Connecticut Horticultural Society
NEWSLETTER
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The Rise, Demise, and Revitalization of American Elms

By Jody Morgan, writer and CT Hort member

At left - A lone Elm tree survives at Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, PA.

Are American elms ready to stage a comeback? Honoring the Liberty Tree where Boston patriots began gathering in 1765, the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution encouraged planting 250 elms throughout the US by July 4, 2026. The 23 liberty trees dedicated this year in Connecticut by CTSSAR are a small part of recent American elm restoration projects utilizing selections resistant to the Dutch Elm Disease (DED) that decimated our country's once robust population. Despite nostalgia for elm shaded village streets, reestablishing the monoculture that facilitated the devastation of *Ulmus americana* is ill-advised.

An elm tree resident since 1646 at the corner of Orange (now Washington) and Essex Streets in Boston first served the cause of liberty on August 14, 1765. England was taxing everything in the colonies from deeds and wills to playing cards and dice. A stamp would be affixed to each item as proof of payment. Protesters hung an effigy of the tax collector from the elm. On September 11, patriots installed a copper plaque on the tree's trunk reading "The Tree of Liberty." They continued to meet beneath its limbs until British loyalists hacked it down in late August 1775.

American elms grow rapidly, producing a vase-shaped silhouette. Saplings were easily transplanted by colonists from their natural bottomland habitat to shade dooryards or left standing in fields to shelter livestock.

In 1686, the Reverend James Pierpont received two elms. The story (lacking primary source documentation) relates that Wiiliam Cooper, a humble farmer, wanting to contribute to his minister's newly constructed home, dug the saplings and installed them at the front of the house. In any case, the trees thrived, surviving as the original elms on New Haven Green.

"By the time of the Revolution, some wealthy individuals in larger Yankee communities, especially along the Connecticut River Valley, started to fund expansive elm plantings in their respective downtowns as a philanthropic gesture," explains Eric Rutkow in *American Canopy*. "Foremost among the group was James Hillhouse of New Haven, Connecticut, an officer in the Revolutionary War and later a U.S. senator. In 1786, he orchestrated a subscription campaign to bring a 'Row of Elms' to a street that passed through his city's central green (and, conveniently, also through undeveloped property that he controlled). The Hillhouse trees were planted in double rows, spaced out at forty-foot intervals, creating the effect of an outdoor cathedral."

Stopping overnight in New Haven on February 11,1842, Charles Dickens found the mature trees impressive. In *American Notes* he writes: "New Haven known also as the City of Elms, is a fine town. Many of the streets (as its alias sufficiently imparts) are planted with rows of grand old elm-trees; and the same natural ornaments

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Membership Dues:

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Leadership Letter

Dear CT Hort Family,

September arrives with goldenrods and asters, and this year they are already beginning to steal the show. As I write in mid-August, their first blooms are bringing fresh color to our gardens and offering an important late-season feast for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.

While you were enjoying summer vacation, we were busy putting together a September full of programs we think you'll love. We'll begin on September 17 with a special look at the remarkable gardens of the High Line in New York City, led by Yuki Kaneko, Senior Horticultural Manager. We're also thrilled to welcome everyone to our wonderful new program space at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, which will be home to our fall and spring meetings moving forward.

If scented geraniums are on your list of plant favorites, join Patrick McDuffee of Well Sweep Herb Farm on Thursday, September 24, for a deep-dive workshop devoted to these wonderfully fragrant plants. The very next day, Friday, September 25, I'll be co-leading the Friendship Tours bus trip to the New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, with its formal Italianate gardens, orangeries, peaceful woodland trails and apple orchard; then, we'll enjoy a tropical plant shopping spree at the remarkable Logee's greenhouses, home to a 126-year old lemon tree. It's a two-day stretch of learning, exploring, and plant inspiration you won't want to miss.

