

### Chrysanthemum

The lovely Kiku (chrysanthemum) is as much a symbol of Japan as the sakura. Like the cherry blossom, the chrysanthemum symbolizes the season, but more than that, it is a symbol of the country itself. The monarchy is referred to as the Chrysanthemum Throne and the Imperial crest is a stylized mum blossom, which is also embossed on Japanese passports. Originally introduced from China, the flower came with a legend about longevity: the story of a town whose residents all lived to be over 100



years old, where the water came from a mountain spring surrounded by chrysanthemums. Through selective breeding, the original simple flower has developed into numerous forms. For the past several years at Longwood Gardens, the Chrysanthemum Festival has included the unique 1000 blooms style plants (pictured here.) Through vigorous fertilization and pinching, Longwood horticulturists take a variety and grow it into a single plant 8 to 10 feet across with hundreds of individual blooms on it — all starting from a single cutting! Each plant takes about 11 months and nearly 100 hours of work.

### Three Friends of Winter

The New Year calls forth the "Three Friends of Winter": pine, bamboo and plum, which together symbolize steadfastness, perseverance and resilience. The pine says: "May your prosperity be as constant as the green of my mantle, and may your friends stand as I do, steadfast against the adverse winds of the world." Then the bamboo offers: "May your life be as long as mine, and may you know the joy of living abundantly." And the plum tells you: "May your hopes rise fresh and strong like the young shoots that Spring from my rugged trunk, and may your life flower with loveliness. "One of my favorite plants in the garden is *Prunus mume*, usually referred to as Japanese apricot or Japanese plum. It is one of the Three Friends of Winter and has been in cultivation for over 1500 years. In my garden (zone 7b), it blooms from mid-January through February, even with snow on the ground. It heralds the arrival of Spring for Japanese people and a time to celebrate the beginning of life renewal. *Prunus mume* is primarily grown for ornamental value. It is fast-growing, deciduous and typically grows to 15- 20 feet tall. Its blooms are gently fragrant, and it comes in red, a variety of shades of pink, and white. Because of its relatively modest height, it fits in well in small gardens. In a more extensive garden, like mine, you can grow several plants, possibly each with a different color or texture.



### Wintersweet

Susan Kasa's use of the beautiful and fragrant "wintersweet" made me decide to devote this Horticulture Corner to it. I grow *Chimonanthus praecox* (its correct Latin name) in my garden, and I can tell you that few plants can compete with its heady fragrance, especially in the depths of the winter doldrums. What makes this plant very special is that one would hardly notice it through the normal growing season. But in winter, it bursts



into lovely yellow blossoms that smell like honey and send a message of life and beauty! In their native China and Japan, they are highly prized and regularly grown. They are much harder to find in the United States, but several credible mail-order nurseries can find you the right specimen. Since they are hardy in our zone 7, not only is the plant a beautiful addition to the winter garden, but wintersweet is an excellent cut flower for our arrangements.



**Peonies**

They are called Botan in Japanese and Mudan in Chinese. I call them simply magnificent, and it appeared during her presentation that Young Oh agrees with me. I am talking about tree peonies, which are larger woody relatives of the common herbaceous peony. They grow up to 5 feet wide and tall in about ten years and are highly prized for their large, prolific blooms that can be up to 10 inches in diameter.

Seeing my love and admiration of these plants, the father of a Chinese colleague painted my tree peony and dedicated it to me after visiting my garden in 2013.

Historians agree that Buddhist monks, whether Chinese or Japanese, are a matter of dispute, who introduced tree peonies to Japan. They were valued not as ornamental garden plants but as important medicinal plants. Tree peonies were part of the great flow of goods and ideas from China to Japan. Unlike herbaceous peonies, the flower buds of tree peonies do not produce the sweet honeydew sap that attracts ants. These peonies, which bloom in late Spring to early summer, make excellent cut flowers and come in single or double forms.

I grow five of these beauties in my zone-7 garden. They are pink, yellow, purple and red and bloom in early to mid-May. The picture below is my pink one, which was used as the inspiration for the painting above.



## Horticulture Corner November/December 2018

### Lycoris



Each year around the autumnal equinox, the beautiful bright red flowers of lycoris pop up. Despite our crazy weather, this year seems to have been a particularly good year for them, not only in my garden but also in many of my friends and public gardens in our area. Lycoris has many common names, including naked ladies because they bloom after their leaves have fallen, spider lilies because of the shape of their petals, and flower of equinox because of when they bloom.

Spider lilies originated from western Iran and were planted and admired in various countries along the Silk Road until they made it to China and were planted abundantly and for some reason, especially around cemeteries, which may be why in Japan, they are surrounded with sad legends and are considered a sign of loss or death. According to one Japanese legend or superstition, higanbana, as they are called in Japan, grows in the paths of those who will never meet again. This sad story probably originates because when the flowers of lycoris bloom, their leaves would have fallen; when their leaves grow, the flowers would have wilted. Despite these sad legends, they are grown abundantly across Japan. Japan's biggest higanbana field is located at Kinchakuda in Hidaka City, Saitama Prefecture. In the peak season, the whole site is covered with over 500 million beautiful burning hot higanbana flowers, creating a most spectacular view in autumn.



## Horticulture Corner January/February 2019

### Kadomatsu

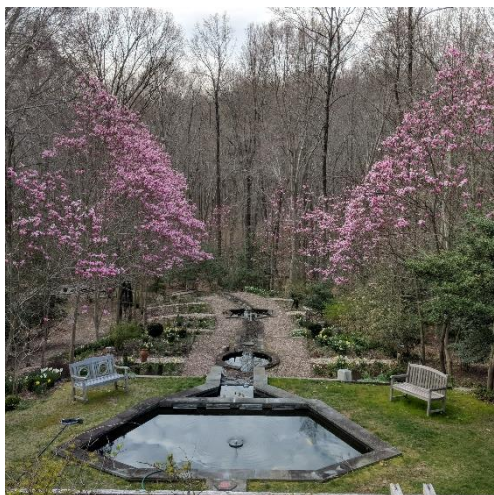


Kadomatsu decorations in Japan are part of the New Year celebrations. Usually, they are just two pines or pines and bamboo at each side of the front door, welcoming the ancestral spirits between Christmas and January 7 each year. Pines are the chosen "flower" of winter because they are evergreen and the foliage lasts long. They represent longevity, strength and steadfastness and the accompanying bamboo represents prosperity. But recently, it seems that flowering kale and cabbage are added to the displays, as in the lovely picture from a Shinto shrine below.

