

Connecticut Horticultural Society

NEWSLETTER

Volume 62, Number 7

Serving Horticulturists Since 1887

April 2020

Ruth Bancroft's Living Legacy

By Jody Morgan, Writer and CT Hort Member

Ruth Bancroft had no idea she was planting a living legacy that would launch an organization dedicated to safeguarding significant gardens across the country when she began setting her collection of succulents in-ground in 1972. Twenty years later, however, her dry garden opened to the public as the founding project of the Garden Conservancy. Fortunately, her aptitude for assessing an appropriate preservation opportunity matched her ability to arrange harmonious horticultural compositions.

For many people on this side of the country who enjoy visiting remarkable gardens during the Garden Conservancy's Open Days events and touring Hollister House in Washington, CT, now a Garden Conservancy project, Ruth Bancroft is merely a character in a legend. As a docent in her garden who heard the stories retold by Ruth, her family, the staff and fellow volunteers, I want to share a more personal look at how a world-class garden came to be created and preserved.

Ruth was a spry 98 when I first made her acquaintance. I had recently moved to Northern California and begun volunteering as a propagator at her garden. I got my first glimpse of the rose gardens and fruit trees surrounding Ruth's house when tasked with driving her home from the annual symposium jointly sponsored by the Garden Conservancy and the Ruth Bancroft Garden (RBG). I offered to help her out of my Jeep, but she demonstrated immediately that she could manage on her own. Once forbidden to go into her dry garden unattended, Ruth often snuck out through the propagation area using a wheelbarrow to steady her steps.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts and raised in Berkeley,

California, Ruth Petersson began dabbling with gardening as a child. She met Philip Bancroft, Jr. on a blind date. After the couple married, they settled on the Bancroft family farm in Walnut Creek. Philip managed the orchards regularly producing award-winning pears and Ruth installed extensive gardens that included heirloom iris beds. She discovered her first rosette-shaped succulent during the 1950s.



Ruth Bancroft remained active in her garden through her 90s. (Photo courtesy of the RBG)

As she related the story to our graduating docent class, she was following up on an advertisement for some oriental furniture. "The furniture wasn't much, but I was polite. Then I spotted a plant on the porch. I couldn't take my eyes off it." Ruth asked the lady of the house about it. She proudly exclaimed, "That's an aeonium. I hybridized it myself!" Ruth bought that *Aeonium* 'Glenn Davidson' and then sought every similar species and genus she could find.

By 1971 Ruth had amassed a succulent collection numbering in the thousands. Philip suggested she plant the collection on the 3-acre parcel where blight-ridden walnut trees were about to be felled. California's building boom had yet to make water conservation a critical issue. Setting her drought-tolerant plants in a garden rather than keeping them in containers was a pioneering enterprise. Ruth's daughter Nina Dickerson recalls, "She was in her 60s when she started the dry garden. Very early on, one winter we had a very hard frost. Her list of plants she lost was pages long. Not to be discouraged, she started over and replanted the garden."

Ruth recorded every plant's acquisition date, location in the garden, weather conditions each year and how it performed. By

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Stay Safe.
Garden!



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Horticultural Happenings & Announcements

Note: Happenings are listed on a space-available basis. To submit an event, send details to news@cthort.org. Please format the announcement to resemble the entries below. Deadline for May issue is April 15.

Events that we receive / have received continue to be posted on our website, unless we have been notified of the cancellation. Please check with the event sponsor before attending to be sure that it is still scheduled.

Visit cthort.org for the MOST CURRENT listings and links.

CANCELED: Spring Plant Sale & Auction

by Trish Lyons, Plant Sale & Auction Committee Chairperson

We are heartbroken to announce the cancellation of the Spring Plant Sale & Auction. The next auction will take place in the fall. We will keep you posted on the where and when of that once those details are ironed out.

With the loss of revenue from the auction (\$5,000 on-average) we are trying to think of some other fundraiser that will generate scholarship dollars for our state's deserving plant science students. If you have any suggestions, please send them to me, Trish Lyons, at auction@cthort.org.

