

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, AUTUMN '05

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

Harvest time! Though the frost is late and some of our plants are still growing, we've been gathering seeds and drying herbs for weeks. Over the first weekend of October, our six HFG interns harvested 16 types of Asian medicinal plant seeds and seven kinds of herbs. We rigged up a small solar dryer (photo, right) according to principles outlined by expert growers Matthias and Andrea Reisen, a perfect opportunity for the interns to see the model in action. Even a small unit makes those herbs "sweat," retaining color, flavor and Qi in the dried product.



Intern Ernesto Berrios checks herbs in solar dryer.

**** Sample Packs in Process ****

From the Northeast Kingdom to New Mexico, more than a dozen small, ecologically diverse farms are cooperating to produce a Sample Pack for clinics and practitioners of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. The Medicinal Herb Consortium (MHC) has presold this special 2005 collection to certain clinics, practitioners, and even a student or two. Fresh-dried samples of 30+ different kinds of herbs, bundled together in one box, are being assembled right now and will be shipped to customers at the end of November.

Mai Ting, head of the New Mexico Herb Growers Association, discovered a grower with the foresight to have planted an orchard of jujube trees several years ago. Becky Thorp of Sun Star Herbs in Cerillos (<http://www.sunstarherbs.net>) will add some of her luscious dà zǎo ("big dates," *Ziziphus jujuba*) to the Sample Pack. Mai brought a sack of 2004 fruit to the HFG workshop in August (see report below) and wowed everyone. But that wasn't the only discovery....

**** Vermont Heritage Hawthorn Project ****

The shān zhā (hawthorn fruit) in the Sample Pack, large by Western standards, is about half the size of the Asian *Crataegus pinnatifida* var. *major*. But it comes with a wonderful story. Our friend Doug Flack, whose northern Vermont farm for many years has offered hawthorn berry tinctures and other medicinals (<http://www.flackfamilyfarm.com/>), alerted us to a unique opportunity. Doug and his family know many of the old hawthorn trees in their vicinity. (Hawthorns are highly variable, though not as much as their Rose family cousins, the apples, which don't come true from seed.)

Doug's favorite hawthorns include a double row of "heritage" trees that appear to have been planted a very long time ago, in what is now a cow pasture on the Forgues Family Farm near the shore of Lake Champlain in Alburg Springs. (Here's an inspiring story about the Forgues family: http://organicvalley.coop/our_story/meet_the_farmers/northeast.html). Doug recognized these plump, red heritage "haws" (fruits) as worth a special propagation effort.

To get things underway, Douglas Feick, a friend of HFG from nearby western Massachusetts, agreed to lead the research project. We went up to northern Vermont to harvest hawthorn fruit and mark trees for future study. As you can glimpse from the photo (below, left), the Forgues farm was hawthorn heaven, with many beautiful old trees of different shapes, colors and fruit flavors.

Douglas Feick wondered whether Charles Sprague Sargent had walked through this same pasture a hundred years ago. Sargent (1841-1927), the first director of the Arnold Arboretum, was a hawthorn expert. The New England Botanical Club published his *Notes on Crataegus in the Champlain Valley* in 1901, and in the next few years he authored *The Genus Crataegus in North America* (1907), *Crataegus in New York* (1913) and similar surveys of Ontario, Michigan, Pennsylvania and other locales.



Red haws glow in sunset at Forgues FamilyFarm.

Our trip to the Northeast Kingdom yielded an unexpected but welcome bonus. Bobbie Flack let us harvest some seven-year-old dǎng shēn (*Codonopsis pilosula*) for the Sample Pack. Before dawn, she and Doug fed us a real farm breakfast -- everything organic, biodynamic, pastured, unpasteurized or lacto-fermented -- then we went out into her exquisite herb garden on an east-facing slope. Just as the sun rose, the scent of dǎng shēn and fertile black soil perfumed the air as we lifted those big roots.

