



# The Trillium

VOLUME 23, ISSUE 2  
MARCH—APRIL, 2013

Piedmont Chapter  
North American Rock Garden Society  
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

## Lessons Learned

By Jane Baber White

There's more than one way to tell a story, and in the case of *Lessons Learned from a Poet's Garden*, there are a number of stories to tell.

To begin, the book relates the story of the Harlem Renaissance poet, Anne Bannister Spencer (1882 – 1975) of Lynchburg Virginia, her garden and its influence on her writing. It is told from a garden perspective using enlarged old photographs of the garden's evolution from approximately 1915 til 1977. Not only was the garden a source of inspiration for her poetry, but a place of refuge for the injustices of life that applied to African Americans during the time in which she lived.

Much of Anne Spencer's poetry is included as well, including at least those works that reflect on the garden and themes of nature. As the author of this book, I readily admit that I am a gardener and not a literary scholar. A number of other books have been written from this literary perspective. This book makes no effort to interpret the poems except in their obvious relationship to specific plants in the garden.

An interesting theme is the beautiful love story of Anne and Edward Spencer and their marriage of 63 years. They met while both were students at Virginia Theological Seminary and College in Lynchburg and were married in 1901. Anne was creative in her poetry and her gardening talents, but Edward was remarkable in his creative recycling skills, as well as his ability to construct features of their home and garden just as Anne envisioned them. The recycling utilized many building materials, cast off as useless by others, which Anne and Edward saw as interesting and useful.



Dunbar HS Librarian—1931



1929—Spencers in Front Yard

There is another story however, which is more delicate to relate. It's the story of race relations in a small, conservative southern town, Lynchburg, Virginia, in both the early and late twentieth century.

The book is a very practical handbook, too, on how to restore an historic garden. It includes primary sources, such as time sheets, invoices, photographs, grant requests, letters, etc., presented in scrapbook form, to illustrate how a group of garden club ladies accomplished the restoration of the garden. There is even a checklist of lessons learned, or principles and goals which are recommended if any one in any area of the country might want to undertake an historic garden restoration.

In the early twentieth century Anne Spencer experienced many of the racial injustices of that era. The fact that, by law, hotels were not available to African Americans did have a surprising positive result for the Spencers. Their gracious home was the frequent respite for many African American notables such as James Weldon Johnson (who discovered Anne Spencer's poetic talents on a visit in 1919), Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, George Washington Carver, Marian Anderson, Paul Robeson, Zora Neal Hurston, Adam Clayton Powell, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others.



Anne Spencer in her Backyard

Many years later the residents of another section of Lynchburg who were members of Hillside Garden Club (a member club of the Garden Club of Virginia) discov-



Back Yard Restored—Note porch columns in both photographs

ered the remnants of the Spencer garden. They learned of the life and poetic passion of this remarkable, talented lady in their community who had lived and gardened on another side of town in an area totally unfamiliar to them. In 1983 the affluent all-white garden club broke historic precedent and adopted the restoration of the garden of this Harlem Renaissance poet and continues to lovingly

care for it thirty years later. This garden restoration has led to personal friendships and unlikely relationships that crossed the traditional southern boundaries of that earlier era.



Through her language of the earth, Anne Spencer has spoken to me and countless others who have come to experience her beloved small garden. The continual delight we gardeners experience from the simple act of digging in Anne Spencer's soil has been an unexpected reward, as has the realization that the beauty of the earth and the universal awe resulting from it, remain the same for all of us - whomever and wherever we may be.

Note: The book, *Lessons Learned from a Poet's Garden, The Restoration of the Historic Garden of Harlem Renaissance Poet Anne Spencer, Lynchburg, Virginia*, will be available for purchase, or can be obtained from the website of the Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum, [www.annespencermuseum.com](http://www.annespencermuseum.com). ☞

# In the Garden: Winter Fragrance

by Charles Kidder



Imagine stepping into your garden and being greeted by delicious fragrance. In winter. And in the North Carolina Piedmont? No, it's not what we usually associate with our coldest time of the year, but by choosing the right plants, it's can become a very real possibility.

