



NORTHWEST
HORTICULTURAL
SOCIETY

GARDENnotes

WINTER 2026



Mahonia × media 'Winter Sun'
Image by Richie Steffen



2026 NHS Garden Tours ||

Sue Goetz

The Northwest Horticultural Society is pleased to announce the return of our popular international and domestic tour program. Join fellow garden lovers and plant nerds for diverse and exciting journeys through the world of gardens.



Sue Goetz –Tour Host





Lost Gardens of Heligan

Southwest England: Devon, Cornwall and beyond!

June 27, 2026 to July 8, 2026

Experience the beauty of the Cornish hillsides and coast. The Gulf Stream along the southwestern coastline creates a milder climate than other parts of England, so gardens have a wide variety of plants, including the exotic and tropical. We'll visit public and private gardens, including experiencing the fascinating history of The Lost Gardens of Heligan, which was unearthed, reclaimed, and restored in 1990 and famous for the restoration and diverse mix of Victorian-era styles, sub-tropical walks, and whimsy. Other gardens on the itinerary will take us through modern, naturalistic styles of Hauser and Wirth, The Garden House and Keith Wiley's Wildside, including a visit to the private garden of James Hitchmough. The trip wraps up as we journey towards London with a visit to Sissinghurst and Great Dixter. Led by NHS board member Sue Goetz & Tour leader Lois Moss.

Philadelphia & Brandywine Valley, Pennsylvania

Fall 2026

Check our website for the itinerary and details for America's Garden Capitol. Join us for garden tours of renowned public gardens and special curated visits to private gardens in Philadelphia and the Brandywine Valley.

Costa Rica: Gardens, Conservation, and Forest Reserves

December 29, 2026 to January 6, 2027

Spend the new year of 2027 immersed in the rich biodiversity and experience of Costa Rica. Join NHS Board member Daniel Sparler for visits to the Green Ark Botanical Garden, surrounded by over 1600 species of ornamental tropical species and fruit trees, claimed to be one of Central America's most extensive collections of flora species. Other visits include the Mistico Hanging Bridges, Nectandra Cloud Forest Garden, La Catalina Botanical Garden, and more.

For more information, go to our travel page on the NHS website (northwesthort.org) for itinerary, travel notes, and costs.



Sissinghurst Castle Garden



An Exclusive Evening with Frances Tophill at the Northwest Flower & Garden Show

by Erica Grivas

NHS is delighted to announce that celebrated UK garden expert Frances Tophill will join the Northwest Flower & Garden Festival, February 18 – 22, 2026, as a featured judge—and offer an exclusive evening talk for NHS members at the Seattle Convention Center.

Each year, NHS helps sponsor a show judge, giving members the opportunity to engage with world-class horticultural minds in an intimate setting.

Frances Tophill 's work highlights the beauty and importance of incorporating native and wild plants into cultivated landscapes, fostering biodiversity while creating vibrant, resilient gardens.

A horticulturalist trained at The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh, she has worked at Monet's garden in France and botanical gardens in Barbados. She appears regularly on *Gardeners' World* and *Love Your Garden*.

Committed to sustainability, Frances has contributed to native tree-planting initiatives and serves as Patron of Thanet Urban Forest. She works closely with the RHS Campaign for School Gardening and the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Her newest book, *A Wildflower Year*, offers readers a month-by-month exploration of wildflower gardening in the UK, along with practical tips and seasonal inspiration.



At this NHS-exclusive evening talk, "The Evolving Role of the Gardener", hear from Frances firsthand about her philosophy on sustainable and wildlife-friendly gardening, and her journey as a writer and garden advocate.

NHS members receive priority access to this special event. Northwest Flower & Garden Festival admission is required.

Don't miss this opportunity to meet Frances Tophill and discover what it means to garden with nature's rhythms in mind.

Go to northwesthort.org/events for event details, date, and registration and gardenshow.com for garden show tickets.

2026 SPRING SYMPOSIUM

Beyond Tradition:
New Visions in Plants and Planting Design

by Nita-Jo Rountree

Throughout this year, the Northwest Horticultural Society will celebrate its 60th anniversary. In celebration of this monumental achievement, our annual symposium will feature luminary speakers from around the world. The symposium's theme, *Beyond Tradition: New Visions in Plants and Planting Design*, draws partial inspiration from Nigel Dunnett's recent book, *The Dynamic Landscape Design: Ecology and Management of Naturalistic Urban Planting*, which he co-authored with James Hitchmough.

The Spring Symposium will begin with a history of NHS presented by **Richie Steffen**, Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and a past president of NHS.

Symposium speakers include:

Nigel Dunnett, Professor of Planting Design and Urban Horticulture in the Department of Landscape at the University of Sheffield in England, is one of the world's leading voices on innovative approaches to planting design. In December 2022, Nigel was named one of the top three most influential people in the UK landscape industry and a gold medal winner at the prestigious Chelsea Flower Show. While ecological designs have often been applied at the larger scale, his focus is on both the large and small-scale designs.

