

# Connecticut Horticultural Society

# NEWSLETTER

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## They Came and Swarmed, Hived and Thrived: Honeybees at Work in Colonial America



By Jody Morgan, writer and CT Hort member

Duped by promoters suggesting the New World was, as promised in the Bible, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Numbers 14:8), English settlers arrived in North America to find neither available. They craved the products bees native to North America don’t make in sufficient quantities for harvesting by humans. They missed having milk from domesticated dairy cows. Wild mammals only serve as wet nurses to children in legends and fairy tales. The first documented shipment of honeybees reached Jamestown in 1622. Cattle first set foot in Plymouth in 1624.

In *Bees in America: How the Honey Bee Shaped A Nation*, Tammy Horn explains: “Before sugar had become an established product in the Caribbean or North America, bees fulfilled an important need in the English diet, economy, and culture.” She continues: “Bees provided sweeteners, wax for candles and waterproofing, and honey for mead. In fact, mead was Queen Elizabeth I’s favorite drink. And at the opposite end of the social spectrum, peasants used products from the hive to pay taxes, to supplement their diet, and to barter for wheat and salt.”



mead

A letter dated December 5, 1621, addressed to the Governor and Council of Virginia by the Council of the Virginia Company of London reads: “We haue by this Shipp and the Discouerie sent you diuers sortes of seedes, and fruit trees, as also Pidgeons, Connies [rabbits], Peacockes Maistiues [dogs], and Beehives...”

The Discovery arrived in late March 1622 followed by the Bona Nova (probably the vessel bearing the beehives) in early April.

What happened next is open to speculation. On March 22, 1622, a third of the English population of the Virginia Colony was slaughtered in a surprise attack by Native Americans. No one had time to write about beekeeping. Although a shipment of honeybees arrived in Massachusetts in 1638, Brenda Kellar notes in “Honeybees Across America” (posted by the Los Angeles County Beekeepers Association) that no further documentation of beekeeping in Virginia exists until 1648.

Kellar quotes a letter written in March 1648 by the neighbor of beekeeper George Pelton, a.k.a. George Strayton. Until losing home and hives in a fire, George earned 30 pounds a year from honey and beeswax. His neighbor wrote: “If men would endeavour to increase this kind of creature, there would be here in short time abundance of wax and honey, for there is all this country over delicate food for bees, and there is also bees naturally in the land, though we account not of them.”

Better adapted to forest life than most of the settlers, honeybees had populated the wilderness. Honeybees cope with overcrowding in a hive by swarming, also called hiving off. The current queen lays an egg that is nurtured to develop into a new queen. Once her royal daughter reaches adulthood, the mother queen leaves the hive with a swarm of followers to

continued on page 5

**2026-2027 Speaker  
Sneak Peek!**

**Page 8**

### IN THIS ISSUE:

Leadership Letter	2
Plant Sale Wrap-up	6
New trips!	7



Connecticut Horticultural Society  
P.O. Box 330966  
West Hartford, CT 06133-0966  
(860) 529-8713

email: [office@cthort.org](mailto:office@cthort.org)  
website: [www.cthort.org](http://www.cthort.org)

Phone Hours  
Tuesday & Thursday  
11 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Tracey Weiss  
CT Hort Director of Communications  
[news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org)

*All announcements, advertising news  
and articles for publication should be  
sent to: [news@cthort.org](mailto:news@cthort.org).*

Send Membership Information  
& Direct General Questions To:  
Mary Anna Martell  
Office Administrator  
P.O. Box 330966  
West Hartford, CT 06133-0966

Membership Dues:

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Organizations.....	\$80

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## Leadership Letter

Dear CT Hort Family,

As I write, we've had some sultry, summer weather that followed weeks of rather unseasonably cool temperatures. I think plants in my garden are catching up but I'm not ready for summer quite yet!

