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The Boathouse and Its Landscape

by Camilla Wilcox, curator of education

Almost a century has passed since the Boathouse was built on the banks of Lake Katharine. Weathered and worn, it has been an object of curiosity, speculation, and legend for many years. Today, it is the home of the RGWFU education programs for children. Without heating and cooling systems and with the ever-present threat of flooding, which occurs at least once a year, it is an informal place. In small rooms that once provided privacy for family and friends to change clothing before and after water sports, there are tables full of natural items gathered by children and education volunteers—cones, seeds, lichen, leaves, and flowers—and books on snakes, birds, frogs, botany, and ecology; natural history posters line the walls. The dock is gone, but the covered porch by which it was once reached has been restored and is a good spot for viewing plant and animal life in the wetland that is all that remains of the lake. The shady, cool terrace is just right for potting plants to take home, creating nature art, learning about Piedmont animals, and listening to stories. The pleasant voices of children can still be heard—in quiet learning instead of noisy play. This old building is still full of life, but life that is different from that envisioned by its owners so many years ago.

When it was new, the Boathouse was the finest of its kind. With about eight hundred square feet of floor space, it was built in a style reminiscent of medieval English structures, with decorative details designed to look like those on half-timbered



Early Plantings at the Boathouse

by David Bare, greenhouse manager

It is hard to imagine that, in the passing of ninety years, Lake Katharine could fill with silt, or that bucolic views across open water would turn to lush mud banks of cattails, jewelweed, and grasses. Today, the calls of blackbirds and the drone of bullfrogs are familiar sounds in what has become a rich, freshwater marsh, but this landscape was once a cultivated one, with a design as intentional as the framework that defines the formal garden. Although most of the plants from Thomas Sears' original 1916 plan for the Boathouse are long gone, a few remain; an undesirable few have jumped the wall and become dominant features in the landscape, to the detriment of the native plant population. Some of these plants were selected for their fragrance, some for their obvious tolerance of moist conditions, and some for their undeniable beauty.

Spring must have been the high season for this garden, with its laburnums, forget-me-nots, viburnums, and irises. The pendulous flowers of the golden chain tree, then called *Cytisus laburnum* but now named *Laburnum anagyroides*, are in effect much like a golden wisteria. The famous *Laburnum* arch at Bodnant Gardens in Wales features these trees trained over a tunnel-like pergola, so the flowers dangle in a long, continuous curtain. Not the best selection for the South, it is yet another example of Thomas Sears' penchant for plants more suitable to cooler climes. Korean spice viburnum, *Viburnum carlesii* is the other woody plant on the list. It fares a bit better here, though it, too, will be

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buildings; a decorative cupola added a distinctive touch and helped keep the inside cool by drawing hot air up and out. Grand old trees shaded it from hot summer sun. The terrace, with its splashing fountain and brick paving, was outlined with walls of varying heights and bordered with flowering plants: fragrant Korean spice viburnum shrubs at the door and the bottom of the steps; handsome golden chain trees at the corners; delicate forget-me-nots; creeping leadwort; and multitudes of stately pale blue and lavender irises around the perimeter. Thousands of daffodils were planted near the shoreline. A lighted path led along the bank to a small, shallow cove. There were practical details, like the circular driveway that allowed for easy drop-off of people and equipment; and lovely, unusual touches, like the very narrow planting beds for ferns at the base of the fountain.

It is likely that the Boathouse was built between 1912 and 1914. The architect's drawings have been lost, so the date of its construction must be deduced from other sources. We know that the lake was finished and filled by early 1913. The Boathouse was built precisely at the edge of the lake, with an arched foundation designed to let water flow underneath the porch. When the name of the property was officially changed from Reynolds Farms to Reynolda on October 14, 1914, an inventory of the value of all properties listed the value of the Boathouse as \$1,570.17. Two rowboats were valued at \$100.61.

Dated February 21, 1916, the design for the Boathouse terrace was one of the first plans landscape architect Thomas W. Sears created for Mrs. Reynolds. Mr. Sears' work reflected a philosophy developed by the founders, students, and associates of the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture, from which he had graduated. Two members of this group, Henry V. Hubbard and Theodora Kimmel, wrote *Introduction to the Study of Landscape Design*, which was first published in 1917. By examining their writings and observing features of the Reynolda landscape, we can see the philosophy of this community of landscape architecture pioneers reflected in plans, plant lists, and photographs. The author's comments accompanying the early photographs are followed, in italics, by statements from the Hubbard and Kimmel text.



CONCEPT AND SETTING

This undated sketch by Thomas Sears, presumably created before construction, illustrates the terrace almost exactly as it appears in early photographs. Another sketch, now owned by the Smithsonian Institution, shows a very different concept. In that drawing, the building is approached through low hedges. A comparison of the two drawings suggests that the concept for the Boathouse landscape evolved from an informal cottage garden-type setting to a more sophisticated architectural construction.