Most of us are familiar with cherry trees, perhaps either the native Black Cherries or one of the Asian species known for blooming at the Washington Tidal Basin. Less well-known is their cousin, the Japanese Flowering Apricot, *Prunus mume*. It's something of a mystery why these small trees (to a maximum of twenty feet) are not more widely planted, but it could be yet another case of the dreaded Spring Syndrome. Too many gardeners don't venture out to nurseries until spring, and if a plant's not in bloom, it's invisible. By then, the Flowering Apricots are through flowering, having done their thing off-and-on throughout the winter. Depending on the variety as well as the vagaries of the weather, their spicy-sweet flowers can open any time from December through February. One of this plant's greatest virtues in the winter garden is its staggered bloom sequence. During a mild spell, many of its flowers open, perhaps only to be caught by harsh weather that follows. Not a problem, since the tree holds many dormant buds in reserve, waiting for the next warm spell to repeat the show. There are a couple of dozen *Prunus mume* varieties available, with flowers ranging from white to pale pink to rosy pink, either single or double. All appreciate full sun, moderate moisture and average soil. Flowering Apricots are what we would call a single-season plant, however; fairly non-descript when not in bloom, they probably don't merit a place of honor in the middle of your front lawn. Plant them where they can recede into the background when not in bloom.

Another winter bloomer that should not be plunked down in your front lawn is Mahonia, sometimes known as Leatherleaf or Holly-grape. Not that Mahonias aren't worthy plants for your garden; it's just that their often somewhat gaunt, leggy appearance won't cut it standing all by themselves. They look better up against a stone or brick wall, or perhaps backed by a row of more delicate shrubs. Also, they don't particularly appreciate full sun, especially in winter. The best Mahonia for winter fragrance is *M. bealei*; unfortunately, it also comes with the caveat of being invasive in the Southeast. Plant it only if you remove the flower heads before they ripen into the berries that birds will spread. (And if you sell your property, dig up the Mahonia and compost it!) A better choice would be *Mahonia xmedia*, available in several cultivars; 'Winter Sun' is one of the more popular. These are less fragrant than *M. bealei*, but better behaved. They can get up to ten feet tall, and in December and January are topped with sprays of bright yellow flowers.

Sweetbox (*Sarcococa* spp.) is another plant that's good for shady places in your garden. An evergreen shrub, Himalayan Sweetbox (*S. hookeriana*) can reach six feet tall, but it's more commonly sold as the cultivar *humilis*, which tops out at about two feet. The small, creamy-white flowers are inconspicuous, except for the powerful fragrance they emit in late winter; ditto for the glossy purple-black fruits, which are noticeable only when you look carefully. Sweetbox creeps by stolons, but never fast enough to be a problem. *Sarcococa confusa* is reportedly even more fragrant, but only marginally hardy in this area.

Witch hazels are stalwart fall-, winter- and early spring-bloomers. Our native *Hamamelis virginiana* blooms in late fall, sometimes with the leaves still hanging on the shrub. This can diminish the floral show, but doesn't affect the sweet fragrance. For fragrance in late winter, the many cultivars of *H. x intermedia* sport flowers that may be yellow, reddish or coppery. 'Arnold Promise' is an old standby with yellow flowers that are particularly fragrant.

Arguably the most fragrant of the winter bloomers is the aptly-named Fragrant Wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*). The 3/4" bell-shaped flowers are attractive, although not terribly showy. The outer petals are a pale, translucent yellow, revealing purplish petals underneath; they're best shown off with the sun coming from behind. You're really growing these somewhat ungainly shrubs for their wonderful sweet aroma, but if you insist on something a bit more showy, look for the variety 'Luteus,' with brighter yellow flowers. These shrubs can ultimately attain a height of 10'-15', with slightly less breadth. If they get too big for your taste, they can be whacked back to twelve inches in early spring, following flowering. And don't confuse this plant with *Chionanthus*. A very similar name, but a totally different plant.

With all of these plants, flowers and aroma are dependent on weather. Although they can flower in surprisingly cold temperatures, fragrance will be much more noticeable on a mild, sunny day. As long as their basic horticultural requirements can be met, it's best to plant them near a door or path where you will frequently walk by them and enjoy the fragrance. A little something to brighten up the gloom of winter. And good gardening in 2013! ❄️

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# Pathway as a Gardener and Garden Traveler

