

Connecticut Horticultural Society

NEWSLETTER

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Sycamores Securing Historical Recognition

by Jody Morgan—writer and CT Hort member

The welcoming shelter of a hollow sycamore tree didn't turn the Pringle brothers into heroes, but it did provide them with a safe haven for almost 3 years from 1764-1767. Today John and Samuel Pringle are revered in West Virginia as the pioneers who established the first permanent settlement west of the Alleghanias. But they were wanted as deserters from the British army when they took up residence in their sycamore.



The Pringles enlisted in the British army during the French and Indian War. Disgruntled with their posting at Fort Pitt, they left the garrison without permission in 1761. After falling out with trader and trapper John Simpson who initially employed them, the brothers found refuge in a sycamore tree near what is now known as the Buckhannon River. In the fall of 1767, John chanced a trip back to the pair's home territory on the South Branch of the Potomac River. He came back to the sycamore bearing good news. The war was over, and he and Samuel were no longer wanted men.

Both brothers returned to their South Branch home. Enthused by the Pringles' descriptions of the fertile valley beside their sycamore refuge a group of intrepid pioneers crossed over the Alleghanias with Samuel and began staking claims to parcels of land. Among those in the original party was Stonewall Jackson's great grandfather, John Jackson. John Jackson and his sons later fought in the American Revolutionary War, while Stonewall achieved fame as a Civil War General.

Today Pringle Tree State Park includes 700 acres with several markers memorializing the Pringle brothers' sycamore. Their tree succumbed to disease. A second-generation tree sprouting from the root stock was taken out by flood. The tree honored today is a third-generation specimen.

Settlers arriving in the New World frequently called plants they discovered by names of familiar species. Finding trees with exfoliating bark and leaves

reminiscent of maple foliage, they referred to them as sycamores. In England, the common appellation is applied to a maple species, *Acer pseudoplatanus*—a plane tree-like maple that was brought to the UK from central or southern Europe during the 15th or 16th century. The North American tree native east of the Mississippi is a plane tree. When Linnaeus dubbed it *Platanus occidentalis*, Western plane, he was considering that it was native to the Western Hemisphere. The species indigenous west of the Mississippi is *Platanus racemosa*.

Just to add to the confusion, North American sycamores have acquired several other popular nicknames. Because the wood provided excellent material for making buttons, they are known colloquially as buttonwood trees. Based on the nature of the seed pods, they are also called buttonball trees.

The Panic of 1792 generated the first financial crisis faced by the United States. Within two weeks securities lost almost 25%

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**Meet our
Mehlquist Award
Winner!**
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We're having our bulb sale!

October 19 at Elmwood Community Center, (1106 New Britain Avenue, West Hartford) starting at 6:30 pm. Buy some bulbs and then stay for the talk by Robin Lensi (see page 3 for more about her presentation).



Every October we sell bulbs to help fund our scholarships, grants, and general programming. So on October 19, when we meet for our program speaker, we will get you in touch with some bargains, some old loves, and some sparks of 'hope & joy' in the form of bulbs!



Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!



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A Year in the Life of a Gardener

with Robin Lensi

Thursday, October 19 • 7 pm



Elmwood Community Center, 1106 New Britain Ave., West Hartford and via Zoom (you'll be sent the link on the Sunday before the talk). **ENTRANCE AND PARKING IS OFF BURGUYNE STREET. Set your GPS to Burgoyne Street, West Hartford.**

Robin Lensi

The garden of Robin Lensi (aka lensi designs photography) and Tom Zabel in Burlington, CT started as a blank slate seven years ago. Every landscape is first seen through her lens. As a former photographer for the Garden Conservancy, and a member of the Connecticut Daylily Society, those many wonderful spaces inspired this one.



This creative yandscape is intertwined with color explosions and architectural structures spanning months of viewing beauty incorporating all the possibilities into a personal landscape, that creates “magic” and infuses one with a calm Zen-like feeling. Enamored of all types of plants and with a background in interior design, garden design, and horticulture, there were tons of ideas and a blank slate to begin. The challenges here: the heavy clay soil, a windy site, exceptional water runoff

down the mountain, rabbits, and voles. We all know gardens are never stagnant but a constant work in progress, and this one's no different.

As with her passion for cooking, Ms. Lensi views the landscape like a layer cake combining large trees and shrubs for color, texture, height, bird habitat, and structure. Then the filling: the perennials that change with the seasons, ending with the icing: the annuals like herbs, dahlias, and zinnias that thrill all summer. Finally, hundreds of bulbs like alliums, tulips, and daffodils that prepare us to be excited when spring beckons us outside again. This true four-season garden is a passion, including a wide variety of daylilies, hydrangeas, dahlias, roses, grasses, and hostas scattered throughout. Through this diversity the landscape changes daily-and who knows what next year will reveal, since only Mother Nature will decide.