Flowering kale is one of my favorite cool-weather plants. The beautiful colors become stronger as the temperature drops and they provide both needed color and texture in the winter garden, particularly if it is not a very harsh winter. They are easy to grow, and in conjunction with evergreen foliage and some pine cones, can make stunning floral arrangements. I like to plant several varieties from seed, making for a very economical cutting garden, especially when nothing else is growing.



**Magnolia**



Every year in April, I look forward to the blooms of the Jane magnolias that line both sides of my Persian garden. It is the one time of the year when the "walls" of the garden are clearly seen. When designing the garden, I debated with the landscape design firm I considered hiring to help me. Among the many reasons I decided against them or anyone else was their insistence that I use Yoshino cherries instead of my desired magnolias (my guess has always been they had the cherries in stock.) I love the Yoshino's, but I find the magnolias' longer petals more majestic; the leaves come out after the flowering is over. They are a beautiful dark green and somewhat leathery in appearance. As the flowers mature and the petals fall, they make a pink carpet

over the spring bulbs, and the upright trees make a beautiful natural wall for the garden. Jane is a member of the "Little Girl" group of hybrid magnolias developed in the mid-50s at the U.S. National Arboretum. They are a small hardy tree. The flowers are a gorgeous tulip shape with a lightly scented fragrance. They have an impressive reddish-purple on the outside and are white on the inside. They open late in Spring, so they usually avoid frost damage. We are privileged to have many beautiful flowering trees in our area in early Spring; to my mind, few match the beauty of these little gems.

**Azalea**



When I think of Mother's Day, many flowers come to mind, but the loveliest picture is that of crowds of Washingtonians and visitors flocking to the U.S. National Arboretum to see the glory of the azaleas! These mainstays of Spring in the D.C. area are so popular that a decision to eliminate them from the Arboretum several years ago led to articulate protests from many locals and visitors alike and to an extensive outreach program by the incoming Arboretum Director to reach out to the public and reassure us that the azaleas would stay and continue to be a destination for many flower-loving mothers and their families on Mother's Day.

The Azaleas are also a big part of Japan's spring celebration. Nezu Shrine in Tokyo's Bunkyo ward is one of the city's most famous places to view azaleas during the flower's bloom, which usually peaks in mid-May. The annual festival is called Tsutsuji Matsuri in Japanese; visitors can see 50 varieties of flowers in the 3,000 bushes planted in the shrine's compound.





Liatriis



"Often, you've heard me say that Seika can be made of any material that can stand up vertically. For this class, I'd like you all to bring your own material," Bruce told us for our Saga Goryū class at the end of July.

I started studying with Bruce in 2010, and since he likes to use materials selected from what is blooming in the garden, I also started to grow some of my materials for our classes. One of my favorites is Liatriis. This lovely plant has so much going for it. Since we are all much more aware of wanting to plant and use natives, it is nice to know that Liatriis is native to the U.S.; its upright spikes bear pinkish-purple or sometimes white tassels in July and August after many other flowers are exhausted. It is a reliable performer in the garden, an excellent cut flower and a magnet for butterflies, bees, rare moths and hummingbirds. As if all of these qualities were not enough, it is deer-resistant! It reaches a height of 3-4 ft. Its erect, slender stems are covered in

attractive grass-like leaves. The flowers start at the top of the spike and keep opening up later as they move down the spike, making it possible to cut the top one-third part and use it and leave the lower parts to open up for a second cutting or just to shine in the garden. It has a number of apt common names, including Gayfeather (due to its protruding flower heads that give it a feathery look) and Blazing Star. It is easy to grow and beautiful to look at in the vase, as a Seika arrangement or in the field.



Cleredendrum



One of my garden's most beautiful small trees is the clerodendrum trichotomum. This lovely tree can grow to 20 feet and can be controlled to stay under 15 feet with careful pruning. It is a magnet for butterflies. When the beautiful white and slightly fragrant blooms open in late Spring, we see as many as 50 butterflies at a time all over the tree. This fabulous bush provides multi-season interest. During his demonstration on September 26, Bruce Wilson used the beautifully colored berries that appear in the Fall and attract hummingbirds during their migration south.

The name clerodendrum is derived from the Greek word for chance (Kero) and tree (Dendrum), leading to one of its many common names, Chance Tree. Clerodendrum trichotomum has edible leaves (boiled to remove the odor). The wood has been used to make clogs and the berries to make dyes. Grubs in the trunk are reported to be toasted and given to children in Japanese villages to eat to calm them down. The boiled leaves are reported to lower blood pressure. The fall berries' striking colors have led to another of its common names: Harlequin Glory Bower. The odor of the rubbed leaves or cut shoots gives rise to another name, Peanut-Butter Shrub. I have two varieties. I planted the shorter one, about 5 to 6 feet tall, next to the steps leading up to my terrace and the light fragrance in Spring is inviting. The other variety is much taller, has variegated leaves resembling dogwood, and has been confused with dogwood by many visitors. The plant is hardy to zone 7B and does very well with just a little protection against cold winds. What a shame that it is not better known and used.



Camellia



As I watched Mrs. Mihori make her beautiful, simplified arrangement using camellias, I started to think about what remarkable plants camellias are. They are native to eastern and southern Asia, but fortunately, they seem to do well in the milder parts of the U.S. and our area here in Northern Virginia and Maryland. Few small trees and shrubs offer so much: beautiful flowers that begin to bloom in winter, when few other plants offer us color; useful oil, which is a rich source of palmitic and omega-6 fatty acids and numerous anti-aging polyphenol antioxidants; beautiful glossy and evergreen leaves, shade and occasionally

fragrance, not to mention tea.

