year and I am asking that you make a donation to the Garden in support of our horticulture efforts and the Vine Line. Consider a minimum of \$12 which averages \$1.00 per month. You can send a check to my attention or [use this link to make a credit card contribution](#).

Thanks for considering this, and as always, I welcome your feedback.

Jim



Bill Ferrell-President, MBG Board of Directors

As I go out in my backyard, my attention goes directly to my 'Singing in the Rain' Peony. This is an Itoh hybrid of garden and tree peonies. Growing now for five years, it is covered in peach-colored blossoms each spring that age to salmon and yellow tones. This peony grows to 2-2 ½ ' tall and wide and dies back to the ground each winter. I clean up all the spent leaves each winter and anticipate the new growth each spring. I have planted this in the center of a bed I began as a lasagna garden, so it has plenty of soil mixed with leaf and organic matter.

I add a grow thru ring to support the many blooms, knowing the first spring rains are hard on the blooms. I chose this peony because of its unusual color flower, and with its deep green foliage it is just a show stopper when in bloom.

Rick Pudwell-Director of Horticulture

Picking a favorite plant is like picking a favorite child. It can change based on your mood

and what is happening at the time. I have always loved Bamboo. It has a certain “mystique” that no other plant seems to possess.

Growing up in the Chicago area, the only bamboo I had seen growing was in conservatories. That changed rapidly while serving in the Army in Southeast Asia. I was amazed by not only the beauty of the plant, but the huge number of species as well as its utility. It is used to build everything from scaffolding, to homes, musical instruments, a source food, and more.

When I was horticulturist at the Memphis Zoo, I grew 44 species there. I currently grow 10 species at home. The largest species I have is *Phyllostachys vivax*, one of the giant timber bamboos. I have a grove of it on the west side of my house. What I like about this plant is that the canes are widely spaced, probably 6 feet apart on average, and the foliage begins about 8 feet off the ground. This makes it possible to walk through the grove with ease.

The plants are much taller than my two-story house, which gives you the feel of being in an Asian forest. Because of the height of the canes, the house is shielded from the hot sun in the afternoon, which is another plus. As the grove has matured it has shaded out smaller plants underneath, so nothing else is left except for some large pines. The ground is carpeted with pine needles and fallen bamboo foliage, allowing you to walk in silence. Even though it's a relatively confined space, it's a great place to get away from the noises of the city that surrounds me.

Laurie Williams-Botanist and Adult Education Coordinator

Right now, my favorite spot (it changes with bloom times) is my woodland garden. It's down at the bottom of our 2 ½ acres, so it's far away from the telephone.



It is a mixed bed with many pass-along plants. The Christmas, Autumn, and Japanese painted ferns are some of my favorites throughout the growing season, but when in bloom, the Virginia Bluebells and Trilliums get my vote. Jewelweed and Woodland Poppy are attempting to take over but are easily pulled and kept in check. Last year we had a nice surprise, in that morel mushrooms showed up unexpectedly.

As with the rest of my yard, it is a work in progress, but that's what makes it fun.

Jana Wilson-Director of Marketing/Public Relations

Contrary to what you might think, working at a botanic garden doesn't mean you have a green thumb. Most of my yard and "flower" beds are overgrown, despite our best efforts to keep up. The one exception is my herb garden.

Chris O'Bryan-Certified Arborist and Horticulture Assistant

I fell in love with the idea of planting an herb bed a few years ago. There's nothing better than walking out the back door for a sprig of rosemary or winter savory to season whatever we're making for supper.

Need a relaxing bath? Snip some lavender and toss it into the tub with warm water and milk.

Bay leaves? They make nearly every dish more flavorful, and my husband is a sport about moving my giant, potted laurel tree into the sunroom over winter.

Fennel? Don't much care for the flavor, but it's beautiful, growing tall and feathery year after year, even when I forget to water.

And mint? Well, I can't figure out what to do with all that mint, so we just let it grow out onto the path...it smells delightful when we step on it!

Did I mention my lack of green thumb? My herbs aren't judgmental. I try my best to remember when to water what, but they forgive me when I don't.

