

# Connecticut Horticultural Society

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 68, Number 6

Serving Horticulturists Since 1887

March 2026



## Indoor Light for Houseplants: An Engineer's Perspective

By Darryl Cheng

**Darryl Cheng is our featured speaker this month.  
See page 3 for details**

As an engineer, I love to measure things—and measuring light is my absolute favorite activity when it comes to houseplant care. It is the only way to truly know if your plant is working—as in, doing enough photosynthesis to stay alive.

Have you ever wondered, what does it mean to have perfect light? It occurred to me that a plant nursery would be the place where plants got perfect light. Why? They have an incentive for growing plants as fast and as perfectly as possible. “In the wild” would, in fact, not be where you’d find the ideal conditions—by definition, the wild is only where the fittest would survive. And survival doesn’t always look pretty. Therefore, it is the controlled conditions of the nursery where we would create the perfect conditions for plant growth.

Through doing some research online, I found a treasure trove of datasheets that specifically defined the ideal nursery conditions/practices needed for producing many of our favorite house plants. (<https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/>)

What do they say about light? Here are some findings on common house plants: “Spathiphyllum will not tolerate high light intensities without reduction in quality and should be grown under 1,500 to 2,500 foot-candles.” (FC)

“Boston ferns have a wide tolerance to changing light levels, but

grow well when receiving 1,500 to 3,000 ft-c, with best quality usually produced near 2,000 FC.”

“(Pothos) Stocks plant are best grown at 5,000 FC. Number of cuttings and weight of cuttings are larger than those from stock plants grown at 2,000 FC. Pothos cuttings will have rapid shoot and root growth if light is 3,000 FC.”

Great! So how do they achieve these light levels?

The roof of the greenhouse is covered by several layers of shade cloth, so the sun’s light is evenly diffused and distributed. Just for context, here are some examples of light intensities and the physical situations that produce them:

- 10,000 FC: outdoors, direct sun at noon.
- 5,000-7,000 FC: indoors, direct sun through a window.
- 1,000-3,000 FC: outdoors, overcast at noon.
- 400-800 FC: indoors, beside a large floor-to-ceiling window, no direct sun.
- 200-400 FC: indoors, a few feet farther from the large floor-to-ceiling window, no direct sun.



continued on page 5

## Scenes from the Flower Show

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## 2026—new opportunities and a new president

Dear friends,

As the new president of CT Hort, I thought I would tell you a bit about my background. I have spent my life teaching others about the wonders of nature and our role in protecting biodiversity, having earned a B.S. in Forestry: Nature Interpretation from West Virginia University, a B.S in Secondary Science education from Miami University and a M.S. from Antioch University School of Environmental Studies. In 2024, I retired after 23 years as Education Coordinator at the Yale Peabody Museum. I have a life-long interest in gardening and became a Master Gardener in 2019. I give talks throughout the region on ecological gardening and workshops on propagating native plants from seed.

I also love growing tropical plants, and every summer cram our patio with an array of botanical treasures I've overwintered, from bananas to orchids. Check out the article on houseplants by Darryl Cheng beginning on page 1, and be sure to catch his talk on Thursday, March 19.

We had a great time at the CT Flower & Garden Show, and it was wonderful to be back at the show with a dedicated space, meeting people and making connections. The theme this year, The Storybook Garden, was a great way to bring new creativity to classic stories. Check out a few of the photos from the show on page 6.

We are just getting started with being out and about this year. We are proud to be a co-sponsor, along with some incredible organizations, for the Doug Tallamy talk on March 11. We'll be there, manning our table full of information and giveaways, so stop by and say hello.

In the future, you'll be seeing us at Celebrate! West Hartford in early June, too, and we'll keep you apprised of other events as we plan for the spring.

Speaking of spring, think Plant Sale & Auction. Mark your calendars for Friday, May 15, at the Bethany Covenant Church in Berlin. More information is coming your way, so be sure to check your inbox for that. Hope to meet you at these and other events!

Cheers,  
Jim Sirch



Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!