Note the single tree to the right of the building, and the rectangular shape of the mullioned windows. *We will discuss one aspect of this subject, the beauty and intelligibility of the presentation of our design by landscape plans. The drawing... should be suited not only to the subject treated but also to the person addressed.... The person of artistic temperament... may be best approached with a colored perspective.... The general artistic ability of the designer is judged by the presentation.... The client may say to himself, "He must be an artist to produce a drawing like that; if he is an artist, he can make the final result look well."*

This very early photograph was taken before grass had become well established on the slope above the Boathouse. The lake appears to be full, and the fountain wall is visible on the west side of the Boathouse. The circular drive near the Boathouse may have been under construction at this time. This drive served simply as efficient access to the Boathouse.

The practical considerations of gradient, possible radius of turning of an automobile, and view from one road to another to prevent accidents, must come first.



THE TERRACE

From the top of a long, steep flight of steps near the driveway, the visitor looked down toward the building and out to a view of the lake that was framed by the walls of the terrace. This photograph was taken a few feet away from the top of the stairs, but it illustrates the drama of the scene when seen from above. *The upper landing, particularly when it projects, is likely to be a point commanding a view.*



BUILDING FOUNDATION

The native stone used in the foundation of the building was of similar color to that used elsewhere on the estate, but these stones were not smoothly rounded, uniform in size, or laid in a decorative pattern as in other foundations already built. *The choice of local material in stonework may give harmony of color, as well as harmony of texture, between the stonework and any natural ledge which may appear in the composition.*



STEPS

The young trees behind the fountain are now mature, obscuring the view of the dairy barn complex. Steps like those described in this passage are located behind a wall on the left side of this picture, ending near the stone bench. *The terrace...is in itself a definite and segregated unit, but it is segregated without being entirely inclosed. (Steps may) run down by the side of a projecting building or retaining wall, agreeably filling in and softening what might be otherwise a harsh angle.*

WALLS

The height variation of the walls was a function of their use: where the taller walls in this picture gave a feeling of privacy from village activities, the lower one on the right opened the view to the lake. *Walls are an indispensable esthetic element in formal landscape design....They mark the articulation of the scheme into separate functional areas, without which there can be no effective design. The height of a free-standing wall or fence will be determined first by the amount of interruption to the view which it is designed to create. If it is desired that the view shall be in effect confined to the area inclosed, then the wall or fence should be somewhat higher than the eye.... If the intention is to define an area, but to allow the view to pass over outside areas as well, then a wall or fence considerably lower than the eye may be the most desirable structure to use.*

The walls are made of aggregate, cast in place and covered with cement stucco. This technique was promoted as a substitute for cut stone, even less expensive than a wall made entirely of cement. *Somewhat the effect of a concrete wall may be produced even more cheaply by the use of cement stucco....*

Walls were designed to be aesthetically pleasing, as well as structurally sound. Two setbacks were built into the longest wall, and pillars flank the steps at both entrances to the terrace. *Some kind of coping is almost always desirable for a wall, both for the consideration of protecting the masonry from water and for the esthetic consideration of giving the wall a crowning member and recognizing the important horizontal line of its top.... If there is danger of too great uninterrupted expanse of wall surface, this may be broken up by piers or buttresses.*

To further soften the surface of the walls, flowers, vines, shrubbery, and small trees were planted at their base. *A terrace wall is an ideal backing and protection for herbaceous planting, as can be seen in many examples of the English borders.*

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FOUNTAIN

The construction of the fountain subtly displayed several elements that were considered vitally important: a cohesive plan for the appearance and function of the structure; the provision of an ample amount of water; decorative means of introducing and discharging the water; and creating conditions for appropriate plantings surrounding it.

Water enters through a spout in the form of a stylized lion's head.

It is usually better to have water issue from some definite and decorative object, from the mouth of a grotesque mask or from a dolphin, for instance.

A depression in the center of the coping around the fountain pool allowed water to overflow in a controlled manner.

In any thoroughly satisfactory arrangement...the splashing of sparkling water is the center of interest, and the water itself is sufficient in volume to be adequate to its position.... A small supply of water, however, properly managed may give a very considerable effect. It can be arranged to fall from one basin into another in a clean but thin sheet without wasting any of its volume by running down over the surface of the stone, if the lip of the basin be properly undercut.

A pergola atop the wall provided a shady cover for the fountain below. On the plan, a border of loam surrounds the base of the fountain to catch the overflow and provide planting space for ferns.

Water may appear first in a scheme, with a certain suggestion of being a natural supply, if it comes out...in a retaining wall...in a deep overshadowed niche, perhaps planted with ferns and other vegetation thriving in damp and shade.

TRANSITION FROM THE FORMAL TO THE NATURAL AREA

The landscape immediately surrounding the Boathouse marked an understated transition between the more structured regions of the estate and the natural areas. Several large trees survived construction of the building and lake, and other trees were later planted to mimic a natural grove. Note the low walls that allowed the viewer to see beyond the terrace and anticipate discoveries outside its confines. Also note the two large white oak trees to the left of the steps; only one appears

in the conceptual drawing. One of these trees died and was removed recently; the other is still vigorous.