The oil is derived from the camellia's bulbous fruits and is used as a multipurpose product, serving as a food, a hair and skin treatment, and even machine oil. It is non-greasy and an excellent all-around moisturizer for skin and hair.

With its aroma, color, and taste, tea has been a source of romance and inspiration for thousands of years. It is the leaves of *Camellia Sinensis*, used to make black, white, oolong and green tea. Like all camellias, it is an evergreen shrub and known for its bountiful winter blooms. Its cousins, *Camellia Japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua* are beautiful garden plants.



*Camellia japonica*, known as Tsubaki in Japanese, is one of Japan's most famous flowering trees. *Camellia sasanqua*, also known as Christmas Camellia, is my favorite because it starts to bloom in mid-fall into winter. Camellias are long-lived plants; some Japanese camellias around the emperor's palace in Tokyo are more than 500 years old.

All camellias have a deep green color on their top surface and a bit lighter underneath and are natural for ikebana arrangements. The soft, new leaves grow after flowering in the Spring. Flower buds are formed in the Fall and open in late winter or early Spring.

My favorite camellia *sasanqua* is crimson candles, which in my garden planted against a brick wall seem to withstand snow and still look beautiful and home.

*a camellia falls*  
*a rooster crows*  
*another camellia falls*  
—Baishitsu



Winter Blooming Shrubs

Prunus mume  
Matsuhara



We all like to gather at least some of our ikebana materials from our own gardens, and during winter, except for evergreens and bare branches, there seem to be scant materials. But thanks to the many winter-blooming plants that are featured in the Saga School magazine during the cold season, I learned to add several unusual and very beautiful plants that like to bloom in winter. A mild winter day, and this year we seem to have many of them, gives me a chance to stroll through the garden, admiring the bare tree branches and

the many unexpected beautiful little winter-blooming bulbs and the shrubs and trees that add color to the winter garden. As I am writing, in my garden, the prunus mume (Japanese apricot trees) are in full bloom with their pink, white and red flowers, brightening the garden and heralding the glories of Spring to come. This early in February is the earliest they have bloomed; they usually begin opening up in mid-February and their lovely blooms put on a show right up to the first day of Spring in mid-March. The snowdrops have been blooming for almost three weeks. Their nodding heads are admired by the squirrels that peep their heads out, especially on the warmer days, as if they are looking to see if Spring is here yet. The winter-sweet (Chimonanthus praecox) and the winter-blooming honeysuckle (Lonicera fragrantissima) have been perfuming the air. Some sturdy camelias,



Winter-Sweet

Winter Blooming Honeysuckle

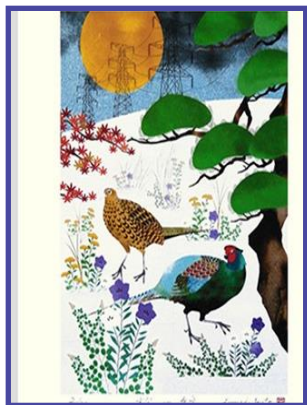


Chinese paper bush (Edgeworth), Carolina jasmine, and hellebores add color in unexpected corners. Winter is when I look to some of the indoor tropicals for some inspiration. Inside the glass of the screened-in porch, the amaryllis and cymbidium orchids are joined by Brunfelsia's unusual and fragrant flowers (yesterday, today and tomorrow plant) so-called because its dark purple flowers gradually fade to white. On any given day, it is covered in dark purple, light purple and white blooms. The clivias have just started to reach their peak. They are perfect indoors for the winter since they do not need water during the colder and darker seasons and like to bloom during this dry period. With all these lovely

companions, gathering ikebana materials from the winter garden is still possible!



Platycodon



Aki-no Nanakusa, with  
Balloon Flowers

Recently I read that almost 30% of Americans say that Fall is their favorite season. There is even some scientific evidence that Fall is a favorite because it is associated with comfort, going back to school, meeting friends, and beginning the holidays.

Although, as a gardener, I put Spring ahead of Fall on my list of favorite seasons, I enjoy the quality of light and brisk weather and even watching the garden slowly being put to bed. I also love Fall's colors, including the

beautiful colors of the flowers that enjoy the cooler weather and produce their most lavish displays in Fall. Among my favorites are the dainty, sky blue flowers of *Platycodon grandiflorum*, commonly called the Chinese Bellflower (because of its star-shaped open flowers) or the Japanese Balloon Flower (due to its buds that puff up like tiny balloons before they open).



Platycodon Buds

I started to grow them about ten years ago in my garden and have enjoyed seeing them increase in clumps over time, livening the beds with their beautiful sky blue colors. Their delicate beauty makes them excellent candidates for ikebana arrangements.



Saga Goryu Arrangement  
by Bruce Wilson

*Platycodon* originates in eastern Asia and is native to Japan, China and Korea. In Japan, it is called Kikyo and is described through ancient haiku poems as one of the "seven flowers of autumn" (Aki-no Nanakusa 秋の七草).

*Flowers blossoming in autumn fields  
When I count them on my fingers  
then they number seven*

--- Yamanoue-no Okura

### Witch Hazel



During the winter months, when few flowers are blooming in the garden and what is available in stores is unimaginative, the branches of shrubs and trees play the starring role in my ikebana arrangements. Certain trees and shrubs, particularly those with winter-blooming flowers, are my favorites. Witch Hazels (*Hamamelis*) are among such lovely shrubs. They brighten the garden and keep it interesting. And when branches are brought indoors, the flowers perfume the air and the branches make for attractive lines in the floral designs. You

may know that there is nothing related to magic about these plants. The name originates in the middle English "*wiche*," meaning pliant. The flower bracts look like spiders exploding from the center in burgundy, orange or yellow. Witch hazel has a delicate scent, sweet but slightly citrusy. It is easy to grow as long as windy or shady sites are avoided. Like so many other beautiful shrubs, Witch Hazels have many medicinal properties and are also used in cosmetics as an astringent.