**Colorblends Wholesale Flower Bulbs**  
**Connecticut's Historic Gardens**  
**Elizabeth Park Conservancy**  
**Federated Garden Clubs of Connecticut**  
**The Garden Barn Nursery**

**Garden Solutions**  
**Go Organic LLC**  
**Mountainview Landscaping LLC**  
**Otter Gardens**

# An Engineer's Approach to Houseplant Care

with *Darryl Cheng*

Thursday, March 19 • 7 pm



Darryl Cheng

**On Zoom Only**

(Members will receive the Zoom link the Sunday before the talk.)



If you follow traditional houseplant advice, you'll be disappointed because your plant is no longer "perfect." Darryl's approach breaks down the barriers to true, long-lasting enjoyment of houseplants. When you understand how plants work, you can gain a deeper appreciation for their character and more acceptance of how they'll grow. It's a healthy dose of practical science and realistic expectations!

Darryl Cheng is the author of *The New Plant Parent* and *The New Plant Collector* and creator of the website [House Plant Journal](http://HousePlantJournal.com). Darryl's passion for plants and engineering approach to plant care have turned him into one of the most trusted houseplant resources on the internet. What was initially a hobby Tumblr page has turned into an Instagram account with more than 500,000 followers, a go-to website for anything houseplant related, two houseplant books, and plant time-lapse videos that have gone viral around the world.



## COMING UP IN PERSON AND ON ZOOM:



**APRIL 16 AT 7PM**

**The Past, Present, and Future of the Keney Park Sustainability Project**  
with *Herb Virgo*

CNTR • 725 Main Street • Middletown



### 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.

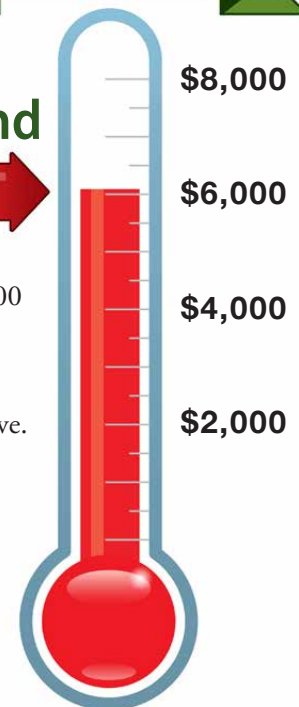


## 2025-2026 Scholarship Fund

**\$6,009**

Won't you help us with our annual goal to raise \$8,000 to provide scholarships and grants?

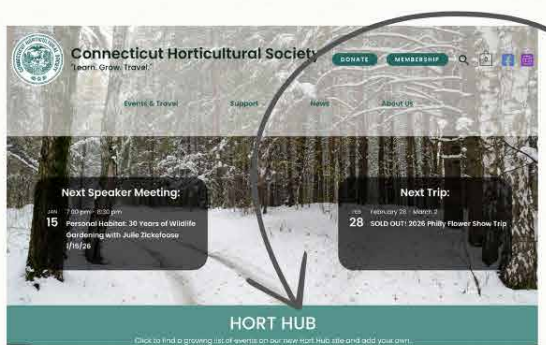
Go to [cthort.org/donate](http://cthort.org/donate) to give. Thank you!





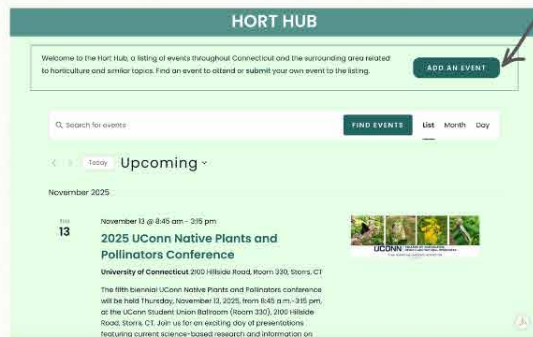
# Introducing Hort Hub!

We're thrilled to announce the launch of Hort Hub—a new online home for all things horticulture in CT and beyond! Discover upcoming presentations, workshops, garden tours, and more.

