



NORTHWEST HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

GARDENnotes
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Epimedium grandiflorum var. *higoense* 'Bandit'
Image by Richie Steffen

SEEDED MEADOW GARDENS: ARE THEY FOR ME?

Text & Images by Jonathan Hallet (*unless otherwise noted*)



The seeded Merton Borders

You've probably been hearing about meadow gardens; it's been in the *New York Times* lately. This type of gardening — the mixing of grasses and flowering plants — is part of a wider push to make our home gardens into oases for wildlife and insect life, out of interest in conservation, and out of our growing capacity to appreciate a more complex and wild version of a garden. Tastes are changing. But is a meadow garden something that you want to try at



your home, or is it something that is actually really hard and looks terrible unless you know what you're doing? Well, the answer is: it's a little bit of both. Nevertheless, the adventure and learning and excitement makes it a sort of dynamic gardening that is worth trying.

I don't try meadows on most client gardens because creating a meadow is more of an experiment and process than something that is simple to hand over. But it is also my favorite type of garden design because of how much more alive it feels to achieve a garden from seed. My favorite garden I've ever visited was a small area towards the back of the Oxford Botanic Garden, the Merton Borders designed by James Hitchmough who is a master garden-from-seeding designer. I wasn't expecting it, but when I got back there, it was the coolest thing I'd ever seen. There were a lot of familiar perennials and grasses, but they were layered and intermingling in a way I hadn't seen before. It was a sort of hypernature or hypergardening where it was clearly a garden, but it appeared perfectly natural and effortless the way things grew so comfortably and naturally together. It was a garden from seed. There really is nothing else like it, and you cannot get the same effect from planting container plants closely together (that's not to say you can't achieve something extremely beautiful that way, too). It's just different. And I think the way it sits in an indiscernible territory between intentional garden and a wild scene in nature makes it as tantalizing as it is beautiful.

The Oxford Botanic Garden also has a traditional British border garden, near the Merton Edges. I spoke with the Oxford gardeners there who were tending this conventional border garden, and I asked them about the new Merton Borders seeded garden. They said it was way easier to take care of the Merton Borders; they simply cut back the whole thing once a year and did not water it at all. In the border garden, it takes a lot of regular pruning to negotiate space for all the individual plants (for the effect of naturalism). In the seeded meadow garden, you let it go.

That was my first encounter with a seeded garden. Since then, I've been experimenting and chipping away at a rather obtuse design topic, and it's really just been more recently that I've had some ground to experiment with.

Meadow Gardens are Dynamic

One of the exciting or horrifying things about meadow gardens is that they change! They are truly alive, and they are an environmental process in action. In the Salish Sea region, meadows typically occur over glacial till's loose gravelly soils; and, over time, shrubs and trees invade and take over. The meadow becomes a forest. And there is succession within the meadow itself: grasses tend to outcompete forbs (herbaceous flowering plants) over time. So it's best to plant more forbs than grasses, I shoot for about a 3:1 ratio of forbs to grasses. You do want the grasses to help cover the ground and suppress the weeds when the (often deciduous) forbs are not present. You get to selectively weed and add seed over the years to guide the composition.



Traditional border garden at the Oxford Botanic Garden

Preparation is Key

The lack of preparation has been the bane of my meadow experiments thus far. As I am on all fours weeding my little pollinator experiment in late winter, I think, "Oh, this isn't so bad; I can do this." Then I return a week later (somehow, it's actually been a few weeks!) and now a crop of new little weeds have germinated, grown, and are on the verge of going to seed. I realize then it's going to be like this all spring or even well into summer, and I start to despair.

As every book I've read and every resource and person tells you, preparation is key. I can attest to that, yes, preparation is key. You can have your pick which type of preparation to pursue such as sheet mulching, solarization with plastic, or sometimes turf-cutting can work. It really is situational and depends on what you're starting with. If you have aggressive rooters (morning glory, blackberry) or a lot of weed seed stock in the soil (thistle, dock, etc), this will determine how serious you need to be with your preparation. Also, your expectations are important. If you love weeding, you could



Seeded pollinator meadow at Magnuson Park P-Patch



skip the preparation and just go ahead and seed, but I don't recommend that.