Before the heat arrived, I took time out to plant a memorial Eastern Redbud tree in honor of longtime CT Hort member Nancy Johnson of Gales Ferry. Thanks to her gardening friends and neighbors – especially Roberta Levandoski for coordinating and helping to make this happen. See the photos on page 4.

I'm really looking forward to our June hybrid speaker meeting, which will feature nationally-known native plant author and speaker Uli Lorimer. Uli will be discussing the importance of both biodiversity and genetic diversity in our gardens. This meeting is made possible through the generosity of the Lois and Herb Isaacson Endowed Lecture Fund and the Mountain Laurel Chapter of Wild Ones. I hope you can join us in person at CNTR in Middletown. At our in-person meetings we always have a great door prize too! Please note that there is a July-August summer break in speaker meetings but join us in September when Yuki Kaneko presents "Editing the Garden: Advice from the High Line" at our new fall meeting location: Congregation Beth Israel, 701 Farmington Avenue, West Hartford.

We are excited to announce that our annual plant auction raised a record \$10,172, with proceeds benefiting both our Scholarship Fund and the CT Hort Cares Program. This year, support exceeded every expectation. Volunteers quickly turned the church hall into a welcoming paradise for the plantaholics among us (like me). Because of their efforts, an enormous undertaking became a smooth, well-coordinated, and tremendously successful event. Kudos to the team: Cheryl Marino, Sarah Bailey, Elizabeth Cooley, Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, and Robin Dressler. Thanks also to my fellow auctioneers Nancy DuBrule-Clemente and Kevin Wilcox.

We are grateful for the many nurseries throughout the state who donated truly exceptional plants. Please see the list of them elsewhere in this issue and please give them your patronage.

Thank you all for continuing to make CT Hort the quality organization that it is!

Cheers,  
Jim Sirch, President

Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!



FRIENDSHIP TOURS  
THE SHIP SHOP

grace farms



Hollister House Garden

NATUREWORKS

White Flower Farm

PLANTSMEN SINCE 1950



Colorblends Wholesale Flower Bulbs

Connecticut's Historic Gardens

Elizabeth Park Conservancy

The Garden Barn Nursery

Garden Solutions

Mountainview Landscaping LLC

Otter Gardens





Uli Lorimer

# Digging Deeper into Ecological Horticulture

with Uli Lorimer

Thursday, June 18 • 7 pm

CNTR, 725 Main Street, Middletown and on Zoom (See map below)  
(Members will receive the Zoom link the Sunday before the talk.)

What is Ecological Horticulture? What distinguishes it from mainstream horticulture? Why is genetic diversity important?

Ecological Horticulture takes a different approach from traditional gardening by focusing on nature-friendly principles. This talk will dive into key ideas and challenge common gardening practices. For example: Why is genetic diversity essential? Can I use cultivated versions of native plants? How should climate change influence my gardening choices? These questions and more will guide a discussion on creating and caring for gardens in harmony with the environment.

Uli Lorimer serves as the Director of Horticulture for the Native Plant Trust, a leading non-profit dedicated to preserving the native flora of the Northeastern United States. In this role, he oversees the acclaimed Garden in the Woods in Framingham and Nasami Farm in Western

Massachusetts, which focuses on native plant propagation and research. Uli's impressive career includes positions at the National Arboretum, Wave Hill, and as the Curator of Native Plants at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. A lifelong enthusiast of plants and biodiversity, Uli continues to study the region's ecosystems, collect seeds from the wild, and introduce new plants to collections.

He is also a prolific author and speaker, well-known to audiences across the horticultural community. His publications include *Tough Natives for Tough Places* and *A Native Plant Reader*. His latest work, *The Northeast Native Plant Primer*, reflects his deep commitment to native plants and their ecological value. With a science-based approach and a passion for biodiversity, Uli offers invaluable insights into selecting plants that maximize the ecological impact of our gardens while celebrating the beauty of native flora.



