

# Connecticut Horticultural Society

# NEWSLETTER

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## Sharing & Preserving Nature: The Curious Tale of Beatrix Potter



By Jody Morgan, writer and CT Hort member

Fortunately for fans of Peter Rabbit, Beatrix Potter chose a different way of sharing her understanding of nature when the scientific community declined to take her research on fungi seriously. Despite dressing her characters in human garb, Potter always drew the animals' anatomy and behavior from close observation of living models. Finally able to garden, farm and live as the country mouse she always wanted to be, Potter became a fierce protectress of open land, ancient woods, and pristine water.

Potter's talent for recording every element of the natural world is evident in her earliest artwork. Her 1875 sketchbook, done when she was not quite nine, includes remarkably realistic images of a dozen or more caterpillars along with descriptions of their habits. Born in London on July 28, 1866, Beatrix Potter always valued time spent at Camfield, the home of her grandparents, and the country places in Scotland and the adjacent English Lake District where her family vacationed for months at a time.

According to the custom of the era, Beatrix was schooled at home by a succession of governesses. Luckily, drawing and painting were considered appropriate accomplishments for a proper Victorian young lady. Recognizing their daughter's talent, Potter's parents added art lessons with professional instructors from the time she

was twelve. Her father also shared his interest in photography, giving her another way to focus on nature.

"Beatrix's interest in drawing and painting mushrooms, or fungi, began as a passion for painting beautiful specimens wherever she found them," explains Linda Lear in *Beatrix*

*Potter: A Life in Nature*. "She never saw art and science as mutually exclusive activities, but recorded what she saw in nature primarily to evoke an aesthetic response." Potter's earliest watercolors of fungi date from 1887. She exchanged correspondence and specimens with Charles McIntosh, an experienced, self-taught mycologist whose day job was delivering the mail.

"But Beatrix was beginning to think of moving beyond the stage of drawings — from observation to experimentation, and to theory; the spring of 1896 gave her opportunity," writes Sarah Gristwood in *The Story of Beatrix Potter: Her Enchanting Work and Surprising Life*. Admission to Kew Gardens was granted only to scientists pursuing an approved project. Potter's

uncle Sir Henry Roscoe, newly appointed vice-chancellor of the University of London, was able to get her a student ticket. Consulting George Masee, Kew's fungi expert and sharing the news that she had successfully germinated spores was her goal.

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Beatrix and her younger brother Bertram kept a menagerie of pets including one rabbit after another.

**The CT Hort Cares Grant Program  
is accepting applications!**

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## LEADERSHIP LETTER

### More than ever, we need your involvement

Dear Members,

I hope you enjoyed the last speaker program with Sheryll Durant and Randell McShepard. I was thoroughly inspired with their work and the gardens they developed. Our own urban gardens in Hartford were invited to attend; however, we received no response from Knox Community Garden, and the Keney Park Sustainability Project leadership was away.

This month our program by Duncan Himmelman will inspire us with native plants for our containers on March 21 at 7pm and it's a virtual only broadcast. In April, we will be back in person at the Elmwood Community Center.

I'm sharing news of what our Board of Directors have been grappling with for months. As you know, I have been in the role as Past President for two years. It is time for new ideas and a new face at the helm. We at CT Hort have a solid, competent Board of Directors, which I am very proud of. However, we haven't done so well with advancing individuals into the leadership positions of President and Vice President. If you are reading this, I expect you care and want CT Hort to thrive.

The board will be voting in time for our next meeting on March 5 to hire an Executive Director. This is a paid position. If the vote is passed, we hope and expect this path will move the organization in the direction it should go. That means wider exposure, more funding, and ultimately, even better programming over time.

I will be stepping down after our June speaker meeting and expect to stay involved—CT Hort has been a big part of my life.

Warmly,  
Cheryl



**Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!**



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**The Garden Barn Nursery**

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**Go Organic LLC**  
**Grace Farms**





Duncan Himmelman

## Native Plants for Container Gardens with Duncan Himmelman

### Thursday, March 21 • 7 pm

**Zoom Only** (you'll be sent the link on the Sunday before the talk).

Many native plants make great choices for container gardens. From shade to sun, perennials to shrubs, spring to fall, there are exciting options that will bring a host of beneficial insects and birds to your yard, patio, deck, or balcony.



