

# Connecticut Horticultural Society

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 66, Number 10

Serving Horticulturists Since 1887

Summer 2024



## The Queen of the Border

### *A lesson in growing delphiniums*

by Chris Dreisch, CT Hort member and owner, Good Soil Nursery  
Photos courtesy of Chris Dreisch

Have you ever tried growing delphiniums but they never come back? I'm here to help and teach you about these regal, Queen-like plants. (Delphiniums gained the name Queen of the Border since their tall flower spikes make excellent perennial borders in gardens and classic landscapes.)

I'm Chris Dreisch, and I'm a full-time flight engineer with the CT National Guard that crews and fixes the CH-47 Chinook helicopters you see flying around. After my last tour to Afghanistan, I decided to start Good Soil Nursery, a small nursery that specializes in growing delphiniums and blue poppies in Stafford. I was heavily influenced by the nurseries in the UK.

Over the years I've grown hundreds of delphiniums. This year, I'm proud to say I named my first ever English delphinium—Delphinium Annalise—with the Royal Horticultural Society, making me the first person on the east coast and only the second American since 1933 to do so. The first was Charles Barber of Oregon, with his Hoodacre Whites.



Chris Dreisch, owner of Good Soil Nursery in Stafford, with his delphiniums.

What is a delphinium? A delphinium isn't a larkspur. Delphiniums for the most part are all perennial. And even though they are related, larkspurs are annuals. The name is used between the two, but they are not the same. Delphiniums are also an alpine plant with a fairly shallow root system that doesn't mind our cold winters.

If you are on the hunt for delphiniums, there are four types of delphinium in cultivation today to choose from: the Elatum group consisting of English delphiniums and Pacific Giants. Also within this group are two distinct ways of propagation: seed and vegetative. The second group is the Belladonna which makes excellent flowers for cutting, and is the group that CT Yankee delphinium

seed comes from (and created by the famous photographer and delphinium breeder Edward Steichen from Ridgefield, CT).

Then there is the Grandiflorum group, which has been in cultivation in Europe since the 1700s. Last but not least is the Species delphinium which consists of delphinium the world over.

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Meet our new (and very first!)  
executive director

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**Welcome Summer!**

Hasn't this gardening season been spectacular? At least, until the heat came upon us a bit too early.

I think the Chinese calendar should add the year of the chipmunk. I write this after watering and seeing more chipmunk holes every day and noticing heaved up plants left and right. Our old cat Señor just gives them a side-glance as they skitter by.

Hopefully you were able to Zoom in or join us for Sam Hoadley's spectacular presentation, "Knockout Natives." Just a reminder that we will take a break from presentations in July and August, but stay connected by joining us at one or more of the educational events planned for the next few months.

Our new Executive Director Ashley Stewart will begin over the summer, meeting with myself, Mary Anna and Tracey, and getting up to speed. Then she'll be "all in" for our September meeting with Lee Reich presenting "Native Fruits." I will be moving into the background but still attending some BOD meetings in a support role. The years I've served have enriched my life and expanded my friendships, I thank you all for your encouragement and support.

We still need a Board Member—please consider serving and directing this beloved organization. Membership, Hospitality, Auction, and CT Hort Cares Grant Program all need volunteers to take over the leadership roles. The members running these committees have put years into these committees, documenting processes and seasonal work flow, and making the transition to new leaders full of ease. Can you imagine the organization without an auction to fund scholarships and the Cares Grant Program? Or a speaker meeting without refreshments?

Join in on the Fellowship—we need you!

Fondly,  
Cheryl



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



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**The Garden Barn Nursery**

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Lee Reich

# Native Fruits

with Lee Reich

Thursday, September 19 • 7 pm

**1106 New Britain Avenue, West Hartford, CT and via Zoom (you'll be sent the link on the Sunday before the talk).** (Set your GPS to Burgoyne Street, West Hartford. The entrance to the community center is off Burgoyne Street.)

Most people, when they decide to grow fruits, plant apples or peaches, pears, cherries, and other familiar market fruits that mostly reflect this country's traditionally European heritage. Consider native American fruits, which often are better adapted to withstand our pest and climate challenges, and look naturally at home in our landscapes. We'll explore the beauty, the flavor, and the cultivation of American persimmon, pawpaw, beach plum, lingonberry, and a host of other native delectables, as well as blueberry — a relative newcomer to our market shelves.