And, occasionally, when the planets align, the husband and I manage to grow a couple of perfectly ugly heirloom tomatoes. We slice them up with goat cheese and a sprig of basil, and pretend that we are gardener chefs. Which, I suppose, is not too far from the truth...if you ask my herbs.



My wife Julie and I were married on March 20, 2013. As part of our wedding day, we decided that after we were lawfully wed at the courthouse, we would reconvene at to our home with my parents and the Cosby family for a planting ceremony.

In the weeks leading up to the ceremony, Julie and I chose three trees. Julie chose a Witch Hazel, Hamamelis for herself. She also chose a Sweet Tea Olive, Osmanthus fragrans for her daughter Olive. I chose a Japanese maple, Acer palmatum 'Red Dragon' for myself. We wanted to begin our life together by beginning a garden together, so we literally planted ourselves in our new home and our new lives. We chose a place in our back garden where we could see all three trees from the house.

After the holes were dug for our trees, instead of planting the trees, Julie and I stepped into the holes of our respective trees. We had asked Olive to step into the hole for her tree, but she refused to get wet and dirty (go figure.) We had our friends and family backfill with soil around our feet, spread a little fertilizer, mulch, and water us in. As the cold water made its way down my legs and I felt the soil settle around my feet, I imagined roots spreading from my toes. I couldn't help but raise my arms out like branches.

I felt the permanence of planting these trees as the permanence of planting



Kyle McLane-Assistant Director of Horticulture

I have many favorite plants in my backyard, but for now my favorite plant is a small tree called a Japanese Snowbell Tree. *Styrax japonicus* is the botanical name.

To quote G.S. Thomas, "To come upon a plant in the plenitude of its scented flower is one of the year's great experiences."

Spring is always a busy time for me, and I sometimes miss out on "taking in" a plant that is in full flower.

After such a cold winter, I thoroughly enjoyed my Japanese snowbell tree this spring. The sweet fragrance filled my backyard as my two sons and I enjoyed observing all the different types of bees working the small bell shaped flowers for pollen.

Even when not in flower, this small handsome tree with its lustrous dark green leaves helps to frame my picket fence and adds an element of beauty to my backyard.

myself in this life with my new family. It was a cold day so we didn't last long in the holes. We climbed out, rinsed off, and planted our trees properly.

All three trees have established well in our garden and all three of us have established well in our new lives.

Nick Esthus-Curator of Japanese, Asian, and Nature Photography Gardens

Asking a gardener about their favorite plant is much like asking a chef what their favorite food is. The possibilities are seemingly endless with many thoughts and questions determining the choice. What is in season? What sort of meal is it? Hot or cold?

When I am asked this question regarding a plant, I often ask the inquisitive mind to narrow the field a bit. Luckily, that is the case here.

My favorite plant that I have growing in my garden is a champion of our native West Tennessee forest, *Quercus phellos*, the Willow Oak. The tree in my backyard is a giant, ascending to a height of around 80 feet with a trunk of nearly 5 feet wide to support it. It casts a shadow over my house during the summer and sheds its foliage in the winter, to give the house some warming rays.

The branching structure is graceful yet strong and supports much life including, squirrels, numerous different birds, mosses and other plants even, tucked neatly in between branches.

It is not without its difficulties though. As I mentioned earlier, the leaves fall all over the property in the fall and in the spring, the catkins, its flowers, graffiiti everything about. But for the thrifty gardener, these headaches are a

My Japanese snowbell tree has thrived with afternoon shade and only needs occasional light pruning. I think this tree would be great anywhere in one's yard!

One interesting fact: the wood of the Japanese snowbell tree is used to make umbrella handles.

blessing in disguise. The fallen foliage and flowers make for a fast acting mulch, returning the spent material back into the tree.

Quercus phellos is easily grown in sun and is adaptable to many soil types, but thrives in moist bottom lands, where it is found naturally. Although this is a very common tree, it reminds me of all things mundane; when done right, there is nothing better. Think potatoes.