Meanwhile, if you would like to help fund our scholarships in light of the loss of our most lucrative annual fundraiser, you can easily do so on our website. Click on the donate icon that you'll find in the right-hand column on the website. Or, go to CTHort.org/donate. Be sure to indicate that your donation should be directed to the Scholarship Fund. This online option will let you pay by credit or debit card, or with a PayPal account. If you prefer to mail your donation, please send to:



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Letter from the Presidents

From President Brett Isaacson and Vice President Cheryl Marino

In the last few weeks you have heard and maybe even thought, “We are living thru unprecedented times.” It certainly feels that way. We need not look any further than our own beloved Society and its storied history to know that we have been thru times like these before. As an organization founded in 1887 CT Hort has been thru a lot – the Depression, financial ups and downs, social changes and so much more. The thing that has sustained the organization and the community we love is all of us! Our society was established as a means for estate gardeners, florists and gardening enthusiasts to *socialize, share their common interests and learn from each other.*

So far this year our organization completed and enjoyed two important gardening events. We want to thank Nancy DuBrule-Clemente’s team who planned and volunteered at our successful 10th Symposium “Creating a Beautiful and Healthy Oasis.” Our presence at the Flower Show – thanks to Nancy Brennick and Keri Milne and everyone who introduced speakers – gives our interesting CT Hort organization a face to gardeners who may not know us. As always we are grateful to Cheryl Whalen of White Flower Farm who supplies us with the forced bulbs resulting in the stunning Flower Show display. All of these volunteers are what make CT Hort a sustainable entity, without them we would not exist. We ask each of you to consider filling a position in our organization.

We miss seeing you all and being together. During this time of social distancing, the need to connect is more important than ever. Many of our members have been contacting each other via phone, video chat (who knew we would discover a new meaning for ZOOM) Facebook, Instagram and so many others. Though we have had to cancel our upcoming April speaker meeting and learning event in accordance with the guidelines set by the CDC, CT Hort will strive to be creative with ways to stay connected. Look for future correspondence on this and other events. **We are first and foremost a community and we will get thru these hard times as we always have.**

Currently we need a chair and members to fill the Membership Committee. Our wonderful Garden Market/Raffle that Ginny Mills has done a stellar job of organizing and facilitating each Speaker Meeting is in need of a person or two to step in so Ginny can step away. Plus the Education / Workshop Committee is looking for a Chair as Diane Erling plans to step down. We are also in search of a Treasurer. You may think you’re not qualified to tackle one of these roles but with the helping hands of our membership, you soon would become proficient.

As we yearn to be together and put this virus behind we remember what joy that we are able have in our gardens reconnecting with our plants as they start to unfold into this spring season. We look forward to seeing everyone soon.

Spring is eternal - The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just on the body, but the soul.

– Alfred Austin

Yours in friendship-
Brett Isaacson, President
Cheryl Marino, Vice President

Speaker Meeting News

In order to comply with public health guidelines at this time, the April Speaker Meeting with guest Dr. Kirby Stafford from the Conn. Agricultural Experiment Station will NOT be held. Dr. Stafford was to present *Ticks: It's Not Just Lyme Disease Anymore*.

In the next few days we will be emailing members to survey your interest in seeing our speakers in a different manner, given the state we are in. An option would be to set up a webcast and you could view the presenter on your computer. Please let us know if you are open to trying something new to see our speaker or dead set against it in the survey you get from us. Thanks.

Our remaining speakers scheduled for the 2019-2020 Season are:

- Thurs, May 21 *The Art of Growing Food*. Ellen Ogden, writer, gardener, cook
- Thurs, June 18 *A Garden of Well-Being: Creating Your "Gardentopia."*
Jan Johnsen, Landscape Designer, Author and Speaker



Head out to our website
at CTHort.org for updates.

Meanwhile, stay home
and stay safe!



