

The *Tribbium*

Piedmont Chapter
North American Rock Garden Society
Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, NC

Moss: The Lawn With No Mower

Frank Hyman www.frankhyman.com

Some people pay good money trying to get rid of moss in their grass, but it just keeps coming back. A better idea might be to go with the flow and let the moss grow. Because of shade, some places are just better suited to moss than to grass. And especially with water restrictions in place, a moss lawn needs less maintenance than a grass lawn. Which isn't to say that moss beds are "no maintenance." There is, after all, no garden without a gardener. Yes, random patches of moss can survive unaided, but keeping a lawn of moss looking good does take some investment. Fallen leaves will smother mosses as easily as they will grass, so regular, gentle leaf management with a blower set on "low" helps. And they are not the best weed suppressors, so grooming with some hand weeding or spot spraying is necessary. But no matter how much time you spend grooming your moss lawn, you can remind yourself with a smile how much time you did *not* spend mowing every week.

Moss is not only a good substitute for grassy lawns, but they are also the perfect complement for a rock garden. We're trained to think of "rock gardens" as beds in full sun featuring tiny alpine plants. But there's no reason not to create a rock garden in the shade with a collection of weathered, lichen-crusting stones with mosses growing on and around them. Throw in some ferns, hellebores, native ginger and spring ephemerals to contrast with the velvet mosses and the bones of stone and you will have a visually lively garden indeed.

There are essentially two ways to start or enhance a bed or lawn of moss. You can transplant it or you can buy it. A moss nursery in Pa. called Moss Acres sells 4 different mosses by the box. I've started several moss beds for clients this way and have used the scraps of leftover moss in



Photo by Frank Hyman

Fern Moss in Partly Shady Site Edged with Stones

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my shady garden of spring ephemerals. Of the various ones offered by Moss Acres, the novice moss gardener will probably want to try the sampler kit with a few square feet of each type of moss or start with a box of the fern moss (*Thuidium delicatulum*)—so named because of its resemblance to a sheet of tiny fern fronds. I recommend starting with fern moss, even though moss connoisseurs consider it a weed, because it out competes other, daintier mosses. But then again, most of us in our early days of gardening probably used plants that internationally famous designer and Durham resident Edith Eddleman calls “thugs” because they are tough and tend to fill out a new garden. Using “thuggy” “perennials and “weedy” mosses is, I think, a stage all young gardeners must go through as we develop our skills. When our garden practices allow us to graduate to growing daintier things, we can simply dig up the fern moss or obedient plant and pass them along to other, younger gardeners to help get them started.

The other way to get mosses going is to transplant them. There are several ways to do that. Ideally, if you have some mosses on your property, you can scrape them up by hand and consolidate them nearby on bare soil in similar light and soil conditions. This method can have the greatest level of success because transplanted mosses do best if their growing conditions change as little as possible. If the conditions are different at the new site—a couple of hours of morning sun instead of a couple of hours of late afternoon sun, for instance—then you’ll likely have better luck “seeding” the moss into the new area. The largest and most verdant moss garden I know of in the piedmont is north of Greensboro and I’ll share that gardener’s method of spreading moss: in a motion similar to brushing crumbs off a countertop, she uses the edge of one hand or her fingers to brush across the top of the moss and catch any loose moss foliage in the palm of her other hand. Mixed with this will be lots of moss spores. She then tosses the whole mess onto some bare soil in the shady part of her garden and over time it fills in with new moss.

Other moss gardeners have success mixing moss, water and buttermilk in a blender and spreading the slurry on bare soil. Others insist the buttermilk (or beer as some recommend) has no effect and they simply crumble the moss onto bare soil. I’ve had luck with all these methods and think that the key is keeping the area moist for a couple of weeks in the spring or fall until you see some bits of vibrant green taking hold.

I almost used the phrase “taking root” in the previous sentence, but that wouldn’t be accurate. Mosses are like the vascular plants in our gardens in many ways—they photosynthesize, they transpire water, etc. —but they don’t

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Photo by Frank Hyman

Moss with Wind Chimes

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use roots to acquire nutrients or water from the soil. In a sense they are like the epiphytes—orchids, Spanish moss, etc. —that use trees only for physical support. Mosses are sort of epiphytes of the soil. Which explains why you can often find some of them also lounging on stones and fallen trees.

Mosses tend to be evergreen, but can turn pale green or brown in a drought. Sometimes they have gone dormant and will respond quickly to moisture by greening up. If they are brown and dead, cooler, wetter weather will cause the spores to germinate and fortunately old moss makes a good nursery for the next generation.

