

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, Autumn 2014

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

This year calm prevailed on the home front as our farmer/practitioner groups proceeded to get those plants in the ground. We are back to basics: abiding the rhythms of plant time, completing essential tasks, and yet always looking toward a future when the world around us has changed and the value of our foresighted actions becomes widely apparent. I am regularly impressed by how many of us know that “something different” is called for, the precise definition of that “something” is obscure, and yet people take action. Even without being told what to do or paid to do it.

**** Domestic Production is Underway! ****

Our collective efforts to grow some of the plants used in Chinese herbal medicine were acknowledged on National Public Radio recently. * The story focused on the Appalachian Medicinal Herb Growers Consortium, but also quoted Jamie Starkey, L.Ac., director of the Cleveland Clinic’s Chinese Herbal Therapy program, begun last winter. If domestically grown herbs are properly tested and identified, she affirmed, “I think it’s such a great opportunity.”

Many other board-certified practitioners agree with her, some so emphatically they have founded businesses that include a domestic production component. Three local groups of Chinese herb growers and allied clinicians moved forward this year, planting a quantity and variety yet to be assessed.



Glycyrrhiza pallidiflora Maxim., source of 刺果甘草 *ci guǒ gān cǎo*, germinated in 1999 from seed from Turpan Botanical Garden via Robert L. Newman, L.Ac., MSTCM. This robust plant with strongly aromatic leaves fruited well this season.

◆ The Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine in southern Virginia has maintained a substantial garden since 2006. Now they are sponsoring the Appalachian Medicinal Herb Growers Consortium. Nine local farms were planted this past season, with 20 more farms waiting in the wings. The planting is systematic, with starts from verified sources germinated by project managers at the Blue Ridge Center and set out in fixed arrays replicated at each farm. Soil tests, measurements of plant growth and observations will determine which conditions are most favorable for each species. This cautious approach insures that each farmer will be able to grow at least one pre-approved crop. Since most of these are perennial species, the approach and style of farming is different from annual vegetable cropping.

◆ Inner Ecology of Chicago is a custom herbal formulary founded as one of the first benefit corporations in Illinois by Amanda Kreiss, L.Ac., Dipl.OM. Inner Ecology has run a Midwest farmer program for the past two years, with winter workshops co-sponsored by Ecovision Sustainable Learning Center and other farm organizations. Pioneers in Ecological Medicine (PEM) has attracted a variety of Midwest farmers, from heirs of big family farms who want to diversify beyond corn and soy, to retirees ready for another career, and young couples taking on the challenge of leased farmland. The February 2014 session brought back several growers who reported their experiences in the 2013 season, and prompted a favorable report from *Edible Chicago* (<https://innerecology.com/our-vision/in-the-news/>).

◆ The Northwest Asian Medicinal Herb Network, with leadership and active participation from several clinicians in the Seattle area, receives organizational support from the Northwest Agricultural Business Center based in Mt. Vernon. They also have been able to run workshops for the past two years. Their April 2014 topic was Descriptive Sensory Analysis and Organoleptic Evaluation, PDA-accredited for practitioners, featuring Christopher Hafner, L.Ac., and Craig Hassel, Ph.D., who have developed an evidence-based herbal quality assessment protocol (http://www.highfallsgardens.net/newsletters/Hassel_RCHM_article.pdf), and also HFG Advisory Board member Andrew Ellis of Spring Wind Herbs.

* NPR story: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2014/10/26/359023810/fresh-from-appalachia-chinese-medicinal-herbs>.

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***** Eastern Forest Chinese Herbal Medicine Consortium *****



The Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine and Inner Ecology have launched a joint venture with High Falls Foundation. We share a set of Chinese medicinal plants that grow well in parts of the Eastern Forest biome, so we want to share our experiences and avoid duplication of effort. Our aims are to: (1) raise funds for capacity-building, (2) locate or develop verified sources of seed, (3) use results of trials to help each participating grower determine what crops to grow (this is a difficult problem that can take years to solve), (4) provide technical assistance to growers through the entire process of planting and harvest, (5) develop a central team of source herbologists (i.e., “herbal pharmacists”) enabled to

compare a wide variety of harvested products and provide coordinated feedback to growers and sponsors, (6) track production and products sold to coordinate future planting. For more, see our new Facebook page.

***** Cooperation and Consensus on Values *****

Why is this happening? *Because people get good results from the medicine.* Licensed herbal practitioners are seeking greater transparency and control over quality to secure a future for their herbs. Farmers find assurances in working directly with professionals who represent the market and forming key relationships for the long term. Most thoughtful people want to prepare for big changes in the world; efficacious plant medicine based on a widespread, restorative agriculture is an ideal means to safeguard our health. Domestic production is proactive!

If, perhaps, you think this is only about avoiding pollution in China, then look closer to home. Early in October, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved a new pesticide that blends an ingredient of Agent Orange with glyphosate, for use on new crops genetically engineered to be resistant. This is because superweeds have become resistant to glyphosate used alone. Genetically engineered corn and soy now account for 93 and 94 percent, respectively, of about 84 million total acres planted in each crop in the U.S. All that land is routinely sprayed with pesticide, every year, constantly degrading the soil. Yes, this means a cornfield near you.

Farmers and landowners in North America, in China and almost everywhere else, are faced with counteracting the disastrous impacts of industrialism on our soil, water and air. The health of human beings, animals, plants and the soil is all the same problem, to paraphrase Sir Albert Howard. In both medicine and agriculture, we need to shift the focus from killing pests to restoring/supporting the terrain.

***** What You Can Do To Help *****

Here comes the pitch, O faithful Friend of High Falls Gardens. No one in our national network has gotten any state, federal or foundation grants since 2008. All this domestic production activity has been bootstrapped. Just as Traditional East Asian Medicine and organic farming in the U.S. were originally under-the-radar grass-roots movements since 1970, we’ve been required to hitch up our overalls and volunteer our time to get plants in the ground. However, there’s only so much we can do without money.

Our fundraising is ambitious, and we need to show tangible support from the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine profession, including grateful patients and public health-minded citizens. Many of you herbal medicine practitioners answered our request for support letters in August, and that’s important. We really need your help and also the help of all the colleagues you can inspire to connect with this important work. Our major donors are impressed by numbers -- not just number of dollars, but number of donations. Each \$25, \$50 or \$100 tax-deductible gift to High Falls Foundation is a solid vote for domestic production! Show us your support by making your donation today, here: <http://www.localherbs.org/donate/index.html>. ☒