

Dear Friends of High Falls Gardens,

Yes, we're still here, going strong -- haven't faded into the mists to live with the fairies, absconded to Rio with the checking account, or otherwise forgotten about you. I do apologize for being out of touch for so long. There are several good excuses (see below).

But first, having broken all previous records for tardiness of this newsletter, I'd like to make a special offer to all members in good standing as of September 1998. Not only will you receive at least all four of the newsletter issues that you paid for (however long it takes to publish them!), but upon your request I'll be happy to send you a free reprint of the paper presented at the Herb Growing & Marketing Network conference this past January, entitled *Issues in Chinese Medicinal Plant Production*.

Before I report all the news since last summer, let's take a look at what's happening now at High Falls Gardens. The plants are still snug underground, while the only sign of spring is that the birds returned around the first of March. But they've been kicking themselves ever since. This new Year of the Rabbit has already shown a surge of interest in traditional Oriental medicine and the cultivation of Chinese medicinal plants in particular; we feel it in an increased volume of inquiries, emails and phone calls.

Our basic goals for the year are to continue to work with our cooperating growers and to add as much diversity to the main garden as possible. We have formalized our advisory board and are actively seeking new sources of funding. A practitioner education initiative (see article on page 2) will further our efforts to organize and consolidate a market for traditional Chinese medicinal plant products.

And, looking back a few short years, I have finally accepted the reality that *The View From High Falls Gardens* is a triannual, not a (LETTER, continued page 4)

SAVE THE DATE!

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| March 27 | HFG Workshop in Millbrook, NY
Institute for Ecosystem Studies |
| Aug. 14 | Garden Weeding Party (Practitioners) |
| Sept. 18 | HFG Annual Field Day |
| Oct. 16 | Garden Clean Up Party (Practitioners) |

**NEWMAN VISITS HERB GROWING
AREAS IN CHINA**

Robert Newman, famous plant-person and center of the network of Chinese medicinal plant cultivators in North America, ended his eighteen-month stint as curator of the medicinal plant garden of the Nanjing Institute of Botany in China as of December 31st, 1998. But not before he was able to briefly tour cultivation areas in the provinces of Jiangsu and Anhui.

Anhui, about the same latitude as Georgia and Arkansas (32° N), is an area of extensive herb cultivation in eastern China. The small city of Bozhou boasts the largest herb market in the nation, and at least thirty different crops are produced nearby. Last October and November Robert saw farmers harvesting roots there, using big steel drums filled with rocks and water to clean the material, then spreading it out on the road to dry.

The overall layout was small plots (less than an acre) of any one plant, with several of these growing near each other. Each farmer seemed to be responsible for two or three crops; whether this was on their own land, leased land or a collective enterprise, Robert was unable to determine. But he spotted *Polygala tenuifolia*, grown for Yuan Zhi, *Trichosanthes* grown right on the ground rather than trellised -- probably *T. uniflora*, the species grown for the root remedy Tian Hua Fen ("Heavenly Flower Powder"), *Atractylodes macrocephala*, *Achyranthes bidentata*, *Angelica dahurica*, *Astragalus*, *Platycodon*, *Peony lactiflora* and *P. suffruticosa*, two forms of *Salvia*, and others. Farmers there lost several crops last year from rotting due to heavy rains.

Robert realized that some of these perennials are dug up and moved every couple of years in a combination of harvesting and an effort to keep plants healthy and predator-free. No tractors or other heavy equipment were in evidence, so our assumption is that this is all done with human labor. He ascertained that plants harvested every two years include *Astragalus*, *Scute* (*Scutellaria baicalensis*), *Pseudostellaria heterophylla* (for Tai Zi Shen) and *Glehnia littoralis* (Bei Sha Shen). Two years for these plants is shorter than we had anticipated. Others such as the Peonies are on a longer cycle of perhaps four years.

In Sheyang in northern Jiangsu, the seacoast province just northwest of Anhui where the provincial capital of Nanjing is located, Robert saw (Newman, cont'd. p. 2)

(NEWMAN, cont'd. from p. 1) White *Atractylodes* and *Astragalus* growing relatively close together in rows. *Platycodon*, *Angelica dahurica* and *Dictamnus* were nearby. The soil was a sandy loam.