Member anniversaries will be celebrated in June this year!

By Cheryl Marino,
Membership Committee Chairperson

In recent years, we recognized member anniversaries at our April meeting. Like so many other things, this year will be different. It is our hope that we will be able to meet for our June 18 Speaker Meeting which is the last meeting in our 2019-2020 Season. This meeting traditionally includes our Ice Cream Social as well. We'll make it a trifecta of a celebration this year, as we also plan on recognizing anniversaries of members who have been with us 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 and 50+ years. Don't miss this fun event! It will be a great way to wrap up the season.

LAST CALL: 2020 Mehlquist Award

By Fairlee Latawic, Awards Committee

Do you know a Connecticut resident who deserves to be honored and recognized for their significant and extraordinary contributions in horticulture or the art of gardening? If you do, please submit a nomination letter describing the background and qualifications of your nominee for the Connecticut Horticultural Society Mehlquist Award.

In 1987, on its 100th anniversary, the Connecticut Horticultural Society (CT Hort) established the Gustav Mehlquist award to honor our member Dr. Mehlquist for his extraordinary contribution to horticulture in our state. Dr. Mehlquist, who had been long recognized as one of the leading horticulturists in the United States, was a longstanding member of CT Hort. Every year since 1987, nominations are sought for this prestigious award named in his honor.

Nominations must be received by April 30, 2020. Send your nomination to:

Mary Anna Martell
CT Hort Office
2433 Main Street
Rocky Hill, CT 06067

OR

Email: office@cthort.org
Subject line: Mehlquist Award

“Ruth Bancroft” from page 1

choosing what she loved and learning what survived, Ruth led the way in altering the direction of the horticultural mainstream and introduced a broad spectrum of drought-tolerant species not previously seen in California landscapes. Always willing to experiment with plants she was assured would expire, she amassed data that significantly aided professional and amateur growers in selecting water-wise plants for commercial propagation and private properties.



Ruth Bancroft and Brian Kemble admire photos and text in *The Bold Dry Garden*. (Photo courtesy of the RBG)

Brian Kemble, Curator of the RBG, started working for Ruth in 1980. Describing Ruth’s aesthetic criteria, he explains, “Ruth definitely attached a lot of importance to the flow of the plantings and this was why she did not want prominent signage in the garden. She viewed identifying signs as intrusions that interfered with the composition of the beds, and a distraction from seeing the beds as a painterly composition. She cared very much about what each plant was, but she did not want labels competing with her artistry.”

Tom Bassett, past-president of the RBG Board of Directors recalls, “To Ruth the garden was a series of stories -- where each plant came from, how she had found it, how it had done in the garden.” Ruth allowed her plants to overgrow their borders so that paths became ways leading through the wilderness rather than formal walkways. Asked whether she knew where she would place each plant when she purchased it, Ruth replied with a twinkle

in her eye, “Oh, no! First I fell in love and then I found it a home!”

Friends insisted Anne and Frank Cabot visit Ruth’s garden while they were in San Francisco in 1988. Frank didn’t expect to care much for what he expected to be a bunch of cacti. Overwhelmed by Ruth’s creation, he tactfully asked the octogenarian what would happen to the garden when she could no longer tend it. “When I go, the garden goes,” she said. She knew her offspring did not share her passion for plants. Frank decided he could not let that happen and proposed founding a Garden Conservancy.

Details of first granting the Garden Conservancy a conservation easement protecting the 3-acre parcel containing the garden and space for a visitor center from development and then setting up the non-profit Ruth Bancroft Garden, Inc. to manage the space took a few years. The formal opening of the RBG to the public occurred in April 1992 with Angela Lansbury’s attendance as honorary chair of the Garden Conservancy generating the kind of widespread community interest essential to making this seminal project a success.