**** **Robert Newman and Joe Hollis at Summer Workshop** ****

The last weekend in August was an important occasion for HFG, as two of our main collaborators and fellow Asian medicinal plant conservators visited the garden for the very first time in over a decade of working together. Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.C.M., based in Los Angeles, is the center of the network of Asian medicinal plant conservators in the U.S. and has sourced the seed for most of HFG's collection. We scheduled Robert to present a workshop for practitioners, accredited by the NCCAOM for 8 CEUs, then the ball started rolling. Weiqing Han, Robert's wife who was trained as an agronomist in China, got a break in her nursing school schedule. Then, our medicinal plant power couple decided to take advantage of the trip East to fly into Asheville, NC and see Joe Hollis's Mountain Gardens for the first time. Finally, plant geek momentum reached full flood, and Joe decided he had to drive them all north to HFG for the workshop.

What a satisfying experience to see Robert, Weiqing and Joe prowling through the HFG field! Some unresolved questions were answered. For example, is our shān yào (*Dioscorea batatas*) the real thing, even though it has aerial tubers and the picture in Bensky doesn't? *Answer: Yes!* *Question:* Why don't our *Trichosanthes* (perennial cucumber) vines bear more than a few guā lóu shí even though loaded with flowers this year (see photo, left)? *Answer:* Because most of our plants are males.



Guā lóu is all show, no go.

One evening over the supper table, Joe and I asked one of our most burning questions. How the heck do you grow and harvest dāng guī (*Angelica sinensis*)? We were thrilled to experience Weiqing and Robert's joint freehand translation of three pages out of a hefty Mandarin tome (they usually travel with a case of reference books), detailing an elaborate two or three-step procedure for growing starts in densely planted nursery beds then transplanting to facilitate rapid root growth before the seed stalk emerges. (Note to American growers: experiments needed.)

Joe has dāng guī self-sowing in his mountain hollow (see <http://mountaingardensherbs.com>).

He's teaching botany to students at Daoist Traditions College of Chinese Medical Arts in Asheville and working with farmers in Yates County. You should have been there when Joe and

Robert and all the workshop participants went over to visit the biodynamic Healing Plant garden at Camphill Village in Copake, at the invitation of their new director Marc Blachere. You could've had many of your own questions answered, and replenished your spirit at the same time. Now, don't fret. We'll just have to do it again.

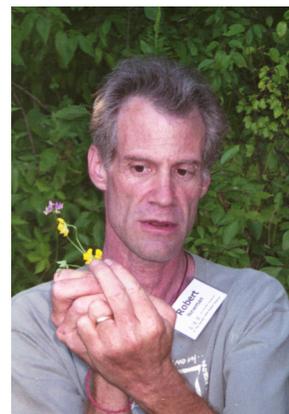


Photo: Ann Brameier, L.Ac.

**** **Internship Program a Success; To Be Expanded?** ****

HFG's 2005 internship program was organized around a four-weekend structure: February/Germination, May/Planting, August/Cultivation, and October/Harvest.

Interns were drawn from those most invested in getting to know the Asian medicinal plants, the practitioners of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine. They were able to experience the plants' entire seasonal cycles from seed to seed. The swimming hole in the creek and Alison Appleby's cooking had their own unique appeal, but the plants have great power to win hearts and minds, and this season was truly a win-win for everyone.

Early next year, look for an announcement regarding the 2006 program. We may develop a two-level structure, one for students of A&OM and another for graduates.

FREE SEEDS
For qualified students and growers
distributed January-April 2006.
Seed list emailed early January.

**** **Botanical Studies for Oriental Medicine: Thanks for Your Pledges!** ****

With a steady stream of three-year pledges and gifts, the profession of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine is demonstrating tangible support for our national Botanical Studies program, endorsed by the Council of Colleges of A&OM at their May meeting in Newport, RI. We aim to develop 15 teaching sites around the country and provide educational experiences like those described in this newsletter to all of our students. The Newman conservators, the Medicinal Herb Consortium and other farmers will be fully involved as we let the Asian plants teach us to advance plant medicine in North America.

Send us your three-year pledge to support Botanical Studies for Oriental Medicine! Your gift to the High Falls Gardens Fund is not only fully tax deductible but also helps farmers and practitioners build a bridge that will lead people back to right relationship with nature. That's the essence of health, and the basis for efficacious, cost-effective health care.

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