Annuals versus Perennials

Annuals can be planted in fall or spring and generally flower the same year and die. Before they die, they produce seed for the next year. Perennial plants (better to sow in fall) are a bit slower to get started, not really looking like much until year two, and grow to become plants that live for multiple years. Annuals are better at competing with existing lawn because they grow more quickly and can flower before a lawn gap closes in. Perennials need more space and time to turn into viable plants so are most suitable for meadow plantings where they won't get shaded out.

Native Plants

Does a seeded meadow garden need to be only native plants? No. I like to plant 70%+ natives generally, both for looks and for habitat value. I find they tend to look more at home in the Pacific Northwest (makes sense), helping to create a garden that looks like it belongs here. I like to add some non-natives that are of visual interest and extend the flowering season since most of our native meadow plants flower at a similar time. It can be nice to get some later summer flowers from non-native plants, which also has habitat value in making nectar available later in the season.

To make the most habitat-value impact with the native plants you include, check out the National Wildlife Federation's new programs called 'Garden for Wildlife' (www.nwf.org/home/garden-for-wildlife) and 'Native Plant Finder' (www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder). Plant species are ranked by the number of butterfly and bee species that use them.

What should it look like?

Figuring out what makes a good meadow for the Pacific Northwest environment has probably been tricky because we have beautiful examples in nature but not many translations into garden examples. It just means you generally have to go further afield for natural examples. The lowlands around the Salish Sea are home to some stunning remaining meadow habitats, especially in the South Sound and on the rocky balds of the San Juan Islands. April until June is a great window for visiting Salish Sea regional meadows during their most floriferous time. Visiting these meadows is an extremely helpful way to get inspired in replicating or creating your own meadow experiment. And so, you can be part of



**Tess Schavione's lawn-to-seeded native meadow conversion in her Ballard front yard. This is the meadow's first year. I'm envious of her results.
Images by Tess Schavione.**

the experiment of planting and observing and sharing what makes a successful meadow garden in the Pacific Northwest.

Easy Ways To Dabble (or Gateway Drugs)

There's a huge range in degrees of involvement you can take. It's often better to start small and enjoy it than to overcommit. Here are a few ideas:

1. Make some holes in your lawn and throw in some annual seeds. Let your lawn grow for the spring, and let the annuals flower in summer. Then, probably in June sometime, cut the lawn back along with annuals. Hopefully by then, the annuals will have seeded and you may get some more action next year.
2. If you have a perennial or annual bed, add to it with annual seeds. If there is mulch, scrape it back before seeding.
3. Annuals are great to sow in pots. It's an environment you actually have pretty good control over. Sow directly into a display pot and wait or sow into trays in order to grow small annuals (or perennials) to plant out in your garden. This is also a great way to learn to identify your plant as a tiny seedling, because you'll know what it is as it comes up.



Over 40 native species growing together in a seeded garden bed, by Osoberry Habitat Service.
Image by Shawn Beach.

Resources for Going Deeper

If you want a deep dive that is still accessible, check out James Hitchmough's book, *Sowing Beauty*, for both a technical and practical guide for how to sow an entire garden from seed. It's truly amazing to see his case studies and learn quite specifically how to do it. For a more concise guide centered specifically on seeding native meadows of the Pacific Northwest, check out Northwest Meadowscape's (northwestmeadowscapes.com) "zine" called *Making Meadows*. This is a concise and wildly practical guide that takes you through common pitfalls and questions, specific to the Pacific Northwest. It's a wonderful resource, the first of its kind that I know of because meadow-making in the Pacific Northwest is in a phase of renewed interest (there has been a long history of indigenous stewardship of Salish Sea meadows!) Northwest Meadowscape is also a great source for native seeds.

Seeded Meadow Gardens

So why, again, should I plant a meadow garden? With seeding, you can grow a lot of cool plants that you can't find in nurseries simply because they are not easy to propagate, and so nurseries don't grow them. Not to mention, seeding is much more economical than buying containerized plants and more environmentally gentle because we are saving the plastic and resources that go into growing nursery plants.

As you scatter seed and hope for the best, you're intimate with the miracle of life and all its complexity. You get to be extremely observant, and there is nothing really more satisfying than seeing seeds turn into plants. And if the result looks good, it's like a cherry on top. Worst case scenario, you learn something for next time. If you're intrigued, take a dabble into seeding this year. Be exacting or reckless in your approach. Either way you'll learn something. 🌱

Jonathan Hallet is a Seattle-based landscape architect, and his practice, Supernature LLC (formerly Beautifer LLC), aims to make gardens that are functional both for people and ecology.



