



The Vine Line

April 2016

Greeting to all and welcome to spring!

Although the arrival of spring officially falls on March 20th with the Vernal Equinox, signs of new life have really been occurring since shortly after the first of the year. Day length has as much to do with the growth of plants as the temperature. Right now at MBG there are lots of plants in bloom. Many birds and insects are now active. Raptors, such as owls and hawks, started to nest in February. Last week, with the heavy rain fall, tree frogs could be heard at night calling for mates.

As Jeff Reynolds talks about in this issue of Vine Line, it certainly wasn't the greatest year for daffodils and many other flowering bulbs. The winter just wasn't cold enough! On the other hand, flowering trees such as Asian Magnolias have been in bloom far longer than normal. They will soon be followed by the Yoshino Cherries along Cherry Road. Redbuds, Quince, Forsythia, Spike Winterhazel, Camelias, and many other trees and shrubs are joining in the celebration of color we call Spring!

In another couple of weeks, the majority of Azaleas and Dogwoods will be in bloom, then Iris, and finally Roses. By then, the weather will be consistently warm and another season will have passed. Be sure to get out and enjoy what is in bloom in your back yard and here at the Botanic Garden. It changes every day, and, if you don't check frequently, you will miss part of the show.



Talking about events not to miss, our Spring Plant sale is coming up April 15th and 16th. We will have our usual great selection of trees, shrubs annuals and perennials, with special emphasis on using edible plants in the landscape.

Well-known author Rosalind Creasy will have a program and book-signing on the use of edible plants, with a cocktail reception on Thursday evening, April 14th, to kick off the plant sale. This is something you shouldn't miss!

Wishing each of you a joyous Easter Holiday. Take some time and really enjoy the sights and sounds of this most beautiful time of the year.

Rick Powell

Bamboo Fencing

Bamboo, or *take* in Japanese, is probably one of the most consistently used plant materials in Japanese gardens; although not in the way you might initially think. Being a grass, bamboo is terribly fast growing, abundant, and is very aggressive, impeding all other plant growth in its vicinity. It is typically not planted in the garden for these reasons, but, due to its copious nature, structural stability and straightness, it makes for a fantastic building material, especially for fencing.

There are many types of fence, *gaki*, within a Japanese garden, each with their own particular purpose and ambiance, complimented by the gardener's own style. There is the simple *yotsume gaki*, a rustic, transparent fence with a simple vertical and lateral arrangement, commonly found in tea gardens. There is the *mizu gaki*, a solid barrier to provide security and privacy. But fence that I have been working on and utilizing in the garden is the simple *nanako gaki*, or hoop fence.



MBG horticulturalist David Vaughn and Chris O'Bryan assisting with last year's nanako gaki

Nanako gaki is typically used along walkways as a simple barrier and a reminder to stay on the path. Although it may be simple in form, there is much work that goes into making it. Unlike in Japan, we here in the U.S. do not have a bamboo store to purchase materials for a job like this, so you have to make your own. The material for this year's fence came from long-time MBG Spring Plant sale vendor and friend of the garden Paul Little, of Little Hill Nursery. (Be sure to check him out at our sale.) Paul has a grove of *Phyllostachys viridis* growing on this property and was kind enough to let me harvest some for the project. Ideally, you want a larger diameter bamboo, 6+”, as it will make flatter and wider pieces, but smaller bamboo, 2-3”, will work as well.

Harvesting of bamboo is preferably done during the dormancy of winter, as the sugars in the plant have turned into starches, making the material stronger. You want to harvest canes that are straight and 2-3 years old. This ensures that they are mature and structurally sound and keeps the grove healthy. By removing older canes, you make room for new canes to grow in their place, making for straighter canes, ideal for fence material. Older canes will have a rougher texture compared to smoothness of new canes and will have black soot of sorts on it as well. When cutting the cane, be sure to cut just above a node as these areas are solid the whole way through, making a cap of sorts to deter water from rotting out the area you just cut.

Once you have your material on the ground, remove all stems from the cane and scrub the canes with soapy water to remove dirt and grime. Next is to determine the length of your pieces. I prefer a lower style fence, so I cut my pieces around 24-30". Depending on the size of your bamboo you are using, you should be able to get several sections out of one cane, providing the cane is straight. Now comes the splitting of the bamboo sections you just made. Like I mentioned before, flatter pieces are better as more round pieces will snap when you put them in the ground. Use a sharp hatchet and a hammer to gently pound the hatchet into the bamboo to make two even sections. Once started, you should be able to push the hatchet through the piece with some force and also hitting it with the hammer. Continue splitting until you have made a piece that is flat, 24-30" long and, ideally, .5-1" wide.

To install, simply push one end into the ground to a depth of about 3" as this will give the fence more structural stability. Now take the other end, start bowing it, and push it into the ground X distance away. Be sure not to work the pieces too fast as this might cause them to break. The next piece overlaps the last by whatever distance looks right to you. Repeat the process until you have completed the fence.

