

The
View
FROM

高深園
HIGH FALLS GARDENS

Dear Friends of High Falls Gardens,

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The transition to a new millennium being difficult, this is the first newsletter since last July. (*Good excuse, but I can't use it again.*) Nevertheless, there's positive news to report beyond mere evidence of our continued survival.

It was a jungle out there during the 2000 season! So much rain that we didn't use our new sprinkler system even once. We learned the hard way what our local farmers have been saying, that once you have a good irrigation system in place the dry, sunny years are better and easier than the wet years. Alas, those lovely garden nooks sometimes felt like the Little Shop of Horrors. The weeds, the weeds!

Overgrowth and fungi made the plants look exhausted on HFG Field Day, September 16th. But perhaps this appearance was only in the critical eye of the intimate weeder who knows the plants' private parts. To the three dozen visitors, all was lush and sparkling in the sunshine. We pitched our yellow and white tent in the garden and family and friends made a party.

The new bees from Champlain Valley did very well over the summer and by frost-time had filled three supers with brood and comb. With those stores, and the formic acid treatment to remove Varroa mites, the bees were prepared for winter as best we novices know how. The autumn frosts were early and hard but were greeted with great sighs of relief, especially after snows blanketed the garden.

Around noon on February 10th, a brief window of thaw and sunshine, we watched the hive as several dozen workers flew out and lobbed poops on us and the surrounding snow. (They eat their honey stores all winter to keep themselves alive and to generate warmth around the queen. But they need temperatures of 50° F or above to come outside to defecate.) That was the High Falls Gardens version of Groundhog Day, and the bees' survival was cause for rejoicing.

Those cheers have turned to groans as March has come and we're still shoveling. The good news is that the snow cover has been constant this winter, protecting those plants. And, no doubt, the weeds. 

Student Gardens to Bloom Throughout Nation

Council Backs HFG's Proposals for Plant Studies

Last year High Falls Gardens, backed by the Council of Colleges of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (CCAOM), submitted two proposals to fund Asian medicinal plant studies on a national level. One of the proposals, to support gardens created by students at several of

the CCAOM member colleges, was funded for 2001 by the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust. The award includes eight \$1500 stipends for student garden programs and the development of a website to share horticultural information related to Asian medicinal plant studies:

The second proposal was submitted to the
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The View FROM HIGH FALLS GARDENS

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STUDENT GARDENS

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U.S. Department of Agriculture, and is a plan for a nationwide trials program, to be carried out by the colleges in cooperation with local farmers, universities and extension services. Just recently, funding was declined for 2001, but HFG and allies expect to resubmit a stronger proposal next year.

Those interested in eventual domestic production of the Asian medicinal plants welcome these initiatives as important steps toward development of the market.

A Solid Base for Research

In the past year, HFG's work has been joined by a number of new colleagues. We are seeing the contours of an emerging continent-wide effort to grow and understand the Asian medicinal plants.

Our first research project, a three-year trial program for six species of Chinese medicinal herbs, was completed at the end of 2000. This pioneering set of field trials was carried out in collaboration with Dr. Lyle E. Craker of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and funded in part by Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education), a U.S. Department of Agriculture program. Replicates of the test plants were sited at HFG's Hillview Farm field and at three other participating farms in New England. Reports on these trials will be published later this year.

While these data are important — as are the results of central New York's (CADE's) Medicinal Plant Project and the Minnesota Medicinal Herb Network's cultivation project — our ambition is to be able to compare outcomes across a wide variety of climate zones. While comparisons are done informally among growers, formal plant trials require simultaneous planting of identical material in fixed amounts and arrangements, to help

insure that variations in results are due to climate and soil conditions only.

To compete for research funding, especially against the predominant interest in (some would say "obsession with") biochemistry and genetics, is a mighty challenge. Yet the world is changing rapidly, and many helpers are at hand. The past few years have seen substantial development of the practice of traditional Oriental medicine in North America. The Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (A&OM) professional organizations are strong, the accredited colleges have established a doctoral curriculum, the number of colleges has grown in a short time to over forty — and they are located in every region of the U.S. Where would we find a better network to sponsor Asian medicinal plant research?

The colleges of A&OM need not reinvent the wheel. Each has the necessary resources nearby, which include universities, botanical gardens, the extension service and, last but not least, ecologically conscious, experienced farmers. The model for this cooperative arrangement already exists in Minnesota and Sonoma County, California, as detailed in past issues of *The View*. Now, if similar arrangements can be established in Florida, Texas/New Mexico, the Northwest and Hawaii, we'll have locales spanning a wide range of climate zones. Funds are being sought, participation is welcome.

Prospects for Medicinal Plant Production

HFG has worked with farmers for years. They are ready for medicinal plants and will plant as soon as the markets are organized enough to pay a fair price for a clean, top-quality, locally grown product. Many savvy farmers who produce clean food have learned to avoid the worldwide commodities markets and to seek out direct market connections. As a result, direct-marketed herb cooperatives are being developed in California, Minnesota,

Vermont, West Virginia and New York, not to speak of Canada and other nations ahead of us in the enlightenment department.


The marketplace itself is in the process of being reinvented. Since 1998 the mainstream herbal products industry has suffered the same consolidation trend as other sectors of the economy, and retail sales have actually declined, as noted by industry analyst Peggy Brevoort and also Mark Blumenthal in the latest issue of *Herbalgram*. Mainstream observers cite recent herbal product scares, as well as consumer uncertainty regarding products and dosages, to explain the decline in sales.