Coming up:

Thursday, November 19, 7pm

Designing in Challenging Situations: Plants and Techniques that Deliver
with Ian Caton

Elmwood Community Center,
106 New Britain Ave, West Hartford



Landscape designer and gardener Ian Caton will share his understanding on how plants behave and why the habitats they come from can create a low-maintenance landscape.





Congratulations to Jane Harris, our 2023 Gustav A. L. Mehlquist Award Winner

With special thanks to Tom Christopher

“In my half century career as a horticulturist, I have encountered no one as active as Jane Harris in greening her community through gardening.” So said Board member and horticulturist Tom Christopher in the nomination he submitted for her consideration as a Mehlquist award winner.

Indeed, her legacy in Middletown and in Connecticut is astounding, and she was unanimously voted in as the recipient of this year’s award.

Here’s a reprint of Mr. Christopher’s nomination, for your enjoyment:

Ms. Harris began her career as a gardener, as so many of us do, when she purchased her first house in the mid 1970’s. At first, she began her exploration of the craft on her own. A growing fascination with trees, however, led her to pursue educational opportunities. In 1998, she completed the University of Connecticut Master Gardener training program, and the Meskwaka Tree Project, a three-day immersion in urban forestry sponsored by the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut College Arboretum. The latter experience began Ms. Harris’ introduction to tree biology, tree care, fundraising, media relations, community affairs, tree law, and marketing. She put this education to work the following year (1999) when she joined the City of Middletown’s Urban Forestry Commission. She has continued to serve this body to the present day, as a member, then vice chair, and currently as chair. Ms. Harris’ contribution has been a steadfast commitment to the city’s green infrastructure, as she has led the way in planting well over 1,000 street trees across Middletown, as well as protecting and promoting its existing urban forest.

In 2003, Jane Harris secured her arborist’s license, which led to a position as the diagnostician and office manager in a local tree service. A member of the Connecticut Horticultural Society since the mid 1990’s, she served on its board in 2003-2004.

In 2005, she initiated a program to renew a historically important collection of trees in Middletown, the Wadsworth/Kerste Deboer Arboretum. Established in the early 20th century by

local philanthropist Clarence Wadsworth with assistance from the famous landscape architectural firm Olmsted Brothers, this planting aimed at creating a publicly accessible display of all the forest trees of the northeastern United States. With Ms. Harris’ encouragement, the City of Middletown, with the assistance of the Middletown Garden Club, the Rockfall Foundation (a Middletown-based conservation organization) and Wesleyan University, failing trees have been replaced and the collection expanded to include some 200 specimens of 50 tree species. Ms. Harris was simultaneously involved in the restoration of the grounds of Clarence Wadsworth’s former estate; as chair of its Parkland Committee she spearheaded the restoration of the tree allées that were its most notable landscape features.

In 2009, Ms. Harris’ love of trees led her to join the Connecticut chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. As a board member of that organization, she secured the support of the Middletown Garden Club in planting a test orchard of 400 American chestnut tree hybrids in Middletown. Ms. Harris served as manager of the orchard until 2021.

Since 2013 Ms. Harris has also served with her fellow members of the Middletown Garden Club in planting and maintaining a rooftop garden at the headquarters of the Community Health Center of Middletown. Designed to teach horticultural skills for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the garden has also become a popular field trip for elementary school students. Its produce is donated to a local food pantry

Central to the art and science of horticulture is the act of sharing. Jane Harris exemplifies the many powerful impacts this can have on our communities and on the advancement of gardening.

In 1987, the Mehlquist Award was established to recognize a Connecticut plantsman or woman who has had an impact on the art of gardening or has made an extraordinary contribution to the world of horticulture. The honor is named for CT Hort member Gustav A.L. Mehlquist (1906-1999), a world-renowned plant breeder and beloved UConn professor.



Sycamores

from page 1

of their value before Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton, intervened to avert disaster. On May 17, 1792, a few weeks after the crisis ended, 24 merchants and stockbrokers met under a sycamore tree that stood near what is now 68 Wall Street in Manhattan to sign a document known as "The Buttonwood Agreement" thereby establishing the New York Stock Exchange.

In pledging to trade securities only amongst themselves and to maintain fixed commission rates, the signatories of the Buttonwood Agreement generated a trustworthy investment system. They continued trading beneath the buttonwood tree until the following year when the Tontine Coffee house was completed. The buttonwood tree fell during a storm on June 14, 1865.