And the best part of growing mosses is having the smooth texture of a lawn without once have to break out the lawn mower.

A few mosses that can be found locally:

Rock Cap Moss (*Dicranum* sp.) Shade. Thin tufts of hair. Stays green under all moisture conditions. Grows on any quality soil.

Fern Moss (*Thuidium delicatulum*) Shade. Pale green/brown in drought. Looks like tiny ferns. Favors compact clay soil. Easiest to grow.

Flat Moss (*Plagiothecium* sp.) Shade. Looks like shag carpet laid flat. Dull green when wet. Grey green when dry. Can cling to stone.

Sun Moss (*Bryum* sp.) Sun. Tight, low carpet. Bright green when moist, brown when dry. Favors compact, moist clay soil, but tolerates growing on sand and screenings between pavers.

Resources:

www.mossacres.com A terrific site for learning about mosses and buying mosses, growing accessories, books, etc.

Native Grasses, Ferns and Mosses by Bill Cullina
Recently hired as plant curator for the Coastal Maine Botanic Garden, Bill will be speaking at the JC Raulston Arboretum in Sept. on shade loving plants.

Moss Gardening by George Schenck
New hardback, \$35. Well written, extensive information about his experiences with moss.

Outstanding Mosses and Liverworts by Susan Munch

Paper back, \$18. Best for identifying mosses.

Gardening with Moss booklet by Dave Benner, owner of Moss Acres
Paperback, \$15. A good book to start with.



The last two books are available through Moss Acres. Schenk's very good book can possibly be found at used book stores or online at a better price. His book and Cullina's can be ordered through the Regulator Bookshop.

Basic moss growing technique:

Expose bare, compacted soil.

Lower pH with sulfur.

Layout sheets of moss or crumble and spread particles or slurry of moss.

Protect small areas from birds and squirrels with bird netting pinned to the ground.

Keep moist if you can for 2-3 weeks.

Repeat in new areas as moss spreads.

Remove weeds by hand.

Keep leaves off moss with a blower set on low speed.

Enjoy frequently.

Moss Garden Plants (a very incomplete list of compatible shade loving plants)

Quaker ladies, *Houstonia caerulea*

Trout lily, *Erythronium americanum*

Toothwort, *Dentaria lanciniata*

Trillium sp.

Pipsissiwa, *Chimaphila maculata*

Solomon's seal, *Polygonatum* sp.

Barrenwort, *Epimedium* sp.

Crocus sp.

Rohdea japonica

Lungwort, *Pulmonaria* sp.

Green & Gold, *Chrysogonum virginianum*

Wild ginger, *Hexastylis shuttleworthii*

Pieris japonica

Camellia japonica

Cyclamen sp.

Arum italicum

Lenten rose, *Helleborus orientalis*

Champions Wood fern, *Dryopteris championii*

Southern Shield fern, *Dryopteris ludoviciana*

Autumn fern, *Dryopteris erythrosora* ❧



Calycanthus

Dee Hamilton

Calycanthus floridus (aka Sweetshrub, Carolina Allspice, Strawberry-shrub and Sweetbetsy-bush) has a distinct niche in my life. It grew in the earliest Colonial gardens. Calycanthus was dug from swamps and woods and planted in gardens where it thrived. It is an ungainly plant which suckers and forms clumps. It grows 6 to 9' high and spreads 6 to 12'. Its hardiness break point is -15 to -20 degrees F. (Zone 4 to 9) According to Dirr (Manual of Woody Landscape Plants) its habit is "dense, bushy rounded with an irregular outline; often straggly and unkempt in the wild".

Dirr lauds *Calycanthus floridus* as a "worthwhile plant for every garden, especially welcome in the shrub border or around an outdoor living area where its dark reddish brown 2" blooms produce a strawberry-banana-pineapple scent." The bloom smells and looks like nothing else in the plant world. Dirr points out, and I can corroborate; there is great variation in flower odor. Be sure to smell whatever Sweetshrub you plan to plant. Some have no odor at all and others give off a paltry scent.

My first encounter with what I know as a Sweetbetsy-bush was on a hot afternoon when I was three. The person in charge of me for the afternoon picked a bloom, tied it in a corner of her white handkerchief and gave it me to smell. I remember the wonderful sweet smell, the closeness of the afternoon and where we stood underneath the shade of the back porch high above us.