And don't wait to reserve your spot for our biennial symposium, Gardening For All Ages, on October 24. This exciting day will feature a terrific lineup of nationally known horticultural experts! Garden vendors interested in hosting a table should contact us soon, as only a few spaces remain. Nurseries are also invited to sponsor the event, a great way to share your name with the gardening community while supporting CHS. Register for all programs at cthort.org.

Looking forward to seeing you soon!
Jim Sirch, President

Thank you to our generous business members and supporters!

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Yuki Kaneko

Editing the Garden: Advice from the High Line

with Yuki Kaneko

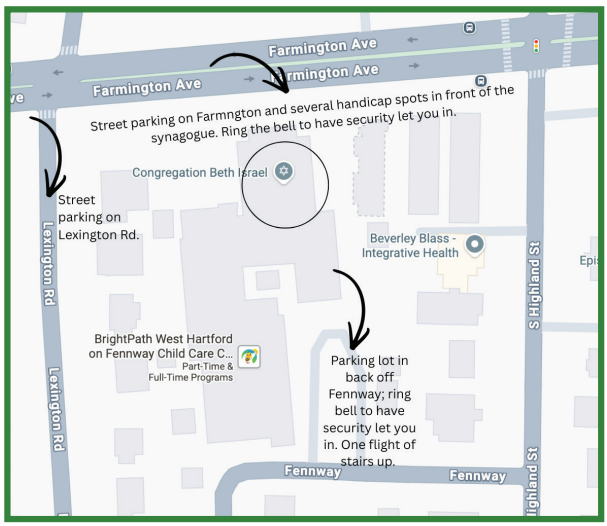
Thursday, September 17 • 7 pm

On Zoom and in person at Congregation Beth Israel, 701 Farmington Avenue, West Hartford
(Members will receive the Zoom link the Sunday before the talk.)

A naturalistic garden may appear effortless, but its beauty is the result of intentional care and thoughtful curation. Drawing from her work stewarding one of the world's most influential naturalistic gardens, Yuki Kaneko will share strategies for managing dynamic plant communities while preserving design intent. The talk covers practical techniques to cultivate naturalistic aesthetics that remain vibrant and intentional across all four seasons. Attendees will walk away with a new perspective on plant selections that enhance texture and structure, learning how to balance ecological function with an artistic vision. Join us to learn the art of "editing"—an essential practice to refine ever-evolving naturalistic gardens.

Yuki Kaneko is the Senior Horticulture Manager at the High Line where she manages the landscape of the internationally celebrated urban public park in New York City. Born in Japan, Yuki earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Fine Arts from Tama Art University and was awarded the Blanchette H. Rockefeller Fellowship to study art in the United States. She received certificates from the New York Botanical Garden in horticulture and botany and further trained through the John Nally Internship at Wave Hill. Since joining the High Line in 2016, she has stewarded its iconic naturalistic gardens designed by Piet Oudolf. With a passion for interpreting designed landscapes in the context of ecological conservation, she manages the High Line's horticulture operations, plant curation, and programming to provide a naturalistic landscape corridor that supports biodiversity and connects people with nature.

Congregation Beth Israel Parking





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. Click on the survey icon found on any page then choose the speaker you want to rate. Thank you for your feedback.



2026-2027 Scholarship Fund

The 2026-2027 season begins, and with it, a fresh goal of $8,000 to provide scholarships to students. We hope you'll consider helping us reach that goal! Go to cthort.org/donate to learn how to give.

Thank you!

2026 CT Hort Cares grants recipients

The Connecticut Horticultural Society is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2026 CT Hort Cares Grants. These projects demonstrate the power of plants to educate, inspire, improve accessibility, strengthen communities, and foster environmental stewardship throughout Connecticut.

SPRING 2026:

From Seeds to Scholars - $260
CT State Community College - Tunxis, Farmington
The From Seeds to Scholars project at CT State Community College-Tunxis will create hands-on gardening opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and children at the Early Childhood Learning Center. Through new greenhouse spaces and campus planters, participants will learn about plant cultivation, sustainability, and environmental stewardship. Led in partnership with campus sustainability groups, the project is expected to benefit 150–300 individuals annually while fostering a deeper appreciation for plants and the growing process.