**Witch Hazels** set their flower buds during the previous year's growing season. Outdoors, once plants have experienced a 6-8 week cold spell followed by mild, moist weather, the flowers will begin to open. It is after this cold stretch that you can take cuttings. If you have a nice big plant in your garden, why not sacrifice a few budded branches for indoor arrangements? Splitting the stem base allows for better water intake; they may last as long as a month.

What distinguishes witch hazels in the plant world is that flowers, fruits, and next year's leaf buds can manifest simultaneously on the plants; indeed, *Hamamelis*'s generic name translates as "together with fruit." Some witch hazels put on a fall color show, their foliage aging from butter yellow to orange, finally turning scarlet before falling exhausted to the ground. The climax to this show comes with the fruit: two-parted capsules, each about a half-inch long and containing a single glossy black seed, split open with such explosive force that seeds land as much as thirty feet away. The sheer diversity, beauty, and all-season appeal of witch hazels have put them near the top of the list of valuable garden shrubs.



## Horticulture Corner March-April 2021

### Rapeseed

March is the perfect time to talk about Nanohana, literally "Vegetable Flower." This beautiful flower is completely edible. In Japan, it has been mentioned as a food source for almost 2000 years. It is said



that the oil from this flower is what lit up Edo (Tokyo). In Canada, it is best known as Canola (Canadian oil). In Italy, the young plant is called Rapini (broccoli rabe), and these days, you can find it in the gourmet sections of your favorite supermarket. Its common name in English is Rapeseed.

Although extracted from the same flower, Rapeseed oil is used when talking about the industrial

uses of the oil in automotive and chemical industries, and canola is used when talking about it as a food product in baking, cooking and food processing.

As you can tell, it grows in many parts of the world. In warmer areas, it begins to bloom in late February and early March. In colder areas, such as Canada, it will bloom in May. A rather surprising place to see a yellow carpet of rape blossoms in Tokyo is near Shimbashi Station, in



Hamarikyu Gardens, where tens of thousands of plants can be seen.

In Tokyo, Japanese flower lovers can also take the Kominato Railway/Isumi Railway line from Goi to Ohara in Chiba, which winds its way around the countryside - through gorgeous canola fields.

For those who like to use wildflowers in their ikebana designs, Rapeseed adds a vibrant touch of color. The Ikebana International Magazine used it as its cover photo for Volume 34, Issue 2 (1989-1990.)



*Flowers of Rapeseed*  
*The moon in the east*  
*The sun in the west*





## Horticulture Corner May/June 2021

### Ranunculus



On May 11, our Annual Meeting & General Workshop is using as its theme the Japan Greenery Day, which is celebrated on the day of the past Emperor Hiro Hito's birthday. The flower of the day for this occasion is the Ranunculus. Ranunculus is also called the Persian Buttercup. It is a beautiful flower with layers upon layers of petals that are both delicate and showy. They come in a wide variety of pastel colors. A bouquet of Ranunculus radiates charm and elegance. There are several stories about the origins of its name. One is that because they usually grow abundantly along streams surrounded by tadpoles, the name is a combination of two Latin words: rana, meaning frog, and unculus, meaning little. Thus, the name ranunculus means 'little frogs.' The name, Persian Buttercup, originates from a Persian fairy tale of a young prince dressed in colorful layered robes who falls in love with a beautiful nymph. He would visit and sing to her all night and day! The other nymphs finally got fed up with his

constant singing, turning him into a ranunculus flower. Another version of the tale is that the nymph never returned the prince's admiration, so he died of heartbreak. A ranunculus now blooms in the place where he died. Ranunculus are cool weather plants. In the garden, they like to grow in sandy or loamy soil with good drainage and a slightly acidic soil pH. If you have heavy soil, amend it with peat moss or plant in raised garden beds or containers, where you can control the soil makeup. They are long-lasting, usually blooming for over a month. The Ranunculus is an excellent cut flower. It will keep its vibrancy long after it has been cut from the garden. Once this flower has been cut, it will last up to 7 days without needing any special food or care.





### Castor Bean



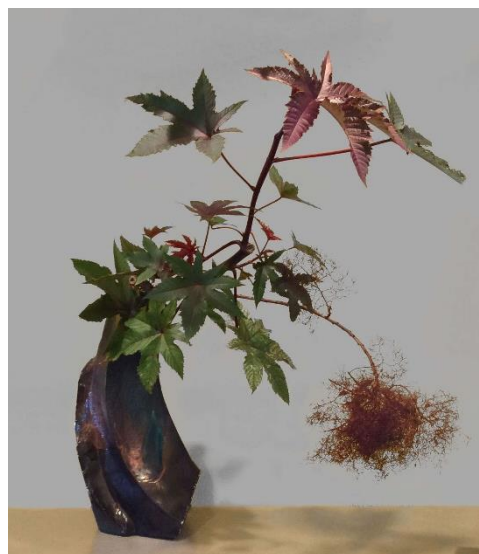
Motivated by one of Diana Cull's lessons to use unusual materials for arrangements, I went for a walk through the garden in search of unusual plants. The large and statuesque Castor Bean plant caught my eye and made me wonder why I have not seen it used more often in arrangements. I grow the castor oil plant, also called castor bean, because of its beauty, architectural impact, and tropical looks. It reminds me of my childhood when my mother treated any signs of stomach upset with a spoonful of castor oil.

Castor bean (*Ricinus communis*) is native to tropical East Africa around Ethiopia. Castor bean has been cultivated since 7000 B.C. or so. The seeds have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs. In ancient times, the oil was used as fuel for lamps and is now used in paints and varnishes, for water-resistant coatings, in high-performance motor oils, soap, inks, and plastics.

Castor bean is a beautiful plant with large (almost foot-long) star-shaped leaves with many deeply incised lobes with serrated edges and prominent central veins. The species has glossy green leaves, and cultivated selections may have black-purplish, dark red-metallic, bronze-green, maroon leaves, or bright green leaves with white veins. The seed pods may be green, pink, or red, depending on the variety. It is very easy to grow. I save seeds from my plants each year and in Spring soak them in water for about two hours and then plant directly in the flower bed where I want it to grow. It flowers from June to October. The seed pods are much more striking than the blossoms. The small flowers form dense, crowded clusters or panicles that can be one to two feet in length. These contain numerous, crowded blooms. Possible colors are yellow, whitish, greenish, or reddish-brown.