Within the city limits of Beijing on another occasion, Robert observed fields maintained by the government's Institute of Medicinal Plant Development (IMPLAD). He saw what looked like at least an acre of *Phragmites communis*, a marsh reed that grows wild along the eastern U.S. coast, the rhizomes of which are an important medicinal, Lu Gen. There was *Eupatorium fortunei*, Pei Lan, and also *Rehmannia glutinosa*, Chinese Foxglove Root, growing in raised beds of moderately sandy soil interspersed with irrigation ditches. The *Rehmannia* seems to be harvested every year, as the roots would probably rot if not separated regularly. The cultivated form for Sheng and Shu Di Huang has larger roots. It's still also wildcrafted, and Robert has observed it growing wild in hard dry clay in disturbed areas. ■

ADVISORY BOARD FORMED

In support of High Falls Gardens fundraising efforts, several very special people who have lent their valuable advice and counsel to the project over the years have consented to allow their names to be listed as advisors.

The board now includes: Alice Chun, R.N., of Briarwood NY, a health professional active in Chinese-American community affairs; Lyle E. Craker, Ph.D., of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, professor, plant scientist and specialist in herbs; Andrew Ellis of Berkeley CA, practitioner and coauthor of well-known textbooks in traditional Chinese medicine; Steve Gilman of Ruckytucks Farm, Stillwater NY, farmer and president of the Interstate Council, Northeast Organic Farming Association; Edith Lee, R.Ph., L.Ac., M.T.O.M., New York NY, practitioner and teacher; Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.C.M., Sherman Oaks CA, plant specialist, curator of the medicinal plant garden of the Nanjing Institute of Botany 1997-98; and Jeffrey C. Yuen, The Swedish Institute, New York NY, Taoist priest, teacher and practitioner. ■

HFG LAUNCHES PRACTITIONER EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Domestic production of Chinese medicine plants, currently an exciting area for research, will remain an academic exercise without one crucial element. Producers need a market -- a market that prefers domestic produce to the imported, which is not a trivial distinction where food is concerned.

As its contribution to the producer/consumer relationship, HFG has begun to develop educational programs for practitioners of Oriental and western herbal medicine. To date, we have submitted a proposal to the National Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine concerning the matter, are consulting advisors and

practitioners on program development, and are pursuing funding from private foundations. Three types of programs are contemplated:

- Cultivation of Medicinal Botanicals: Context and Considerations

Format: A workshop, three to six hours in length, to include lectures, audiovisuals, and discussion.

Synopsis: A general understanding of contemporary agriculture is pertinent to the development of clinical herbalism for several reasons, among them the urgent need to relieve worldwide pressure on wild plant populations and the continued uncertainty over the quality of imported remedies.

PRICE CUT ON DOC FILM

Videocassettes of the stunning Swiss documentary, *The Knowledge of Healing*, are now available for \$49.95, reduced from the \$100 price set last year after the film ended its all-too-brief run in a few art film cinemas in the U.S. Directed by Franz Reichle, winner of awards in Europe, reviewed with raves in the *New York Times* in November of 1997 and in this newsletter Winter 1998, the feature-length film shows traditional Tibetan physicians at work in Siberia and India. There are panoramas of wind-swept tundra, glimpses of the secluded mountaintop headquarters-in-exile, closeups of the compassionate faces of people who fully infuse their practice of medicine with spirituality, and -- by the way -- shots of herb gathering, processing and preparations. This film deserves to be part of every good library on Oriental medicine.

The U.S. distributor, In Pictures, moved from New York to Los Angeles (1024 12th Street #1, Santa Monica CA 90403) and has made the videocassettes available through their website, inpictures.com. You can also order them by email at inpix@earthlink.net or by phone at 310-451-8722. (In Pictures' Phillip Marques told us that in late April his company will premiere in New York a new documentary, *In Search of Kundun*, featuring interviews of Tibetan people done by Martin Scorsese as background research for his commercial film.)

Due to the current economic status of world agriculture and trade, a widespread effort to cultivate the Chinese medicinals faces several problems that may not be solved without an active involvement of the practitioner community. Both growers and practitioners need to understand each other's needs and points of view. In addition, practitioners need an understanding of recent developments in agriculture; such knowledge not only affects their ability to procure clean, high quality remedies grown

in healthy soil, but also directly impacts the dietary habits and health of their patients.