Duncan Himmelman, Ph.D., earned his doctorate at Cornell University and taught horticultural science at the college level for 24 years. He recently retired as the Education Manager at Mt. Cuba Center, a public garden in Delaware devoted to native plant advocacy. He continues to enjoy teaching, designing landscapes, and promoting ecologically focused gardening practices.



#### SPEAKER FEEDBACK

After you attend a speaker meeting, please take a moment to tell us what you thought of the presenter. Your candid feedback helps us to arrange for speakers that will hold your interest. Take the six-question survey on our website – [cthort.org](http://cthort.org). Click on the survey icon found on any page then chose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.



**April 18: In person at Elmwood Community Center and on Zoom**

### Ecological Approaches to Garden Design and Management

Harland Patch, *biologist, Pollinator Programming Director at Penn State's Bird and Pollinator Garden*



**May 16: In person at Elmwood Community Center and on Zoom**

### Roses for New England

Mike & Angelina Chute, *landscape design, rose experts, authors*

This program will not be recorded.



**June 20: This program will be held at First Church, UCC, 190 Court St., Middletown and on Zoom**

### Knockout Natives

Sam Hoadley, *horticulturist and landscape designer at Mt. Cuba Center*

“The garden staff included three women, recruited under pressure in 1896 from the Horticultural College for Women at Swanley in Kent, who were compelled to labour in brown knickerbockers, woollen stockings, waistcoat, jacket and peaked cap, a costume guaranteed not to distract their male colleagues.” (Lear). Beatrix’s presence was similarly treated as disruptive, but she finally gained grudging support for her theories.

When her research paper on fungi was accepted for reading by the prestigious all male Linnaean Society, Beatrix already had three strikes against her: she lacked an academic degree; her research was not conducted in a proper laboratory; and worst of all, she was a woman. Presented for members to peruse on April 1, 1897, Potter’s paper was withdrawn a week later for unspecified reasons.

“In 1997 the Linnaean Society publicly acknowledged that she had been ‘treated scurvily’ a hundred years before. The theories she developed for herself are generally accepted today.” (Gristwood). Although Beatrix was earning a bit of money with other scientific artwork, her fungi illustrations didn’t appear in print until 1967 when W.P.K. Findlay included 59 in *Wayside and Woodland Fungi*.

Potter formed a lifetime friendship with the last of her governesses Annie Carter who married Edwin Moore. Potter wrote the most famous of her picture letters to Annie’s oldest son Noel on September 4, 1893. It began: “I don’t know what to write to you, so I will tell you a story about four little rabbits whose names were Flopsy, Mopsy, Cottontail and Peter.” In 1900, Annie suggested Beatrix should turn her picture letters into books for children. Rejected by several publishers, Potter printed the first version of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* herself in 1901.



The house at Hill Top was Beatrix Potter’s holiday home, sanctuary and studio. This cozy converted farmhouse is filled with Beatrix’s belongings and inspired many of her famous stories.

In October 1902, Frederick Warne & Co. published a revised edition. Popular demand had the firm printing 28,000 copies by year’s end.

Beatrix and her younger brother Bertram kept a menagerie of pets including one rabbit after another. She took Benjamin Bouncer, known as “Bounce,” out strolling on a leather dog-lead. She named his successor Peter Piper. To faithfully capture their habits for *The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin* she bought two squirrels that proved incompatible. “I had to get rid of the handsomer – and most savage one,” she told her former neighbor Mrs. Wicksteed. Mice were easy to come by. She rescued two kitchen intruders, named them Hunca Munca and Tom Thumb, and watched them investigating a set of doll’s house furniture complete with miniature plaster food on platters.

In her journal entry dated May 28, 1895, Beatrix described her aunt’s garden at Gwaynynog. “The garden is very large, two-thirds surrounded by a red-brick wall with many apricots and an inner circle of old grey apple trees on wooden espaliers. It is very productive but not tidy, the prettiest sort of garden, where bright old fashioned flowers grow amongst the currant bushes.”