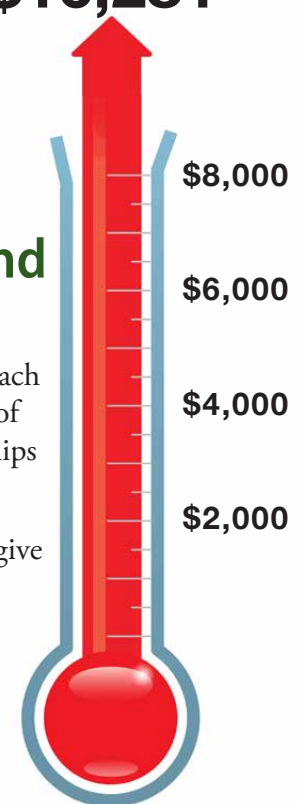
# \$16,281

## 2025-2026 Scholarship Fund

**We did it!**

Thank you for helping us reach our goal—and beyond!—of \$8,000 to provide scholarships and grants?

Go to [cthort.org/donate](http://cthort.org/donate) to give and to learn more and thank you!



### 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 choose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.

## Dedicating a tree to Nancy Johnson

Members of CT Horticultural Society, Ledyard Garden Club and the Historic District Commission came together to honor and plant an Eastern Redbud tree in honor of Gales Ferry resident Nancy J. Johnson, (October 25, 1945 - Sept. 13, 2024). She shared her passion for horticulture through a lifetime of volunteer work with the Ledyard Garden Club, CT Horticultural Society, Hardy Plant Society, New England Hosta Society and Friends of Harkness.

Pictured, left to right: Jim is the president of the CT Horticultural Society. Roberta and Kathryn are members of the Ledyard Garden Club. Charlie is Roberta's husband. Doug Kelley works for the town and is a member of the Historic District Commission that oversees the Nathan Lester House Museum and Tool Museum where the redbud tree was planted to honor Nancy Johnson. *Photo by Willow Sirch*



## Adopt-a-Garden

We recently took a trip over to Annie Fisher Montessori Magnet School to see how the 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students were doing in the Adopt-a-Garden program!

CT Hort is proud to be a partner of the program. Led by Valerie Bryant, the students learn where their food comes from, enjoy the outdoors, and contribute to sustainable practices that benefit everyone. The school has several raised beds, where they are growing snow peas, lettuce, mint, potatoes, beans, kale, collard greens, onions, strawberries, tomatoes and more.



## Cares Grant program is open

Our second round of grants for the 2026 CT Hort Cares Grant program will be accepted from June 1-July 31, 2026. Watch your emails and our website for the application.

The CT Hort Grant Program expands the Society's efforts to educate our great state on the importance of plants and our precious environment.

When reviewing applications, the committee gives priority to projects that support the educational mission of our organization, and the project must take place in Connecticut.

Two rounds of grants are awarded for a total of \$5,000 each year; the maximum amount per grant is \$500. The application periods each year are Feb 15 through April 15 and again June 1 through July 31.

If you would like to support our efforts with a monetary donation, please go to <https://cthort.org/support/other-ways-to-give/> to donate. You will be able to choose 'Scholarship Fund' or 'Community Grants' as the destination for your donation.

## Honeybees at Work

from page 1

inhabit the new space her scouting bees have found, such as a hollow in a tree.

Many colonists raided the hives of feral bees rather than bothering to keep them. Born in France in 1735, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur settled in New Jersey in 1765. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, first published in London in 1782, he extols his pleasure in watching his captured wild bees at work and gives a detailed account of acquiring them each autumn.

“I proceed to such woods as are at a comfortable distance from any settlements. I examine carefully whether they abound with large trees. If so, I make a small fire on flat stones, in a convenient place; on the fire I put some wax; close by this fire, on another stone, I drop honey in distinct drops, which I surround with vermilion laid on the stone; and then I retire to watch carefully whether any bees appear.” Lured by the scent of burning wax and honey, bees inadvertently coat themselves with the vermilion, making it easy for Crevecoeur to follow them to their hive. Once he has identified the tree they occupy, he summons friends to assist in felling it. He adds: “I have found out sometimes eleven swarms in a season; and it is inconceivable what a quantity of honey these trees will sometimes afford.”