In the immediate surroundings of buildings, the outdoor forms may be definitely subordinated to a dominant architectural conception by the creation of terraces, parterres, ramps, steps, by the formal inclosure of areas of ground, by the use of vines and shrubs and trees trimmed and clipped as objects of architectural decoration. Farther from the building, the trees may retain their natural forms, though still made a part of the same scheme as the building by being arranged in man-made compositions.... In many English estates and modern American parks and large country places, there is a transition rather than a demarcation between man's and nature's domain.

STEPS

Even the character of the steps was different on this side. Instead of the straight, steep stairs of the western entrance, these are wider and broader, encouraging a leisurely approach to the natural area.

(Steps in a natural area) should usually seem to be fitted to the topography with as little disturbance and difficulty as possible; they should almost always be sunk into the bank rather than protruding from it...they should be enframed, supported, made a part of a harmonious composition with their surroundings.

THE LANDSCAPE COMPOSITION

The Boathouse was an important part of a landscape composition that involved the building, the surface of the water, and the surrounding landscape and views. Close and distant views and a variety of experiences for those using the facility were key considerations.

The line between water and land ... is a more important thing in the composition than the line between turf and shrubbery. This is partly due to the flatness of the water surface, which necessarily meets the shore everywhere in a definite line, but largely due to the reflection of the shore in the water. The planting which stands on the brink shows practically its whole form in reversed reflection.... If there is boating on the water the conditions may well be reversed, and the planting may then be arranged to be inspected close at hand. Particularly where the surface of the water is quiet, both the real shore and its reflected counterpart must be considered in the composition.



Reflecting upon the following passage, we may imagine Mr. Sears at work on the lakeside path.

As a general principle, a path, like a road, should go from one point of interest to another as directly as is reasonable under the circumstances...making a sort of compromise between the directness of the path and the suggested, more than real, difficulties of the topography, which taken as a whole will make the path more a part of the landscape. This subtle play of curve of surface on plan and profile is an extremely difficult thing to study except in its larger aspects, on the drafting-board in the office. It must be staked out upon the ground, studied, re-staked, changed in plan and profile perhaps only by inches, but in this way delicately fitted to its particular situation before the designer can properly feel that he has done his best.

The use of stepping-stones instead of paving enhances the naturalistic design.

Stone laid in flat slabs is a paving which lends itself particularly to the construction of garden paths and which is much used for this purpose, especially in England.



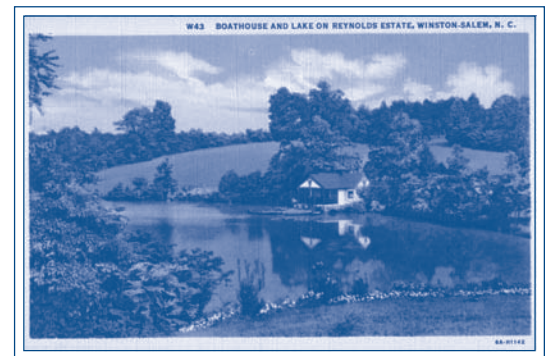
This unusual view of the Boathouse from the water encourages the viewer to imagine taking part in activities on the lake, while taking note of the architecture and placement of the building. Note the latticework on the wall; the opposite side of the building is also covered with lattice. Also note that the windows on the east wall are arched, as they were actually constructed, not as they appeared in the sketch.

Planting may be used purely for the decoration of the façade of a building, as for instance, where vine covered lattices of definite shapes are used as part of its architectural design.

Blooming shrubs and daffodils along the bank; groves of trees; a shimmering lake; and a charming Boathouse set against the back-drop of a beautiful, green hillside meadow created a pastoral scene for this old postcard entitled "Boathouse and Lake on Reynolds Estate, Winston-Salem, N.C." By the time this photograph was taken, the lake had begun to fill in; now, it is all but gone. Over the years, some of the trees around the Boathouse grew old and died; English ivy vines overgrew their bound-

aries and escaped into nearby woods; walls split in some places and crumbled in others;

and the fountain ceased to operate. But there are small reminders of the hopeful first days of its existence. Last spring, while work was underway on the foundation, part of the shoreline was cleared of brushy undergrowth. A colony of netted chain ferns, likely descendents of those chosen by Thomas Sears, emerged from the cleared ground, and one of the stones from the shoreline path was uncovered.



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Though their ideas on how to design landscapes for utility and aesthetics were new and somewhat radical, the Harvard landscape architecture community and its followers understood that carefully designed buildings and landscapes would be changed by time; by continuing to exist in a dynamic world, often the elements of a design would become more a part of one another than they were when they were new.

A building usually assumes greater harmony with the landscape as it grows old, that is, as it is subjected for longer and longer time to the natural forces of rain and wind and weather which are operating also on all the other objects of the scene.

