

INTERVIEW WITH
2024 Scott Medal &
Award Recipient

**Margaret
Roach**
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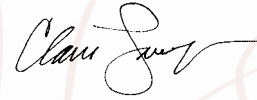
HYBRID

THE SCOTT ARBORETUM OF SWARTHMORE COLLEGE | Spring 2024

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As we celebrate the 95th anniversary of the Scott Arboretum in 2024, we are looking back on how we came to be, our notable successes, and how we have evolved to serve the mission of the Arboretum.

With the fall semester having come to a close, including the Arboretum's two Swarthmore College fall courses, I'm reflecting on how the Arboretum has engaged with Swarthmore College students over its history. The peculiarity is that, since the Arboretum is part of a liberal arts college, we have neither horticulture or landscape architecture departments nor related majors.

The first offering of educational programming specifically designed for Swarthmore College students did not start until 1970 when Joe Oppe was appointed as the second director of the Arboretum. In announcing Oppe's appointment, it was noted that he, "hopes to begin a program in horticultural education designed for the layman," recognizing that the first director, John Wister, had amassed a "superb" collection and display of ornamental plants on which to build quality programming.

To assist the new director, no doubt, the Scott Foundation Horticultural Advisory Committee was appointed and had, "as its responsibility the coordination of the Foundation's activities to the College and general public." By 1972, the Committee suggested:

"that Swarthmore College students should be offered the opportunity of making better use of the Scott Foundation's resources. Arrangements were made to offer Swarthmore students 14 sessions in practical horticulture. ... Subjects of interest for the Fall 1972 course included: campus tour, plant labeling, growth requirements of plants, turf growing, propagation, pruning, wildflower gardening, plant pest problems, and Christmas decorations. Registration response was very good. The size of the greenhouse limits our ability to serve more than 20 persons a semester, so when 54 applied ... we were forced to suggest that some students try again the following semester." (from the 1972 Director's Report)

Two years later, the Committee's minutes noted 13 students were involved in the Practical Horticulture course. Arboretum leadership changed from Joe Oppe to Judy Zuk in 1983. While there are no director or annual reports again until 1987, the course clearly continued during that transition, as the 1987 Annual Report states: "A practical horticulture course offered during the spring and fall semesters provided Swarthmore students with the opportunity to learn through hands-on experience, including sessions on propagation and houseplants." But by the next year, the course was replaced with other efforts to engage students and there was little memory or record of it when I arrived in 1990.

Since then, every college administrator I have reported to directly has, at some point, questioned how the Scott Arboretum might better engage Swarthmore College students with the mission of the Arboretum. I'm very

pleased to say we are now again offering courses specifically designed for Swarthmore College students, for which they earn credits to graduate, funded by the \$1 million endowment fund gift received from Janet Jones '61 in 2020.

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Since 2020, we have created and offered two distinct courses bringing students and plants together, both of which are offered through the Environmental Studies department. Josh Ellow has taught Nature Rx each semester since 2022 and Sue Barton, a visiting faculty member from the University of Delaware, has just completed her second semester teaching Plants and Human Culture, which replaced our 2020 inaugural course, People and Plants. Much to my deep

gratification, Sue shared some of her student evaluation comments from this semester. A sampling:

- ▶ "I enjoyed this course and the insights it provided on environmental impacts of human activity. I already made my mom watch Doug Tallamy's lecture since we are remodeling our yard."
- ▶ "I learned a lot about how we engage with the landscape and about how we can improve the ways in which we interact with nature. I really enjoyed this class and feel like I've learned a lot from it."
- ▶ "I have much more awareness and appreciation of my surroundings. I often tell my friends things I've learned from the readings."

Josh will teach another section of Nature Rx in the spring semester, and again, many more students have expressed interest in taking the course than we are able to accommodate in one section. Sixty-four students pre-registered and only 26 can be enrolled. It kind of sounds like 1972.

In addition to Nature Rx and also offered through the Environmental Studies department, we are excited to be offering a new course this spring semester. Rebecca Popowsky and Claire Casstevens, two landscape architects at the landscape design firm OLIN in Philadelphia, will teach the course titled, Seed to Systems: Design and Resilience in the Landscape Medium. They plan to have students engage in the "layered systems of landform, water, plants, movement, human and non-human use, and time. Readings and lectures on design and planning history, theory, and practice will be coupled with guest presentations on real world case studies ... much time will be spent in the field ... where spaces throughout the Scott Arboretum and Crum Woods provide opportunities for observing, sketching, and intervening." We have already had 24 students pre-registered for the class; 20 have been enrolled via lottery.