Finally having a plot of her own to plant when she purchased Hill Top Farm in 1905, Beatrix gratefully accepted gifts of hardy perennials from the gardens of her Near Sawrey Village neighbors. In *The Writer’s Garden*, Jackie Bennett notes: “It is rare to find a garden we know so much about. From Beatrix’s letters and notes we know she put in azaleas and laurels for shrub cover and interspersed them

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with lilies, hollyhocks, phlox, saxifrage and Japanese anemones.” Potter put apples, pears, and plums in her orchard underplanted with snowdrops and daffodils. Although she rescued all kinds of wildlife, Beatrix chased her share of marauders from her garden. In 1917 she wrote to one of her nieces that “there are *swarms* of rabbits, we had a hunt among the cabbages one evening.”

Beatrix disliked art that misrepresented nature. Landscape painters who didn't know how trees grow were a pet peeve. In a letter dated October 7, 1937, she advised Delmar Banner, a young artist recently resident in the Lake District, that he might improve his work by studying trees. “If you study an ash you

will see every branch from the main trunk, or the stem of a young sapling, has come out in curves; and curved on and on with the weight of foliage. Other species in contrast grow upward. We can tell every tree in winter without reference to foliage by its mode of growth.”

From the time she wed William Heelis on October 15, 1913, Beatrix was known to her Lake District neighbors as Mrs. Heelis. She and her husband worked together to acquire parcels of land for preservation, managing and restoring the properties before selling or gifting them to the National Trust. Hill Top is open to the public today, with the garden looking much as Beatrix left it upon her death in 1943.



## Thank you to everyone who volunteered, sponsored, promoted, and joined us for our symposium, "Gardening Matters: Our Future is Growing"

### Our speakers:

Fergus Garrett  
John Forti  
Jared Rosenbaum  
Gary Lewis

### Our sponsors:

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### Our symposium committee:

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Diane Erling  
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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](mailto:news@cthort.org).

Please format the announcement to resemble the entries below. Deadline for the April issue is Friday, March 15.

Sat., March 9, 11 am—Kerry Mendez presents “Time-saving, Mighty-Mite Shrubs that Outshine Perennials,” **online only**. In addition to practicing the latest earth-friendly practices and incorporating more natives, Kerry has shifted her focus from perennials to shrubs that provide months of radiant color but are far less maintenance. This eye-opening lecture focuses on remarkable shrubs for front to mid-border gardens, as well as their pruning requirements. These stunning beauties also are ideal for over-wintering in containers. This webinar is best suited for gardeners in hardiness Zones 3-8. The cost is \$13.95. Go to <https://pyours.com> to register.

Sat., March 16, 11 am-noon—Gardening Workshop: **Beekeeping Basics at Grace Farms**, 365 Lukes Wood Road, New Canaan. Learn the fundamentals and seasonal rhythms of beekeeping from Master Gardener Lauren Elliott during this workshop covering how to start your own hive. Includes a honey tasting and cup of tea. Cost: \$12 for members; \$15 for non-members. Go to <https://gracefarms.org>.



Sat., March 16, noon-5 pm & Sun., March 17, 10 am-4 pm—CT Orchid Society presents the “Come See Our Bloomers” show and sale, West Hartford Meeting & Conference Center, 50 South Main Street, West Hartford. Beautiful Orchids from all over the World will be displayed by hobbyists, orchid societies and commercial growers. Exhibits, orchid supply vendors, arts & crafts and door prizes are part of the show. Cost is \$10. Go to [nutmegorchids.org](http://nutmegorchids.org) for more information.

Wed., March 27, 7:30 pm—Hardy Plant Society of New England CT Chapter presents “The Magic of Soils,” Wethersfield Academy for the Arts, 431 Hartford Avenue, Wethersfield, and on Zoom. Learn about the science and art of soils from Neil Lajeunesse, the General Manager of the Custom Soils division at Dunning, located in Farmington. Neil creates soils that are custom engineered for ballfields, golf courses, rooftop gardens, rain gardens, commercial marijuana growing and more, and he oversees the extensive composting production. Free for members; \$10 general admission fee. <https://www.facebook.com/hardyplantsocietyconnecticut>.

Visit [cthort.org](http://cthort.org) for the MOST CURRENT listings and links.

## CT Hort Cares Grant Program

Applications are being accepted for the CT Hort Cares Grant Program. The program supports community efforts to educate state residents on the importance of plants and the environment.