The Boathouse was perhaps not the building we would have chosen for the education program. If we had had the option to build a new building, we would have added more restrooms, climate control, comfortable seating, fixed exhibits, and a hospitality kitchen, at the very least. But, in its own way, this curious little building nestled at the edge of the woods expresses our values in a way that a new building could not. We believe that children should have special places, apart from the distractions of harried modern life, where they are encouraged in their own small discoveries; where they can be outside and see where and how plants and animals live; and where they can experience the changes of the seasons, even when temperatures and conditions may be less than perfect. At the Boathouse, almost every day from early spring through late fall, caring adults share their knowledge and experience with grateful children. We're not bound by the comfort and ease of modern conveniences and technology, so we're free to explore, imagine, and create like those in generations before us. The early architects, planners, and owners of the Boathouse may have been way ahead of us; perhaps the old Boathouse is the building we need, and it functions exactly as it should.

The building should be beautiful, convenient, and efficient after its own kind. In fact, fitness to local conditions, and simple form obviously expressing a practical need in construction or in use, tend of themselves to make the building less expressive of man's will, more expressive of man's necessity, and so less incongruous with natural expression.

*For a similar discussion on the roadways of Reynolda, see *The Gardener's Journal*, summer 2003. 🌿

EARLY PLANTINGS AT THE BOATHOUSE

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happier where the temperatures are a bit cooler. Famed for its fragrance, the Korean spice viburnum can be seen (and more importantly smelled) at either end of the teahouse in the Pink and White Garden near the greenhouse. The heady fragrance wafts through the April garden from snowball-size white, flushed pink flower clusters. The flowers form as the leaves begin to unfurl, giving the shrub a thin appearance. Autumn berries of little significance (especially considering the highly ornamental quality of some viburnum fruit) turn from red to black. Mr. Sears placed these shrubs at either side of the door to the Boathouse and on either side of the short stairway leading from the terrace to the shoreline.

In the herbaceous level, Mr. Sears selected several moisture tolerant plants suitable to the Boathouse environment and to the clever moat of damp soil left at the base of the lion's



CALTHA
PALUSTRIS

head fountain. The native marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris* has kidney-shaped, glossy leaves and bears yellow, star-shaped flowers resembling buttercups. It grows to two feet tall and is found in bogs, swamps, and springy areas. In New England, the spring leaves are harvested, cooked, and eaten as "cowslip greens."

Glory-of-the-snow, called *Chionodoxa gigantea* on the plan, is now known as *Chionodoxa luciliae* Gigantea Group. It is related to the squills. The flowers come from pear-shaped bulbs that need to be planted in masses to have an impact. The flower is a soft violet-blue, the petals suffusing to pure white toward the center. There are up to eight flowers carried on each four- to six-inch stem.

Myosotis palustris, whose name has been changed to *M. scorpioides*, is a moisture-loving perennial version of the familiar forget-me-not.



MYOSOTIS
PALUSTRIS

This is the plant around which the legend and common name have sprung up. The story goes that a fair maiden and a knight of honor were strolling along the banks of a river when the maiden spied the floating blue flower. As she remarked on its beauty, he leapt in to retrieve it but was swept under by the current. As he went to meet his fate, he tossed the flower ashore to his maid and cried out "forget me not." Neither as showy nor as common as the biennial forget-me-not of gardens, *M. sylvestris*, it has bright blue flowers with a yellow eye, which are carried in loose, open racemes that unfurl like fern fronds in the fashion typical to the genus.

Three irises are represented on Mr. Sears' list. The Japanese iris, *Iris kaempferi* (now *I. ensata*) 'Gekka-no-nami' is described in



CHIONODOXA
GIGANTEA

the 1908 Dreer garden catalog (the source of many of the plants in the gardens and around the estate) as a very early, pure white, and the Japanese iris itself as among the most beautiful of summer-flowering plants. It is well adapted to moist conditions and is often planted at the water's edge. *Iris pallida dalmatica* (now *I. pallida* spp. *pallida*) is a familiar German-type iris. It has pale blue, fragrant flowers and broad, glaucous fans of leaves. These plants are often found surviving on abandoned home sites. The third iris, 'Othello', was described on the plan as a dark blue German iris, but little other information has been found about it.



IRIS KAEMPFERI

Creeping leadwort, previously known as *Plumbago larpentiae* but now named *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*, is a rhizomatous groundcover. It was planted in several areas on the estate, including the borders along the main allée in the formal garden. Blue-purple flowers emerge from bristly red buds on this spreader in summer. It is an easy and adaptable plant for the edges of borders, where its beautiful color lends a pleasing contrast to bright yellows and oranges. This native of China grows only a few inches tall.

The netted chain fern, *Woodwardia angustifolia* on the plan, now *W. areolata*, is still extant on the banks of the former Lake Katharine, descendants of what we believe to be the original planting. This creeping fern is an eastern native in swampy and boggy areas and seems much at home creeping down the wet banks into the muck of the former lake. Looking much like the more common sensitive fern, the netted chain fern differs in its distinct fertile leaf and in the netted pattern of veins that give the fern its name.