SPECIES TULIPS FOR SPRING

Tulipa clusiana
– Richie Steffen



Tulipa humilis – Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center



Tulipa clusiana (var. *chrysantha*) – Richie Steffen

Text by Rick Peterson (images as credited)

As a gardener, I always look forward to receiving and perusing bulb catalogs when they arrive in early summer. Tulips are often presented in the first pages, and the fantastical array of vibrant colors offered by a myriad of tulip cultivars keeps me mesmerized for hours. I so want to grow the giant Darwin's, the Triumph's, the Emperor's, the single late tulips and even, perhaps, the gaudy peony flowering or parrot types.

Alas, however, many of these types do not always persist long term in the garden. Possibly under the right conditions and with careful cultivation, these groups of tulips might be

coaxed to return for more than a couple of years. However, for more success in gardening with tulips, especially for the first-time grower, one should turn to species tulips as I learned from the Great Plant Picks educational program at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden. These return much more reliably for many years than their hybrid descendants.

Some of my favorites are:

Tulipa clusiana

Tulipa clusiana, commonly called the lady tulip, has vase-shaped flowers of cream or white with the outer tepals (tulips



Tulipa humilis var. *puchella* (in the wild: SW Konya Province, Turkey) – Abdullah Ünlü - Wikimedia Commons - CC BY-SA 3.0



Tulipa humilis var. *puchella* – Kurt Stüber - Wikimedia Commons - CC BY-SA 3.0



Tulipa humilis var. *violacea* – Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center

do not have differentiated petals and sepals for its flowers, but rather has six tepals) shaded in brilliant dark pink or red, produced singularly or in pairs, 10 to 12 inches tall. The linear, gray-green leaves are from six to 11 inches long. The bulbs can be stoloniferous, spreading gently by underground roots to former larger colonies with each passing year. This species is a native of Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and the Western Himalayas.

There is a popular variant of this species with yellow instead of white inner tepals, but still with red shaded outer tepals. Often labeled *Tulipa clusiana* var. *chrysantha* or *T. chrysantha* in the trade, this sweet flowering bulb is, botanically, included under *T. clusiana*.

Tulipa humilis

A more diminutive species tulip than the previous one, *Tulipa humilis*, only reaches about six inches tall, but the bright, charming flowers glow in the garden. A variable species, it is native across many areas and countries: Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, the North Caucasus region, Iraq, Iran, and

Afghanistan. In his 2006 book, *Tulips: Species & Hybrids for the Gardener*, Richard Wilford notes, "A good indication of the range of variation found in the wild is given by Brian Mathew, writing about the Bowles Memorial Expedition to Turkey in 1963. He described plants of *T. humilis* found near Tabriz as 'exceedingly variable in colour' and said, 'In just a few square yards one could obtain lilac, shell pink, deep violet and red colour forms. . .'" Be that as it may, two varieties that are available from bulb companies are var. *puchella* with flowers of deep rose and var. *violacea* with intense red-violet blooms. Two other varieties, var. *aucheriana* (pink flowers) and var. *kurdica* (red flowers), are, sadly, rarely available.

Tulipa linifolia

The common name of *Tulipa linifolia* is flax-leaved tulip or Bokhara tulip, and it also has a large indigenous range from northern Iran through Afghanistan into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The flowers are scarlet with black markings at the very base inside the petals. After *T. linifolia* was first brought into European cultivation, several collections of



Tulipa linifolia – flickr.com/photos/blumenbiene33058579385



Tulipa linifolia – Nasser Halaweh
- Wikimedia Commons - CC BY-SA 4.0

bulbs from various areas of its range were initially identified as *T. afghanica*, *T. maximowiczii*, and *T. batalinii*, the latter with yellow flowers. These species were later merged by taxonomists with *T. linifolia*.

T. batalinii is still commonly listed in bulb catalogs, although it should be written as *T. linifolia* Batalinii Group. At the Miller Garden, there tends to be more shade than sun, but the cultivar *T. linifolia* (Batalinii Group) 'Bright Gem' has persisted for more than twenty years next to the lower parking area, one of the sunnier locations. The flowers of 'Bright Gem' are a captivating pastel apricot color atop the gray green foliage. Bulbs of the red-flowering *T. linifolia* are about to debut for their third year in the ground at the Miller Garden.