From the time I was three, *Calycanthus* remained significant in my life. I had an especially close attachment for my Aunt Betsy. After she died, I dug a Sweetbetsy-bush from her yard in Oxford and planted it on a red hill that sloped at a 60 degree angle in Chapel Hill. Ten years later, I moved off the hill in mid-December and took no plants with me.

Along about February I remembered I left the Sweetbetsy-bush growing in Chapel Hill and I was living in Hillsborough. I put my, aptly named, poaching spade and a big black plastic pot in the back of my car to drive to Chapel Hill on a single minded quest to dig up my Sweetbetsy-bush. I reasoned the shrub had to be rescued from callous, uneducable Philistines who did not know that a Sweetbetsy-bush is and would never learn. Reasoning need not be realistic but a pragmatic twist is good.>>>

Garden Conservancy's Open Days Program

Comes to Charlotte, North Carolina

September 27-28, 2008

Variety and inspiration pop out at the 6 private gardens and 2 public gardens included in the 2008 Garden Conservancy Open Days Program. Behind garden gates you'll find magical landscapes that transcend the expected. Modeled after the British, the Open Days Program invites the public to see the best of Charlotte's autumn gardens. On tour will be private gardens of Bruce Clodfelter, John E. Denti, Tom Nunnenkamp and Lib Jones (Maple Walk), Kay Minor (Minor Manor), Lindie Wilson (The Elizabeth Lawrence Garden) and Genie and Jim White. Public gardens of University of North Carolina-Charlotte Botanical Gardens and Wing Haven are included. Gardens will feature unusual plants, grasses, fall bulbs as well as interesting combinations of foliage, textures and design.

There is a \$5.00 admission charge for each private garden. Tickets will be available at each garden as well as at Wing Haven, 248 Ridgewood Avenue. Wing Haven will begin selling \$5.00 tickets and books of 6 tickets for \$25.00 after September 1. The private gardens, Wing Haven and the UNCC gardens will be open from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. on Saturday and from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The Garden Conservancy, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1989, preserves America's finest gardens for the public to enjoy. Open Days Program admission fees will benefit the Garden Conservancy and Wing Haven.

For more information call:
Wing Haven 704.331.0664
Lindie Wilson 704.374.1650
Pam Crown 704.334.6241 ☞

After its daring rescue, the *Calycanthus* from my aunt's yard grows peacefully in a shady corner overrun by violets in Hillsborough. To my surprise during the 2007 summer drought it showed amazing drought tolerance—an attribute I didn't suspect it possessed until then.
dewittnc1@yahoo.com ☞

Chapter Members Tour Charlotte Gardens

Carolyn Williams and Kirtley Cox



On Saturday, May 3, 2008, a busload of Piedmont NARGS members and friends set out for a day of visiting gardens in the Queen City.

Our first stop was in a quiet historical Charlotte neighborhood, where a pictorially famous garden gate opens onto Elizabeth Lawrence's garden. Our local chapter member, Lindie Wilson, welcomed us into the house and garden which she bought in 1986 and whose structural and horticultural integrity she has maintained. Lindie now leads the Friends of Elizabeth Lawrence, whose goal is the preservation and maintenance of the house and garden. See www.ElizabethLawrence.org for more details.

How does one write about Elizabeth Lawrence's garden? Humbly. The garden is small (70 ft. wide by 225 ft. long, requiring our group to divide up) and formally arranged with gravel paths dividing the mixed borders of woody and herbaceous plants. A

stone-edged pond in the center completes the formal arrangement. Amazingly, Lindie's hard work has



Photo by Kirtley Cox

Lithodora in Lindie Wilson's Garden

managed to preserve about 60 percent of the original plantings.

Among the valued old plantings is the largest *Stewartia pseudocamellia* in North Carolina, which Ms. Lawrence planted in 1949. Some of us woodland gardening enthusiasts especially enjoyed the rich understory structure provided by such old favorite broad-leaf evergreens as Mahonia, Illicium, Sarcococca, Danae, Ruscus, Osmanthus and, of course, Camellia and Rhododendron.

Inside, one is drawn to Ms. Lawrence's study window, which overlooks the garden and from which literal and figurative perspective she wrote many of her books and articles. The window of the sitting room opens into a bamboo thicket. Ms. Lawrence and her mother reportedly loved to watch the birds who sheltered in the dense bamboo.