Fruit Orchards: First of a Kind - $500
Community Garden of Joy, Bridgeport
This community orchard in Bridgeport's South End is transforming a once-vacant lot into a thriving educational and food-producing space. Featuring more than 40 fruit trees and berry plants, the orchard provides fresh produce while teaching youth and residents valuable horticultural skills. Grant funding will support orchard care, tools, and educational activities, helping volunteers, families, and community members continue to learn, grow, and cultivate environmental stewardship together. The project is from the Community Garden of Joy organization.

Intergenerational Nature Art Program - $500
Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens, Stamford
The Bartlett Arboretum & Gardens' Intergenerational Nature Art Program brings together senior residents of The Villa at Stamford and students from Villa Maria School through monthly nature-themed activities. Participants explore plants, pollinators, seasons, and environmental topics through hands-on art projects and discussions. The program encourages learning, social connection, and creativity while fostering appreciation for the natural world among people of all ages and abilities.

Forest Friends Story Time with HVA at Local Libraries - $240
Housatonic Valley Association, Cornwall Bridge
The Housatonic Valley Association's Forest Friends Story Time program introduces young children and their families to the importance of trees, forests, and watersheds. Hosted at libraries and community locations across northwestern Connecticut, each session combines storytelling with a hands-on planting activity. Participants leave with a native plant to nurture at home while gaining a greater understanding of local ecosystems, conservation, and the role plants play in healthy communities.

Dragonfly and Mosquito Beds at Mystic Aquarium - $500
UConn Master Gardeners, Mystic
UConn Master Gardener volunteers will create educational garden beds at Mystic Aquarium, showcasing plants that attract dragonflies and help deter mosquitoes naturally. Located near the Penguin Pavilion and Marsh Trek exhibits, the gardens will demonstrate environmentally friendly approaches to pest management while supporting pollinators and beneficial insects. With approximately 75,000 annual visitors, the project will provide a unique opportunity for families and guests to learn about the important relationship between plants, wildlife, and ecosystem health.

2026 CT Hort Cares grants recipients

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SUMMER 2026:

Girl Scouts Daisy Garden - $500
Arrigoni Girl Scout Service Unit, Portland/Middletown
The Arrigoni Girl Scout Service Unit will create gardens in Middletown and Portland as part of the Daisy Garden program, introducing kindergarten and first-grade Girl Scouts to gardening, pollinators, and environmental stewardship. Grant funds will support raised garden beds, soil, tools, and native plants. The gardens will provide hands-on learning for the Scouts while benefiting local neighborhoods and community gardeners. The project is intended to become an annual tradition, with each new group of Daisy Scouts caring for the gardens.

Enfield Common Grounds Compost Amendment Project - $500
Enfield Common Ground Garden, Enfield
The Enfield Common Ground Garden provides fresh produce for the Enfield Food Shelf, producing approximately 4,000 pounds annually. A CT Hort Cares grant will fund 10 cubic yards of compost to enrich the soil in the garden's 14–15 growing beds. UConn Master Gardeners and more than 50 community volunteers maintain the one-acre garden, which uses sustainable growing practices. Improving soil health will help sustain or increase production and provide more fresh, healthy vegetables for Enfield residents experiencing food insecurity.

Seeding the Naugatuck River Greenway
Pollinator Pathway - $500
Ansonia Nature & Recreation Center, Ansonia
The Ansonia Nature & Recreation Center will expand the Pollinator Pathway along the Naugatuck River Greenway by replacing invasive vegetation with Connecticut-native plants and seeds. Grant funds will purchase flowering perennials, grasses, and other native plants that provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife while strengthening the river's riparian corridor. The restored areas will also serve as outdoor classrooms for community members, school groups, and visitors to the Greenway, demonstrating the importance of native plants, habitat restoration, and stewardship.