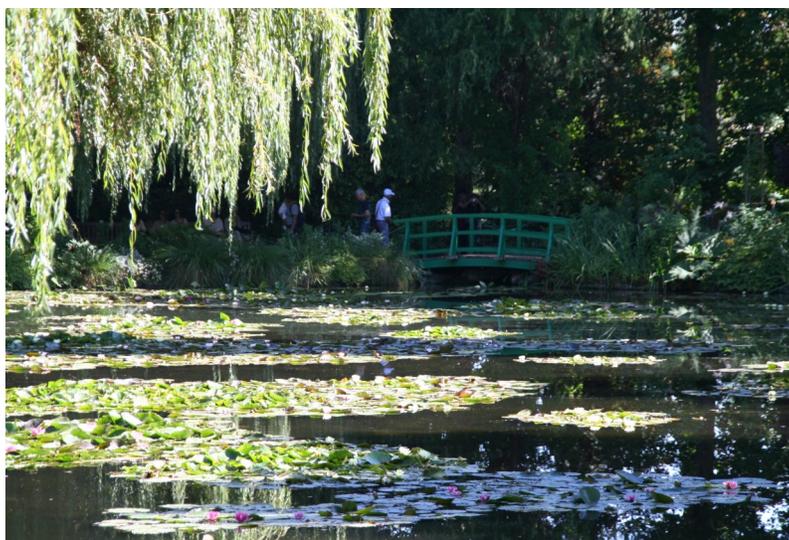
by David White

Some of you may know that I am an engineer who got into gardening as a form of weekend therapy. I have no formal training in horticulture or landscape design, but over time I have come to appreciate the technical challenges and aesthetics of garden design. I have also become interested in the history of gardens and the gardeners who were involved with their development. The following story provides a quick overview of the development of my interest in gardening, and key events that have influenced me.

I grew up in west Texas during the 1950s and 60s. My mother loved her flower beds, but my gardening interests were limited to running the lawn mower. After Carolyn and I married in 1970, we moved from El Paso to Maryland (the first time I ever saw a dogwood or redbud tree in bloom), to the San Joaquin Valley of California (a great location for visiting multiple National Parks), to central Texas (my first encounter with live oaks and poison ivy), and to North Dakota (a place with wonderful soil but a brutal climate). It was in North Dakota that I first realized there was more to gardening than mowing grass and that my favorite color is green.

We moved to Chapel Hill in 1986. We bought a house that was being built on the side of a hill with an intermittent stream cutting through the backyard. One of my first projects was to put in a small perennial bed along the edge of the stream. Over the next dozen years, this small perennial bed grew into an obsession with digging holes, building retaining wall with pressure-treated lumber, and trying to grow a range of bulbs, perennials, and shrubs. But for the most part, my interest in gardening remained a relatively solitary weekend hobby.

In early 1998, we decided to move from Chapel Hill to Durham for job-related reasons and ended up buying 0.4 acres that backed up to a manmade lake. The lot was roughly half sun and half shade, had a nice slope from front to rear, and had an amazing number of different tree species. While the house was under construction, I started thinking about landscaping and things that I might be able to plant. That fall, I found out about an 'open garden tour' that was being sponsored by the Garden Conservancy (an organization that I had never heard of previously) and spent a Saturday afternoon in Hillsborough visiting Montrose and two other wonderful gardens. I had gone by myself, but remember coming home and telling Carolyn what a great time I had.



**Giverny in Vernon, France**

Photo by David White

Soon after moving into our new home in the spring of 1999, one of our new neighbors invited me to a meeting of the Piedmont Chapter of NARGS and suggested that I "might enjoy it." I went to the meeting and realized that I could learn a lot about plants and gardening by simply coming to the meetings and talking to other gardeners. Soon thereafter I joined the Garden Conservancy and attended open garden events elsewhere in the U.S. Through my attendance at monthly NARGS meetings and visits to other gardens, I began to realize that part of the joy of gardening is being around and talking to other gardeners.

In 2001, Carolyn and I started traveling overseas and began looking for gardens to visit.

Our first such venture was a springtime trip to

Holland and Germany that included visits to Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam and Keukenhof. In subsequent years we made trips that included garden visits to England and Scotland (2003), New Zealand (2005), and the Canadian Rockies and Puget Sound (2006).



Photo by David White

**Il Giardino di Ninfa in Sermoneta, Italy**

including the display gardens of the Czech Rock Garden Club. In 2010 we returned to the United Kingdom to visit Nymans, Great Dixter, and Sissinghurst for a second time, plus the gardens at Crathes and Kildrummy castles in Scotland, followed by a cruise from Dover to Stockholm that allowed us to visit Jac Thijssse Park in Amsterdam, Peterhof and Pavlovsk in Saint Petersburg, and Millesgarden in Stockholm. In 2011, we went to Tuscany, Rome, and the Western Cape of South Africa and visited Biboli Garden in Florence, Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Villa Lante in Bagnaia, and Kirstenbosch Botanic Garden in Capetown. In 2012 we made two trips, a land tour of Bordeaux, Normandy, and Paris in September that included visits to several wonderful gardens, and a cruise from Rio de Janeiro around Cape Horn to Santiago, Chile in December.