Tulipa saxatilis

The first appearance of the bright green, strappy leaves of *Tulipa saxatilis* can be as early as midwinter when they emerge upright out of the soil and then curve outwards as they grow with the tips sometimes touching the ground. By mid-spring, pendulous green buds appear atop delicate stems, developing into bowl-shaped flowers of pastel to hot pink with a yellow blotch encircling the inside center. When the sun is shining, the tepals open so far as to be almost flat.

This bulb is native to islands of the southern Aegean Sea including the larger islands of Crete and Rhodes as well as the Datça peninsula in southwestern Turkey. The darker pink forms of *Tulipa saxatilis*, found on Crete at higher elevations, were initially called *Tulipa bakeri* but are now considered

T. saxatilis Bakeri Group as their differences are minor. A selection of the latter, 'Lilac Wonder' is a beauty with pink flowers and magenta highlights on the outer tepals along with a circle of rich buttery yellow on the inside center.

Tulipa sylvestris

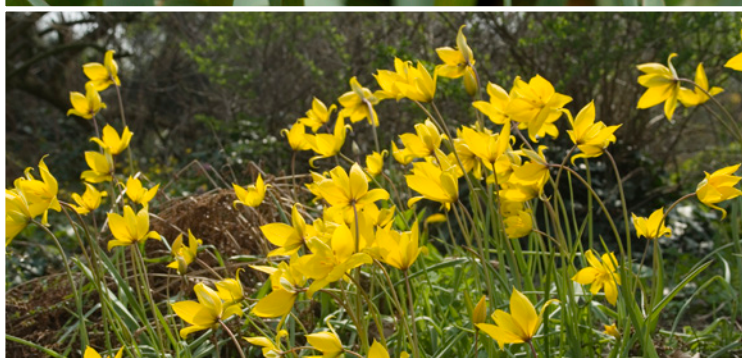
The woodland tulip, *Tulipa sylvestris* (sylvan = woodland), has rich golden yellow flowers with the outer tepals blushed with green or red. This bulb can spread delicately by stolons to form a naturalized drift of spring color. At the base are two to four lance-shaped leaves that are six to eight inches long with the flowering stems rising to 18 or 20 inches tall

Being the most widespread of tulip species, *T. sylvestris* is native from the most western areas of China through the Middle East to around the Mediterranean basin. With such an extensive range, a large number of species were called out over the centuries since first described in the mid-18th century. Those have been whittled down to three subspecies: var. *australis* which has the widest nativity from Xinjiang Province, China and across central western Asia, Iran, Turkey, and southern Europe in countries along the Mediterranean Sea; var. *primulina*, native to Algeria and Morocco; and var. *sylvestris*, found in Italy and Libya.

The cultivated varieties available in commerce are generally distinguishable: var. *australis* with a violet to crimson tint on the outer tepals and var. *sylvestris* with a flush of green plus being slightly larger in its parts. In the wild there are many variable forms which are sometimes difficult to distinguish from one another.



Tulipa linifolia (Batalinii Group) 'Bright Gem'
– Richie Steffen



Tulipa sylvestris
– Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center



Tulipa saxatilis – Agnieszka Kwiecień
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Tulipa saxatilis (Bakeri Group) 'Lilac Wonder'
– Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center

Tulipa sylvestris is the variety you will find in most bulb catalogs, and a swath of its golden flowers is like bringing the color of sunshine to the garden in springtime.

Tulipa tarda

Although not the very last species tulip to bloom in the garden, *Tulipa tarda*, commonly called the late or tardy tulip, is later than many others as the species name implies. The flower stems are short at about four inches tall, although sometimes even shorter or a little taller and stand above a whorl of green, strap-like foliage. The flower buds are shaded reddish green on the outer tepals. When open to the sun, the star-like flowers, up to eight flowers per bulb, are golden yellow in the center with white on the pointed tips. Another stoloniferous bulb, the late tulip can increase under the best growing conditions and form a lovely constellation of spring flowers. *Tulipa tarda* is native to the lower rocky slopes of the Tian Shan mountain ranges in the countries of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan.