In 1993, Richard Turner was hired as the first Executive Director of the RBG. When he left that post to become editor of *Pacific Horticulture*, he retained close ties with the garden, serving on the Horticultural Advisory Committee tasked with maintaining Ruth’s criteria for a dynamic design. “Gardens don’t just happen,” Turner noted. “They require attention, management, vision.”

Always generous with opening her private garden to knowledgeable, interested visitors, Ruth found the transition to making it a public destination both thrilling and chilling. She didn’t appreciate being spotted weeding by



Brian Kemble walks beneath a palm planted by Ruth in 1972 from a one-gallon pot. (Photo courtesy of Jody Morgan)

enthusiastic tourists. Once able to work for 12-hours a day, she eventually had to reduce her gardening time. Dickerson recalls, “When she was in her 90s, she just didn’t understand why after a few hours digging in the garden, she felt tired.”

A palm tree (*Brahea armata*) bought by Ruth in a one-gallon pot and planted in 1972 now towers over its bedfellows. She signed 100 copies of *The Bold Dry Garden* when it was released in 2016 with outstanding photos by Marion Brenner and text by Johanna Silver. I proudly hold copy Number 1. Ruth lived long enough to witness ground-breaking for the long-awaited Visitor and Education Center, but passed on in November 2017 at the age of 109 before its Grand Opening in June 2019.



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Got Time?! Plant Seeds!



Content compliments of [Almanac.com](https://www.almanac.com) and Catherine Boeckmann

Link to entire article: <https://www.almanac.com/content/starting-seeds-indoors>

Editor's note: Member Heidi Isaacson who practices condominium gardening mentioned that with all this time at home, she was considering starting seeds indoors this year. Heidi's comment got me to thinking about trying my luck growing Black Krim Tomato plants from seed since I always have a hard time finding them for my garden. If you find yourself in the same boat these days – time on your hands but no Black Krim – read on. Almanac.com editor Catherine Boeckmann has graciously made a policy exception and given us permission to reference an amazingly thorough Almanac.com article on sowing vegetable seeds. Here is an excerpt from STARTING SEEDS INDOORS: HOW AND WHEN TO START SEEDS.

Starting seeds properly can make or break your entire growing season! Here's what you should know about starting seeds, including which seeds to start indoors (or outdoors) and what to consider before you begin.

WHICH SEEDS SHOULD YOU START INDOORS?

Consult the table below to see which crops are typically started indoors, which are typically started outdoors, and which can be variable. (Note that gardeners in warmer climates will be able to start more crops outdoors than gardeners in colder climates.)

Keep in mind that there isn't a hard-and-fast rule about what you can start indoors and outdoors; it varies by your experience, your location, and the plant itself.

It is important to consider how each type of vegetable grows. For example, root vegetables like carrots and beets don't like having their roots disturbed, so it's usually safer to just start them outdoors in the ground rather than transplant them later on. Meanwhile, veggies like tomatoes and peppers are very susceptible to the cold temperatures of spring, so it's best to start them indoors and keep them safe from unpredictable weather. Finally, plants like peas are so fast growing and cold tolerant that it just makes sense to get them right in the ground!



START INDOORS

[Broccoli](#)

[Brussels Sprouts](#)

[Cabbage](#)

[Cauliflower](#)

[Eggplant](#)

[Lettuce](#)

[Peppers](#)

[Pumpkins](#)

[Swiss Chard](#)

[Tomatoes](#)

[Watermelons](#)



START OUTDOORS

[Beets](#)

[Carrots](#)

[Corn](#)

[Garlic](#)

[Okra](#)

[Onions](#)

[Peas](#)

[Parsnips](#)

[Potatoes](#)

[Radishes](#)

[Squash/Zucchini](#)

[Sweet Potatoes](#)



VARIABLE

[Beans](#)

[Celery](#)

[Kale](#)

[Spinach](#)



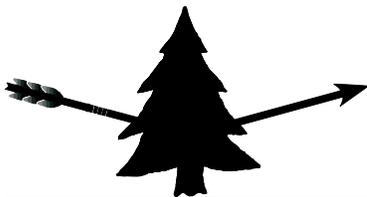
Got Time?! Plant Seeds! BEFORE YOU START

