

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, Spring 2015

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

This year started with good news all around (see “Grants” below). And this year is also the 20th anniversary of the High Falls Gardens newsletter – our first issue was Winter 1995. A little over a year before that, I walked into Lin Sister Herb Shop in New York Chinatown for my very first experience of Chinese herbal medicine. Frank Lin referred me to study with Jeffrey C. Yuen, then teaching at Swedish Institute. I knew I wanted to grow the plants, not to become a clinician, but Jeffrey let me into the class anyway. And so began a journey beyond my imagination, sometimes tortuous but full of frequent surprises. Perhaps my best reward has been our High Falls Gardens interns, students of Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine who did the “herb camp” and thereby acquired a real understanding of the work. Some of them have gone on to found the organizations needed to undertake domestic production of Chinese herbs. I’m working for them now!



Ducks guard seedlings at Retrograss Farm, Austerlitz NY. Owner Karine Bouis-Towe attended the 2014 Pioneers in Ecological Medicine (PEM) training in Chicago and is now working with the NY group.

****** Grants provide seed money for domestic production ******

In January, the Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine in southern Virginia received a \$150,000 grant for its grower program from the Virginia Tobacco Commission (tobacco settlement funds intended to repurpose farmers). This spring they have planted at 20 additional farms, on their way to a total of 37 by year end.

In April, High Falls Foundation was awarded a \$40,000 grant from the New York Farm Viability Institute for a one-year project to form an initial group of 30 farmers. A local newspaper reported the story* which was then picked up by the Morning Ag Report, a national news service, and spread far and wide. China Daily USA also printed a shorter piece. *(http://www.registerstar.com/news/article_46022022-f841-11e4-a69a-6b9fe0b7fa50.html)

In both the Virginia and New York projects, the emphasis is on established small and mid-sized family farms, for which a long-term crop (or two or three) of Chinese medicinal herbs represents an additional income stream. It’s about viability, a living wage, or improved profitability, of many farms over a widely dispersed network. This model is contrasted with an industrial system, with production concentrated in a few large plantations.

Our practitioner-led nonprofit organizations (BRCCM and HFF), with Inner Ecology in Chicago (together, the Eastern Forest Chinese Herbal Medicine Consortium, see: <http://www.highfallsgardens.net/easternforest/index.html>) provide an administrative support system for the farms. We make sure the farmers plant only pre-verified seed and starts and, in Virginia and New York, actually provide the plant material. We compile and distribute species-specific cultivation and harvest information; this is a complex, ongoing effort that will benefit domestic production throughout North America. We are setting up a quality-control system that ultimately will compare domestically-grown products in different regions and to a Chinese-grown standard.

And we are working on the distribution network, starting with Inner Ecology (<https://innerecology.com>). Practitioners should contact Inner Ecology to be in the queue for whatever annual crops become available this fall.

****** Next step: 1,000 practitioners needed! ******

However impressive these grants may be, especially in a strategic sense, it’s only the beginning. We envision a ten-year startup phase for domestic production. We’re on plant time – perennials that take three, five or more years to grow to harvest stage. But the seed money means we now have an opportunity to launch a really big ship. One thousand herbal practitioners are a key part of our strategy, and the next important step.

For those not familiar with the medicine, please understand that Chinese herbs are taken only as part of traditional formulas. The efficacy of the medicine lies in the formula, not the individual herb. Therefore, (1) herbal practitioners must order from a long list of herbs. Some practitioners are combining imported and domestic products right now, but soon they deserve and expect to see a list of 35-50 domestic products

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We never sell or rent our list.

available. That's what makes sense for their practice. And (2) producers MUST cooperate to provide that list of herbs. No one farm alone can do it. Cooperative marketing is imperative for this emerging industry.

Image: *Trichosanthes kirilowii* Maxim., source of 瓜蒌 guā lóu and tiān huā fěn 天花粉

**Want high-quality
Chinese herbs
grown in the USA?**

Become one of the 1,000
practitioners who jump-start the
capitalization of our grower groups.



YOU can make it happen! Go to: LocalHerbs.org/donate

The Eastern Forest Chinese Herbal Medicine Consortium has undertaken a major donor campaign to begin raising the millions of dollars needed to finance the ten-year startup period. We need annual support from 1,000 members of the A&OM profession. The number of practitioners is more important than the size of the gifts. It's all about our credibility with major donors. After all, would you give a six-figure gift to an organization without evidence of support from their primary constituency?

While the Eastern Forest CHM Consortium is working on plants that can grow in the eastern North American biome, this represents over one hundred species, many of which can grow in other regions as well. The technical assistance materials, quality control protocols and market distribution system that we set up will be available to other grower-practitioner groups. If three or four groups can begin the development process, other local groups can form and get a headstart based on previous work. As the variety and volume of products increases, herbal practitioners will be able to incorporate more domestically-grown herbs into their formulas.

We are actively seeking major donor funding right now! Practitioners, PLEASE do not hesitate, do not worry about the amount, WE NEED YOU to be one of the 1,000. Go to: <http://www.localherbs.org/donate/index.html>.

****** Northwest Asian Medicinal Herb Network continues domestic production workshops ******

The practitioner-grower group in Washington state is continuing to offer production-oriented workshops. The latest was May 23-24: "Domestic Production of Chinese Herbs" with Peg Schafer, offered at Pacific Rim College in Victoria, British Columbia. Their Facebook page is the easiest way to follow the NW Asian Medicinal Herb Network.

****** Pao Zhi and medicine-making workshops at Mountain Gardens ******

Joe Hollis's wonderful Mountain Gardens in Burnsville, NC (35 miles northeast of Asheville) is the site for a full roster of workshops this season. Two are NCCAOM-accredited: "Pao Zhi: Chinese Herb Processing," and "Making Preparations from Chinese Herbs." See the schedule at: <http://mountaingardensherbs.com/index.php/workshops/>. I haven't been there since 2012, but Joe tells me that large areas have been cleared by his interns to allow more vegetable crops and sun-loving plants. Visitors are in for a treat, in this magical realm of North American and Chinese herbs living in close proximity.

****** Botanical Studies: Talk and garden tour at Finger Lakes School of A&OM, June 25th ******

Good news: our Botanical Studies program is not moribund, only temporarily eclipsed by the domestic production efforts. High Falls Gardens has suspended its seed and plant offerings until the growers have what they need. However, we still do manage to find seed and plants for colleges working on their garden program, and these are gifts – please contact Jean, see email address below.

Meanwhile, we are continuing college-based presentations, such as the talk at Finger Lakes School of A&OM in Seneca Falls, NY on Thursday, June 25th at noon. We offer two short workshops, NCCAOM-accredited for three PDAs each, "Asian Medicinal Plant Ecology, Cultivation and Conservation" and "Family Patterns in Seeds: A Seed Germination Workshop." These are presented at the colleges, by invitation, and may be run on the same day. The Seed Germination workshop is popular with students and for best effect should be run in late winter or early spring. ☒