The hart's tongue fern, then *Phyllitis scolopendrium* but now *Asplenium scolopendrium*, was Mr. Sears' other choice for bordering the lion's head fountain. This lime-loving fern would have succeeded near the wet stucco surrounding the fountain because concrete rubble is often recommended as a soil amendment for lime-loving ferns. The hart's tongue fern is one of the most beautiful and simple of foliage plants, with wavy, strap-shaped leaves that arch gracefully upward. Beneath the leaves are fertile sori (clusters of spore cases) arranged in distinct lines; in fact, the botanical specific *scolopendrium* means centipede in Greek, referring to the resemblance of multiple sori to the many legs of this creature.



PHYLLITIS
SCOLOPENDRIUM

The final plant on the list is the all-too-familiar English ivy, *Hedera helix*, which is the bane of the Reynolda woodland, where it has formed an extensive, carpeting groundcover and enveloped the trunks of many of the trees. Plants spread by ivy's well-known creeping habit, and birds help distribute the seeds.

English ivy is emblematic of the changes, both natural and artificial, wrought on this landscape. Not truly a wild or a cultivated landscape, it has become a synthesis of the two, with both wild plants and cultivated vying for space on land constantly plied by water. The order that Mr. Sears imposed on this once naked landscape is hard to visualize in its present state. Once bald hillsides are forested or turned to meadow, and willows grow where boats once glided idly. Nature, with its own plant list and its own sense of structure and balance, rules the day at the Boathouse presently. There is a beauty unique to nature's reclamation of the altered landscape. The thin veneer of order is eroded by the inexorable progress of vegetation, reminding us just how transitory our grasp on this world is. 🌱



ENGLISH IVY



Last spring, we received \$25,000 from one of our donors to do needed work on the Boathouse. We have run a new water line and repaired areas of the rock foundation that last year's heavy rains had washed out. This summer, we plan to do some painting and, if the funds can be stretched, some repairs to the walls and fountain. The Boathouse is such a unique part of Reynolda that it is important to us to keep it in good shape for all to enjoy for many years to come.

—Preston Stockton

Life at the Boathouse

by Preston Stockton, *director*

*I*n the summer of 1980, I was working as the horticulturist at Stratford Hall Plantation, the birthplace of Robert E. Lee in the northern neck of Virginia, when I received a call from Ann Cathey. Ann, who was then superintendent of Reynolda Gardens, and I are both graduates of the Sandhills Community College horticulture program, and I had known her for several years. The first thing she said was, "Where in the world are you?" She had tracked me down to tell me that she was leaving Reynolda and wanted to know if I might be interested in her job. I was raised in Winston-Salem, so I was thrilled when the position was offered to me. The first decisions I had to make were whether I was interested in living on the estate and, if so, would I rather live in the Dollhouse (also known as the Play House) or the Boathouse? With the salary that I was offered, free housing was a definite plus. The Dollhouse is a lovely structure with a great view, but it is very small, with no privacy. I had been in the Boathouse when Ann lived there and thought it was an amazing structure and location. Add to that the fact that I had a dog, and dogs and the formal gardens didn't really mix. So the Boathouse it was.

In the 1970s, then superintendent of the Gardens Paul McGill had made some modifications to the house so that the property could be used as a residence. The porch on the lakeside was enclosed and converted into a kitchen. Two walls were removed to expand small dressing rooms into larger bedrooms. A shower and an oil furnace were added.

There are several things that are unique to living at the Boathouse. One is the fact that the interior is all doors. Originally, there were eight small rooms used as dressing rooms. Arranging furniture around all of these doors was a trick. Since each bedroom had two doors, I finally just closed one of the two to each room and treated it as part of a wall. Another peculiar aspect of the house is that the floors of the house were linoleum over concrete. Considering that half of the floor is over water, they were very cold in the winter. You did not walk around barefoot October through March. There was a woodstove in the kitchen, and this did help tremendously. The flooring was an advantage in the summer because it helped keep the house very cool.

The best part of the house was the kitchen. It ran the whole length of the back of the house and was all windows that overlooked the marsh of the original Lake Katharine. Watching the seasons change through these windows was fascinating. There were daily sightings of ducks, geese, muskrats, snakes,

bullfrogs, red-winged blackbirds, and green and great blue herons. I will admit that those bullfrogs were quite a nuisance in the middle of the night, and I was forever throwing ice cubes out the windows to try to get them to move on. One night I got a call from a landscape architect who was doing some consultation for the Gardens. After a few minutes he asked me, "What in the world is that noise?" I had no idea what he was talking about but finally realized he meant the peepers that were in full voice in early spring. I became so used to their nightly drone that I just didn't notice it after a while.

Even though the Boathouse is not in the formal garden, it is still on Reynolda Gardens property, next to the nature trails. I would often sit out on the patio in the late afternoon, and I met scores of the regulars who walk and run on the trails. I didn't know many of the people by name but knew the names of their dogs. I made some very good friends this way and would often go for a walk with them when they came by.