We have come a long way from engaging students in turf growing and Christmas decorations. Personally, I can't wait to read student comments next spring to gain insight into how this course impacted them and their awareness of plants and landscapes. 🌿

Students from the 2023 Nature Rx class taught by Josh Ellow



95 Years of the Best Cultivars: Flowering Cherries

Kaitlyn Lawrence, Gardener



This article is the first in a series highlighting the best cultivars and favorite specimens of a genus at the Scott Arboretum throughout our 95th anniversary.

Since 1912, cherry blossom trees, or *sakura* in Japanese, have been gifted as a symbol of friendship to the United States from Japan. One of the first collections gifted to our nation is in Washington, D.C., and consists of several cultivars, many of which are still used in gardens today. Our collection here at Scott Arboretum began in 1931. The collection was a gift from Swarthmore alumna Mrs. Allen K. White, Class of 1894, in honor of Carolien Hayes White Powers, Class of 1922. Over the years, our collection has grown to encompass the Suzanne Schmidt Memorial Garden, and comprises over 40 cultivars, ranging from small, shrub-like specimens to large, sprawling trees. As part of the rose family, *Prunus* species have become a well-loved landscape staple because of their gorgeous blooms. The genus itself contains over 400 different species, including apricots, plums, peaches, almonds, and the edible cherry.

With slightly fragrant, floriferous white racemes, *Prunus x yedoensis* (Yoshino cherry) solidifies itself on the list of favorites in our flowering cherry collection. This species of *Prunus* has a graceful, spreading habit with white blooms from March to April. They can grow to a height and spread of 40 feet, and their foliage turns golden yellow to bronze in fall. The species is a hybrid cherry with unknown ancestry that has been cultivated in Japan for centuries. We have several specimens in our collection, but one which stands out is the tree dedicated to Clementine S. Smith '17. Accessioned in 1996, it has a trunk diameter of 28 inches and a canopy spread of 58 feet. It truly is a fantastic specimen in the spring, and I often find students and visitors sitting beneath it in the spring and summer.

Prunus subhirtella 'Autumnalis Rosea' (Higan cherry) is impressive simply based on its exceptionally long bloom period, which begins in the fall. The first pale pink blooms this season were spotted in mid-November 2023, and will bloom all the way to March. This cherry flowers best in full sun with well-draining soils. 'Autumnalis Rosea' can grow up to 50 feet tall and has a spreading canopy.

If you love darker hues, you will love *Prunus serrulata* 'Royal Burgundy' (flowering cherry). This cultivar was a sport, or morphological genetic mutation, of the popular *P. 'Kanzan'* and is cultivated for its foliage. In the fall, the foliage is a bright crimson and eventually darkens into a deep, moody burgundy. Along with the foliage, the flowers are also a much deeper shade of pink than their ancestral counterparts. These magenta, double-flowered blooms begin mid-spring and the tree will develop an oval-shaped canopy up to 15 to 20 feet in height and width in full sun.

The Japanese *tai-haku* translates as 'big-white', which is apt for *Prunus* 'Tai-haku' (flowering cherry) with its huge, white, singular flowers and stunning

magenta centers. The large flowers form in clusters of two or three. At the same time, their new leaves emerge bronze-red in color, creating the perfect foil for both the blooms and in an entire landscape. A vigorous grower, 'Tai-haku' can easily reach a height and canopy spread of 20 feet with a broad, spreading habit. Now considered extinct in Japan, *Prunus* 'Tai-haku' has returned to cultivation after a specimen was found in Sussex, United Kingdom.

For the more condensed garden, I highly recommend *Prunus* 'Hally Jolivette' (flowering cherry). With a maximum height and spread of 15 feet, this tree is a great companion in a patio or small courtyard. The white, double-flowered blooms form on dense, pendulous clusters from mid to late spring. Behind its showy nature, this cultivar is one of the best because of its drought tolerance.