The two main sources we use at the Elisabeth Miller Botanical Garden for the correct nomenclature of plants are the Royal Horticulture Society's Plant Finder (rhs.org.

uk/about-the-rhs/publications/plant-finder) and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew Plants of the World Online (powo.science.kew.org). Sometimes these differ which is the case for *Tulipa tarda*. The RHS lists the latter name while Kew considers it a synonym of *Tulipa urumiensis* which has no white tips on the tepals but is all yellow. In his book, *Tulips*, Richard Wilford lists these two separately, and he notes that, "Although not difficult to grow, I have found this species [ed. *T. urumiensis*] can be shy to flower." *T. tarda*, however, is very floriferous.



Tulipa tarda – Agnieszka Kwiecień
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Tulipa turkestanica
– Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center

To confuse the naming even further, *T. tarda* was once considered and offered for sale as *Tulipa dasystemon*, a different species with all yellow tepals and typically only one flower per bulb. *T. dasystemon* is still sold under that name, masquerading as *T. tarda* with pictures showing white tips on the flowers.

Tulipa turkestanica

Unlike the previous species, the star-shaped flowers of *Tulipa turkestanica* are white overall with a smaller golden center on the inside, and the outer tepals are flushed maroon with greenish highlights. This bulb is typically very floriferous with several to many flowering stems as they mature, and they are about six to ten inches tall. At the base there will be two greenish blue linear-shaped leaves about the same length as the flowering stalks.

Turkestan tulip is the common name of *Tulipa turkestanica*, which derives from a historical region formerly known as Turkestan. The area encompasses what is now present-day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Xinjiang Province, China. This rugged part of central Asia typically receives little rainfall except in the mountainous regions and also includes high steppes and deserts. From there comes a resilient little bulb that brings beauty to the spring garden.

Culture

Species tulips grow best in very well-drained soils, and they are apt to rot if there is standing water in the wintertime soil. They are very drought tolerant since the spring foliage dies back for the summer. Plant them in a location with full sun, at least six hours of direct sunlight every day and more is even better. While the bulbs are dormant, they are shipped or purchased at local nurseries in autumn for planting and should generally be planted four to six inches deep in the soil by mid-October before the heavy rains of November begin here in the Pacific Northwest. After blooming in the spring, allow the foliage to die back naturally as this allows nutrient production to be stored in the bulb.

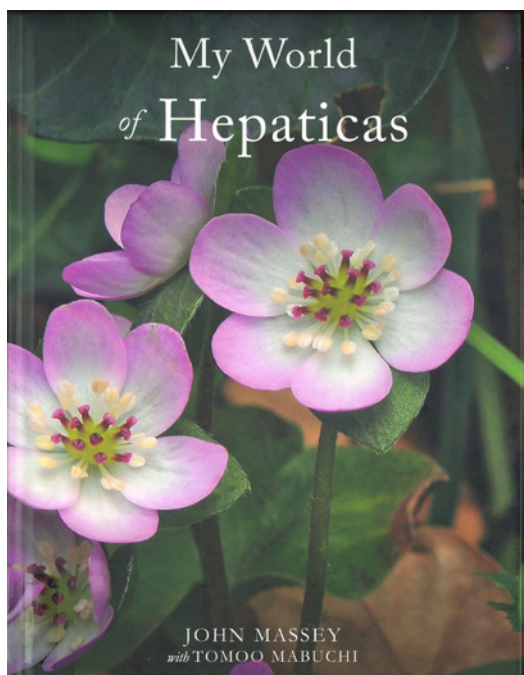
With an extra chilly late winter/early spring this year, many flowering plants are a bit tardy with their show including the species tulips. As I look forward to their extravaganza of liliuputian color, I also await that first bulb catalog. There are still a number of species I haven't endeavored to grow yet, and would like to trial for the Great Plant Picks program to see if any new ones can be added to the GPP list. 🌷

Rick Peterson is the Education & Events Manager at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and the editor of the NHS Garden Notes.

LITERARY NOTES

from the Miller Library

Brian Thompson



Hepatica Images courtesy of Richie Steffen

A couple of years ago at an NHS spring plant sale, I succumbed to the charms of hepaticas. I bought several, but my learning curve was steep. I was expecting them to be ephemeral, leaves disappearing in the summer like their close relatives, the anemones. I was surprised when the leaves persisted through the summer, and chagrined when a couple died because of insufficient water.