Lee Reich, PhD dove into gardening decades ago, initially with one foot in academia, as an agricultural scientist with the USDA and then Cornell University, and one foot in

the field, the organic field. He eventually expanded his field to a "farmden" (more than a garden, less than a farm) and left academia to lecture, consult, and write. He is the author of 9 books and was a syndicated garden columnist for Associated Press for almost 30 years. Besides providing a year 'round supply of fruits and vegetables, his farmden provides a testing ground for innovative techniques in soil care, pruning, and growing fruits and vegetables, and provides an educational site for workshops and training. Science and an appreciation of natural systems underpin his work.



## We need YOU to REVIEW!

Be part of our tradition. We're thinking ahead to winter...but only because we are looking for volunteers to read and review gardening books for our winter edition of the newsletter. We're looking for 300-400 words on your opinion of the book. If you are interested, please call Tracey at 860-796-0185 or send her an email at [news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org).



# SAVE the DATE

Save the dates for this upcoming event!  
Check your inbox for details and registration information:

**Picnic and nursery tour  
at Broken Arrow  
Thursday, August 15  
5 pm**

Enjoy a tour of the nursery, then bring your picnic gear and dinner and relax to music of **Jim and Willow Sirch.**

## 2023-2024 Scholarship Fund

Thank you for helping us reach our goal and more!

Proceeds from our Spring Plant Sale and Auction put us well over the top of our goal. Overflow funds will be directed to the CT Hort Cares Grant Program.

Go to [cthort.org](http://cthort.org) to learn how you can give and support our mission!



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## In Memoriam: Nancy Shipman

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It is with great sadness that we share the passing of Nancy Shipman, on April 23 at the age of 87.

Nancy grew up on her father's tobacco farm on Griswold Street, and never lost her love for horticulture, gardening, and the outdoors.

A dedicated wife and mother, Nancy fostered her children's education and shared her love of learning and of teaching with them. Outside the home, Nancy taught nursery school, supported Bob's landscaping business, and was active in numerous community and civic organizations including Naubuc School PTO, the Country Gardeners, Child and Family Services, Friends of Elizabeth Park, and the Congregational Church of South Glastonbury.

Over the course of the 70's, 80's and 90's Nancy held all four CT Hort officer positions, and was also a longtime board member, finance committee member, and volunteer for the annual Flower Show. She and her husband Bob Shipman, who passed away four months ago, joined CT Hort in 1965, and liked to say they used the meetings as a "date night" for more than 50 years.

Upon retirement she, Bob and several close friends started Glastonbury Partners in Planting where their love of horticulture helped beautify their beloved Glastonbury.

There will be a celebration of life for Nancy and Bob Shipman on Sat., July 27 from 1-3 pm at the Congregational Church of South Glastonbury. If you would like to rsvp or share remarks during the celebration, please contact: Doug Shipman at [douglas.shipman1@gmail.com](mailto:douglas.shipman1@gmail.com).



## PERENNIAL OF THE YEAR: GARDEN PHLOX (PHLOX PANICULATA 'JEANA')



The 2024 Perennial Plant of the Year is Garden Phlox (*Phlox paniculata* 'Jeana').

It was chosen by the voting members of the Perennial Plant Association (PPA).

According to <https://perennialplant.org>, 'Jeana' is an exceptional garden phlox renowned for its impressive flower show, tall sturdy habit, and pollinator-friendliness. Dense, domed trusses crown stiff stems from midsummer to early fall. Individually, the fragrant lavender-pink flowers are significantly smaller than typical garden phlox—only about half an inch wide—but the show at peak is eye-popping, nonetheless.

In trials at Mt. Cuba Center in Delaware, the nectar-rich flowers of 'Jeana' attracted more butterflies—Eastern Tiger Swallowtails were especially plentiful—than any other garden phlox in their study. Hummingbirds and other pollinators are fans too.

Topped with flowers, 'Jeana' can reach five feet tall and four feet wide, although size will vary geographically. Its bright green leaves are highly resistant to powdery mildew, so 'Jeana' has a striking summer look with or without flowers.

Tall garden phlox provide structure and color in summer gardens and are good bridging plants between early and later flowering perennials. 'Jeana' is at home in traditional borders and meadows and is a natural in pollinator gardens. Mix 'Jeana' with other tall

perennials such as bluestars (*Amsonia*), Shasta daisies (*Leucanthemum xsuperbum*), and switch grasses (*Panicum virgatum*). Or let its handsome foliage be the backdrop for shorter companions such as coneflowers (*Echinacea*), alliums (*Allium*), and woodland sages (*Salvia nemorosa*).

The Perennial Plant Association is a trade association composed of growers, retailers, landscape designers and contractors, educators, and others that are professionally involved in the herbaceous perennial industry.

## Queen of the Border

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For this article, I am focusing on the Elatum group. The growing conditions for all four groups are very much the same.