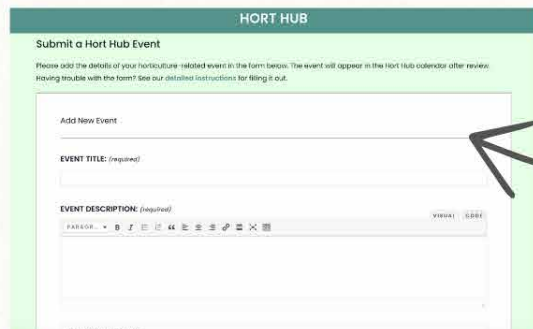


You'll easily find Hort Hub on our homepage.

Organizations, clubs, and businesses—share your events for FREE and reach a wider audience!



Listing is quick and easy. Go to CTHort.org and you will see the link to the page to peruse other happenings and then enter your own submission.



# CTHort.org

## Indoor light for Houseplants from page 1

- 50 FC: comfortable reading light (artificial)

Therefore, the ideal light intensity for growing most tropical foliage plants is achieved by blocking direct sun, weakening it to the prescribed intensity. At the same time, the open sky reflects light down onto the plants from all angles from above. The light intensity rises and falls with the sunrise and sunset.

### The Dark Truth

When you start analyzing light with measurements, you will come to the realization that the light situation for plants indoors is not ideal—with windows, walls, and ceilings—there is both too little indirect light and possibly too much direct sun. When the sun is not in the direct line of sight, the overall view



of the sky is constricted by walls and the ceiling—this is “low light”—the smaller the window, the lower the light because the view of the open sky is smaller. When the sun does shine directly through the window and onto the plant, it’s not that direct sun itself kills the plant, it’s that rapid water loss that can lead to permanent wilting if you’re unable to keep the plant hydrated in a timely manner.

How well your plants grow is most influenced by the physical size of your windows. Think of anyone who seems to have

the proverbial “green thumb”—they likely have very large, unobstructed windows (or they know how to use grow lights). Now, I’m not saying there’s some conspiracy in horticulture—it’s just that truly understanding light might discourage people from buying certain plants. And since indoor plants are often seen as decor, to say that light should determine where they should be placed would go against where a designer might think it will look nice.

Don’t be discouraged that you don’t have the light conditions like a commercial greenhouse; remember that you don’t need to grow the plants for business! What you do need to understand, however, is that there will be a maximum potential for light in your home—some locations that will be “as good as you can possibly provide.”

For any plant that requires “bright indirect light,” you want to give this plant as wide a view of the open sky as possible. The larger the window, the better. The fewer outside obstructions, the better. The brighter objects that reflect the sun into your view, the better. If the sun happens to come into direct line of sight with this area, you must take note of the number of hours that occurs. Most plants that enjoy “bright indirect light” can tolerate 2-3 hours of direct sun, sometimes more for larger plants. You must understand that when the sun shines directly on a plant (especially the leafy tropical kind), although photosynthesis is maximized, the rate of transpiration is also very high, causing rapid water loss from the leaves and subsequently, the soil.

Once you understand the details of your indoor light situation and accept the fact that not every plant will grow well in your space, you will be happier with the plants that are suitable. Combine this with a healthy dose of realistic expectations: that your plants will grow and change—and won’t stay nursery-perfect forever—and you’ll be able to enjoy this hobby for a lifetime! 🌱

## SAVE THE DATES!

### Spring Plant Sale & Auction

Connecticut Horticultural Society’s  
popular annual event!

**Friday, May 15 from 6:30-9pm**

Bethany Covenant Church, Berlin

### 2026 CT Hort Symposium

We’re in person again!

**Saturday, October 24**

“Gardening at Any Age”

Courtyard by Marriott Hartford Cromwell





A lovely nod to Disney characters in this landscape at the show.