- Botanical Studies and Fieldwork

Format: A series of weekend field studies in the garden, with or without preparatory coursework.

Synopsis: To introduce practitioners to the plants, a helpful method is to present slides of species grouped according to treatment indication of the herbal remedy derived from the plant. This highlights similarities in morphology and physiology within the same group, and is useful in understanding the nature and energetics of the remedies. This understanding is further developed through fieldwork, which in New York must be seasonal (May through October), but enables students to compare living plants within the same group and in some cases compare them to related medicinal species of North America and Europe.

Garden collections of Chinese medicinal plants are being established in other regions of North America to serve as educational facilities for practitioners and students.

- Comparative Qualitative Analysis

Format: A suggested format is a series of workshops structured around evaluation protocols to be developed for qualitative analysis of the remedies.

Synopsis: If domestically cultivated Chinese medicinal botanicals are to become available to practitioners, both quantitative and qualitative analysis of plant material must be conducted in order to compare the domestic and imported products. The limitation of quantitative analysis is that even the most elaborate and expensive labwork will not prove equivalency; the chemical constituents of plants and the synergies among them are too complex.

The development of the California wine industry may provide a useful model for this purpose; taste-testing is both a fine art and a method of qualitative analysis. Following a similar model, we might rely upon the judgement of experienced tasters, perhaps herbalists or traditional pharmacists who have a long history of handling the remedies, who conduct evaluations according to specially designed protocols. ■

MIDDLE SCHOOL TO PLANT CHINESE HERB GARDEN

Pauline White, who runs the special education resource room at the Quirk Middle School in Hartford, Connecticut, was pursuing her own Taoist studies when she took a course in Chinese medicinal plants from Arthur Shattuck at the Connecticut Institute of Herbal Studies. (Pauline also holds a master-level black belt in Korean *Tang Soo Do* and is an advanced student of *Sun Do*, a healing meditation practice.) Excited by the possibilities, last year

when the Knox Parks Foundation cleared space for community gardens right across the street from Quirk, she proposed that her middle school students plant Chinese herbs in two 6x8-foot plots.

The proposal was accepted. Only one problem -- Pauline has never done any gardening of any kind. So she appealed to Arthur, who recruited High Falls Gardens to back her up and offered to pay expenses. HFG did a simple design and mailed her a Johnny's Selected Seeds catalog with eight varieties indicated. Johnny's agreed to donate the seeds! The science teacher will help with germination. Planting will be in late May.

Pauline highly recommends the book *Digging Deeper: A Guide to Integrating Youth Gardens Into Schools and Communities* by Joseph Kiefer and Martin Kemple, with a foreword by Alice Waters, published in 1998 by Common Roots Press, 64 Main, Montpelier VT 05602. ■

HFG Helps Fund Expedition to Sikhote-Alin

HFG with colleagues Harry Campbell (Fo-ti expert) and Frank Porter (Riverview Herbs) chipped in to buy a full share of the 1998 expedition conducted by the Komarov Institute of the Russian Academy of Science. Led by Vladimir Popov, Curator of Alpines, the trip was to the relatively wild area north of Vladivostok, the city known for being the eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian railway. At about 45°N, this coastal mountain region is the same latitude as northern Maine.

The expedition was sponsored by Duncan McDougall of The Seed Guild in Scotland, who organized shares and distributed seeds. Plant collecting expeditions have become popular (in certain circles, at least) as an ecologically conscientious means to acquire fresh and unusual material from the wild. In this case several Siberian medicinal plants were included in the share, such as *Platycodon*, *Patrinia scabiosaeifolia*, and *Schisandra chinensis*.

Frank, who has been doing most of the seed germination, reports good results, with rates of about 75 percent.

Sorry, Green Tea On Hold

Our supplier is (we hope) temporarily out of the green tea we've been providing for HFG members, and has in stock only a much more expensive grade or an inexpensive, lesser-quality grade. We're working to come up with alternatives for you, and will report in a future issue.

(LETTER, cont'd. from page 1) quarterly, newsletter. We will no longer attempt to publish a summer issue. The annual \$15 subscription price will remain the same; subscribers as of the end of 1998 will receive four issues.