Kellar provides statistics on 18th century exports of beeswax and honey from the American colonies. In 1730 alone, Virginia exported about 343,900 pounds of beeswax. In 1739, Virginia exported five tons of beeswax. Crediting Lester Breninger who utilized his ancestors’ records in penning “Beekeeping and Bee Lore in Pennsylvania,” Horn notes: “Pennsylvania adopted the bee as its symbol of thrift and industry. And for good reason. By 1771, 29,261 pounds of beeswax were exported from Philadelphia.” In *Beeswax*, William Coggshall and Roger Morse note: “Beeswax has traditionally commanded three to five times the price of an equal weight of honey.”

Although the paper currency issued by the Continental Congress in 1779 wasn’t worth much, the image of a bee skep on the \$45-dollar was intended to convey a sense of prosperity and security. The traditional straw beehive depicted had 13 rings for the thirteen colonies engaged in fighting for independence.



The bee skep and bee gum, a hollow log housing a hive, were far less practical than the movable frame hive Reverend Lorenzo Langstroff created in 1851.

Colonial beekeepers had to kill their bees before extracting honey and beeswax. Reusing the structures without proper sanitation led to outbreaks of American Foul Brood. Nevertheless, Horn discovered: “Colonists in Virginia, New York, North Carolina, and Connecticut left beeswax and/or bee gums to their children or family relations in their wills.”

During the Revolutionary War, bees served with distinction on October 3, 1780, at McIntyre’s Farm near Charlotte, North Carolina. A local lad spotting a foraging party of 450 loyalists led by Captain John Doyle traveling with 60 wagons alerted the patriot force commanded by Captain James Thompson. The patriots remained in hiding while the raiding party began plundering corn and oats. But when the pillaging party accidentally tipped over some bee hives, the enraged bees went into action. Taking advantage of the distraction their stinging allies provided, the patriots managed to kill eight of the enemy, including Captain Doyle, and wound 12 others without suffering any losses.

Praise for the work ethic and social order of bees is referenced repeatedly in 17th and 18th century literature. A typical passage written by Crevecoeur about New England colonists reads: “Thus though fruitful hive constantly sends out swarms as industrious as themselves, yet it always remains full without having any useless drones: on the contrary, the richer an individual grows, the more extensive his field of action becomes...”

Today pollination services provided by honeybees receive more press coverage than the economic value of the honey and wax they manufacture. The only reference I have found from colonial days concerning a need for their pollination skills suggests apple trees William Blackstone planted where the Boston Common now stands failed to thrive until honeybees arrived in Massachusetts. Grown from seeds Blackstone brought when he emigrated from England in 1623, his Boston trees are considered America’s first apple trees.

In 1625, two years after reaching America, Blackstone settled in what became the Beacon Hill section of Boston. His English seeds probably remained bagged for three years. Perhaps the health of the resultant seedlings rather than the absence of honeybees accounts for the failure of the young trees to produce immediately.



## Celebrate! West Hartford

Come say hello to us at Celebrate! West Hartford on June 6 from 10am-6pm and Sunday June 7 from noon-6pm. We’re excited to be a part of this popular event for the second year in a row!



## Plant Sale & Auction is a huge success!

*By Cheryl Marino, CT Hort Past President and Auction Committee Co-Chair*

When tallied, the 2026 CT Hort Annual Plant Sale & Auction came down to 500 Plants, 125 members and friends, 37 donors, 32 trips to nurseries, 35 volunteers, and 3 auctioneers. That means record sales of more than \$10,272 to fund our Scholarship and Cares Grants programs!

The afternoon of the Auction and Plant Sale started outside Bethany Covenant Church.

