

A Harvest of Small Kindnesses

Even those of us who have been dragged into the electronic age with reluctance enjoy instant messages from family and friends but deplore the forwarded spam spreading enough small-minded nastiness to give us a sour outlook on life! The antidote is to look carefully at the real world on your doorstep. You will see your neighbors volunteering in every direction, hear of too many acts of caring to enumerate, read of people helping others as a way of life.

Master gardeners don't confine their efforts to replanting an acre or turning an eyesore into a garden. Sometimes their work involves the exercise of kindness week after week, year after year. This graciousness touches the residents of Walter Reed Convalescent Center and Gloucester House through the Hort Therapy program. Betsy Lane at WRCC and Charles Stubblefield at Gloucester House, with their teams of gardeners, provide diverse activities inspired by a garden but carried out with imagination and humor. There are birdhouses, Easter bonnets, edible Valentines, all sorts of projects to release inhibitions and raise spirits.

The program at WRCC and the garden there was initiated by Mary and George Simpson many years ago and continues to be important to the residents. One of this year's special events was the garden picnic at the home of Jim and Pam Brant. It was slated for late April but had to be postponed: an occasion too good to miss, it was finally held on a perfect May morning. The rhododendrons and azaleas for which Jim's 6-acre garden is famous were past their peak but the beautifully designed landscape is never without color and interest.

For everyone there that morning, the beauty, fun, food and friendship made a joyful day.

Bridge Planter Update

If you have a container or big pot needing a facelift, this article by Noel Priseler, team leader for the Coleman Bridge planters, will inspire you to try something different.

"The Gloucester Master Gardeners decided to explore new plant possibilities for this summer's displays in the planters at the Coleman bridge toll booths. The seed catalogs enticed us to plant seeds for the early summer plantings: our selections were based on the longevity of bloom, colors, and heat tolerance. While our seedlings were growing we still had to maintain the planters. In mid-April the spent daffodil, tulip, and hyacinth bulbs were removed and replaced with additional pansies. In late April red and white geraniums (Pelargoniums) – gorgeous ones – were purchased from the students at the Gloucester High School Horticulture sale. These, along with calypso jumbo white 09 bacopa, were placed in the planters as a bridge toward the summer plantings of our seedlings.

With the advent of hot weather, the seedlings had matured and were transplanted into individual pots: a pot of each for all four planters. The pansies were removed: geraniums and bacopa remained. In went our new plants.

Dichondra 'Emerald Falls', a trailing bright green plant and cypress vine, a delicate, feathery vine were selected as the trailing plants for the front of the planters. These plants were chosen to replace the chartreuse and purple sweet potato vines used in previous years. To accompany them we planted Swiss chard 'Bright Lights' for its rainbow-like colors and large-leaf texture. Angelonia (white and purple), often called summer snapdragons, for they love the heat and flower most all summer were also planted because they are so lovely. The picture and description of Profusion Zinnias (sunrise mix) made us order and plant these seeds. In addition, our own gardens had some plants to contribute. For a vertical display, we dug up and potted Guara lindheimeri, a spikey perennial with waves of butterfly-like flowers from May to October.

Granted, all these flowers make quite a mixture, but, at this point, we are not sure which ones will do well in the harsh bridge environment. This is a test, an experiment! We hope because we have ventured that we gain knowledge about just what plants do well there. Let's watch and see what happens."