P. 'Hally Jolivette'



P. 'Ukon'



P. subhirtella
'Autumnalis Rosea'



P. x yedoensis

Even in extreme drought, only slight foliage burning may occur, otherwise it will keep its green well. Full sun and well-draining soil are a must for 'Hally Jolivette', but even so, it will tolerate most soil types, as long as they are not too compacted. Overall, this is a cultivar as hardy as it is beautiful.

One of the most common cultivars you will see on campus outside of the Cherry Border is *Prunus subhirtella* 'Pendula' (weeping Higan cherry). It is no surprise that this cultivar made this list, because as soon as spring arrives, one of the hottest lounge spots on campus is underneath its swaying canopies. This species is on the larger side, growing up to 40 feet tall. Once established, *P. subhirtella* 'Pendula' is adaptable to a wide variety of soils, and tolerates sun and partial shade. One particular specimen I must point out is nestled between Wharton Hall and Sproul Hall with a canopy spread of 36 feet and stands at a massive 45 feet tall.

When most people think of cherry blossoms, the first thought that likely comes to mind is of flowers in various shades of pink. For *Prunus* 'Ukon' (flowering cherry), however, that is not the case: it sports almost pistachio green to yellow flowers with deep pink centers. Flowers bloom in late spring and are sweetly fragrant. 'Ukon' has an upright, slightly branching habit, and grows vigorously. Along with its unique flowers, its serrated leaves turn a bronzy, purplish brown in the fall. This cultivar does best in full sun and well-draining soils.

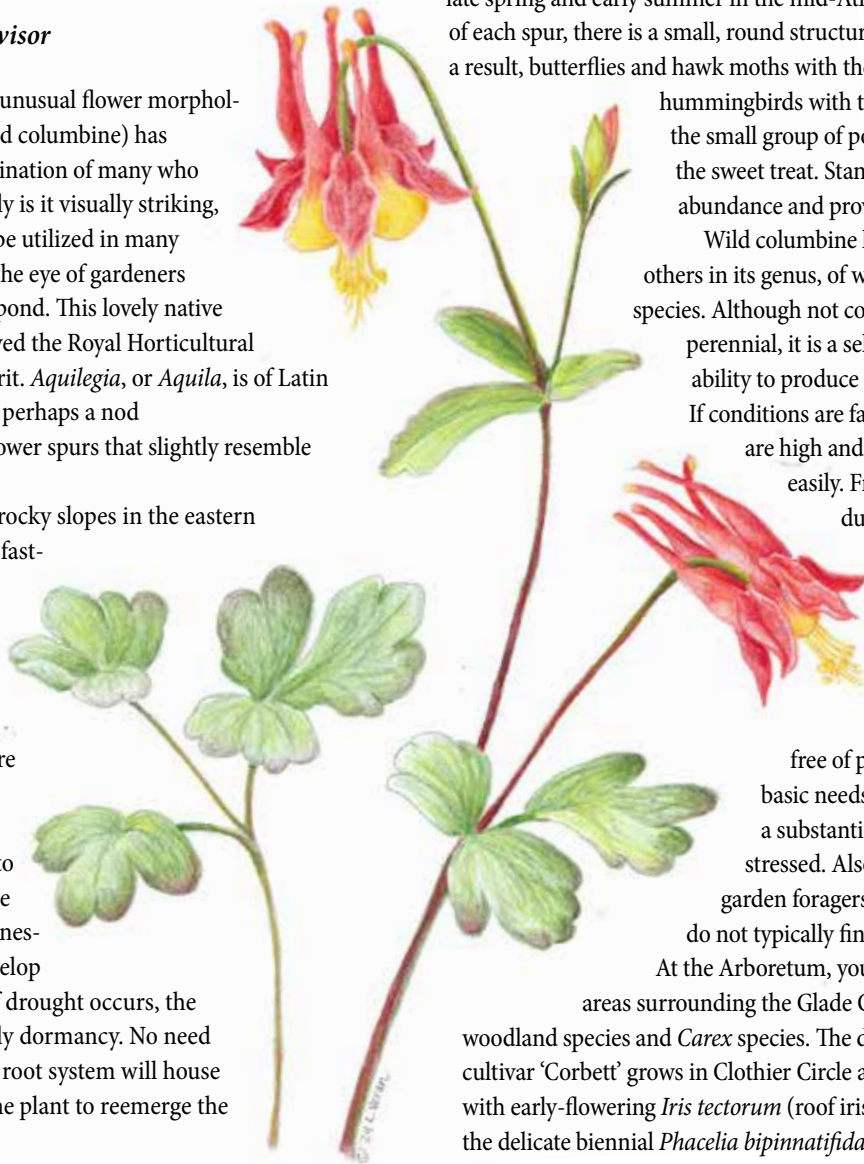
Our flowering cherry collection has been delighting students and visitors every spring for 93 of the Arboretum's 95 years. While we appreciate the beauty of each specimen, it is always worth noting the species and cultivars that stand out among the rest. Map your visit this spring with Arboretum Explorer and see which cherries stand out to you. 🌸