# Flower Show wows with classic tales

## *The Storybook Garden.*

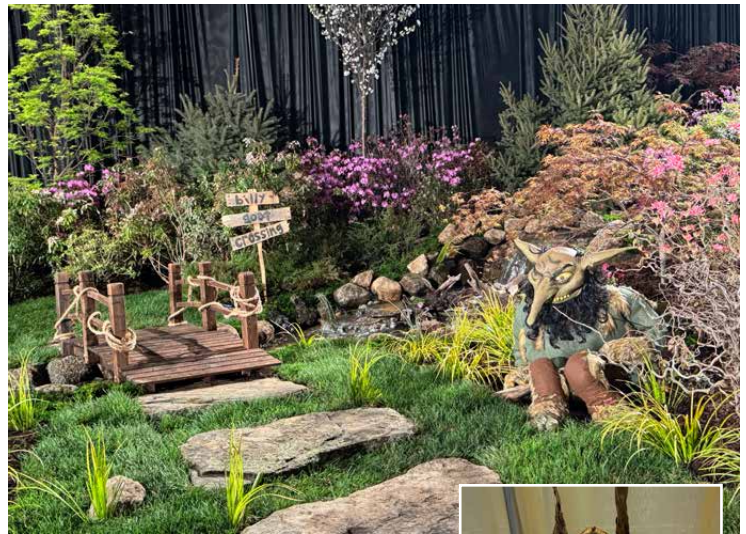
That was the theme of this year's CT Flower & Garden Show, and it was fun to see how many exhibitors, landscapers and show-goers leaned into it.

The winner of Best Display at the CT Flower Show was Aqua Scapes of CT, based in Portland, for their show-themed scene featuring a troll guarding his bridge and koi fishpond, reminiscent of the classic fairy tale, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." Thank you to our judges—Board members James Randall, Diane Erling, and Sarah Bailey—for picking a winner.

We were also happy to participate in this year's show for the first time in years. We had a wonderful time, made a lot of new friends, and reconnected with a lot of longtime ones. We hope to see you again next year. Thank you to our amazing volunteers for manning the table: James Randall, Elizabeth Valdez, Margaret Haldeman, Keri Milne, Janice Hasenjager, Laura Victoria Barrera, Paul Milne, Cheryl Marino, Lori Davis, Jim Sirch, Willow Sirch, Maura Esposito, Ralph Kadden, and Eileen Rausch. We could not have done it without you!

And kudos to Federated Garden Clubs of CT. What a spectacular show!

The Rising Sun Landscape was another beautiful vignette at the show.



above: The winner of Best Display at the CT Flower Show was Aqua Scapes of CT, based in Portland, for their show-themed scene featuring a classic scene from *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*.



at right: An enchanted shoe made of Eucalyptus Silver Dollar, pine cones, Italian Ruscus, Winter Honeysuckle, bush grass, Oleander, and Spotted Laurel, took first place for its unique and beautiful design.

**Rising Sun Landscape**  
Landscape #8

Our storybook is created with natural materials that convey a sense of wonder and enchantment. We allow Mother Nature to be the lead author, utilizing what she provides for inspiration. We invite you to use your imagination and become a character in this story that stars all of the denizens that call this place home.



Jennifer and Marisa are all smiles at the Natureworks booth.



James Randall, one of our newest board members, and Tracey Weiss, director of Communications, took charge of the CT Hort booth at the start of the show.

## 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 March 16.

**Tues., March 3, 7-8pm—CT Chapter of American Rhododendron Society presents: “The Science of Color: How Pink, Orange, Red & Purple Help Rhododendrons Survive and Reproduce in a Stressful World,”** on Zoom only. Dr. Juliana Medeiros, Plant Biologist at Holden Arboretum, will speak. Email [ctrhody@gmail.com](mailto:ctrhody@gmail.com) to get the link for the meeting.

**Tues., March 10, 10am-noon—”Good Bugs, Bad Bugs, Benign Bugs,”** presented by Leete’s Island Garden Club, 32 Church Street, Guilford. Pamm Cooper, Public Service Garden Specialist at UConn Home and Garden Education Center, will cover insects that are pests, insects that are beneficial and those that are benign, all commonly found in Connecticut. Guests are welcome at this free event. Contact 203-453-0780 with questions and to register.

