

2024-2025 Garden Lectures

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A Begonia for Any Season

This program will feature how to grow begonias both inside and out. Far from ordinary, begonias are wonderful houseplants; many make lovely terrarium specimens. As winter wanes and we think about spring, begonias as bedding and container plants are a beautiful addition to any garden. Fall brings cooler weather and is the time to think about bringing plants inside and perhaps taking a few cuttings. With the holidays, it's time for "winter-flowering" and fancy-leaved hybrids to enjoy while waiting for spring.

Fancy-Leaved Begonias . . . But, What About the Flowers?

This program will provide a brief history of the discovery of this large genus and will include what makes a begonia a begonia. Participants will be introduced to a diverse group of begonias grown primarily for foliage. They will learn how to grow and propagate. A discussion and demonstration of old-fashion varieties and new hybrids will include examples of species and some beautiful flowering hybrids.

How to Grow and Show a Blue-Ribbon Begonia

This program will describe how to plan for and enter your favorite begonia into an American Begonia Society or another flower show. In addition to submitting a well-grown plant, growers need to know how entries are classified for judging and become familiar with show rules and schedules. By becoming familiar with the show schedule, you can optimize your chances for success. Demonstrations will illustrate strategies for growing and entering prize-winning begonias.

Plant Parenthood

This program focuses on propagation of popular houseplants. Various techniques such as stem, leaf and petiole cuttings will be demonstrated. Houseplants pruning, and grooming will also be discussed. Tips on early Spring propagation of popular summer bedding plants will also be included.

Winter Sowing

What is winter sowing, why is it useful, what do you need and how is it done? All these questions will be answered with a lively lecture and hands on demonstration.

So. . . What About Those Pollinators?

What is pollen? Why is it important? What about pollinators? What and perhaps who are they? This program will provide information that the home gardener might want to consider when planning a garden friendly to pollinators.

Flower Shows

Everyone enjoys flower shows! We all miss the Spring Boston show, but there are many others to enjoy. This program will describe how flower shows are organized, including horticulture and design competition, vendors, seminars and much more. Plant society, garden club, speciality, regional and international shows will be featured and with much anticipation the New England Fall Flower Show at Elm Bank in September of 2024.

Holiday Decorations at the White House- 2016 and 2023

Every year, at the end of November, over 125 volunteers take just a few days to decorate both public and private spaces at the White House. The First Lady, White House Staff, White House Historical Association, and the National Park service spend many months planning, designing, and installing a marvelous holiday display. I will speak about ,and show photos of my visits to the White House in December 2016 and 2023.

Gardening with Dahlias

Someone once said that peonies are the "Show Girls" of the spring garden; with dahlias, it's all about late summer-early fall "Royalty"! Following a brief history of the discovery of dahlias, you will learn how to select dahlia tubers, where to plant, how to water and fertilize. To stake or not to stake, to dig or not to dig – these are the questions! If you dig tubers, how to store, overwinter, and then how to wake them up and perhaps make cuttings. A discussion of American Dahlia Society Classification and how to enter a dahlia show will follow.

How to Grow and Show a Blue-Ribbon Dahlia

This program will describe how to plan for and enter your dahlia blooms into an American Dahlia Society or another flower show. In addition to submitting a beautiful bloom growers need to know how entries are classified for judging and become familiar with show rules and schedules. By becoming familiar with the show schedule, you can optimize your chances for success. Demonstrations will illustrate strategies for growing and entering prize-winning dahlias.

How to Grow Dahlias – A Four-Part Series

Four one- hour programs that can be sequential or presented as individual programs

Dahlias – Winter: What to Do

Winter is the time to plan and prepare for spring planting, check stored tubers and tuber shopping. Did you know that dahlia seeds planted inside can, in a single growing season, produce both blooms and tubers? Tubers started inside can give a head start and serve as a source of cuttings. Demonstrations will include tuber and seed starting, and how-to taking cuttings.

Dahlias – Spring: What to Do

Spring is the time to plant tubers and tend to young plants, cuttings and seedlings. It's important to plan fertilizing, watering, pinching, pruning, and staking so that you will be rewarded with gorgeous blooms until frost. Demonstrations will show you how to pinch prune and stake.

Dahlias – Summer: What to Do

Enjoying your dahlia garden is the best part of mid to late summer. A well-deserved reward for all of your effort. This is the time to evaluate your dahlias and start planning for next year. What variety was unexpectedly beautiful, what wasn't? Which ones will you save? It's also time to enter a dahlia show. Demonstrations will show how to evaluate a bloom and prepare for a dahlia show.

Dahlias – Fall: What to Do

Fall chores get into high gear with the first hard frost. Will you dig and divide? Do you have a place to store your tubers? A discussion of storage options and tuber dividing demonstration will follow. Soil health is crucial to dahlia success, planning a soil test in late fall will be discussed. It's not too early to start shopping; many choice tubers are sold out by Christmas!

Details

Each lecture consists of

- A 60-minute interactive PowerPoint presentation and a two page resource handout for each attendee
- In-person lecture – demonstration plants, one or two plants to give away or raffle
- Zoom presentation – I have a Zoom account and can serve as Zoom host.
- In-person and Zoom presentations can not be recorded.

Requirements

- In-person lecture - electric outlet and projection screen or white background
- In-person lecture LCD projector - If the meeting space does not have a projector I will supply
- Lecture fee: \$300 for in-person presentation \$250 for Zoom presentation
- Mileage at \$.50/mile if round trip is more than 100 miles.

Betsy Szymczak – Biosketch

Biosketch

I am an avid outdoor vegetable and flower gardener and enjoy growing begonias, primarily as houseplants. I am an American Begonia Society certified judge and former ABS Judging Co-Chair. I have judged begonia sections at the Philadelphia, Boston and Newport RI flower shows. I am also a Gesneriad Society judge. I grow about 75 dahlia varieties in a relatively small suburban garden in Natick. Today I am a member of the American Dahlia Society (ADS), Yankee, Connecticut, and New England Dahlia Societies and am ADS accredited judge. I am immediate past president of the Natick Garden Club.

I am a Principle Certified MA Master Gardener, and volunteer at Elm Bank in Wellesley and the Longfellow House in Cambridge, MA. I am a National Garden Club (NGC) - Garden Consultant and am training to become an accredited NGC Flower Show judge. I am a retired college professor, having taught clinical microbiology at several Boston area colleges and universities for over 35 years and currently serve as a consultant at the Mass General Brigham Medical Laboratory Science Program in Boston.