Just up the street from the Elizabeth Lawrence house is Wing Haven Gardens and Bird Sanctuary, given to the public by Elizabeth and Edwin Clarkson, who built the home in 1927. The Wing Haven Foundation now serves as the parent organization for both Wing Haven and the Elizabeth Lawrence garden. The web site (www.WingHavenGardens.com)

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Photo by Kirtley Cox

Pond in center of Elizabeth Lawrence's Garden

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tells of how Mrs. Clarkson arrived in Charlotte to inspect the new home whose specifications she had drawn up. She was horrified to find it on a barren, treeless red clay lot that had recently been a farmer's field; she began to plant immediately. Now the three woodland acres are filled with plants and trees designed to provide cover and safety for birds and other wildlife, offering food and water as well as nesting materials and sites. Especially noteworthy is the collection of old roses, all of them being species or cultivars that were available before 1924. These old roses do not require the chemicals necessary for modern varieties, and this allows Wing Haven to maintain the ecologically healthy environment necessary for a thriving bird sanctuary.

After lunch in the education building at Wing Haven, we visited two private gardens in the afternoon. First was the Mandrapilias garden and "menagerie". Geary and Gus Mandrapilias have sculpted their sloping back lot



Photo by Kirtley Cox

Geary and Gus Mandrapilias' Garden

with stones and water and plants, creating water features, ponds, and a waterfall that provide a peaceful setting for the koi and rabbits and for the turtles which they rescue and rehabilitate. Their garden showcases over 50 Japanese maples, and the roses and azaleas were at their peak. In addition to the charming collection of antique and unusual water faucets and sprinklers, we enjoyed watching the honeybees enter and exit the hives on the property, which were designed and positioned to minimize contact between humans and the "beeline".

Then we visited Mammoth Oaks Garden, where Bob Rossier and Eldred Hudson demonstrate that the dry shade predominating in their acre lot need not be an impediment to gardening. On one side of the garden,

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stonework and classical oriental lines in the plants are blended with the commanding architectural elements of giant bamboo to create an impressive bamboo forest. The hellebores, ferns, azaleas and weeping Japanese maples provide a soft anchor for the strong vertical lines of the crepe myrtles and other large trees in the garden. The house is in the Arts and Crafts style, and the back windows overlook a free-form pool surrounded by palms, herbs, and cascading annuals in large pots.



Photo by Kirtley Cox

The day ended with a quick visit to UNC-Charlotte Botanical Gardens, where we enjoyed the noteworthy collection of rhododendrons and the tropical greenhouses.

Our thanks go to Lindie Wilson, the staff at Wing

Backyard of Bob Rossier and Eldred Hudson's Garden

Haven and the UNC-Charlotte Botanical Gardens, Geary and Gus Mandrapilas, Bob Rossier and Eldred Hudson, David White, Bobby Ward, and the other NARGS members who worked to provide us with such a pleasant trip. ❧



Photo by Kirtley Cox

Japanese maples in the Rossier-Hudson Garden



Piedmont Chapter Meeting and Member's Plant Sale

Totten Center
N.C. Botanical garden

9:30 am September 20, 2008

Frank Hyman
Durham, N.C.

“Moss Gardening”

The Trillium, Newsletter of the Piedmont Chapter
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OTHER SIGNIFICANT POSITIONS:

Sept. Plant Sale Manager: Kirtley Cox
Refreshments:Gwen and Maurice Farrier

Help Wanted

Tony Avent is trying to locate the NARGS member who shared a variegated form of *Uvularia perfoliata* with him several years ago. He wants to acknowledge the gift and cannot remember who gave it to him. Please contact him at 919.772.5794 or tony@plantdelights.com.

Membership Offer

Responding to the concerns expressed by David White in the last issue of *The Trillium*, member Suzanne Edney shared an idea for increasing membership with the Chapter Board. She suggested we encourage members with businesses (nurseries, landscaping, surveying, etc.) who typically give a holiday gift to clients/best customers, to use a gift membership to the Piedmont Chapter as a way of thanking them at the end of the year.

For example, Suzanne says she has several clients each year to whom she usually sends a thank-you note and a small gift. This year she plans to give a membership to the Piedmont Chapter to her clients, which she notes saves time and money on boxing and wrapping a gift, taking it to the post office or dropping it off at the client's house.

The Board endorses the idea and wants to promote it. A gift membership certificate will be available at no charge from the Chapter to any chapter member who wishes to purchase an annual membership for a client. This may also have appeal as a holiday gift for a gardening friend. Benefits of membership include 7 educational talks, 6-8 issues of the newsletter, *The Trillium* and an opportunity to participate in the occasional garden-tour bus trips offered. More about this at the September meeting.

Marian Stephenson