

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, SPRING '07

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

After a short, mean little winter our seeds are sprouting and we're preparing for spring's many tasks. Unlike the previous year, last autumn brought mild frosts mid-October that brought an end to the growing season, although warm weather persisted well into January. Now the new shoots just emerging seem to include a mysterious expansion in mass awareness. A reevaluation of health and medicine is underway, and the work of High Falls Gardens and the Medicinal Herb Consortium is getting more attention. The plants are our press agents: a carton full of bright, sparkling, aromatic herbs has the power to lead people back home to nature.

**** PRACTITIONER ALERT! Ginseng Direct '07 Deadline Extended to April 13th ****

This is a bit late to remind you of the March 31st deadline, so for our email list we'll extend our Ginseng Direct 2007 deadline to Friday, April 13. If you want ginseng in October, send us your order right away! See the website for details and order form: http://highfallsgardens.net/newyorkgrown/Ginseng_Direct.pdf.

We had an unpleasant surprise last autumn when we tried to submit our order to the usual sources. The price had gone up hundreds of dollars per pound, and no one would sell to us. Then New York's ginseng expert, Bob Beyfuss, came to the rescue and found us some older wild roots so we could go through with our order. He told me that the late 2005 change in the minimum age of legally exportable wild ginseng, from 5 years to 10 years, had resulted in this roiling of the markets. (American ginseng is protected under the CITES treaty and regulated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.) Growers protested the change, as wild-cultivated ginseng is practically undistinguishable from wild ginseng, and a restriction affecting the top grades will affect the lesser grades. After all, if you had valuable perennials growing in your back forty and weren't sure of the stability of the market, why would you harvest your plants?

The lessons learned are (1) "early" means "before the season begins," and (2) regular customers get preferential treatment.



HFG grad intern Regina Serkin harvests fruit of *Phellodendron chinense* last November.

**** New Seed List Posted, Order Deadline April 30th ****

This year's list of medicinal plant seeds distributed free of charge to student gardeners and growers includes several species of starts. Priority is given to our student programs this year and several have already placed their orders. See the list at <http://highfallsgardens.net/botanicalstudies/SeedList.pdf>. Deadline for orders is April 30, 2007.



Students Eric Buckley and Erin Blocher harvest *Isatis indigotica* at Alcalde NM.
Photo: C.A. Martin

**** MHC Sample Pack Shipped End of January ****

Once again, that special box of goodies is getting rave reviews from around the country. (And some disappointment expressed by those who ordered too late.) More than once we heard the phrase "like opening Christmas presents." The product array, certainly colorful enough to qualify for special gift status, glows with vitality.

Highlights this year were Katy Blanchard's bǎn lán gēn (*Isatis indigotica* root) from New Mexico; the hǔ zhàng (*Polygonum cuspidatum* rhizome), which took three strong women an hour to dig one plant out of the creekbed -- and even then we didn't get it all; deep green jiao gu lan (*Gynostemma pentaphyllum* leaf) from Joe Hollis's garden in North Carolina....sorry, I have to stop now, it's impossible to pick favorites from among all these jewels.

Order next year's Sample Pack at <http://highfallsgardens.net/consortium/index.html>.

****** Presentation at Purdue's New Crops Symposium ******

Purdue University's Sixth New Crops Symposium held last October in San Diego really did hear something new. The theme was on "Creating Markets," so Jean Giblette and Charles A. Martin gave an oral presentation on the study conducted by the Medicinal Herb Consortium in 2004. Their paper, "Direct Marketing of US Grown Chinese Medicinal Botanicals: Feasibility and Marketing Strategies" will be published in the Proceedings later this year.

The New Crops website is a useful reference tool for plants in their role as crops. The Proceedings of the Fifth Symposium, held five years ago, are there at <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/newcrop/ncnu02/v5-toc.html>.

****** Excitement Builds for Student Internship August 16-23 ******

As of the first day of spring, a dozen Oriental Medicine students have registered for the first week-long field intensive to be held during the August break here in Columbia County. This event is the brainchild of John Pirog at Northwestern Health Sciences University and their strong Herb Club. Students Taya Mahony at Northwestern and Sara Templeton at Midwest, the "two who wouldn't take no for an answer" in 2006, are strong advocates for this type of program.

Dr. Cheng Chi, who wowed the crowd with his *Pao Zhi* (traditional processing) demonstration at Northwestern last September, will be with us for the weekend of Aug. 18-19. He will describe in detail ten species from germination through processing, and if any time is left over will cook us some tasty dishes using fresh local produce.

Hungry yet? To ice the cake, our favorite Daoist hermit Joe Hollis (<http://www.mountaingardensherbs.com/>) will be on hand to answer students' questions. We plan to meet the plants where they live, find out what they want from us, and learn to keep up our share of the bargain. Application form: http://highfallsgardens.net/botanicalstudies/internships/student_internship_flyer.pdf

****** Botanical Studies Projects Underway ******

How do you stimulate creativity? Give folks a problem, a piece of the means to solve it and all the credit for doing so. Then stand back and expect magic. Not everyone responds, but those who do accomplish amazing things. Among our fifteen garden sites in the three-year Botanical Studies for Oriental Medicine program, several have made real progress and others are on the way.

The Academy of Oriental Medicine at Austin formed a collaboration with the American Botanical Council to put in a Chinese herb garden at the ABC Case Mill Homestead facility. They've been working on site preparation and are planting right now. New York Chiropractic College in Seneca Falls, after laying drainage tile and some stunning stone infrastructure, plans to dedicate their Chinese herb garden on July 13.

New England School of Acupuncture and Harvard's Arnold Arboretum got together to create a map (in process) of accessible specimens of the Arboretum's significant collection of Asian medicinal trees and shrubs. This includes an 80-year-old *Eucommia ulmoides*, a superb grove of Pinus, and a group of mature Acanthopanax near a pond. Vivien Zhang and Jean Giblette will lead a tour on Tuesday, May 29 at 6:00 pm.

****** Honeybees in the News ******

We talk about our interconnectedness but only recently have begun to learn what it means in real terms, for example how dependent we are on the smallest of creatures. The latest reminder of the fragile state of our fouled nest came early in the year with reports from several states of mass deaths of honeybees. Much more than the usual decline, 60 and 70 percent losses in the U.S., the phenomenon has been recognized with a syndrome name: colony collapse disorder (CCD).

What the mass media tend to ignore in their reports of CCD is that commercial beekeeping and honey production is essentially another industrial animal confinement system. Conventional practices do not respect the bees and their needs, the level of stress is beyond belief, and then we wonder why their immune systems fail.

On March 22 *Der Spiegel* reported a German study suggesting that genetically engineered crops may be what's pushing the sick bees over the edge. Okay, class, here's a quick quiz. Why is engineering an insecticide into a crop (as in Monsanto's Bt corn) not a good idea? (a) An open-pollinated crop will spread its GE pollen all over the world; (b) Long-term effects are completely unknown; (c) It will kill "good bugs" as well as "bad bugs;" (d) All of the above, and more.

Readers may take some comfort in the fact that High Falls Gardens' three colonies, two ruled by feisty Russian queens purchased from Kirk Webster in Vermont, came through the winter. You treat them well, they treat you well – *nyet?*

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