I guess the number one question I get is about snakes. Only on rare occasions did I find one in the house, and then it was only very small rat snakes that would come in when the seasons changed. I did often see black snakes in the area; one day a friend and I watched one work its way from a tree to the roof and under the eave into the attic. Several years ago, a water pipe burst in the attic during the winter. The pipes are copper, so we called plumbers to make repairs. When I went to check on their progress, one of them called down to me to come on up, there was something he wanted to show me. The scene in the attic was almost surreal. There were snakeskins hanging from the rafters like Spanish moss; they were everywhere. Luckily, we have removed these water lines from the attic because I am not sure there is a plumber in town who would go up there again!

During the years that I lived at the Boathouse, the lake continued to fill in with silt, and the flooding of the house became more frequent. One rainy night, one of my cats came walking into the bedroom shaking water off her paws. The kitchen was under water. It was time to move. In 1992, I built a house in Pfafftown on high and dry land and now sleep peacefully on rainy nights. 🌿

A Little of Reynolda For Your Home: Anchusa

by Diane Wise, head horticulturist

Late spring is always a really busy time of year at Reynolda Gardens. We are focused on planting annuals; thinning phlox to help prevent mildew; pruning the spring-flowering shrubs; cutting back asters and Nippon daisies; dividing irises; and removing the invading anemones and loosestrife from their neighbors. Then, we progress to edging the beds and applying fertilizer and lime. Finally, we're ready for routine maintenance like deadheading the antique roses and, of course, endless weeding. Between the maples on Reynolda Road and the weeping cherries here in the Gardens, we've pulled enough seedlings to shade all of Winston-Salem!

Usually, I don't really pay that much attention to the plants that are growing here, because there is just too much to do; however, this spring, I've tried to remedy that. I've really looked at each plant, at its color, size, form, and habit, and reviewed its good points and its bad ones. To be honest, there are a few plants here that I would never recommend for anyone's garden. I won't mention any names (can you say gooseneck loosestrife, *Lysimachia clethroides*?). But there are more that I can recommend, plants that have earned the WSA (Wise Seal of Approval). They are easy to grow, hardy, and drought tolerant; do not need to be staked or divided; aren't invasive; and have a long period of bloom. One of them is the alkanet, *Anchusa*.

The genus name *Anchusa*, pronounced ang-ku-sa, comes from the Greek anchousa, meaning paint for the skin, as some were used as a type of rouge. The genus is a member of the *Boraginaceae* family and is comprised of 35 species of annual, biennial, or perennial herbs native to Europe, Africa, and West Asia. They are grown for their funnel-form flowers, which usually are intensely blue but also may be white or yellow, and are borne in terminal and axillary cymes (flat-topped clusters). The shorter annual or biennial species, such as the annual alkanet, *A. capensis*, which has blue flowers with a white throat, are useful in filling gaps left by early flowering perennials. The tufted alkanet, *A. caespitosa*, a perennial anchusa with pale blue flowers, is perfect for the rock garden or alpine garden, as well as good in hypertufa planters. The taller species, *A. azurea* and *A. officinalis*, both perennial with gentian-blue flowers, are well suited to the herbaceous border. All of the alkanets prefer a sunny position. They have no specific soil requirements except good drainage and aren't particular as to pH; either

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Creating Good Garden Soil

by John Kiger,
assistant director

At the beginning of the spring planting season, visitors to Reynolda Gardens often stop me while I am tilling and pose these questions to me—

"What did you do to make it that good? How long will it take for mine to be like that?" They are, in fact, referring to the soil in the vegetable garden, which has a very loamy texture. Most likely, everyone has seen the tiller commercial that promotes the ease of one-hand operation. If your soil is prepared well, this can be achieved; however, most of us, myself included, are blessed with an abundance of red clay in our area. The thoughts of tilling up new ground jar the imagination long before a tiller is started, but with a little planning, effort, and time, you and I can have garden soil that is very easy to work.

As the title of this article implies, good garden soil is created. There are basically three types of soil: loam, clay, and sand.

- ♥ Loamy soil, like that at Reynolda, is basically comprised of organic matter, clay particles, and sand. The advantages of this type of soil are its ability to hold moisture and nutrients and to drain well.
- ♥ Clay soil, which we have in our area, is really not as bad as people think. Without getting into a scientific discussion of cation exchange capacity, which basically describes a soil's ability to hold water, I'll just say that clay soil is comprised of tiny particles that, when wet, are sticky and will dry into either a fine dust or hard clay ball. Like loamy soils, clay does have the capability of holding nutrients and water; however, it is poorly drained, thus causing many plants to drown.
- ♥ Sandy soil. I'm so grateful to live in our area. I think if I lived in the eastern part of North Carolina, I would have some red clay shipped to me. Sandy soils are comprised of large sand particles, which drain excessively well but do not have the capabilities to store water and nutrients.