The toxin in castor seeds is ricin, one of the deadliest natural poisons, estimated as 6,000 times more poisonous than cyanide and 12,000 times more poisonous than rattlesnake venom. Ricin features in many murder mystery novels because there is no antidote to the poison.

As ornamentals, castor beans are sometimes planted as an annual hedge or screen. Shorter varieties are suitable for large containers. Some gardeners grow this plant to repel moles.



### Dahlia



In our household, I am the gardener, and my husband enjoys the garden when he can sit in the shade with some wine and cheese and a cat or two walking around or sitting at his feet. However, there is one big exception when he does all the work, and I enjoy the cut flowers in my arrangements; the exception is dahlias, his favorite flowers. As the weather cools and other flowers and colors begin to wane, the dahlia flowers shine with a spectacular combination of beauty and form in a rainbow of hues. Not only are they beautiful, but they also have an impressive vase life of seven days or more. It is hard to believe these floral divas grow from unremarkable tubers planted in Spring to become some of the most anticipated summer stars.

We are indebted to the Aztecs for these beauties; they were used as a food source by the indigenous peoples and were both gathered in the wild and cultivated. The Aztecs used them to treat epilepsy and employed the long hollow stem of the *Dahlia imperialis* for water pipes. They are variously referred to as "water cane," "water pipe," "water pipe flower," "hollow stem flower," and "cane flower." All these refer to the hollowness of the plant's

stem.

There are 30 species and over 20,000 cultivars of dahlias. Those cultivars are categorized based on size flower-pattern and resemble other flowers (like waterlilies, anemones, and cactus blooms). The large decorative and cactus types are among the most popular, and many varieties are used in cut flower gardens.

They are common wedding flowers, not only for their looks but also for their symbolic meaning. During the Victorian era, dahlias were a symbol of commitment and an everlasting union. They are also used to represent inner strength, creativity, and elegance. In Japan, they are seen as a sign of gratitude.

Dahlias range in color from white and yellow to orange, pale pink, lavender, and red. Bloom size ranges from half an inch to a foot or more across. Flowers may be in tight balls to very open, from single to double, with petals that are flat, curved, or rolled into tubes. The dahlia, a relative of the daisy, was first cultivated by Aztec botanists in Mexico. In the early 1500s, it was discovered by Spanish explorers who brought this tuberous plant back to Europe. Interestingly, they had the same problem with storing the tubers as many modern-day gardeners. The genus *Dahlia* gets its name from an 18th-century Swedish botanist, Andreas Dahl.



## Willow



One of the most versatile trees in the landscape is also one of the most graceful subjects in flower arrangements. The Willow tree can be grown to provide shade or make a hedge or privacy screen, or one can grow a dwarf willow tree for a more compact space or a soft, weeping look. One of the most valuable traits of the willow tree is its flexibility. The willow is one of the few trees capable of bending in outrageous shapes without snapping. The symbolism of the willow tree represents strength, stability, standing firm and withstanding the greatest of challenges. The branches are flexible and strong, bending without breaking. The leaves represent the balance, harmony, and growth we experience through life's challenges.

The willow tree is one of the easiest trees to use in arrangements because its branches easily bend. Willows are usually displayed with leafless green shoots that sway like arms above the old trunk and can give the suggestion of bowing over a quiet stream and nodding. In old Japanese prints, willows are usually shown in three styles and each symbolic of a season: willow in Spring, with parted branches and a gentle breeze flowing through, willow in the wind as in the Fall with a full curved sweep of leaves, and willow in the snow, when stems are held straight as if they are supporting the heavy burden of the snow.



I am writing this column very soon after Thanksgiving, which perhaps contributed toward focusing this column on the willow, with all its associations of balance, harmony, growth, hope, sense of belonging, and safety it seemed appropriate, both for Thanksgiving and as a start to a Happy New Year!

*How calm and serene  
The flowerless willow*

### Jewels of Opar



I asked several friends if they had heard of Jewels-of-Opar. The answer was rather surprising. Two said they remember their grandmother talking about Tarzan and Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan books. So, I looked it up, and Jewels-of-Opar is mentioned in his 1913 book, *The Return of Tarzan*, and then in 1916, he wrote *Tarzan and the Jewels-of-Opar*.

I was talking about a plant (*Talinum paniculatum*). Seeing that this plant has a common name synonymous with a mythical ancient city full of riches gives a clue that someone bestowing its common name thought very highly of it. Kathy York, a friend who owns a cut flower farm (Scarborough Farm) in southern Maryland, introduced me to this plant. I fell in love with the plant and asked Kathy for seeds or cuttings. She warned me that it self-sows abundantly, and I must promise not to blame her if I find it appearing all over the garden. In fact, it has been relatively well-behaved and easily controlled in my garden.

Jewels-of-Opar has attractive, succulent-looking, chartreuse-colored, edible foliage and sends up arching 2-3 foot long panicles adorned with light to hot pink 3/8 inch star-shaped flowers. The flowers repeatedly bloom over a long period. It is also known as Fame Flower or Pink Babies Breath. The edible leaves are a Purslane relative and eye-catching. I have been told it is great in salads, sandwiches, and as a spinach substitute. It also has medicinal uses; in Traditional Chinese Medicine, this plant is known as Tu-renshen and is used to tone digestion, moisten the lungs, promote breast milk, and treat headaches. It's an aphrodisiac and treats pneumonia and diarrhea. The roots are used to cure impotence.



Jewels-of-Opar make an excellent cut flower. The airy spikes and shiny red globes are wonderful fillers for all flower arrangements. The stalks can also be dried and are attractive in dried arrangements - seedpods dry down to shades of orange, red, brown, gold, and grey. It grows in sun or part shade and tolerates poor soil. When the flowers fade, they are replaced by tiny, jewel-like fruits that resemble precious stones. The pollinators, including bees and hummingbirds, love the plant.