The grants will be awarded twice in 2024. The maximum amount available per grant is \$500 and anyone who wishes to apply can do so. Applications are being accepted through April 15. Grants will be awarded May 1. There are no restrictions on who can apply, but the grant must be used on a project taking place in the State of Connecticut.

The program was established last year to expand on CT Hort's efforts to “encourage the enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of plants, the environment, and the art and science of gardening”—the mission of our great 137 year-old organization.



*The CT Hort Cares Grant program helped the Bristol Garden Club work with the Boys & Girls Club of Bristol on the club's summer garden.*



Scan QR Code for more information or go to <https://cthort.org/support/other-ways-to-give/>

## Enjoy a trip to the “Other Cape” Cape Ann, Massachusetts July 21-23

Come along on a summer interlude to beautiful Cape Ann in the height of summer. Enjoy two nights at the Ocean House Hotel at Bass Rocks located on the ocean. We'll enjoy dinners (included) on both nights of our stay! We will cruise the Essex River estuary at sunset. Private gardens with refreshments will highlight one day of our tour. On our trip back to Connecticut we will visit Neal Sanders, author of many mysteries including A Murder at the Flower Show! Join us for this fun trip---sign up now!



Deluxe Motorcoach • 2 Nights Ocean House Hotel  
2 Continental Breakfasts • 2 Lunches • 2 Dinners

**\$1499 PP Double • \$1889 Single**  
**25 PASSENGERS TOTAL-REGISTER NOW!**

**Contact:** Tour Coordinator Kathy Lindroth  
[Kathleen.Lindroth@gmail.com](mailto:Kathleen.Lindroth@gmail.com) or  
[Krisurb@cox.net](mailto:Krisurb@cox.net) to register.



### SAVE THE DATE: CT Hort Plant Sale & Auction Friday, May 17, 2024 Bethany Covenant Church, Berlin

This is our key fundraiser for the educational outreach efforts of the Connecticut Horticultural Society (CT Hort)—for both our Scholarship Fund and our civic grants program, CT Hort Cares.

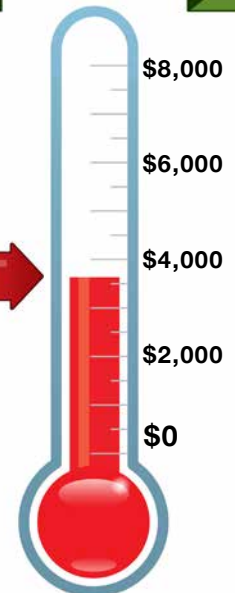
We are also looking for someone who is interested in helping run the auction. Co-chair Trish Lyons will be stepping away from her role after this year, but has graciously offered to train someone this year, and shadow next year.

## 2023-2024 Scholarship Fund

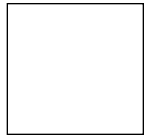
GOAL  
\$8,000

We are almost halfway to our goal for the 2023-2024 season in our quest to raise \$8,000 for student scholarships.

**\$3,829.15** →



We hope you'll consider helping us reach that goal! Go to [cthort.org](http://cthort.org) to learn how to give. *Thank you!*



*Dated Material* 🌿 *Please Rush*

**CT Hort Calendar at a Glance**

**Tues., March 5** – Board of Directors  
Remote Meeting, 7 pm

**Friday, March 15** – Deadline for our April  
*Newsletter*

**Thurs., March 21** – Speaker presentation:  
*Native Plants for  
Container Gardens*, 7 pm  
(Zoom only)

Go to [CTHort.org](http://CTHort.org) for information on these  
and all other meetings and programs.

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Congratulations to **Aqua Scapes of CT, LLC**, based in Portland, for winning Best in Show at the Connecticut Flower & Garden Show last month. The displays, as always, were all beautiful and masterfully designed. Our judges—Trish Lyons, and Richard and Susan Kaminski—had the difficult task of picking a winner.

Every year, CT Hort picks a display at the show that offers educational value, horticultural interest, topnotch design, effective use of plant material and inspiration to a home gardener.

Congratulations to Aqua Scapes of CT owner Robert Townsend and General Manager Austin Foose (shown here accepting the trophy from judges Trish Lyons and Susan Kaminski.