Of course, I could have done more research in the Miller Library. That is much easier now with the addition of *My World of Hepaticas* by John Massey, with scientific input by Tomoo Mabuchi. Massey is the owner of Ashwood Nurseries, located near Birmingham, England.

This book is a treasure only available from Ashwood. Hundreds of sumptuous photographs demonstrate the beauty and variety of these flowers, including a myriad of hybrids and their often delightful foliage. It is more than just a picture book, as I found guidance to ensure the well-being of future additions to my garden.

The authors recognize ten species, and Massey describes each, typically from his trips to their native places around the globe. Sections titled "field notes" chronicle these location visits, describing the ecological niches, but also his interactions with the local people who shared his passion.

Massey writes, "This book isn't just about hepaticas. It is in fact a huge adventure story, traveling the globe and, most of all, meeting lots of wonderful, exciting people. I often feel I am the luckiest person in the world."

Profiles of many of these people are in a chapter titled, "The Cast (Friends & Mentors)," who, like the plants, hale from many places. Throughout the book, Massey recalls fondly his visits to their specialty gardens, nurseries, and hepatica exhibits.

Another story, told by a long-time Ashwood employee, tells of the challenges of mounting a display of hepaticas for the famous Chelsea Flower Show. Held in late May, this meant the early blooming plants needed holding back, an elaborate process involving cold storage and frequent monitoring.

Fortunately, my surviving hepaticas do not need this much attention, but this book will likely entice me to buy more! 🌱

Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear NHS Members,

The dark cold days of winter are finally behind us! Spring has settled in. Buds have become blossoms. The sounds of birds echo throughout the landscape. Seasonal fragrances have shifted. Pollinators are busily seeking sustenance. Gardeners, too, have broken dormancy with a renewed energy to pull weeds and purchase plants. The garden is once again fulfilling promises of reciprocation. As we nurture the garden . . . the garden nurtures us.

I want to give a quick shoutout to the active volunteers for NHS. Since joining the board, I have been in awe of the amount of time and dedication that this board and committees put into making this organization thrive. Much of the hard work is entirely behind the scenes and will never be fully appreciated. It is a true act of love. The resilience that this group has shown over the years is comparable to the hardiest of plants. Through every changing season in the last 56 years, NHS has continued to offer world-class horticulture education to our region. If you have a moment (or an email address) and you know someone who has generously volunteered for NHS, please take the time to send a small note of appreciation. If you have an interest in joining the board or working on a committee, please let us know.

Recently, NHS sponsored Arit Anderson from *Gardener's World* as the international judge for the Northwest Flower and Garden Festival. Many of you saw her at the in-person event at the Center for Urban Horticulture. Coming from the United Kingdom, she brought a delightful perspective. In one of her talks, she posed the question, "Can gardens heal the world?" She states, "If our gardens are healthy with an abundance of biodiversity, then everything thrives within." I found her joy and enthusiasm to be quite contagious. I even caught myself conversing with her using a far from authentic British accent.

We are currently accepting applications for horticulture scholarships and grants. If you know of anyone who can benefit from these programs, please refer them to our website: northwesthort.org. I am so proud to report that since its inception, NHS has given over \$168,000 in scholarships to horticulture students and \$765,000 in grants to horticultural organizations. Whenever you take part in an NHS webinar, or in-person workshop, or rejoin as a member, you are supporting this cause. You are helping to shape the future of gardening in the Northwest. This truly demonstrates what can happen when a group of passionate plant geeks come together. The legacy of Elisabeth Miller (founder of NHS) continues year after year because of you. Thanks for being a passionate plant geek. And for being generous.

The lineup of webinars for the rest of the year is extraordinary. I am perpetually blown away that we have access to some of the most renowned figures in horticulture through this series. I encourage you take a look and sign up. More in-person events and garden tours are being announced! Looking forward to seeing you there!

Happy Spring to all of you. Thanks again for your support.

All the best,

Justin Henderson
NHS President



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"Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

—Henry David Thoreau

Iris sibirica (unknown cultivar)
and *Rhododendron yakushimanum*
Image by Richie Steffen