However, from 1998 to 1999 there was a five percent increase in sales based in health food stores. This bit of evidence validates our distinct impressions, here amid the grass roots, of a widening split in consumer awareness of medicinal herbs. Attitudes perfectly mirror the trends in the food industry. Organic food, now

defined by federal law, has been enjoying a twenty percent annual sales growth rate in the U.S., while industrial food makers consolidate, continue their advertising battle over razor-thin slices of market share, and do their best to claim the concept of "organic." Although the federal organic standard *currently* excludes genetically-modified organisms, irradiation and other nasties, the need for food security prompts the educated consumer to seek food with "a face, a place and a taste," to quote Michael Sligh of Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI). Local food, or "real" food (our favorite term now that the feds have appropriated the "O" word) is now the leading edge of the movement.

If a more educated consumer perceives a difference between "real" medicinal herbs and "junk" medicinal herbs, in the same way they view food, they learn quickly

how to find the good stuff. There is growing recognition of herbalism as a high art, much more than pills advertised on TV, and of experienced practitioners with access to better information. Meanwhile, quietly beneath the radar of the corporate media, over forty accredited colleges of acupuncture and Oriental medicine are busy training thousands of herbal practitioners.

The Student Gardens proposal was a joint effort. Many thanks to Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.C.M., Naomi Alson, L.Ac. (former student gardener at New England School of Acupuncture and owner of Naomi's Herbs in Lenox, Massachusetts), and Marylynn Morales, L.Ac. (former student gardener at American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco). Both Naomi and Marylynn were licensed last year and are now in practice, but they continue to support the student gardens at their colleges. 

Student Gardens: How YOU Can Participate

- ◆ Students/Colleges of A&OM: One page proposals due April 30, as announced previously.
- ◆ Farmers & Practicing Herbalists: Contact your local college of A&OM (see national list at www.ccaom.org, or phone 301-313-0868 for information).
- ◆ Universities & Botanic Gardens: Same as above.
- ◆ All Others: Stay posted with HFG for future reports. Note that one hundred percent of the funding for Student Gardens goes directly to the colleges and for the website. Meanwhile, HFG needs money for operations this year. Know where we can get some? Call or email Jean ASAP! Or, send a check to the High Falls Gardens Fund (*see back cover*).

Aristolochia Controversy Heats Up

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in a display of questionable logic that begs the question of who they're working for, launched

Need more information? Contact the national professional associations of acupuncture and Oriental medicine:

AAOM	AOMA
610-266-1433	253-851-6896
www.aaom.org	www.AcupunctureAlliance.org

two seemingly contradictory initiatives in recent months. On one hand, they banned the import of several Chinese medicinal herbs in response to the European controversy over Aristolochia (see "Herbal Product Makers Consider Self Regulation" in a previous issue of *The View*, Vol. VI No. 2). FDA agents then "visited," without invitation, the U.S. offices of several Chinese medicinal herb product manufacturers, including Lotus, Qualiherb, East Earth, Crane and Blue Light Herbs. They demanded a recall of products containing "aristolochic acid," and also statements of probable product hazards.

On the other hand, in mid-January FDA announced "regulations" on genetically-engineered foods, proposing that the pre-market testing and labeling of new products be a voluntary process for manufacturers. In addition, inverse labeling such as "GMO Free" will be restricted.

Put these two moves together, and it's as if Big Brother is saying to the people, "You have to eat what's cooked up in the lab, without benefit of any objective testing or labeling,

but we have to protect you from those traditional medicinal herbs—the ones with thousands of years of empirical science behind them — they'll kill you!"

While FDA invited a public comment period (until April 3) on the proposed "regulations" for genetically-engineered food products, the actions against Chinese medicinal herbs were covert, without public hearings or comments, expert testimony, or due process.

The profession of acupuncture and Oriental medicine has reacted defensively, displaying reflexes honed in the West where over the past five hundred years herbalism has become "alternative" medicine with a history of suppression. As all trained herbalists are well aware, many herbs can be toxic when used by unskilled people, in large quantities and over long periods of time. Herbalists also know that attacks on the pharmacopoeia tend to escalate. Even so, the formidable amount of evidence in the Aristolochia case must be weighed by the profession of A&OM, whose first responsibility is to their patients and only after that to uphold their traditions.

Several scientific investigations were performed in the wake of the problems in Europe, which involved undertrained Western health professionals prescribing herbs in combination with drugs as a diet regimen. The studies varied widely in quality; some examined the effects of the pure chemical derivative, aristolochic acid, and not the herb itself and, to no one's surprise, found severe

toxicity. The *New England Journal of Medicine* (Vol. 342 No. 23, June 8, 2000) summarized a number of these studies and concluded that the role of Chinese herbs in the incident(s) is still a matter of debate, as herb-drug interactions could not be ruled out.

FDA's actions prompted the American Association of Oriental Medicine (AAOM), one of the two U.S. professional associations, to send out an alert to its members advising them of their rights and suggesting they seek legal protection if contacted by federal agents. The AAOM also circulated petitions protesting the actions, and has formed a legal defense fund. They convened an emergency meeting in Los Angeles in January and decided to form a Chinese Herbal Medicine Coalition to represent the product makers.

Representatives of both professional associations — the AAOM and the Alliance (Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine Alliance/AOMA) — have commenced educational presentations and negotiations with the Food and Drug Administration. The Alliance will hold its annual meeting in Florida in early May and expects to convene a special panel on the Aristolochia case.

While the principle of defending the pharmacopoeia will be upheld, the profession as a whole has yet to reach an internal consensus regarding the continued use of Aristolochia. Several substitutes for *fang ji* are commonly used, including *Stephania tetrandia*, one of the Menispermaceae family rather than Aristolochiaceae. ☐