So, how do we at Reynolda maintain our loamy soil, and how can you achieve such great soil on your own? Let's start from the beginning. Let us assume for a moment that you are wishing to start your own vegetable garden, one that measures twenty by thirty feet (600 square feet). That will give you

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GOOD GARDEN SOIL

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plenty of space for an average home garden. First, find a good spot and measure out the area. A vegetable garden must receive a minimum of six hours of sunlight each day. Once you have your spot measured out, start your tiller! Don't worry about killing any grass that may be there. It will be beneficial to your plantings, as freshly cut grass provides nitrogen to the soil. Yes, I know it will be difficult. On a scale of one to ten tilling jobs, with one being the lowest in difficulty and ten being the highest, I would rate tilling new ground at least an eight. Oh yes, rear-tine tillers work by far the best for this task.

Once the ground is worked to your satisfaction—and it may take several passes—it's time to add amendments. Depending on your situation, such as access to your garden and ease of handling, you may either purchase soil amendments in bags or in bulk from local distributors or you may haul your own free leaf mulch from the city's leaf mulch distribution center. However you decide, you will want to add a two-inch layer of soil amendments to your tilled area.

Coverage and size of bagged products vary. For example, to cover this 600 square foot garden two inches deep, you will need to purchase one of the following: 100 one cubic foot bags, or sixty-seven one-and-a-half cubic foot bags, or forty two-and-a-half cubic foot bags, or thirty-four three cubic foot bags. As you can see, the larger the bagged product, the less quantity you need. If you buy in bulk, your garden will require 100 cubic feet or 3.8 cubic yards of material. Once you have your soil amendments down, you get to till some more! Work the material in with the clay until it's well mixed. You will find that as you till, it will get easier with each pass.

This is just one way to achieve good garden soil; the method I've just outlined will get you started in early spring. Another way is to add your own free material, using what Mother Nature supplies each year: grass clippings and leaves. Instead of piling them at the curb, chop them with a mulching mower and spread them over your garden. I have read articles by some who say the use of leaves can be unsightly in the garden. I disagree. Maple leaves are absolutely the best. The bright colors of sugar, red, and silver maples make for an interesting color scheme and beautify the garden. If at all possible, stay away from willow oak leaves—they never seem to break down. Recycling of these free natural products is referred to as "green waste." By using them at home, it saves precious space in landfills. Here at Reynolda, I have an area where grass clippings and other organic debris are stockpiled. Of course, we generate much more than an average homeowner, but over

the last two years, I have amassed quite a mound of good rich soil, which we apply in the garden annually or as needed.

The benefits of adding organic material to your garden are many. First and foremost, it supports beneficial microorganisms and earthworms, which help make a healthy soil by digesting decomposing materials. Other valuable aspects of amending soil are better drainage; weed control, which will not only help your prized plants grow better but will also reduce any aching muscles that you encounter after a day of pulling weeds; retention of nutrients; and maintenance of adequate moisture to plants, thereby diminishing the need to water.

There is one downside: acidity. If you primarily use leaves, like we do at Reynolda, the soil can become acidic over time; however, that is easily corrected with lime, preferably in granular form. A 600 square foot garden requires almost a forty pound bag of granular lime to correct any acidic problems. Just remember, one bag of lime for every one thousand square feet of space. (This is true even in lawns in our area.)

I've heard it said time after time that achieving something worthwhile is never easy. This is just as true of gardening as of any other endeavor. With a little hard work, determination, and patience, the benefits of a bountiful garden harvest far outweigh the effort. 🍷



GOURD PLANTS COVER A LARGE TRELLIS IN THE VEGETABLE GARDEN.

Butterflies and Herbs

by Michelle Hawks, horticulturist

As I walk through the garden, I feel as if I've discovered a secret garden of flowers and herbs, buzzing with bumblebees, honeybees, and hummingbirds, fluttering with butterflies' wings. Who would have thought of the joy having an herb garden could bring? I have always loved butterflies—the way they just float in the air from one flower to the next, not a care in the world. Have you ever watched a butterfly? I mean really, truly watched a butterfly? It dips and swirls through the air in an almost magical way. Sometimes you can almost feel your heart and imagination soaring along with their colorful wings, forgetting all your troubles and being thankful for all that you have. They flit here and there and then, all too soon, are gone. If only they would stay! They will, if you make an herb garden.

A wonderful feature of butterflies is that you can easily attract them to your backyard by providing plants on which the caterpillars can feed and flowers from which the adults can sip nectar. This will not only attract the butterflies for your own enjoyment but also help them flourish. Providing a few other things will encourage them to stay. Among these is shelter from the wind, so a butterfly's wings will not be caught in wind currents as she feeds. Plant tall shrubs, vines, or trees around the garden to provide a windbreak. A butterfly also needs a sunny spot to soak up the sun's warmth. You can provide small flat stones or bricks; they not only give butterflies a safe resting spot but also add beauty. A sunny garden will not only attract more butterflies but may actually produce more as well, so place it in the sunniest part of the yard. Butterflies, of course, also need food and water to survive. Water can be provided in a birdbath or soap dishes, filled with water, then placed throughout the herb garden.