- **Be seed-savvy.** Obtain [seed catalogs](#) from several companies and compare their offering and prices. Some of the regional companies may carry varieties better suited to your area.
- **Make a list of what you'd like to grow.** A good rule-of-thumb is to imagine your garden one-quarter the size that it really is. This allows for good spacing practices! See [Vegetable Gardening for Beginners](#) for popular beginner vegetables.
- **Prepare for some losses.** Though it's good not to plant too much for your garden space, it's also good to assume that some of your seeds won't germinate, or that they will inexplicably die off later. Plant a few extra, just in case.
- **Consider a grow light if you start in late winter.** Most veggies need between 6 to 8 hours of direct sun (minimum), so it's important to have a grow light if you are sowing your vegetable seeds indoors in late winter. A grow light will also keep your seedlings from getting too leggy. Learn more about [using grow lights](#).
- **Team up with a neighbor** and share seeds if you have leftovers!
- **Use clean containers.** Most seed catalogs offer seedling flats, peat pots, and other growing containers, but egg cartons make good containers for the earliest stages of seed starting, too. Be sure to poke holes in the sides near the bottom of the containers you use in order to allow excess water to drain. Keep in mind that you might need to transplant your seedlings into larger containers at some point before moving them into the garden.
- **Label your containers now!** There's nothing more frustrating than forgetting what you planted, especially when you are testing out different varieties of the same plant.



Editor's note: This is just a snippet from the discussion on seed starting found on The Old Farmer's Almanac website.

Additional information on when to start your seeds, how to plant, hardening off and transplanting outdoors is available at: <https://www.almanac.com/content/starting-seeds-indoors>.



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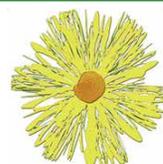
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This culinary event will be Aug. 29 in the Stowe Center Gardens from 3-5 p.m. Fee: \$30. Registration required. Please visit our website for more information and to register: www.StoweCenter.org.

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CT Hort Travel

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE from Friendship Tours

Our thoughts are with all of you at this time. **We are all in this together.** It should be everyone's priority to follow the guidelines being set by our leaders.

The current climate requires that all motorcoach trips scheduled through MAY 17, 2020 be cancelled. Emails and letters have been sent to all travelers with reservations on these tours.

What does this mean for you?

- If you are booked on one of these trips you will receive a full credit toward a future trip.
- Credits will automatically be applied to your account. You don't have to call the office to initiate the credit.
- Credits will not expire and can be applied to any scheduled tour.
- **Friendship Tours is working to reschedule many trips for a later date in the year.** Rescheduled dates will be announced when finalized. If you choose to transfer your booking to the new date, your payments will be transferred.

The Friendship Tours & Ship Shop team is working remotely with temporary office hours from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday thru Friday. With busy phone lines anticipated, the best way to reach them is by email. Staff email addresses are simply the first name of the person with @friendshiptours.net. Or you can email: office@friendshiptours.net.

Regular updates will be posted on the www.FriendshipTours.net website or sent to you via email.
Please check the website regularly.



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House Beautiful Garden Tours: This link brings you multiple YouTube garden videos:
<https://www.housebeautiful.com/lifestyle/gardening/g31746949/gardens-you-can-virtually-tour/>

CT Hort Travel

GARDENS OF SPLENDOR

Untermeyer Gardens Conservancy, Yonkers, New York

POSTONED: New date TBD

The current climate requires that all motorcoach trips through May 17, 2020 be cancelled. This trip will be rescheduled to a fall date and emails or letters will go out to all travelers with reservations. If unable to join on the new date, you will receive a full credit on your account that can be used toward any future travel. Please email anne@friendshiptours.net to advise.