Aquilegia canadensis Wild columbine

Adam Glas, Garden Supervisor

Having a distinctive and very unusual flower morphology, *Aquilegia canadensis* (wild columbine) has sparked the interest and imagination of many who have laid eyes upon it. Not only is it visually striking, its adaptability and ability to be utilized in many garden situations has caught the eye of gardeners both stateside and across the pond. This lovely native flowering perennial has received the Royal Horticultural Society's award of Garden Merit. *Aquilegia*, or *Aquila*, is of Latin origin and translates as eagle; perhaps a nod to the long, hooked-shaped flower spurs that slightly resemble the talons of an eagle.

Native to woodlands and rocky slopes in the eastern United States, it is tolerant of fast-draining soil and is drought tolerant once established. That being said, it performs to its full potential in rich, moist soils in light to moderate shade. If adequate moisture is available throughout the growing season, the delicate, meadow rue-like light green to blue green, three-lobed foliage will remain attractive until senescence in late fall and may develop reddish to orange fall color. If drought occurs, the entire plant may undergo early dormancy. No need to worry; the thick tuber-like root system will house ample nutrient reserves for the plant to reemerge the following spring.



Drooping, bell-like 1- to 2-inch flowers with red sepals, yellow limbed petals, five distinctive red spurs and yellow stamens appear in late spring and early summer in the mid-Atlantic region. At the end of each spur, there is a small, round structure that houses nectar. As a result, butterflies and hawk moths with their long proboscises and

hummingbirds with their long beaks are among the small group of pollinators that can access the sweet treat. Stamens are also displayed in abundance and provide pollen for bumblebees.

Wild columbine hybridizes regularly with others in its genus, of which there are 60 to 70 species. Although not considered a long-lived perennial, it is a self-seeder and has the ability to produce a plethora of viable seeds. If conditions are favorable, germination rates are high and it can naturalize quite easily. From seed, it will flower during its second growing

season. Transplanting seedlings proves to be challenging, but mature specimens can be dug and relocated easily.

This plant is generally free of pests and diseases if its basic needs are met. Leaf miners are a substantial concern if the plant is stressed. Also, to its credit, common garden foragers such as deer and rabbits do not typically find it palatable.

At the Arboretum, you can find the species in the areas surrounding the Glade Garden among other native woodland species and *Carex* species. The dwarf, yellow-flowered cultivar 'Corbett' grows in Clothier Circle and combines effectively with early-flowering *Iris tectorum* (roof iris), deciduous azaleas, and the delicate biennial *Phacelia bipinnatifida* (fernleaf phacelia).

Welcome to the Arboretum!



Caitlin Anello joined us on November 1 as member and donor programs manager. She brings a wealth of experience in membership, donor, and communications management and development. She was most recently the membership & annual giving manager and database administrator at Tyler Arboretum for eight years. Prior to that, she held several positions at the Philadelphia Museum of

Art over the course of eight years, including membership communications assistant manager. She holds a Master of Science in arts administration from Drexel University and a Bachelor of Science in retail marketing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She noted, "The Scott Arboretum is very special to me. My family and I have made many happy memories there. Whether we are enjoying the flowers in the Terry Shane Teaching Garden or exploring the Crum Woods, Scott Arboretum is our favorite place

Plant Portraits

Bignonia capreolata Crossvine

Wylie Lapp, Public Horticulture Intern

Whether we like to admit it or not, all plant lovers have their favorite species. Within this grand botanical world of almost countless taxa, it can be hard to whittle down the plants that really move us, but whether it be for beauty, nostalgia, or uniqueness, there are ones that we are drawn to time and time again.

Bignonia capreolata (crossvine) is one of my top-tier plants, for which my fondness never seems to wane.