During these trips, we have visited as many gardens as we could. Obviously, some have stood out more than

others. The destinations and notable gardens associated with our more recent trips include a cruise of the eastern Mediterranean during the fall of 2007 from Venice to Istanbul that had very little time to visit gardens, we did see wild cyclamen growing in Montenegro and miniature species narcissus blooming in Greece. In 2008, we did a land tour of Iberia with Robert McDuffie of the Virginia Tech Horticulture Department and enjoyed visits to the La Granja, the Alhambra, and Seville's Royal Alcazar gardens in Spain and Monserrate near Sintra in Portugal. A river cruise in 2009 on the Danube River gave us a chance to visit the Alpengarten at Belvedere Palace in Vienna and many wonderful gardens in Prague,



Photo by David White

**Old Nectar in Stellenbosch, South Africa**



Photo by David White

**Sitio Burle Marx in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

others. The ones I most enjoyed were the ones that had not only great plants and interesting designs, but also an interesting story that connected the garden to the gardeners responsible for its design and maintenance. My talk at the April meeting will focus on four of these gardens – Giverny in France designed by Claude Monet, Il Giardino di Ninfa in Italy developed by the Caetani family, Old Nectar in South Africa designed by Una van der Spuy, and Sitio Burle Marx in Brazil designed by Roberto Burle Marx. I'll throw in some slides from a few of the other gardens – both large and small – that I most enjoyed. Hopefully, it will lead to the opportunity to exchange experiences with an interested group of fellow gardeners. ☺



## Update on NARGS May Meeting Registration

The early registration deadline for the NARGS Annual Meeting in Asheville, North Carolina, is Saturday, March 2. The registration fee through March 2 is \$300/person, but will increase to \$325 after that date. Additional information and the registration form for the conference are available at [www.nargs2013.org](http://www.nargs2013.org). Or see the form in the current issue of the Quarterly.

There is still space available on all of the conference tours, but the post-conference trip on May 6-7 is full (a standby list is being kept if there are any cancellations). The deadline for getting the conference rate at the Doubletree (\$120/night) and the Sleep Inn (\$85/night) is April 2.

David White  
Chair, 2013 NARGS Annual Meeting

## To whet your appetite...

Two gardens that will be on tour  
during the  
May Annual meeting.



Photo by Joe French

Japanese rock garden of Joe and Beverly French in Flat Rock, N.C.



Photo by Bobby Ward

The garden of Ev Whittemore in Penrose, N.C.

## Plant Profile by Elsa Liner

**Botanical Name:** *Styrax americanus*

**Family:** Styracaceae

**Category:** Small tree

**Primary uses:** Specimen, woodland garden

**Dimensions:** 10 feet tall by 8 feet wide

**Culture:** Grow in partial shade in humus-rich, moist, well-drained soil. Generally no pruning is necessary except for removing small crossing branches. It blooms on old growth so, if necessary, prune before it breaks winter dormancy. No problems with pests. Zones 6-8

**Bloom time:** Late spring/early summer

**General attributes:** Deciduous, slow-growing native similar to *Halesia*. Elliptic dark green entire leaves. Beautiful rounded undulating habit, especially when grown in more sun. This is a four-season plant. In late spring it has dainty white, reflexed flowers born in the leaf axils in pendant clusters of as many as four. In summer and autumn the dark green foliage creates interest. In winter it presents a beautiful structure similar to Japanese maples but a bit more defined. Because of this it is especially nice grown against a lighter background so that its dark brown, curvi-linear structure can be seen to best advantage. ❧



## LASTING IMPRESSIONS' 7TH SPRING OPEN GARDEN

Saturday, April 20, 2013

9am-4pm, 4904 Hermitage Dr. Raleigh, NC

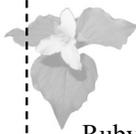
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919-787-6228 or [www.lastingimpressionsleaves.com](http://www.lastingimpressionsleaves.com)



## NARGS Piedmont Chapter Meeting

JC Raulston Arboretum  
Ruby McSwain Education Building

“Lessons Learned from a Poet’s Garden”  
March 16, 2013

**Jane Baber White**  
Anne Spencer Garden  
Lynchburg, Va.

*The Trillium*, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter  
The North American Rock Garden Society  
1422 Lake Pine Drive, Cary, NC 27511

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### OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:

Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox

Refreshments: Gwen and Maurice Farrier

### Food Goodies to Share

If your last name begins with the letter below,  
please consider bringing something to share.

**March: Sp-Z**

**April: Any and all**



Fragrant Wintersweet  
(Photo: Ralston Arboretum NCSU)

## Piedmont Chapter NARGS April, 2013 Program

“Great Gardens, Part II: “South Africa,  
Italy, France, and Brazil”

April 20, 2013

David White, Chair,  
Piedmont Chapter NARGS  
Durham, N.C.