FUN IN THE FOOTHILLS

Hollister House and White Flower Farm – Tuesday, July 21, 2020

This mid-summer day trip will take you to Litchfield County and the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains. First stop is Hollister House Garden where you'll explore an American interpretation of classic English gardens such as Sissinghurst, Great Dixter and Hidcote. Although formal in its structure, Hollister House Garden is informal and rather wild in its planting style. Lunch will be enjoyed at the GW Tavern in Washington Depot. The tavern is named after our first president in honor of his passage through the small town of Washington Depot. And finally, you'll be treated to an intimate behind-the-scenes tour of White Flower Farm by fellow-member Cheryl Whalen who is White Flower Farm's Head Gardener.

Cost: \$112 per person | Non-members please add \$6

Cape Cod Christmas Weekend

December 5-6, 2020

Can you believe we are talking about Christmas?! But we just can't keep this trip under wraps, it sounds like such fun! On the way out to the Cape, we'll stop for some holiday shopping at Brown & Hopkins, one of America's oldest Country Stores. Then it's on to Yoleni's Greek Market for a buffet of Greek specialties. Once we are settled in at the Cape Codder Resort in Hyannis, our welcome dinner will take place at the Hearth & Kettle Restaurant. After dinner we're off to Gardens Aglow at the Heritage Museum and Gardens in Sandwich for their holiday lights and activities. On Sunday we'll enjoy lunch at the historic Daniel Webster Inn that will include a holiday cabaret performance. Then we'll head to the Sandwich Glass Museum for a glassblower's Christmas. Two full days of holiday festivities!

Cost: \$419 per person double occupancy
\$489 per person single
Non-members please add \$50

Garden Walk Buffalo

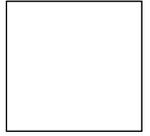
Friday, July 24 thru Monday, July 27, 2020

Garden Walk Buffalo is America's largest garden tour and one of the city's most anticipated summer events. More than 400 residential gardens as well as many community and public gardens are open for viewing! In addition, you'll tour the Buffalo & Lake Erie Country Botanical Gardens, Forest Lawn Cemetery, and the Darwin Martin House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. There will also be a visit to the Women's Rights National Historic Park on the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment. There will be a dinner cruise on the Grand Lady one night, and you'll dine at the Top of the Falls on another.

Cost: \$949 per person
double occupancy
\$1,299 per person single
Non-members please
add \$50



To reserve your spot or for more information, please call Friendship Tours at (860) 243-1630 / toll-free (800) 243-1630 or visit www.friendshiptours.net.



Dated Material  *Please Rush*

CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

Thurs., April 2 – Board of Directors
Remote Meeting, 7 p.m.

Friday, April 15 – Deadline for May
Newsletter

Friday, April 24 – CANCELED:
CT Hort Spring Plant Sale
& Auction, Bethany
Covenant Church, Berlin

Printed on recycled paper.



Help Wanted: Marketplace & Raffle Coordinator, Education Committee Chairperson and Treasurer

It's coming to the end of the 2019-2020 Season and there are a few volunteers who would like to step back from their roles with CT Hort. As a result, we are looking for others to step into the open positions.

Marketplace & Raffle Coordinator – Member Ginny Mills brought organization and polish to the monthly task of managing the Raffle and the Marketplace, during the winter months. Ginny's efforts add nearly \$1,000 per season to the Scholarship Fund where all proceeds from her efforts are deposited. Ginny is available to have the new coordinator shadow her efforts before taking on the task solo come September.

Education Committee Chairperson – Diane Erling has had her Education Committee try new events over the last few years and all have met with success. Diane's successor will coordinate a robust committee of volunteers to choose and coordinate several events sponsored by CT Hort for the 2020-2021 Season that begins in September.

Treasurer – Elected for a one-year term up to no more than four consecutive terms, the Treasurer's responsibilities include attending Board and Finance Committee meetings and assisting in the development of the budget. The Treasurer maintains the CT Hort checking account by recording deposits and paying obligations. In addition, the Treasurer prepares and files quarterly tax reports.