B. capreolata is a woody semi-evergreen vine native to the southeastern parts of the United States, where it can often be found in pine-dominant forests climbing up trees, rambling amongst the brush, or even growing along old fencerows. A member of the *Bignoniaceae* family, which is primarily a tropical family of mostly trees and shrubs, *B. capreolata* is somewhat of an oddity. Those in the mid-Atlantic are likely to be more familiar with crossvine's other native relatives: trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*) and catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides* and *C. speciosa*).

The true beauty of *Bignonia capreolata*, and one of the reasons I'm so fond of it, is its gorgeous, large orange-red and

bright yellow trumpet-shaped blooms. Flowers grow in axillary clusters of three to five and range from 1 to 3 inches in length, appearing from May through June. It is truly a thing of beauty to see an old specimen in peak bloom, glowing in peachy colors that seem almost too tropical for our area. *B. capreolata* is a robust grower, sometimes needing to be pruned mid-season to prevent it from covering the area where it is sited. Luckily, crossvine blooms on new wood, and thus can be kept in check with a hard cutback each year without missing its flowers.

In the garden, crossvine is at home growing up the side of a building, a large tree, or column. When grown up trellises or along fences, *B. capreolata* will form a lovely natural screen. It is hardy in Zones 5 to 9, and at the Arboretum (Zone 7b) its foliage turns a brilliant mahogany color come autumn, much of which is retained through winter. Crossvine is an easy plant to grow and will grow in a wide range of soil types as long as they have even moisture and are freely draining. Plants can be sited in part shade to full sun, but will flower the best in sunnier locations.

There are a handful of specimens planted tastefully around campus. Some personal favorites include 'Dragon Lady' growing on *Ginkgo biloba* (maidenhair tree) in Clothier Circle, 'Atrosanguinea' climbing up the wall as you enter the Harry Wood Garden, and 'Jekyll' growing on the side of the Wister Center greenhouse. If you visit the Arboretum while they are blooming, I am certain you will grow as fond of them as I am.



to spend time in nature!" Caitlin works on site from the Cunningham House, 9:30 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday.

We are delighted Caitlin is now spending more time at her favorite place to enjoy nature and is applying her talents to help the Scott Arboretum reach a wider audience and grow membership to the Scott Associates. *Please join us in welcoming Caitlin!*

Rebecca (Beck) Armstrong returned to the Scott Arboretum on December 5 as gardener I

on Adam Glas' gardening crew. After starting here as a summer intern in 2017, she has worked in a variety of short-term Arboretum positions and already has a strong knowledge of the campus as she begins this new role. One of those stints involved collecting field data and measuring trees for our Heritage Tree Program. Many of our volunteers are familiar with her other talents: Beck created mugs with the Arboretum's logo by hand, which were the volunteer thank-you gift in 2021. She is presently a member of the Potters Guild



in Wallingford and was most recently the assistant manager at Wedgewood Gardens in Glen Mills. *Welcome back, Beck!*



Margaret designed her 2.3 acre garden from her indoor vistas.

2024 Scott Medal & Award Recipient: Margaret Roach

Mackenzie Knight-Fochs, Education Programs Manager



The garden beds and containers closest to the house are kept with featured plants because they lend themselves to closer examination.

Margaret Roach, with a decades long career in garden writing and gardening, is the 2024 Scott Medal and Award recipient. This annual award recognizes an individual or organization who, in the opinion of the Selection Committee, has made an outstanding national contribution to the science and the art of gardening.

Margaret and her body of work is inimitable: Her journalist origin story has come full-circle at *The New York Times* with her weekly gardening column; she was the first garden editor for Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia; and since 2008, has curated her “latest horticultural incarnation” as *A Way to Garden*, comprised of her website and its companion public radio show and podcast. Thus, it was my pleasure to speak with Margaret and discuss what inspires her, how gardening has changed over time, and glean gardening wisdom to share.

On what inspires her: The initial “hook” for Margaret was the pursuit of the next cool plant; she had a collector’s garden ethic and the advent of specialty nurseries from the likes of Daniel Hinkley and Tony Avent fueled her enthusiasm. She was fascinated with not only the beauty of unusual plants not found at garden centers, but by the stories of the plants themselves: their “discovery,” and the countries and habitats in which they originated. Learning about these plants allowed her to learn about the world.