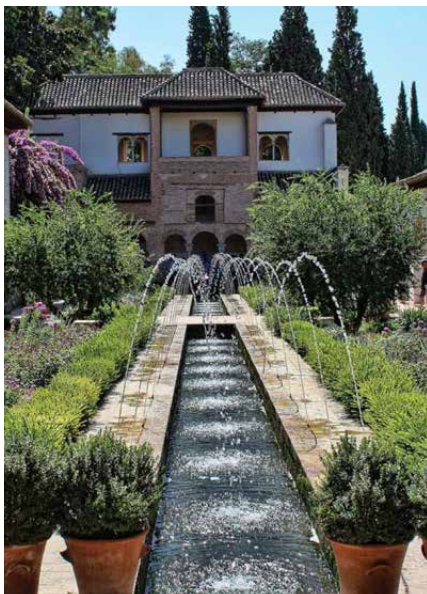
**Tues., March 17, 10:45am-11:45am—The Audubon Nature Center hosts “Beyond the Emerald Isle: Ten of Ireland’s Finest Gardens,”** 2325 Burr Street, Fairfield. In celebration of St. Patrick’s Day, the Greenfield Hill Garden Club presents a public lecture exploring Ireland’s extraordinary garden heritage. While Ireland is widely known as the Emerald Isle, it is also home to more than 400 public gardens and an estimated two million private

gardens, making it one of the world’s most garden-rich landscapes. Internationally recognized garden tourism scholar Richard Benfield will showcase ten of the finest gardens in Ireland, featuring both iconic destinations and lesser-known gems, while sharing insight into garden design, landscape history, and tourism trends. Register in advance at email [GreenfieldhillGardenClub2@gmail.com](mailto:GreenfieldhillGardenClub2@gmail.com).

**Tues., March 24, 2-3:30pm—”Pot Herbs, Sallads and Roots: Kitchen Gardens in Early America,”** Avon Free Library, 281 Country Club Rd., Avon. Christie Higginbottom, Garden Consultant and Research Historian, will present this program that defines the role played by kitchen gardens in the lives of New Englanders 1790 to 1850. Using documentation from Samuel Deane’s book, *The New England Farmer* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1790), with additional 19th-century publications and landscape illustrations, and the re-created gardens at Old Sturbridge Village as examples, Christie will discuss both typical and more progressive garden styles and cultural practices, plant varieties, and preservation techniques. <https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/kitchen-gardens/2026-03-24/>.

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

## CT HORT TRAVEL



### Andalusia, Spain

**May 8-19, 2026**

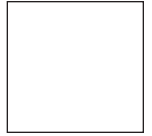
The tour includes transfers to and from Seville/Málaga airports for arrival and departure, transportation to all destinations, eleven nights lodging in Four Star Hotels, breakfast daily, 10 group lunches, six group dinners, host throughout tour—Cole Burrell, a local guide throughout the tour, admissions to all parks and gardens, guided tours and excursions, hotel taxes and service charges, gratuities for your tour host, gratuities to your local driver and guides.

The tour is limited to 24 passengers:

\$5,495.00 Land Price — Double Occupancy \$1,400.00 Single Supplement  
PRICING FOR 15-19 TRAVELERS

\$5,895.00 Land Price — Double Occupancy \$1,400.00 Single Supplement  
Fewer than 15 travelers may result in a small surcharge. Don’t purchase air flight until you have been advised that the minimum registration has been reached.

**FOR RESERVATIONS:** [www.friendshiptours.net](http://www.friendshiptours.net) or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630. [Click here for the brochure.](#)



*Dated Material* 🌿 *Please Rush*

**CT Hort Calendar at a Glance**

- Tuesday, March 10** – Board of Directors Remote Meeting, 7 pm
- Monday, March 16** – Deadline for the April 2026 *Newsletter*
- Thurs., March 19** – Speaker presentation: *An Engineer's Approach to Houseplant Care* with Darryl Cheng, 7 pm, on Zoom only

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

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# CT Hort Cares Grant



Supporting community efforts to educate state residents on the importance of plants and the environment.

The grants, totaling \$5,000, will be awarded twice in 2026.

The maximum amount available per grant is \$500 and anyone who wishes to apply can do so.

There are no restrictions on who can apply, but the grant must be used on a project taking place in the State of Connecticut.



**First round applications will be accepted from**

**February 15 – April 15.**

**Grants awarded on May 1.**

**Go to [CTHort.org/other-ways-to-give](http://CTHort.org/other-ways-to-give)**