Good Turnout for Field Day 1998

Thanks in part to the cosponsorship of the Regional Farm and Food Project in Albany and Tracy Frisch's skill with publicity, the September 12th HFG Field Day attracted around forty to fifty people. The social hall of the Philmont Methodist Church was a comfortable size for the morning slide show, talk, demonstration of traditional herbal decoctions, and question-and-answer period. After about an hour and a half of talk, the group adjourned to the field, where some people picnicked and others wandered in and out over the course of the afternoon. Weather was breezy and warm, with hazy sunshine.

HFG apprentice Victor Kusmin had labored long and hard over the summer to weed, prune, smooth out and mulch the beds with woodchips, and everything looked great -- including the cherry tomatoes, bowl gourd squash and other vegies in his special section. He had been ably assisted on occasion by those very special friends of High Falls Gardens, the Reed brothers Chris and Andy, who also fixed the deer fence and put up the 20x20 tent rented for Field Day.

Michael Keilty, responsible for teaching a course on Asian Medicinal Plants at the University of Connecticut (Storrs) School of Agriculture, graciously showed up the day before to help with last-minute weeding and other tasks. The next day he brought along twelve of his students who asked plenty of questions, snapped lots of photos, picnicked and hung out with the plants.

Christine Kissel, Philmont artist, had produced about 125 elegant plant markers, functional but also a visual enhancement to the garden. Using the familiar 20-inch zinc stakes, she invented a method of painting the label a clear sky blue before penning the plant name in her flowing calligraphy. This technique made the stakes visible from afar as jewel-like dots and the garden fairly shimmered. We'll enjoy these at future events as well.

Intense Agricultural Conference Schedule

Wendell Berry drew a crowd of several hundred people at the NOFA (Northeast Organic Farming Association) Summer Conference on August 9, 1998 in Northampton, Massachusetts, and later that weekend Jean drew a somewhat smaller but still enthusiastic group for her talk "Chinese Herbalism for Growers."

The first weekend of October, Allan Balliett and company put on the Mid-Atlantic Biodynamics Conference at Claymont Court in the West Virginia panhandle. The conference food was superb, catered by Angelica Kitchen of New York City, and the ultimate experience was cornbread from biodynamically grown corn contributed by

Hugh Lovel, who explained that such manna from heaven is possible only a few weeks a year, when the corn dries on the cob to exactly 20% moisture content.

The annual Acres U.S.A. conference moved from St. Louis to Minneapolis last year, very convenient for certain native Minnesotans associated with HFG. Autumn in the Northeast seemed long, but in the Twin Cities everyone was pointing with disbelief to the bare ground, unfrozen

HFG IN THE NEWS

An unexpected but welcome sequel to Field Day was not one but two well-written articles in local daily papers, complete with colored photos. John Mason produced "The Way of the Chinese Garden" that appeared on the front page of the Living Section of the Hudson *Register Star* on Sunday, Sept. 27th. Later, Marianne Comfort interviewed Jean at the garden and wrote "Roots of Health," on the front page of Lifestyles in the Schenectady *Daily Gazette*, Tuesday, October 20th. John and Marianne, each a shareholder in the Roxbury Biodynamic Farm CSA (Community Supported Agriculture project), are especially skillful in reporting agricultural subjects. Members, contact us if you'd like photocopies.

lakes and 50° sunshine Dec. 10-12. Fred Kirschenmann gave the keynote and later a slide show on his North Dakota operation, including comments on his practice of biodynamics. Fred is one of the friendly experts, others being Hugh Courtney of the Josephine Porter Institute of Applied Biodynamics and Steve Diver of ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) who have graciously contributed slides to the forthcoming HFG presentation to practitioners on agriculture.

Maureen Rogers' Herb Growing & Marketing Network annual Winter Getaway was held in Palm Coast, Florida at the end of January, which gave Jean a great excuse to wear her Birkenstocks without the wool socks for a weekend. A small but appreciative group of experienced growers listened to a talk, looked at slides, tasted a decoction and asked intelligent questions about "Issues in Chinese Medicinal Plant Production." Networking was so intense that we never made it to the beach.

Bees Still Alive in February

Despite sleet, snow, and cold that froze pipes, the honeybees were still coming out in February on the few days with bright sunshine and no wind. A north wind barrier made of wooden pallets stuffed with rigid foam insulation seemed to help. The bees come outside to drink water and defecate; an extended period of weather that keeps them inside the hive can kill them. It's a long time until spring and we can only hope they make it through. Stay tuned! ■