



The Vine Line

January 2017

I hope all of you had a great holiday season. It is hard to believe that it has been over a month since Christmas!

As always, the Horticulture Department has kept busy. On cold or wet days, we have a lot to do in the greenhouses. Outdoors there is plenty of clean up to do. Truck loads of leaves to be raked, trees to be pruned, and last years growth to be removed from herbaceous perennials and ornamental grasses.

The Old Farmer's Almanac had promised us a dryer and milder winter than normal. It has been mild, except for a cold week in December and then again in early January when we went down to 12 degrees. That did damage and killed buds on Camellias and it remains to be seen what, if any, permanent harm was done to other plants. We will just have to wait and see. Rain, on the other hand has been a pretty regular commodity, and a good thing too, since fall was very dry.

Some signs of early spring are already evident in the garden. There are already a few daffodils. Witch hazels are blooming and so is winter jasmine. winter honeysuckle and flowering quince are in heavy bud and will flower very soon. The camellias that weren't in bloom, and are varieties that flower later in the winter, will probably be fine. We have planted more tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and other spring flowering bulbs than we have in recent years, so expect to see a lot of color on the grounds in March and early April.

We have added a new member to our Horticulture staff. Jim Crowder is no stranger to the Memphis gardening community, and we are pleased that he is now on our team. He will re-introduce himself in this issue. Carson Ellis will give you some interesting information about moss, one of those plants that is easy to overlook, but has a lot to offer if you take the time to see it in a new light. Manny Paillet will tell you about what it takes to produce the plants that we sell at our spring plant sale, working with our greenhouse volunteers.

This is the time to plan what you are going to plant and what you want to change in your garden this year. Spring is on the horizon.

Happy gardening,

Mossin' Around

Despite the unseasonably warm days we have enjoyed this January, we are still very much in winter. Around the garden, warm-season grasses are brown and brittle, the branches of deciduous trees are bare, and herbaceous perennials are decidedly dormant. There is no winter dormancy for a gardener,

though, and our team of horticulturalists remains busy. On a given day you may see us tucking in bulbs, pruning trees and shrubs, laying down mulch, cutting back perennials, and, of course, pulling winter weeds. There are many plants, in fact, that tolerate winter's cold and continue to bring welcome green to the garden, and the most luxurious green of all belongs to our moss gardens.



Winter is one of the best times to admire the moss, which remains earnestly green throughout the seasons, but becomes especially verdant during our wet winters. We have cultivated several moss gardens on our grounds, located in the Asia Garden, Japanese Garden, and the Container Garden.

Walking through the property, though, you will notice that moss has volunteered throughout, growing on stones, pathways, trees, and seemingly everywhere, if you look carefully.

The mat of green we observe is often not a singular “moss”, but a cohabitation of bryophyte species-- “bryophyte” being the term used for non-vascular, terrestrial plants, like mosses, but also liverworts and hornworts. Like the vascular plants we are most familiar with, bryophytes photosynthesize, and require mineral nutrients, carbon dioxide, and water. Unlike vascular plants, bryophytes lack a cuticle, and absorb water and nutrients directly through their leaves. They do not have a root system, rather a mass of root-like rhizoids, which anchor them and do not move water or nutrients from the substrate. They also do not flower or produce seed, reproducing instead via spores and vegetative fragments.

For gardeners interested in cultivating their own moss, winter is a good time to begin! Mosses make an excellent lawn alternative in troublesome areas where grass seems to pout, and they pair nicely with ferns and small wildflowers in woodland gardens. Furthermore, mosses require little of the standard maintenance. The moss lawn can be established on poor and compacted soil, does not require fertilizer, does not need to be mown, and has few pest or disease problems. The cultivation of moss does, however, require the removal of debris (we periodically blow out our moss gardens, but sweeping with a soft broom will suffice), and weeding. And, while mosses can be surprisingly resilient to drought, they flourish and look their best when kept moist, and so will require irrigation.

But where to obtain moss? It's likely that you already have some, if your site is appropriate, and it's possible to begin by simply encouraging the moss that has volunteered in your garden. To quote Robin Wall Kimmerer from her book [Gathering Moss](#) (Oregon State University Press, 2003):

"Mosses appear in a lawn when conditions for moss growth are better than conditions for grass growth. Too much shade or water, too low a pH, soil compaction... discourage grasses and let mosses grow."

Better to... pull out the remaining grass and let nature build you a first-rate moss garden."

However, for more immediate gratification, moss may also be gathered (with permission only!) or purchased in flats. Remembering that moss grows readily from fragments, a prepared area of bare ground may be "seeded" with small sections of moss (be sure to take your cues from nature, and choose the right moss for the right location-- a moss found growing on a tree, for instance, is not a strong candidate for growing on soil), and tended until they fill the desired area. A mild winter day, when the ground is somewhat fudge-y, is a perfect time to transplant your propagules, securing them in place with a hearty "smoosh!"

For further reading and inspiration, I recommend Annie Martin's [The Magical World of Moss Gardening](#) (Timber Press, 2015), and the George Schenk's moss classic, [Moss Gardening, Including Lichens, Liverworts, and Other Miniatures](#) (Timber Press, 1997).

By Carson Ellis, Butterfly Garden Curator

Spring Plant Sale

Starting in October through January, the Memphis Botanic Garden receives plants for the spring's biggest plant sale.

This year will be fantastic. We are featuring a wide variety of sun and shade perennials, herbs, and vegetables. There will also be trees, shrubs, and annuals. This year we will have a large number of mini and small hostas, spider form daylilies and Bletilla (hardy Chinese ground orchid) just to name a few.



Just like a bad penny, the Grumpy of nurseymen is back!

Hi, this is Jim Crowder (retired from Dan West Garden Center) and I have joined the staff here at the Memphis Botanic Garden. Retirement was great for me, but my wife Carol said, after 40 years of marriage, getting twice as much husband and half as money JUST WASN'T WORKING! So here I am! I'll be working about three days a week helping with adult education, planning and acquiring seasonal color, and helping with plant production for the Spring Plant Sale.

Also, I'm here to answer questions and hopefully lighten the load on Rick and Kyle. I've been in the lawn, garden, and nursery business for 45 years, so, I bring with me a vast knowledge of what does and doesn't work here in the Mid-South. I have a strong background in problem solving after ten years on the Jim and Jim Garden Show on Memphis radio, and the countless customers I've had the privilege and pleasure to meet

and help at retail.

Our goal at the Garden is to give each plant the special attention it needs, like soil requirements and fertilizers, then carefully grow outside where they receive the proper amount of water throughout the winter and, of course, vernalization (subjection to cold temperatures). This will give the consumer the very best plants and latest cultivars resulting in the highest quality plants. Many of these plants can be found around the Memphis Botanic Garden in our own plantings.



I invite you to come to my garden programs and let's just talk about gardening. (They're not lectures! They're an interesting, entertaining, and interactive garden dialog between friends!) Bring your questions, problems or opportunities and let's talk.

By Jim Crowder, MBG Horticulturist



Interested in volunteering? [Submit your contact information and interests here.](#) We meet Monday, Wednesday, Friday 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. The Garden will have plants available for sale throughout the year from our nursery and on our plant racks. Become a member to receive additional discounts on plant purchases.

By Manny Paillet, Greenhouse Manager

Need information on a particular plant or gardening topic?

Email us at: plantquestions@memphisbotanicgarden.com and our horticulture staff will answer your questions!