Providing the food needed is where the herbs come in. With most herb gardens, design is an important part of the garden, but butterflies don't care about that. They just want to eat! They need the nectar-rich herb plants. Some examples of nectar plants are chive, chamomile, lavender, lemon balm, mint, catmint, basil, oregano, rosemary, sage, and thyme. To make the most of the butterfly-attracting capabilities of nectar flowers, plant them in patches rather than as isolated plants. Massed nectar flowers provide a large area of color or a strong scent that will attract the butterflies. Have nectar plants of various heights, for smaller species of butterflies often stay low, while larger species often prefer to stay high when feeding.

The larger the number of nectar blossoms, the longer the butterflies will stay in your garden. From a butterfly's point of view, you cannot have too many flowers. If acquiring lots of

plants seems expensive, consider growing plants from seed or find a gardening friend who's willing to share.

If you want even more butterflies in your garden, provide for caterpillars as well; they require a different menu than adult butterflies. Caterpillars eat the leaves and sometimes flowers and seeds of certain plants.

They are often highly selective in their tastes, and some species will eat only one species of plant. The adult female butterfly chooses these plants and then lays her eggs on them. Planting larval food plants thus will attract egg-laying females to your herb garden. Some larval plants are fern-leaf dill, fennel, comfrey, tansy, nasturtium, and parsley.

My favorite thing to watch butterflies do is mud-puddling. Mud-puddling usually occurs during the warmest hours of the day, generally between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Butterflies will gather on the moist dirt or sand beside, rather than in, the puddle, which allows them to obtain moisture without putting themselves in any danger. Interestingly, almost all butterflies at puddling sites are males. Tests have shown that the most attractive element to males at these sites is salt. Males need extra salt and other nutrients, such as amino acids, for mating. Males pass along nutrients with their sperm in a package called a spermatophore. These nutrients aid the female in producing eggs. Butterflies become very absorbed when gathering at these sites, so you can get very close to them. You can make a shallow puddle in your garden and add salt to the water from time to time. The next time you are weeding, you may come across some male swallowtails.

If you don't have an area for a butterfly herb garden, you can always put it in a container. Potted butterfly flowers bring a great deal of versatility to gardening. Move them around, bring potted cold-sensitive plants inside for the winter, or put them closer to a window. If you do use containers, remember to mass plants in one area, just as you would in a garden.

Keep a journal of butterfly activities on a daily or a seasonal basis. The information you record about butterfly behavior and preferences will help you learn how to enhance the garden and increase your success. A journal might also lead to some interesting discoveries, perhaps a new choice of host plant for a particular butterfly or a new type of hibernation spot.

With an herb garden made with butterflies in mind, you are sure to have many opportunities to watch them and be blessed by some of their magic for you to enjoy every day. 🦋



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REYNOLDA FOR YOUR HOME: ANCHUSA

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alkaline or acid will do. The species is propa-
gated by seed in late spring. Cultivars may be
divided in early spring.

We grow the Italian alkanet, *A. azurea* at the
Gardens. Drought tolerant once established, this
is the only anchusa that is adaptable to clay soil
and will tolerate some shade, making it a good
choice for our area. It can grow up to five feet in
height, so it is ideal for the back of the border,
and it does not require staking. The flowers are
showy, a lovely and unusual blue, and profuse.
They complement yellow flowers like oenothera,
calendula, and coreopsis particularly well. *A.*
azurea blooms during late April, well into May,
and, if cut back after flowering, will bloom again
in late summer. It stays covered with bees and
butterflies. The root is thick and fibrous. While it
will travel just below the soil and send up new
plants, it is not invasive. The plants can be
chopped apart and moved to other locations, if
desired. The leaves are lanceolate and large, to
fifteen inches long and three inches wide, pale
silvery green in color, and covered with fine
hairs. It looks old-fashioned, sort of like the
deutzia in the Pink and White Garden. It “loosens
up” the borders here, keeping them from
looking too refined and bringing a different
element to the mix. The Italian alkanets are on the
left of the main allée and in the outer beds of the
Blue and Yellow Garden. There are no special rules

for planting this anchusa, and it is not
particularly hard to find. Any of our
local nurseries should have a selec-
tion. Remember to cut it back after
spring bloom and give it a shot of
time-release or 10-10-10 fertilizer after
flowering, and it will reward you with
late summer bloom.

I've prepared a list of cultivars you
might want to try. Those growing here
at Reynolda are marked with an *.

**A. azurea* 'Dropmore'

A very old cultivar with deep blue
flowers on five-foot tall plant. Very
floriferous.

A. azurea 'Little John'

Long-lasting, deep blue flowers on
dwarf plant, to eighteen inches tall.

A. azurea 'Opal'

Sky blue flowers on four-foot tall
plant. Leaves dark green, tinted gray.

A. azurea 'Royal Blue'

Royal blue flowers on five-foot tall
plant. 🌸

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