Volunteers pulled up to unload their vehicles in a systematic frenzy, as plants were evaluated, then carried to their sale destination. Meanwhile, the eager team of set-up volunteers readied the room for the plants. Coordinators helped the Silent Auction, Live Auction and Sale Table setups. Our kitchen crew headed by Margaret Haldeman carried the food and supplies through the commotion to ready her spread of delicious offerings. Volunteers baked scrumptious finger desserts which we all enjoyed devouring.

At 6:00PM, the doors opened up and people milled around the plants, spying treasures they wanted. Auctioneers Nancy DuBrule-Clemente, Jim Sirch and Kevin Wilcox never disappoint as they amused us with their bantering and shared their knowledge and expertise on the qualities of each plant offered in the auction.

Auction Committee Coordinators Sarah Bailey, Betty Cooley, Robin Dressler, Nancy DuBrule-Clemente and Cheryl Marino planned and streamlined the many varying tasks for two months to ensure a successful event. Each year we are gratefully humbled by the generosity of our donors who are listed below; please, remember these organizations as you procure your garden needs this year.

### 2026 Plant Sale & Auction Donors

Ballek's Garden Center  
Broken Arrow Nursery  
Butler Florist & Garden Center  
Cheshire Nursery  
Connecticut Flower Collective  
Country Flower Farm  
Cricket Hill Garden  
Dreamland Flower Farm  
Earth Tones Native Plant Nursery  
Elizabeth Park Conservancy  
Garden Sales  
Garden's Dream  
Gotta's Farm  
Hart's Greenhouse & Garden Center  
Judges Farm

Larson's Garden Center and Landscape  
Maple Tree Nursery  
Natureworks  
Paul & Sandy's too, Inc.  
Planters' Choice Nursery  
Prides Corner Farms  
Spear Head Spade  
Summer Hill Nursery  
The Garden Barn and Nursery and Landscape  
The Lil' Plant Shop  
The Plant Group  
Two Heron's Farm  
Town & Country Nurseries  
UConn Horticulture Club & advisor  
Shelley Durocher-Nesta

Warner Nursery and Garden Center  
WaterField Farms  
White Flower Farm

### Individuals

Sarah Bailey  
Susan Burchsted  
Betty Cooley  
Robin Dressler  
Nancy DuBrule-Clemente  
Linda Jenson  
Elizabeth Morin  
Cheryl Marino  
Roman & Terry Mroczkowski  
James Randall

## CT HORT TRAVEL

### Ready to get away?

We have four wonderful trips to share with you.



#### A day trip to Rhode Island's South Coast

**Wednesday, June 24**

Join the Connecticut Horticultural Society with special guest, **Nancy DuBrule-Clemente**, as we visit the South Coast of Rhode Island. Sakonnet Garden is a secret garden in Little Compton. We'll have a guided tour of this delightful garden. Enjoy lunch at the Brick Alley Pub in the heart of historic Newport. The Farmer's Daughter in South Kingstown is the perfect spot to browse through this garden center.

• **Cost: \$170 per person / \$165 per person with CT Hort Member Discount**

Register: <https://www.friendshiptours.net/tours/cthort-sakonnet>



#### Day Trip and Private Tour of the Florence Griswold Museum and Gardens

**Wednesday, July 1**

Arrive at 9:45 to check in at the front desk in the lobby of Kriebler Gallery. Tour the Gallery and enjoy a talk by Linda Turner about the property, gardens, and artists. You can bring a picnic lunch and eat on the grounds (bring a blanket) or eat at The Cafe Flo on the grounds (be sure to make advance reservations). You can also go to The Old Lyme Inn across the street or the Hangry Goose which is on an adjacent property. All are within walking distance.

At 1:15pm, you'll be treated to a garden tour and talk, and at 2pm, take a formal tour of the house with a docent or tour the house on your own. At 3pm, enjoy a coffee break and Q&A session in the barn before heading home.