### Nemophila

May is a beautiful month in Japan with many flowers to greet visitors. Among the places dedicated to large displays of flowers is the Hitachi Seaside Park. The park features various beautiful seasonal flowers and large green spaces; it is never more beautiful than when the blue Nemophila flowers bloom at the beginning of May!



Nemophila Flowers

**Nemophila** (*Nemophila menziesii*) is an annual herb. It is a native plant of North American origin, mostly Pacific coast. Its common name is Baby blue-eyes. The five-lobed, wheel-shaped flowers range in color from blue to white and may have blue veins; the blossoms are about 1.5 inches across. The leaves are divided into five to nine lobes. The plants, sometimes creeping, can grow to about 6" inches tall and spread to 12" inches wide. The plants bloom profusely in cool weather.

Nemophila means "woodland-loving;" it derives from the Latin *nemos* (a grove or wooded pasture) and Greek *philos* (loving).

The display at Hitachi Seaside Park is made with over 5 million plants of 'insignis blue' variety sown on 4 hectares to create an almost neverending sea of blue on Miharashi Hills at 190 feet above sea level. The blue of the flowers flows seamlessly into the blue Spring skies next to the blue ocean.

To achieve this display, in November, the soil is renewed, and Nemophila seeds are planted and covered with white sheeting to protect the plants from frost. As Spring approaches, the plants are watered, and any weeds are removed until the nemophila are ready to flower. The display lasts until mid-June when the warming weather stops the flowering.



Nemophila Display at Hitachi Seaside Park

### Seven Sisters

Fall is just around the corner, and our thoughts move from the abundance of summer vegetation to the relative quiet of autumn. In Japan, where attention to flowers and plants is part of the culture, seven autumn flowers (collectively known as aki no nanakusa) are celebrated and often depicted in paintings and described in haiku and other literature. All, except for Kudzu, are popular garden plants and, when massed together, make for amazingly beautiful fall scenery; all are edible and have medicinal value. When used in floral arrangements, they add a special flair to the design. Except for carnations (a member of the Dianthus family), they are not available through florists but can be grown in the garden, enabling us to experience the joy of exploring our gardens for our ikebana materials.

The seven fall flowers were enumerated by the poet Yamanoue Okura (ca. 660–ca. 733).

*Flowers blossoming  
in autumn fields-  
when I count them on my fingers  
they then number seven  
The flowers of bush clover,  
miscanthus, kudzu,  
dianthus, patrinia,  
also, mistflower  
and bellflower*

The next time you find yourself in Tokyo in the Fall, you can visit the Mukōjima Hyakkaen Garden in Sumida, where all seven are grown. In the U.S., the Japanese Garden in Seattle grows four of the seven: Lespedeza (Bush Clover), Miscanthus, Eupatorium (Mistflower) and Platycodon (Bellflower)-- blooming there during the early months of Fall.

Hagi: bush clove. Lespedeza



Kuzu: kudzu, Pueraria montana

Kikyou: Chinese bellflower, Platycodon



Nadeshiko: pink Dianthus



Ominaeshi:  
patrinia,  
Valeriana  
officinalis



Fujibakama:  
boneset,  
mistflower,  
Eupatorium  
perfoliatum



## Horticulture Corner November /December 2022

### Accers

If you love horticulture and gardens, Fall is most likely your first or second favorite season. In the Spring, I enjoy the exuberance of the new foliage and the promise of renewal in the bulbs and blossoms. Fall is more calming; the colors are subdued, and the garden signals that it is ready to sleep for winter. I hope the picture I am evoking in your mind's eye matches the view from your window into the garden. There are the magnificent Acer (Japanese Maple) changing their foliage color from green to red, yellow or purple; supplemented with the beauty of the Fall



blooming Camelias and Colchicums, and the fireworks display of the Lycoris (naked lady) and various chrysanthemums in red, yellow, and white.

All ikebana practitioners love chrysanthemums, but to Saga Goryu practitioners, and I am one of them, chrysanthemums are more than just beautiful plant material. They are the symbol of the School and the Imperial Family, who have granted permission for the School to use Kiku as its symbol in honor of its founder, Emperor Saga.

For those interested in the Acers, I recommend visiting this website: <https://essenceofthetree.com/>. I want to make sure that it is clear and understood that I am recommending this nursery only as a fellow hobbyist.



And if you feel ready for a short trip, consider the exhibits and events at the New York Botanical Garden

<https://www.nybg.org/blogs/plant-talk/2011/10/exhibit-news/video-take-a-look-inside-fall-flowers-of-japan/> or at Longwood Garden <https://longwoodgardens.org/gardens/our-seasons/chrysanthemum-festival>. Note that the Longwood Garden show ends on November 13.

*it is quiet  
the monk sips his morning tea  
chrysanthemum flowering*

*Basho*



## Horticulture Corner January /February 2023

### Amaryllis

Although this is the January/February issue of the Newsletter, I know you will receive it ten days before Christmas. It is hard to think of flowers at this time without thinking of popular Christmas flowers. Among the most popular is one of my favorites: Amaryllis.

Although Amaryllis is a tropical plant, it is among some of the easiest and most impressive flowers you can grow for Christmas. The huge, trumpet-shaped blossoms measure up to 8" across and come in amazing colors, from velvety red to pink, peach, white and even pale green. Amaryllis means "to sparkle" in Greek. Another reason it is a popular Christmas plant. One of the reasons Amaryllis are so special is that everything needed to produce a living bouquet of big, beautiful flowers is self-contained. Just plant the bulb, give it some light and water sparingly. Amaryllis bulbs may also be grown without soil. Fill a vase or watertight pot with about 5" pebbles or coarse stone. Add just enough water to cover the stones. As water evaporates or is absorbed by the developing roots, add more water, keeping the level just below the base of the bulb.

Amaryllis should probably be more popular than they are for floral arrangements since they have a very long "vase life."

One of our fellow I.I. Chapter No. 1 members, Keith Stanley, has posted a lovely picture of his Amaryllis arrangement on his website. In his arrangement, he is using Amaryllis facing both upward and downward. It makes a beautiful display, and one of the reasons it works is that he is using another feature of this gorgeous plant. You can pour water inside the open stem of the upside-down Amaryllis, cover it with candle wax to prevent evaporation, and have an arrangement that lasts for all twelve days of Christmas and more!