John James Audubon describes his 1808 exploration of a hollow sycamore in *Birds of America*. Arrived in Louisville, Kentucky, he learned of a tree where incredible numbers of swallows were known to roost. In the chapter titled "The Chimney Swallow, or American Swift" he writes: "I found it to be a sycamore, nearly destitute of branches, sixty or seventy feet high, between seven and eight feet in diameter at the base, and about five for the distance of forty feet up, where the stump of a broken hollowed branch, about two feet in diameter, made out from the main stem. This was the place at which the Swallows entered."

Audubon watched thousands of birds enter the tree at sunset. "I remained, my head leaning on the tree, listening to the roaring noise made within by the birds as they settled and arranged themselves, until it was quite dark, when I left the

place, although I was convinced that many more had to enter." Determined to count the birds and observe them within the tree, Audubon tried unsuccessfully to squeeze through their entrance, before hiring help to bore a hole in the base. The shell was only eight or nine inches thick.

Scrambling up inside the sycamore with a lantern, Audubon saw birds clinging side by side and estimated that 9,000 swallows were roosting within. He monitored the changing balance of males, to females and juveniles throughout August. By September the birds had flown south. Returning in February 1809 and finding the tree empty, he sealed his entry point and later learned that the tree had succumbed to a storm.

Connecticut's champion sycamore grows beside the Farmington River in Simsbury. In 1965, the year after his death, the tree was named for Simsbury native Gifford Pinchot, appointed by Theodore Roosevelt to serve as the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Pinchot also served two terms as Governor of Pennsylvania. Although the precise age of the Pinchot Sycamore is open to speculation, it was certainly stranding when Gifford was born in 1865.

The Buttonball Tree resident in Sunderland, Massachusetts is said to be the largest sycamore on the East Coast. In November 2019, the tree rose over 113' high with a girth of 25' 8" (at 4.5' high) and a spread of 140'. The Pinchot Sycamore was last measured in 2016. Although its 100' height and canopy span of 121' makes it smaller than the Buttonball tree, the Pinchot Sycamore's 28' trunk surpasses its rival's.

Connecticut Horticultural Society

2024 Virtual Symposium

"Gardening Matters: Our Future is Growing"



HEADLINE SPEAKER
Fergus Garrett
Award-winning gardener, plantsman



JOHN
FORTI



JARED
ROSENBAUM



GARY
LEWIS

FEBRUARY 3, 2024 - 9AM-4PM EST

DETAILS & REGISTRATION: [CTHORT.ORG](https://cthort.org)

Register by January 9, 2024 and the cost to attend is \$75 for members, \$90 for non-members, and \$15 for students with valid ID.

Starting January 10, the cost will be \$95 for members, \$115 for non-members and \$20 for students with a valid ID.

<https://cthort.org/event/ct-hort-2024-virtual-symposium-gardening-matters-our-future-is-growing/>

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 Winter issue is October 15.

Mon., Oct. 2, 11:30 am—Farmington Garden Club Fall Quarterly Meeting, Farmington Main Library, 6 Monteith Drive, Farmington. Enjoy lunch and a little mini-pumpkin painting. No talent necessary! Free for members; \$10 non-members. <https://www.farmingtongardenclub.org/events>

Tues., Oct. 3, 12:00 pm—The Garden Club of Hartford presents “Advocacy for an Equitable Zero Waste Future.” Asylum Hill Congregational Church, 814 Asylum Avenue, Hartford. Kevin Budris, Co-Founder and Advocacy Director of the non-profit Just Zero, will speak about an equitable zero waste future and present solutions to our waste crisis. Free to the public. Call 860-874-4878

Tues., Oct. 10, 11 am—Wallingford Garden Club presents “What’s Up With Fall?” Yalesville United Methodist Church, 8 New Place Street, Yalesville. Margery Winters of Roaring Brook Nature Center will discuss what ideal fall foliage is, what happens to fallen leaves, why are there more acorns one year versus another, and more. BYO lunch follows, with a Horticulture Bench Show on ‘Nature’s Fall Beauties’ on Perennials and Tomatoes. Cost is \$5. Call 203-269-2653

Tues., Oct. 10, 11 am—Pomperaug Valley Garden Club hosts Edible Landscapes, Woodbury Fire Department Headquarters, 25 Quassuk Road, Woodbury. The discussion features Dan Furman, co-owner of Cricket Hill Gardens, who will discuss how to create unique, functional and edible landscapes in New England’s climate, how to grow heirloom apples and historic pears, as well as pawpaw and persimmon. He will cover the “what, where and how” of incorporating fruiting trees and shrubs into the landscape, whether the goal is delicious chemical-free fruit, providing fodder for wildlife or a beautifully designed garden. A plant sale will follow the talk. Cost: \$5 for non-members. Go to pomperaugvalleygc.org or call 203-405-1506.