SCSU Buley Library Plant Lending Project - $500
Southern Connecticut State University Buley Library, New Haven
Southern Connecticut State University's Buley Library will expand its innovative plant lending program, which allows students, faculty, and staff to borrow houseplants for a semester. The program promotes plant appreciation and accessibility while giving Honors College students hands-on experience propagating and caring for plants. Grant funds will support a rolling cart, grow lights for low-light dorm rooms, plants, and potting supplies. The program already lent 32 plants in spring 2026 and hopes to make approximately 50 available each semester.

Lyman Hall Student Plant Identification Garden - $500
Lyman Hall FFA Alumni & Supporters, Wallingford
Agriculture students at Lyman Hall High School will create a permanent Plant Identification Garden on the school campus. Students will research, select, install, label, and maintain trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, and native plants, turning the garden into a living classroom for horticulture and plant science. CT Hort Cares funds will help purchase plant material, identification labels, soil amendments, mulch, and educational signage. The garden is expected to serve more than 300 students, visitors, and community members each year.

Seeds of Wonder - $500
Imagine Nation, A Museum Early Learning Center, Bristol
Imagine Nation's Seeds of Wonder project will introduce 119 preschool children and museum visitors to gardening through hands-on experiences. Children will start seeds indoors, nurture seedlings, and transplant them into the outdoor Learning Park, where they will explore plant life cycles, pollination, soil, and sustainable gardening. They will also harvest vegetables and herbs and learn about healthy eating. With support from the Bristol Garden Club, the project will build gardening skills, environmental awareness, and a lasting appreciation for plants while encouraging families to grow at home.

American Elms from page 1

surround Yale College, an establishment of considerable eminence and reputation. … The effect is very like that of an old cathedral yard in England; and when their branches are in full leaf, must be very picturesque."

Throughout New England, villages began similarly lining their streets with elms. In *Republic of Shade: New England and the American Elm*, Thomas L. Campanella describes the great "Tree Bee" held in Sheffield, Massachusetts in 1846. "The event, something of an arboreal barn raising, met with great enthusiasm. It began in May and lasted for two weeks. The entire community participated in the effort – men carrying saplings and women furnishing noonday meals … children steadied the small trees as they were set in the ground." One thousand elms were planted.

Picturesque towns with elm-lined streets drew affluent city residents to vacation in their cooling shade. Campanella asserts: "Elm trees were understood to be an essential feature in the commodified image of the rural Yankee town. Without an elm-shaded common and bosky streets, such a village would be bypassed and left to rot."

Mania for the monoculture of elms soon spread throughout the country. Rutkow notes: "There were clusters of 10,000 or more ornamental elms in every state. The total number planted nationally by the 1930s exceeded 25 million …"



Avon's 'Princeton' elm was dedicated by Rich Kendall, President CTSSAR Wadsworth Branch #7.

Dutch Elm Disease, killing trees throughout Europe, reached America in 1930. Both the fungus and the elm bark beetle disseminating it arrived in a shipment of elm burls intended for use as furniture veneer. In New Haven alone, the hurricane of 1938 felled 13,500 and left 7,000 damaged elms vulnerable to the pathogen. During World War II, funding and manpower previously allocated to eradicating DED were redirected to the war effort.

Was there a miracle cure? For his research dedicated to eliminating insects responsible for spreading typhus and malaria, Paul Hermann Muller received the Nobel Prize for Physiology in Medicine in 1948. The chemical he discovered was marketed thereafter as DDT. In 1947, elms in Englewood, New Jersey were sprayed in the first experimental use of DDT to treat DED. Widespread use of the insecticide followed.