• **Cost: \$35 Limit: 20**

Register: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/pa2pdx>



#### Tour two breathtaking gardens:

#### Private Tour of Cheryl Fox & Chrissie D'Esopo gardens

**Sunday, July 19, 1-5:30pm**

Tour two breathtaking gardens in one summer afternoon: Cheryl Fox's astounding daylily garden and Chrissie D'Esopo's famed Flower House in Avon, on Sunday, July 19 from 1pm-5:30pm. First, it's off to see Cheryl Fox's daylily collection as well as her perennials and shrubs in a scenic area of Bloomfield, from 1-3pm. Then, we'll go to Chrissie D'Esopo's Flower House in Avon, where quality and quantity combine for an amazingly beautiful outing. It's all grown by Chrissie; a true labor of love.

• **Cost: \$10**

Register: <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/ev/reg/46ywwq3p>



#### Maine Getaway

**Aug. 30-Sept. 3**

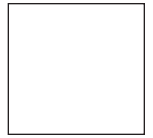
It's off to charming Maine! Travel with Friendship Tours and Federated Gardens Clubs of Connecticut for a three-night, coastal Maine trip packed with sites, gardens, and delightful dining.


We focus on Boothbay, Wiscasset, and Portland Maine where we meet our Maine garden club friends! Come along and enjoy the fun!

We'll be stopping at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, Coastal Maine Botanic Garden, Wiscasset and Boothbay Gardens and Portland Gardens. We'll spend two nights at Smuggler's Cove and one night at the Courtyard Marriott Portland Waterfront.

• **Cost: \$1799 Per Person Double Occupancy / \$2229 Single Occupancy**

INFO: Kathy Lindroth Tour Coordinator at [kathleen.lindroth@gmail.com](mailto:kathleen.lindroth@gmail.com) or 860.836.3407.



*Dated Material*  *Please Rush*

### CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

- Tuesday, June 9** – Board of Directors Meeting, 7 pm
- Monday, June 15** – Deadline for the Summer 2026 *Newsletter*
- Thurs., June 18** – Speaker presentation: *Digging Deeper into Ecological Horticulture* with Uli Lorimer  
7 pm, live at CNTR,  
725 Main Street,  
Middletown, on Zoom

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

Printed on recycled paper.



## 2026-2027 Speaker Series

Meeting Date	Speaker	Presentation	Speaker Information
9/17/26	Yuki Kaneko	Editing the Garden: Advice from the High Line	<a href="https://network.thehighline.org/events/plabnyc/speakers/yuki-kaneko">https://network.thehighline.org/events/plabnyc/speakers/yuki-kaneko</a>
10/15/26	Patrick McDuffee	A Scented Geranium Deep Dive	<a href="https://wellsweep.com">https://wellsweep.com</a>
11/19/26	David Jacke	Gardening Like the Forest: Designing Edible Ecosystems for Homes and Communities	<a href="https://www.edibleforestgardens.com/about-the-authors">https://www.edibleforestgardens.com/about-the-authors</a>
1/21/27	Theresa Crimmins	When the Wild Things Are: The Science and Experience of Phenology	<a href="https://snre.arizona.edu/theresa-crimmins">https://snre.arizona.edu/theresa-crimmins</a>
2/18/27	Jillian Shea	All Things Cut Flowers: Growing, Designing & Industry Insight	<a href="http://www.facebook.com/PlantHerLife">www.facebook.com/PlantHerLife</a>
3/18/27	Merrie Avallone	Geeking Out with Dahlias	<a href="https://www.dreamlandflowerfarm.com">https://www.dreamlandflowerfarm.com</a>
4/15/27	Dina Brewster	Ecotypes, Ecoregions, and Restoration Agriculture	<a href="https://www.thehickories.org/about">https://www.thehickories.org/about</a>
5/20/27	Jeff Eleveld	How to Kill a Houseplant	<a href="http://www.jefftheplantguy.com">http://www.jefftheplantguy.com</a>
6/17/27	Larry Weaner	Breaking the Rules: Ecological Landscape Design and Traditional Landscape Methodology.	<a href="http://www.ndal.org/about">www.ndal.org/about</a>