Thurs., Oct. 12, 6:30 pm— Arbor Garden Club of Clinton presents Autumn Wildflowers of CT, Henry Carter Hull Library, 10 Killingworth Turnpike, Clinton. Guests Peter and Barbara Rzasa who will have a powerpoint presentation highlighting summer wildflowers

as well as berries and seedpods. Stories and flower folklore of our native summer and fall wildflowers will be shared. The program is free. Call 203-710-0133 or email ginny.casanova@ctgardenclubs.org.

Fri., Oct. 13-Tues., Nov. 7—Branford Garden Club presents 13th Annual Scarecrows of Branford, Branford Town Green, 1011 Main Street, Branford. Scarecrows are built in various seasonal and creative vignettes that will be displayed on the Branford Town Green. Free. www.Branfordgardenclub.org

Thurs., Oct. 19, 4:30 pm—Westbrook Garden Club presents “Enjoying Local Wildlife,” Westbrook Public Library, 61 Goodspeed Drive, Westbrook. Peter Picone, Wildlife Biologist with CT DEEP, presents a talk on enjoying wildlife in your surroundings through observation and hands-on habitat management. Free. Call 860-399-9206 or email pathubb@icloud.com

Tues., Oct. 24, 9:45 am—Orchard Valley Garden Club hosts Cacti and Succulents for Connecticut Gardeners, American Legion Hall, 64 Main Street, Southington. Matthew Opel from the UConn Botanical Conservatory will discuss what cacti and succulents work best for your home.

Tues., Oct. 24, 11 am—Daytime Gardeners of North Haven present Garden Trivia Game, North Haven Recreation Center, 7 Linsley Street, North Haven. Join the club for this special event featuring garden trivia, have fun, and learn something as well. Donation of \$5 is suggested. Register at 203-239-1557.

Wed., Oct. 25, 7 pm—Hardy Plant Society of New England, CT Chapter presents Kokedama workshop, location TBD. We will plant double snow drop bulbs in moss-covered balls. All materials supplied. Free with \$40 annual membership or \$10 drop-in fee. Register ahead: hardyplantct@gmail.com or call 860-983-1741



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

Trip to the Philadelphia Flower Show, New York Botanical Garden Orchid Show and Longwood Gardens Orchid Extravaganza

March 9-11, 2024

With Special Guest: Nancy DuBrule-Clemente,
Author & Founder of Natureworks Horticultural Services

Trip includes deluxe motor coach, two nights hotel accommodations, tax and baggage, two breakfasts, two dinners, flower show admission, orchid show admission, sightseeing per itinerary, all gratuities, and a Friendship Tour director.

\$945pp double / \$1089pp single

CT Hort members receive a \$55pp discount

Deadline to reserve your spot/deposit is January 5, 2024

Contact Barbara at Friendship Tours

email barbara@friendshiptours.net or call 860-243-1630.



CT Hort Cares Grant News

We're thrilled to publish some social media from the results of the first ever grants we disseminated in the spring. We are so grateful to you, our members, for your participation in this exciting new program, and to the recipients who shared the results of their efforts with us and on social media.

Thank you. See below for our grant schedule.

2023-24 Season Grant Schedule:

A link to the grant application will be available February 15, 2024. Stay tuned for details.

2023-2024 Season - Cares Grants

Applications accepted	Grants awarded
February 15 thru April 15	May 1
June 1 thru August 1	August 15





Dated Material 🌿 *Please Rush*

CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Tuesday, Oct. 3** – Board of Directors
Remote Meeting, 7 pm
- Friday, Oct. 13** – Deadline for our Winter
Newsletter (Nov/Dec)
- Thurs., Oct. 19** – Speaker presentation:
Speaker presentation:
A Year in the Life of
a Gardener, 7 pm
(In person and on Zoom)

Go to CTHort.org for information on these
and all other meetings and programs.

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**CT Hort is thrilled to be co-sponsoring this
FREE virtual series with Avon Public Library
featuring Doug Tallamy and Nancy DuBrule-Clemente**



Registration is required for both programs:

Homegrown National Park: Virtual Lecture with Doug Tallamy

Tuesday, October 24, 2023, 7 pm

Our parks, preserves, and remaining wildlands – no matter how grand in scale – are too small and separated from one another to sustain the native trees, plants, insects and animals on which our ecosystems depend. We can fix this problem by practicing conservation outside of wildlands, where we live, work, shop, and farm.

<https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/homegrown-national-park-doug-tallamy/>

Nature's Best Hope: book discussion

Tuesday, November 14, 7 pm

Join us for a discussion of *Nature's Best Hope*, with special guest appearances by industry experts, as well as time to share your personal Homegrown National Park success stories.

<https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/natures-best-hope-virtual-book-discussion/>