In the intervening decades, the collector ethic that she and others shared “short-circuited.” Some plants have turned out to not be good to have imported or brought to gardens, and it is not necessarily enough for a plant to simply have ornamental value. The expectation for plants in gardens to have an ecological contribution has shifted the value proposition. In 1994, she wrote *The Natural Habitat Garden* with Ken Druse, which took them across the United States to see gardens and meet gardeners who were doing early versions of habitat gardening

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARGARET ROACH



design friends as they were making dinner and staring out the kitchen window, which provided a direct sightline to the top of her driveway, where the car was parked right next to the house. This deadpan query led to an after-dinner look out every window, and realization that, unless you are designing a patio, gardens are better designed when considering what you will

see from the inside looking out. Needless to say, the following week, a contractor erased the driveway up to the house and the sightline now leads to a garden.

Let go of imperfections. If Margaret had been told she would end up hooked more on the nature part of horticulture than the drive to collect plants at the beginning, she would not have believed you. Early on, as a former city person, she was terrified of the animals coexisting with her rural garden. Now, she loves learning who is eating who, who is eating what, and understands that most creatures are just looking to eat and not be eaten. Her macro-view on gardening allows her to appreciate the processes going on throughout the day *and* night, and be unconcerned

Margaret is hooked on the nature part of horticulture. “The birds taught me to garden.”

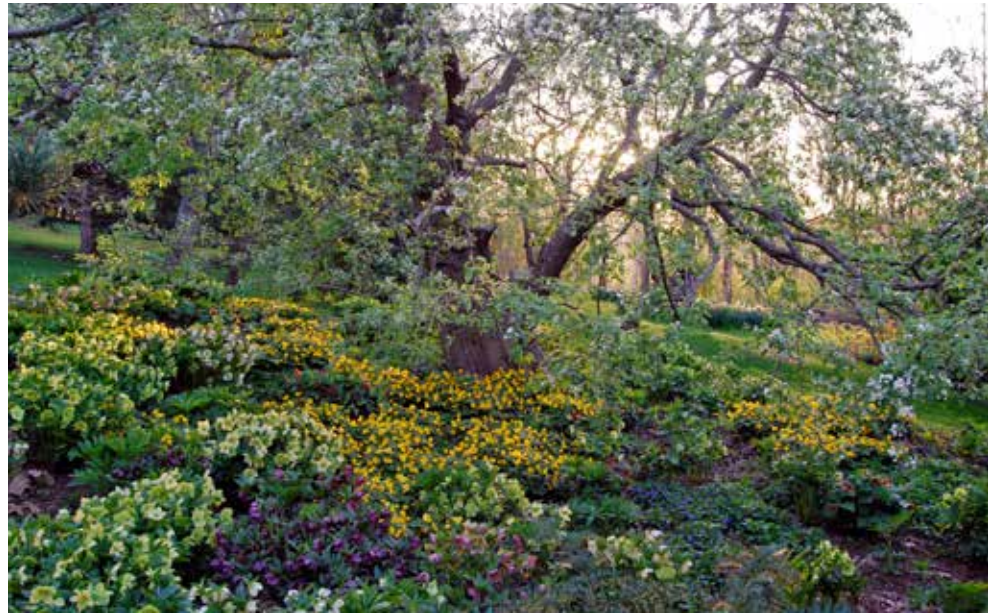
and not simply ornamentality for ornamentality’s sake. The tenets of the Scott Medal — art, science, and nature — have been “her thing” for a long time. After all, the tagline of *A Way to Garden* is “horticultural how-to and woo-woo.” It is that “woo-woo” of watching nature play out with its characters and drama that is altogether mind-blowing, contemplative, meditative, and awesome in the truest sense of the word. This is what inspires her today.

How the ecological and collector’s garden coexist: Though beginning her journey with an eye toward collecting, her 2.3 acre garden began with creating large beds at the garden’s perimeter filled with native viburnums, chokeberries, and masses of winterberries. This is not necessarily a strategy every gardener would take, but Margaret has always had an interest in art and science. These shrubs provided beautiful berries, but she also saw birds engaging with the garden, and the more birds she saw, the more birds she wanted to meet. To that end, she now has more than 70 species of birds who visit her garden annually. “The birds taught me to garden,” she often says.