The public was assured DDT presented a minimal hazard to birds and mammals. But as Rachel Carson documents in *Silent Spring*, DDT poisons the insects and earthworms that feed birds and small mammals working its way up the food chain, generating sterility where it doesn't bring death. A decade before DDT was banned for general use in 1972, she warned: "Spraying is killing the birds, but it is not saving the elms. The illusion that salvation of the elms lies at the end of a spray nozzle is a dangerous will-o'-the-wisp that is leading one community after another into a morass of heavy expenditures, without producing results."

"Not until 1968 did scientists realize that up to 60 percent of Dutch elm disease infections occurred below the soil, far beyond the reach of DDT or any other prophylactic aimed at controlling the elm bark beetle. Elm roots are promiscuous, and 'sap transfusion' via roots can occur between trees as far as fifty feet apart." (Campanella)

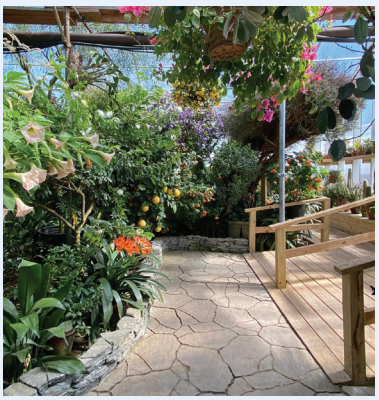
Despite the staggering loss of trees, some elms remained. At Longwood Gardens, I discovered the first mature elm I'd ever encountered. Scarred by a 1998 windstorm and less a large limb dropped in 2021, the tree still stands, sole survivor of an elm allée planted in the 1930s. Such trees surviving exposure to DED provide genetic material for producing disease-resistant selections.

Breeding programs and trials documenting disease resistance take decades. *Ulmus americana* 'Princeton', released by Princeton Nursery in 1922, is still one of the best choices for reestablishing elms in the landscape. Six genetically diverse cultivars marketed together as 'American Liberty' by Elm Research Institute exhibit a variable rate of long-term survival. 1995 release 'Valley Forge' has an unruly habit requiring regular pruning. 'Jefferson', bred from an elm growing in front of the Freer Gallery on the Washington Mall, was released by the National Park Service and Agricultural Research Service in 2005.

One of Connecticut's many elm restoration projects in progress directly reflects the spirit of 1776 we celebrate this year. In 1777, Captain Ebeneezer Faxon planted 13 elms at the intersection of South Quaker Lane and New Britain Avenue. Now part of West Hartford, the area was named Elmwood thereafter. Arriving too late to engage in the battle, Faxon's Hartford company of men returned home unscathed, but determined to honor General Burgoyne's victory at Saratoga, New York. Elmwood was bereft of elms when Dr. Rick Liftig, President of the Elmwood Business Association, realized disease-resistant trees were available. He initiated a campaign to bring elms back to Elmwood. The first was planted On October 6, 2007, the 230th anniversary of Burgoyne's victory. Except for a single 2009 sapling that succumbed to an unknown cause, all continue to thrive, including the elm dedicated to West Hartford Historian Dr. Tracey Wilson in 2017.

Unfortunately, DED is only one of many problems plaguing American elms. In "View from the Street: Elm Reintroduction", Tom Zetterstrom, who founded Elm Watch in 1999, shares his extensive experience with maintaining existing American elms and introducing disease-resistant saplings to Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York. He cautions: "Allee plantings are inconsistent with current sustainable community forestry practices and should be considered an old-school aesthetic lacking in the diversity required for future resiliency."

CT HORT TRAVEL



Gardens & Greenhouse Treasures: A Day Trip to New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill and Logee's Plants for Home & Garden

Friday, September 25

Join CT Hort President Jim Sirch on this delightful day of gardens and greenhouses!

First stop: New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, for a walk through the many gardens before enjoying a fresh boxed lunch from Farmer & Fork Café.

Then, enjoy a special visit to Logee's Plants for Home & Garden, a destination every plant lover should visit at least once.