I could hardly have asked for a better example of art and nature meeting to bless a Happy Holiday season!!



## Edgeworthia



March is among my favorite times in the garden when anticipation for the new blooms is high and every day brings change. One of the lesser-known treasures of the March Garden is Edgeworthia Chrysantha, a shrub native to woodland areas of China and the Himalayas.

*Chrysantha* refers to its golden yellow flowers. The common name, Paperbush, comes from its use to

produce high-quality paper. Plants are widely cultivated in Japan for use in making the paper used in the production of Japanese banknotes.

Edgeworthia branches easily without much need for cutting and pinching to produce a well-formed shrub. Its silvery buds are formed in late summer into fall, but the fragrant flowers begin to bloom in December when it is nothing but a bare silhouette in the garden. Flowering continues through the winter. The individual florets are tiny, but a few dozen make up 2–3-inch clusters of beautiful yellow flowers and the fragrance rivals that of a gardenia. Be sure to snip and bring in a few blooms to keep the house fragrant through the winter.

Because of the beautiful branches, it is an excellent plant to use for ikebana. The stems can last in water for upwards of a week.

Edgeworthia thrives in partial shade. After the blooms pass, lovely bluish foliage with silvery undertones appears that is eye-catching and soothing. The foliage turns a nice yellow in the fall. Among its other favorable attributes, it is disease and deer resistant.



## Horticulture Corner May /June 2023

### Lilac

Lilacs are among the oldest shrubs in cultivation. Like most garden plants, these lovely shrubs originate in Iran, Turkiye and China. The common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) grows to about 20 feet and is widely grown in temperate areas of the world; it originates in Turkiye. It has deep purple, lavender, pink and white flowers. The Persian lilac (*Syringa persica*) has a more drooping habit and grows to about 7 feet. Its flowers are usually a pale lavender, but darker and even white varieties exist. The Chinese lilac (*Syringa chinensis*) is thickly branched and is a cross between the Persian and common lilacs. The Japanese lilac tree (*Syringa reticulata*) can grow up to 30 feet tall.

Known as the "Queen of Shrubs," lilacs are some of the hardiest and most fragrant flowering bushes we use in our gardens. The lilac's scent is stronger in full sun and is commonly used in perfumes and soaps. Lilacs usually bloom profusely every other year and benefit from pruning during the abundant year, which provides a perfect opportunity for the ikebana artist to cut and use them in floral arrangements.



The scientific name *Syringa* comes from Greek mythology. It was said that Pan, the god of forests, was in love with a nymph named Syringa. As he chased her through the forest one day, she turned herself into a lilac shrub to disguise herself. Pan found the shrub and used part of it to create the first panpipe (syrinks means pipe in Greek). The stems of the common lilac have a spongy pith that can be removed, leaving hollow tubes used to make panpipes.

Lilacs have different meanings in different cultures. The Celts saw lilacs as magical because of their sweet scent. During the Victorian age, lilacs symbolized old love—widows often wore lilacs. In Russia, holding a sprig of lilac over a newborn baby was thought to bring wisdom. Each color of lilac has its specific meaning. White lilacs represent purity and innocence, while purple lilacs symbolize spirituality. If the blooms edge more on the blue side of the color wheel, they symbolize happiness and tranquility. Red lilacs symbolize love and passion.



## Horticulture Corner November / December 2023

### Eryngium

Eryngiums, commonly known as sea hollies or thistle flowers, are a captivating choice for those who like using our gardens to provide ikebana materials. My introduction to these unusual plants came as I visited the famous English plantswoman Beth Chatto's gardens in the 1970s. Beth had combined Eryngiums with other drought-tolerant perennials in her Dry Garden, making an eye-popping scene.



Eryngiums are instantly recognizable due to their spiky, globe-like flower heads surrounded by a crown of sharp, silvery-blue bracts. These bracts often resemble thistles or prickly sea urchins, giving eryngiums a distinctive and exotic allure. Their color palette ranges from deep blues and purples to vibrant greens and metallic hues, making them versatile elements in ikebana arrangements. Eryngiums' architectural form and intriguing texture add a touch of drama, texture, and contrast. Their spiky structures can be a focal point or provide a dynamic counterpoint to softer, more delicate flowers, leaves, or branches. Eryngiums have a long season in the garden, blooming all summer and fall.

When used in floral arrangements, their sharp edges and geometric patterns can add structure and order, while their vibrant colors inject life and energy. Furthermore, eryngiums' durability makes them suitable for ikebana displays that can last for an extended period, maintaining their form and texture over time. The natural variance in eryngium colors and forms allows artists to create diverse arrangements that evoke emotions and themes, from tranquility to vibrancy.

Their unique form, vibrant colors, and intriguing textures make them versatile and captivating components in ikebana arrangements. As you look to add flowers to your landscape that also support your ikebana needs, Eryngiums should be among the plants you select.



## Horticulture Corner January / February 2024

### Orchid

The day before writing this piece, it was grey and cloudy; I walked into my greenhouse, and the world was transformed. Eighteen different orchids were in bloom, and their elegant and exotic blooms washed away the grey and brought peace and beauty. I grow five varieties of orchids: Phalaenopsis, Cymbidium, Dendrobium, Cattleya, and Epidendrum. But do you know that there are over 25,000 varieties of orchids? They grow in every part of the world except Antarctica and have existed for over 100 million years. They are one of the oldest known flowering plants. In Japan, they are called Ran and are known as the Princess of Flowers, which seems an appropriate name for the flower I find was almost created for ikebana.



Their intricate and exotic blooms exude an aura of regal elegance. Like any flower with a long history, orchids are associated with many symbolisms, including love, luxury, fertility, refinement, charm, thoughtfulness, and beauty. They come in a range of colors, shapes, and sizes, allowing ikebana artists to create diverse compositions. They seem to embody harmony, balance, and the appreciation of nature's beauty.