This is not to say that there is no tension between her collecting impulse and having a garden that supports nature and the ecosystem. She has made peace with how she manages these two desires that could be at odds with one another, as other gardeners also do. The beds closest to the house are kept with feature plants and that lend themselves to close examination such as *Epimedium spp.* (barrenworts), *Helleborus spp.* (hellebores), and the oddball *Primula spp.* (primroses). The remaining garden space is dedicated to plantings that support wildlife and un-mowed areas that she has let grow into their “wildness.” She also eschews the use of chemicals and has a deer fence around the garden.

Garden wisdom: Margaret views her responsibility and job as a journalist as that of a researcher and curator. Her role is to be ever-curious and seek answers, tracking down the right expert, and then putting the pieces together to share with her audience, since not every gardener will have the opportunity to meet renowned horticulture and horticulture-adjacent experts. An important component to this process is figuring out the connections and knowing enough about the subject to make it interesting: “Pure art can be too high-minded; pure science can get too geeky ... I try to find the nuggets within that can tell a bigger story to a wider audience.” With this in mind, here are a few nuggets from our conversation to consider for your gardening life:

Design your garden from the indoor vistas. “Do you like looking at your car door?” was the question posed to Margaret by visiting garden



Early spring blooms of hellebores, Japanese woodland poppy, and an apple tree lighten the garden landscape.

with the impacts of those processes that some might view as unsightly.

Water is essential to everybody. Margaret learned this early lesson when she installed two in-ground water gardens simply because she wanted to have the sound of water. What she did not anticipate at the time was that it would be the smartest thing she ever did. With year-round access to water (she keeps a hole in the ice in the winter), her garden is transformed from an upland, hilly site that may not be as attractive to wildlife to a hilly site with an important amenity for all living creatures.

Margaret Roach cannot imagine life without taking this adventure in gardening, and the Scott Medal and Award is a fitting way to honor her accomplishments. Members of the Associates of the Scott Arboretum are invited to join us on Sunday, March 10 for the award presentation. ❁



HERITAGE TREE

Heritage Tree Highlight: *Taxus x media* 'Hicksii' Anglojapanese yew

Stephanie Myers, Gardener

Taxus x media 'Hicksii' (Anglojapanese yew) is a popular evergreen shrub celebrated for its durability and elegant appearance in landscapes. This hybrid yew, resulting from the crossbreeding of English and Japanese yews, boasts a distinctive columnar growth habit, making it an ideal choice for various garden settings. Located outside of Bond Memorial Hall, our specimen is 20 feet tall with a canopy spread of 36 feet. Its massive trunk gives way to many large branches extending to the sky as its lovely brown, peeling bark with undertones of soft red demonstrate its strength and resilience.



'Hicksii' was discovered by Henry Hicks of Hicks Nursery in Long Island, N.Y. It was developed from the seed of *Taxus cuspidata* 'Nana' (Japanese yew), and was introduced in 1900. It was crossed to incorporate the excellence of the English yew with the winter hardiness of the Japanese yew. Today, it is one of the most widely used plants in landscapes throughout North America. It is this cross for which Henry Hicks is most known.

With a typical mature height ranging from 18 to 20 feet and a width of 6 to 10 feet, 'Hicksii' presents a tidy and narrow profile, fitting well into both formal and informal landscapes. Its deep green, needle-like foliage provides year-round interest, creating a lush and dense backdrop in gardens.

This cultivar is most known for its adaptability and is hardy in Zones 4 to 7. It thrives in well-drained soil and can tolerate many pH levels, which makes it suitable for diverse environments.

Maintenance of 'Hicksii' is straightforward, adding to its appeal for gardeners seeking a low-maintenance addition. While it is relatively drought-tolerant once established, regular watering is essential during dry spells. Pruning in early spring helps maintain its desired shape and size, ensuring a neat and well-behaved appearance.

Whether used as a formal hedge, privacy screen, or an accent plant in mixed borders, *Taxus x media* 'Hicksii' brings a touch of timeless elegance to any landscape. Its enduring greenery, adaptability, and ease of care make it a favored choice for those seeking a reliable and attractive evergreen addition to their outdoor spaces. 🌿

Through the Heritage Tree Program, the Scott Arboretum is determining the most valuable specimens in our collections using quantifiable criteria to help preserve such trees into the future.

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The *Hybrid* is published quarterly by:

Associates of the
Scott Arboretum

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