Cost: $170 per person / $165 per person with a CT Hort Member Discount
Register: www.friendshiptours.net/tours/longwood-gardens-christmas-ct-horticultural-society **or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630**

Invasive Plant Symposium October 28, 2026

CT Hort is proud to be a partner in this important event.

The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group's 2026 symposium From Awareness to Action - Strengthening Our Response to Invasive Plants will be in person at UConn Student Union, Storrs, CT, open to all; Wednesday, October 28, 2026. Sessions include a variety of techniques for management of terrestrial and aquatic invasives, as well as restoration with native alternatives. CEU's for organizations and Pesticide Recertification Credits are available. $90 General Registration (in person attendance). $80 Recording Only; Student Registration Available.

More info: cipwg.uconn.edu/2026-symposium



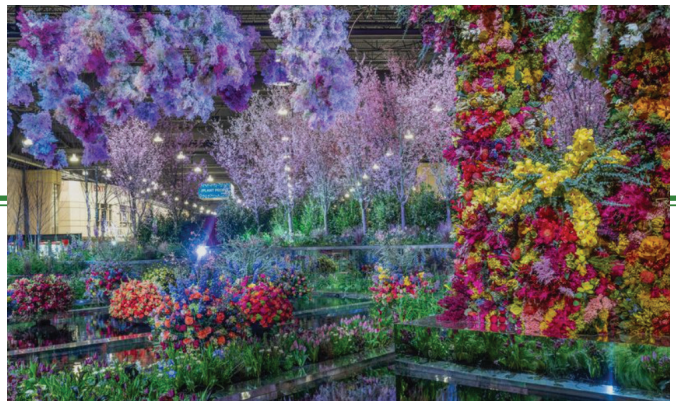
Longwood Gardens Christmas

Dec. 11-13, 2026

Experience the beauty of the holidays in Pennsylvania and more. Over the course of our three days together, we'll travel to Lyndhurst Mansion, the famous Winterthur Museum, and then, to Longwood Gardens, before catching the New York Botanical Garden Holiday Train Show
Includes two nights at the hotel, two breakfasts and one lunch and one dinner (with $50 in dining dollars), sightseeing and admissions.

Trip cost: $1169 per person double occupancy / $1119 with CT Hort member discount $1359 single person single occupancy / $1309 with CT Hort member discount

Register: www.friendshiptours.net/tours/longwood-gardens-christmas-ct-horticultural-society **or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630**



Philadelphia Flower Show with New York Botanical Garden Orchid Show & Longwood Gardens Orchid Extravaganza

March 12-14, 2027

Join CT Hort, Friendship Tours, and special guest Nancy DuBrule-Clemente for this incredible annual trip to see the famous Philadelphia Flower and more.

Trip cost: $1045 per person double occupancy / $1219 per person single occupancy (CT Hort members receive a $50 discount)

Register: https://www.friendshiptours.net/tours/philadelphia-flower-show-ct-horticultural-society **or call Barbara at Friendship Tours at 860-243-1630**

Connecticut Horticultural Society
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West Hartford, CT 06133-0966

Dated Material *Please Rush*

CT Hort Calendar at a Glance

Tuesday, Sept. 8 –	Board of Directors Meeting, 7 pm
Tuesday, Sept. 15 –	Deadline for the October 2026 *Newsletter*
Thursday, Sept. 17 –	Speaker presentation: ***Editing the Garden: Advice from the High Line* with Yuki Kaneko** 7 pm, live at Congregation Beth Israel, 701 Farmington Avenue, West Hartford, and on Zoom

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

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Connecticut Horticultural Society presents

2026 Symposium
Gardening for ALL Ages

Sat., October 24
9-4pm
Marriott Hartford Cromwell



Rebecca McMackin

Featuring:

Rebecca McMackin

Christine Darnell

Jennifer McGuinness

Panel discussion
Vendors Lunch
Free parking

860-529-8713
office@cthort.org
www.cthort.org

***2026 Symposium:* Get your tickets by Oct. 1 and save money!**