What is the difference between growing the Pacific giant strain vs. the English strain? Pacific giants are typically propagated by seed, not by cuttings like the English strain. Pacific giants were never bred to be perennials. Frank Reinelt, the breeder of the Pacific Giants, never intended for them to be perennial, especially in California, where he emigrated.

So if you've tried to grow Pacific Giants and they have never come back, it's not surprising. Delphinium enthusiasts are familiar



Chris Dreisch named his first ever English delphinium—Delphinium Annalise—with the Royal Horticultural Society.

with the fact that that strain is not reliable as a perennial.

Read on if you still want to add the “queen of the border” to your garden. Plant your new delphinium in soil enriched with organic matter; they are hungry plants, preferably in soil with average drainage in full sun, even though they can handle light shade. If planted in a spot that gets too wet, you will lose your delphinium to crown rot.

After planting in the ground, water once, maybe twice a week. You can also feed them at this point; personally, I use tomato food. Make sure to stake your delphinium. Use three canes 4'-6' in length positioned in a triangle around your plant. Then using string you're going to create a cage out of it every foot or two. The reason for this is that it allows the flower spike to sway in the breeze. If you directly stake the flower spike or don't create a cage, the flower spike could snap, possibly causing the delphinium crown to crack, allowing water to get in and rot the plant's crown. If you have a lot of delphiniums in a cluster, use black netting instead of string; it will look much better.

After flowering, cut the spike down to the first set of leaves, when the leaves die back or a new flower spike pushes through. They can bloom a second time in the fall but the spike will be much shorter, so cut the old spike down to a couple inches above ground level. Add a good tomato feed afterwards, or something not too high in nitrogen. The reason for this is if the feed is high in nitrogen it can cause your delphinium to have weak flower spikes.

Good care is important the first few years. Every spring delphiniums will push up new shoots—all potential flowers—so cut off the excess to have a stronger delphinium. The first few years leave three shoots, then in subsequent years you can leave up to five to seven. The reason for this is that it allows your delphinium to develop its root system, leading to a healthier plant. I've seen and know of delphiniums that are 10-15 years old. I know of one located in Germany that's been around for an astonishing 30 years.



Use three canes 4'-6' in length positioned in a triangle around your plant for staking delphiniums.

Want to take the plunge in starting your own from seed or cuttings? If you have delphiniums and want to try cuttings, take them in the spring when they are a few inches tall. All you have to do is move the soil, find the part of the crown it's growing from and, using a knife, cut it off taking a bit of the crown with it. I use a 50-cell tray and straight potting soil; all you have to do is pop it into the soil and water, making sure the soil stays moist and not wet, pot up when ready.



Delphinium shoots in the spring.

From seed is just as easy, however I recommend throwing them in the refrigerator for at least a week to cold-stratify them, and starting in roughly mid-January you're going to want to plant them in the same type of tray and soil used for cuttings. You're going to plant the seed roughly a ¼" deep; water, keeping the soil moist, and in 14-21 days you have yourself delphinium seedlings. Pot them up as soon as roots fill the cell, which won't take long.

Delphiniums are such a misunderstood, and underrated plant. Personally, what I enjoy most about growing them is that when they are fully grown and you are up close it's like seeing an old friend. An old royal friend. 🐞



## Fairfield Nursery Tour

What a day! In late June, a group of 20 nursery-lovers enjoyed a tour of Fairfield County's finest nurseries, including Oliver Nurseries (where they watched an alpine trough planting demonstration).

## It's a Throwdown of the Nancys! Wednesday, July 17 • 5 pm

Two of the masters of horticulture—Nancy DuBrule-Clemente and Nancy Ballek McKinnon—will go head-to-head at Ballek's Garden Center, 90 Maple Ave, East Haddam on Wed., July 17 at 5 pm, for two rounds of throwdowns!

**First round:** they'll vie to pick the best combination for a late summer/fall garden.

**Second round:** Who will design the best container for late summer and fall?

**Who will win?** Attendees will vote for the winner!

## Nancy vs. Nancy



Nancy Ballek McKinnon and Nancy DuBrule-Clemente

\$25 per person includes a dinner wrap, chips, non-alcoholic drinks and dessert by Simon's Marketplace Garden Cafe of Chester. Go to [cthort.org](http://cthort.org) to register.

## 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 September issue is Thursday, August 15.

**Sun., July 14, 10:13 am-12:30 pm—Basket-Making Workshop** hosted by Connecticut Landmarks, Nathan Hale Homestead, 2299 South St., Coventry. CT Landmarks is offering this workshop, featuring instructor Sue Muldoon. She'll teach participants how to make a small wall-hanging basket to display fresh cut flowers or store personal items. Cost: \$45. Register: <https://ctlandmarks.org/event/basket-making-workshop/>.