Garden features such as the *nanako gaki* help to create an ambiance in your garden, setting the mood for which you desire. Just remember, work slow and be patient; good advice for most things in life.

By Nick Esthus, Japanese and Asian Garden Curator

Seasons and Plants

Those of us who work in the plant industry are often asked why a certain tree or shrub performed as it did this spring or early spring. Some questions can be answered by looking back at the previous seasons of fall and winter.

This fall and winter seasons started out mild and warm, then progressed to cold and rainy. This weather pattern contributes to the spring color experience, as it does every year. For example, a warm dry fall will typically cause a shorter fall color season.

This past fall and winter have influenced groups of plants that makes us take notice. Daffodils are one group that did not perform as we might expect and are used to seeing in years past.



This winter had some cold days, but not cold weeks or months. This causes the bulb not to conserve the energy (bloom power), as it would in a longer winter. After the daffodils start to bloom, rain can shorten the time the flowers are in prime condition. Heavy, long rain events like we experience the past few weeks really can hurt our daffodil presence.

A group of plants that has thrived in their color display this year has been the Asian magnolia. In a typical year, the magnolias will bud out, be in full flower, then start to drop petals in a little over a week, maybe two.

Asian magnolias normally have a short window of showing color, but this year the

Exploring Place with Plants

We've heard the adage, "Right plant, right place." This is helpful garden advice, but also a reminder that we gain a sense of place by observing and knowing plants as they grow in our environment. I grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, and my memories are of the dense shade under *Rhododendron maximum*, picking *Gaylussacia ursina* berries in July, and the unmistakable, musky odor of *Galax urceolata* colonies. Whenever I pass our specimen of *Tsuga canadensis* on the Woodland Trail, I pause, and am reminded of the Appalachians, where I would often encounter these trees leaning over mountain streams, branches dipping low to the water, roots scrambling over the rocks.



But, what about houseplants, can we appreciate a sense of place from plants so estranged from their native soils? Recently, I've begun caring for the plants that we offer for sale in the Visitors Center, and I have been confronted by their strangeness, their boggling diversity of colors, shapes, and textures.

For example, from the forest floors of Brazil, we are selling *Cryptanthus*, commonly known as Earth Stars. These odd little plants with pink-banded, strap-like leaves are terrestrial bromeliads, relations of the familiar pineapple. The name comes from the Latin word *crypt* meaning "hidden" and the Greek word *anthos* meaning "flowers." Ours are showing signs of blooming soon, and I have to disagree with this naming: the little bouquet of white flowers that appears at the center of the rosette is hardly hidden, and is quite cute.

conditions were right for a longer bloom time. The bigger trees are the ones showing the extended season. After the weather conditions went through the months leading up to spring bloom time, then the rain hit while the buds were still strong enough to prevail.

If your daffodils suffered, just be patient and hope for next year. On the other hand, it might not be the best idea to go out and buy an orchard of Asian magnolias.

Next year will bring a whole new set of weather conditions that will favor some genres of plants over others, so enjoy the show of color that is presented.

By Jeff Reynolds, Horticulturist

[Don't miss Japanese Gardens of Memphis Tour](#)



April 10, 1-5 pm

Presented by Memphis Botanic Garden and Ikebana International Memphis Bamboo Chapter. Home tours from 1-4 pm will highlight extraordinary examples of Japanese architecture and gardens in Memphis, at the following addresses: 346 Waring Road, 6125 Green Meadows Road, and 5174 Walnut Grove Road. The final stop of the day, from 4-5 pm, will be the Seijaku-en Japanese Garden, celebrating its 50th Anniversary.

Tickets available at each home site on the day of the event, or [buy tickets online here](#). \$12 in advance/\$15 day of event. Call 636-4100 for information.

One of my other favorites is the Zee Zee Plant, or, *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*. It is an unusual and striking aroid, with glossy, fleshy, compound leaves trusting upwards from stout, tuberous rhizomes. The Zee Zee is a newer addition to the cast of houseplants available, having only been commercially grown since the 1990s, but already has earned a reputation as a tough plant, able to tolerate a range of abuses. In its native ground in eastern Africa, the plant is adaptable to a range of environments, including tropical moist forests, savannahs, and stony ground. It readily regenerates from leaflets, which has earned it the moniker “money plant” in China (because who doesn’t wish that their money readily regenerated when set on moist media?).

Lastly, we have *Diffenbachia*, native from Mexico south to Argentina, and better known as “dumbcane.” This curious common name originates with the plant’s ability to render a person mute when chewed. This is attributed to the raphides (needle-shaped crystals of calcium oxalate) present in this plant, which irritate the mouth, causing numbing, swelling, and excessive drooling. Of course, left un-chewed, as is my recommendation, it makes a graceful houseplant, with green and silver foliage.

Each plant belongs to a place, and has a story. Learning these stories not only gives us important context which helps us understand how to better care for these plants, but also feeds our imaginations and curiosity-- getting to know houseplants is like exploring the world, if only a couple leaves at a time!

By Carson Ellis, Horticulturist