Like many old flowers, orchids have medicinal and culinary uses. In traditional Chinese medicine, certain orchids treat many ailments, from cancer, lung disease and stomach deficiencies to eye disease and kidney ailments, usually as tea. Dendrobiums (Bamboo Orchid) have been used in Taiwan, Korea, and Japan to treat stomach aches and night sweats. Vanilla planifolia orchids are used to treat hysteria, fevers and impotence. Other kinds of orchids were used to treat wounds and sunstroke, and a compound extracted from orchids is being tested as a potential new treatment for prostate cancer. Orchids can absorb heavy metals and other toxins from the air, soil and water. Researchers hope this quality can be harnessed to help remove pollution from contaminated areas.

The vanilla bean is the seed pod of the vanilla orchid (*Vanilla planifolia*), the only type of orchid to produce edible fruit. Vanillin, derived from the vanilla bean, produces an instantly recognizable flavor and fragrance. It's used in baking, the perfume industry and, of course, to make the world's most popular ice cream flavor!



In the Middle East, orchid tubers are ground up to make a starchy, flour-like powder known as Sahlab. Together with milk and sugar, Sahlab is used to make a hot, creamy, comforting beverage popular in the Middle East. Sahlab is an ingredient in some desserts, such as Turkish Delight.

*An evening orchid,  
Hidden in its scent,  
The flower's whiteness*

— Buson

## Horticulture Corner March /April 2024

### Japanese Quince (Chaenomeles)

Many of my favorite ikebana arrangements are made with material cut from my garden. It's not just because they come at no cost; these botanical treasures are the fruits of my gardening labor and bring immense joy as I witness the seamless harmony between my home and garden. Also, several lovely branches are rarely available to purchase and can only be used when cut from the garden. One such is the Japanese Quince (Chaenomeles) or "Boke" in Japanese.



Flowering Quince is a tough, hardy plant that lends itself to making a great informal hedge. Its tangled and dense twiggy growth and spiny branches will make it a natural barrier against the deer. Tangled branches make a perfect territory for sheltering bird nests and the homes of other small wildlife in winter. Around March and into April, it will flower profusely with medium-sized, scarlet-red,

pink or white blooms. Fortunately, this plant should be pruned in the spring to shape and stimulate the growth of flowering spurs for the next year. So, as I cut my ikebana materials, I am also helping my plant.

As its common name suggests, this plant is a fruiting shrub and produces quince fruit. The flowers and fruit are attractive to bees, hummingbirds and swallowtail butterflies. The aromatic fruits are round, yellow and hard, slightly resembling a small apple, and in addition to making wonderful jams, jellies, and fruit leathers, they can be juiced. The fruit can be left in the car or around a room as a natural air freshener. The juice's high acidity makes it an excellent alternative to lemon juice, and it's packed with vitamin C, potassium, magnesium, iron, copper, zinc, sodium, and calcium traces. Japanese Quince has three primary medicinal uses. It is an anti-inflammatory in joint and muscle problems; it can treat and cure seasonal respiratory illness and is a general tonic to stimulate health or recovery.

Japanese Quince flowers come in different shapes, such as single, semi-double, and double. Its distinctive branch structure has numerous small, twiggy branches. These characteristics provide flexibility with textures in your ikebana arrangements. The juxtaposition of the delicate blooms and the gnarled branches can add depth and character to the design. Quince is one of the easiest spring bloomers to bring inside to force into flower. Cut branches with fat buds beginning to swell and place them in water near a sunny window. Buds will often begin to unfold in days. The arrangements can have a long life as a week or more can pass before buds open.

## Horticulture Corner -- Keeping Hydrangeas Fresh

### Hydrangea



Hydrangea, or "Ajisai" in Japanese, are beautiful and versatile flowers often used in ikebana. They can bring a unique and enchanting touch to arrangements, particularly during the late spring and early summer when hydrangeas are in full bloom. The word hydrangea is derived from the Greek words "hydro," which translates to water, and "angeion," which in Greek means vessel or receptacle. The word implies a plant that's a voracious consumer of water, and perhaps that is why, despite its beauty and versatility, keeping the cut flowers looking good is a challenge.

Hydrangea blooms are known for their numerous, small, and delicate petals. These petals can be manipulated to create intricate and textured designs, adding depth and complexity to the arrangement. They also come in a range of colors in shades of pink, blue, purple, white and even green, all evoking tranquility, elegance, and serenity. The lush, round clusters of hydrangea blossoms symbolize unity and togetherness in Japanese culture. They are often associated with appreciation, understanding, and heartfelt emotions. The broad leaves and sturdy stems provide structure and balance in ikebana arrangements. These elements can complement the softness of the petals and create a harmonious overall design.

As ikebana floral material, the big challenge is their water absorption needs and notorious wilting potential. Proper conditioning and care are essential. Whether you cut them from your garden or purchase them from a florist, the key to keeping them healthy is water right from the start! Some plants, including hydrangeas, ooze sap when cut to protect them from bacteria or other harmful elements entering their vasculatory system. But this protective sap also prevents water intake. There are three proven methods to deal with this problem.

(1) Alum powder is used in pickling to strengthen tissue and keep pickles firm. It affects the flower stems similarly; it is slightly acidic, prevents algae growth, and can prevent the stems from clogging with sap. It's as simple as dipping each stem in alum powder before placing them in fresh, room-temperature water.

(2) Bring a pot of water to a boil, then remove from heat. Dip each stem into the water for 15 to 30 seconds and then place them in room-temperature water. The boiling water breaks down the sap.

(3) Use Floralife® Quick Dip Hydrating Treatment Solution. It's an acidic product that breaks up the sap and allows the stems to take up the water. You can find it online and in craft stores. Recut the stems, and then dip them quickly. Remove several leaves to direct as much water to the flowers as possible. They are heavy drinkers, and you want all the water to go to the flowers. You only use a small amount of the dipping solution. If you put flowers in the frig for conditioning before making your arrangement, make sure there are no fruits in the frig. Fruits give off ethylene, which harms the flowers. Finally, Replace your water every other day. Fresh water will keep your flowers looking nice longer.