**Sat., July 20, 10 am-4 pm—The Garden Conservancy Open Days at the Garden of Richard and Susan Kaminski.** All aboard! Longtime CT Hort members and board directors Dick and Sue Kaminski have opened up their garden during the Garden Conservancy's Open Days program. Train lovers will enjoy the OSP&C (Old Swimming Pool and Compost) garden railway, where they run three trains simultaneously along with a trolley, and it's one of many gardens on the property. Cost: \$10 for non-members. <https://www.gardenconservancy.org>.

**Wed., Aug. 7, 10 am-4 pm—114th Plant Science Day** hosted by the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, Lockwood Farm, 890 Evergreen Avenue, Hamden. A day of barn displays, field plots and exhibits, technical demonstrations, plant diagnosis and plant identification, insect identification, activities for Kids, Lockwood Farm walking tour, tour of the native woody shrubs, and more. Free admission. More information: <https://portal.ct.gov/caes>.

**Thurs., Aug. 15, 10-11 am—Identifying Native Trees and Shrubs in CT** with the Garden Club of Brookfield, Newbury Congregational Church, 126 Tower Road, Brookfield. The club presents Felicia Millet, Plant Diagnostician at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. She will discuss Native Trees and Shrubs in the state. Free admission. More information: [thegardenclubofbrookfieldct.org](http://thegardenclubofbrookfieldct.org).



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

**CT HORT TRAVEL**



**COASTAL NEW ENGLAND GARDENS  
September 12-14, 2024**

Featuring:

Bedrock Gardens • Moffatt Ladd House • Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens • Tower Hill • Shop at Weston Nursery  
• Two Nights Hotel Accommodations at the AC Hotel Portsmouth Downtown/Waterfront, Portsmouth, NH • Two breakfasts, two lunches

With special guest: Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, author & founder of Natureworks Horticultural Services  
**\$1254 per person Double / \$1684PP single**  
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Go to [www.friendshiptours.net](http://www.friendshiptours.net) or Call Barbara at Friendship Tours: 860-243-1630



**AUSTRALIA!  
March 21-April 5, 2025**

Join Friendship Tours as we embark on a spectacular adventure in the Land Down Under. President & Owner of Friendship Tours, Brett Isaacson, along with local expert guides will lead the way on this land tour to explore this amazing continent.

Sydney • Ayers Rock • Cairns • Melbourne  
**\$8995 per person Double + Air**

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[www.friendshiptours.net/tours/australia-2025](http://www.friendshiptours.net/tours/australia-2025)

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

**March 7-9, 2025**



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

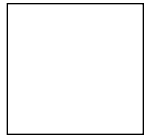
Begin the trip with a stop at the New York Botanical Garden's annual orchid show before we head to Philly for a two-night stay at the Mendenhall Hotel for a welcome reception and dinner. The next day we are off to the 196th Annual Philadelphia Flower Show. On our last day, we will take a trip to beautiful Longwood Gardens for their spectacular orchid exhibit.

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.

**\$975pp double / \$1129pp single • CT Hort members receive a \$55pp discount**

Deadline to reserve your spot/deposit is January 5, 2025

**Contact Barbara at Friendship Tours  
email [barbara@friendshiptours.net](mailto:barbara@friendshiptours.net) or call 860-243-1630.**



*Dated Material* 🌿 *Please Rush*

### CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Thurs., August 15** – Deadline for our September *Newsletter*
- Tuesday, Sept. 3** – Board of Directors Remote Meeting, 7 pm
- Thurs., Sept, 19** – Speaker presentation: *Native Fruits* with Lee Reich, 7 pm (In person and on Zoom)

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

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## Meet Ashley Stewart, our new executive director



It's official! Ashley Stewart, our new executive director, has arrived. We cannot wait for her to get started. She brings a wealth of experience and a new energy to CT Hort.

Ashley is an enthusiastic and experienced professional committed to the advancement and sustainability of underserved communities. She began her career in the Hartford nonprofit sector more than 12 years ago, occupying various leadership roles. She has an extensive background fostering organizational partnerships, rebuilding existing frameworks, and facilitating strategic growth opportunities by increasing accessibility to programs, local resources, and creative opportunities.

Her work expands beyond the Greater Hartford community, having collaborated with state, regional and national organizations.

In her spare time, she enjoys yoga, tending to her plants, and planning playdates for her five-year-old son.

