

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, WINTER '09

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

Faithful readers, feeling the change in the wind, may ask if HFG's fifteen years of sowing, watering and weeding is about to bear fruit. The short answer is yes, though winter's grip is still tight. We're as busy as the field mice digging long tunnels under the snow, creating the means to meet the needs of our constituents – Oriental medicine students, practitioners and patients, medicinal herb growers, researchers and conservationists -- all those devoted to broader, healthier diets which increase the biodiversity of our fields and forests. Watch for exciting announcements coming up this spring!



The 2008 group of interns constructed a prototype for a portable solar dryer for herbs. It worked well – for a day, then blew over. But everyone learned the principles involved.

**** *New Seed List Posted* ****

Some new species and varieties are included in the 2009 Seed List, thanks in part to Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.C.M. and other Student Gardens stalwarts around the country. See <http://www.highfallsgardens.net/botanicalstudies/SeedList.pdf>. We hope to exchange germplasm among garden sites in future.

**** *2009 Student Internship Set for Aug. 20-26* ****

Once again, our week-long immersion in agriculture, ecology and horticulture for students of Oriental Medicine will be held at Hawthorne Valley Farm, cosponsored by HV's Visiting Students Program. Your profession plays a key role in the reform of health care, and ecological farmers are among your principal allies. Come expand your worldview and strengthen your commitment: <http://www.highfallsgardens.net/botanicalstudies/internships/index.html>

**** *Ginseng Direct Folds Into Local Herbs* ****

High Falls Gardens is proud to have pioneered the successful Ginseng Direct program, locating reliable sources of roots grown in faithful imitation of the wild with no chemicals, fertilizers or artificial methods whatsoever. In 2007 the price of wild ginseng went up to \$1,000 per pound. Nevertheless, with the help of our friends we have been able to establish relationships with excellent growers in western New York and Pennsylvania. As a result, Local Herbs, the website portal for providing Chinese medicinal herbs direct from farms to licensed practitioners of Oriental Medicine, is offering very high quality *ungraded* American ginseng, 2008 harvest, from our own approved sources. Local Herbs' price of \$640 per pound is a very good deal. A one-ounce bag is \$40 (plus shipping) and contains approximately 8-10 roots plus broken pieces and fine roots, which can be ground or tinctured. I can't understand why some people consider ginseng bitter. Perhaps it's because this excellent wild quality stuff is my only experience. Contact info@localherbs.org.



Schisandra vine, hardy survivor, toughs out the Dec. 12th ice storm. The buds still look good, so we hope for wū wèi zī this year.

**** *Training Program for Growers* ****

Specialty crop growers will have an opportunity to learn about Asian medicinal herb production, processing and marketing during a two-day intensive training to be held Thursday and Friday, April 2-3, at New Mexico State University's Sustainable Agriculture Science Center in Alcalde. Peggy Schafer, Jean Giblette and NM organic grower Loretta Sandoval will teach the program along with NMSU researcher Charles A. Martin. Instruction will be hands-on, with pruning, harvesting and processing demonstrations.

The registration fee is \$60 for both days. Lunch is not included. The registration deadline is March 27. Contact Charles Martin at cmartin@nmsu.edu or 505-852-4241 to register and for more information. The program is sponsored by NMSU and the Western Center for Risk Management Education at Washington State University, based upon work supported by USDA/CREES under award number 2007-49200-03892.

To receive the *High Falls Gardens* newsletter, please send us an email at hfg@capital.net! It's only twice per year, and we never sell or rent our list.

**** **Book Corner** ****

➤ ***Herbal Pearls: Traditional Chinese Folk Wisdom*** (Boian Books 2008) is a product of the same collaboration of Steven Foster and Yue Chong-xi that gave us *Herbal Emissaries*. *Herbal Pearls* is Professor Yue's translation of a book of fables collected during the mid-20th century by folklorist Miao Wen-wei. Here are stories of about fifty of our best-known Chinese medicinal herbs, each chapter annotated by Steven Foster with helpful summary descriptions of the plant species.

Like other folklore, the tales are less about plants than about people. They are read not as clues to how medicinal properties of the plants were recognized in the distant past but rather as memory aids used to pass on knowledge through oral tradition. That understood, the stories are fascinating as human projections with the plants offering the hook.

Usually cast as savior, the plant is the nature token that imbues the discoverer with special advantages over others. Many of the stories revolve around learning, hoarding, selling or donating secrets. Plants always cure miraculously as simples. Imperial physicians are utterly remote in this framework, and country doctors are usually benign side characters who validate the discoverer's findings.

With its exploited peasants (class tensions prominently on display, filtered through mid-20th century political correctness), battling mothers and daughters-in-law, nefarious monks, worthless fortunetellers, the whole colorful cast of characters ranks with Grimm Brothers fairy tales in its thorough explication of the dark side of human nature. There's the stingy old man who forces his son dying of tuberculosis to earn his keep by guarding the pear grove. The son eats only the cooked unripe pears felled by a storm and is cured.

But repentance, reconciliation and ethical behavior lead to redemption. In these stories, the plants are powerful agents of change, truth and justice. Students, take heed: melodrama is one effective means to remember the herbs!

➤ ***Needles, Herbs, Gods and Ghosts: China, Healing and the West to 1848***, by Linda L. Barnes (Harvard University Press, 2005), is a scholarly and well-written book that reads in many places like colorful folklore. But stranger than fiction, this is one of those recent works, like Charles Mann's *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*, that lays bare the discrepancies among scholarly judgment, recorded history, and what actually happened.

Dr. Barnes draws on a rich array of sources, including wonderful drawings, from the 13th century forward. The picture that emerges, of "interacting forms of pluralism," is surprising in the amount of exchange between East and West since ancient times. For example, Dioscorides was exposed to unfamiliar Asian herbs coming through international trade. The Arabs collected and documented medical information, also provided translations of ancient texts that became available for study in Europe by the 12th century. Chinese sailors and slaves were on the first Spanish and Portuguese ships to circumnavigate the globe, and brought their medicines with them. Diagrams of pulse and tongue diagnosis were published in Cleyer's *Specimen medicinae sinicae*, 1682. Four hundred Chinese botanicals including some medicinal plants were incorporated into a garden at Westminster by botanist/physician Leonard Plukenet, late 17th century, later transferred to Sloane Herbarium of the British Museum.

Despite this wealth of information, especially during the last 500 years, Westerners repeatedly misinterpreted and rejected the knowledge available to them. This book is a valuable study of the mind, through the lens of Western reactions to Eastern healing practices. The psychological sources of materialist science and medicine seem highly relevant to contemporary concerns, now that we're struggling to pay the bills for the plunder.

At the start of the Modern Era, what Westerners had for academic medicine was their inheritance from Galen (the theory of humors), plus a newer obsession with anatomical dissection. When they encountered Chinese healing practices, the superficial resemblances between concepts – qi and blood, four elements and five phases, acupuncture and blood-letting – allowed the dogmatic Westerners to assume they understood the meanings. They routinely blocked perception of substantial but subtle differences that would lead them into an expanded worldview.

Then they felt entitled to criticize the Chinese in terms that sound silly to our ears. ("Those darn Buddhists, why did they have to go and add another element? And they left out Air!") Western surgeons derided the Chinese for not understanding anatomy or using surgery, all the while conveniently ignoring the high mortality rates among their patients. By 1735 the use of terms such as Progress and Science were being wielded to claim unwarranted superiority.

But let's thank our lucky stars, the post-modern era has begun. And thank you, Dr. Barnes, for this thoroughly entertaining account of where we've been. ☒