Lisa Roper serves as the horticulturalist for the Gravel Garden and Ruin at Chanticleer, an internationally recognized public garden located in Wayne, Pennsylvania. She has cultivated expertise through thirty-five years of dedicated work across multiple sections of the garden. Lisa has been a guest gardener in South Africa and at Great Dixter in England. Her lecture, "The Chanticleer Gravel Garden: Xeriscaping in the Delaware Valley," will cover select plants, planting methods, and how photography can guide design choices.

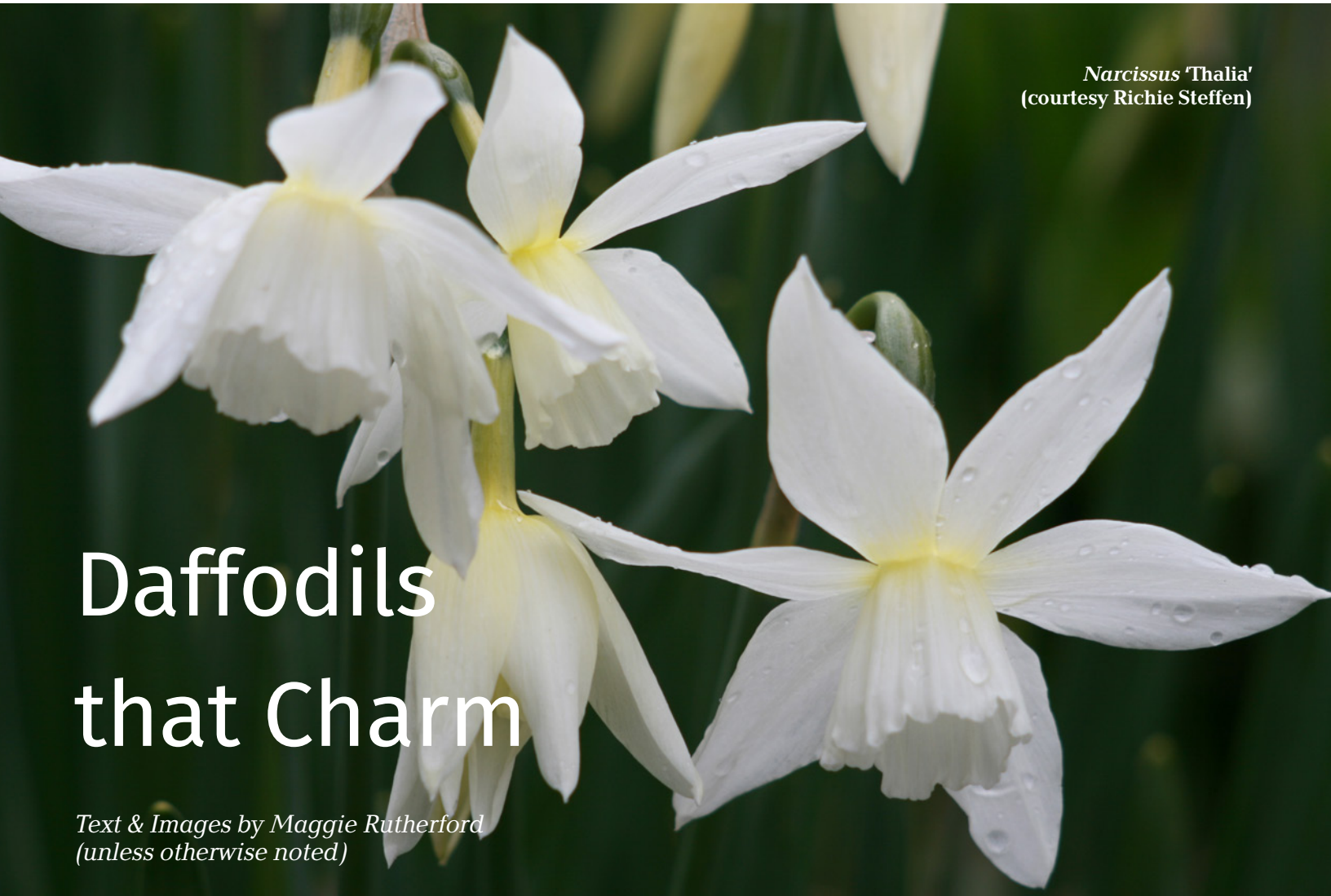
Jared Barns, Ph.D., is a teacher and researcher at the Stephen F. Austin University and is acclaimed as one of the rising stars in horticulture. He is inspiring growing numbers of young horticulturalists with his enthusiastic style. He has delivered lectures for Gardens Masterclass, organized by Annie Guilfoyle and Noel Kingsbury, and has appeared in various publications nationwide. In his symposium lecture, "The Aesthetics of Naturalistic Planting," he will illustrate combining beauty with ecologically sound design.

Daniel J. Hinkley is a world-renowned plantsman, author, plant collector, and lecturer. He has won numerous awards, including the prestigious Veitch Memorial Award presented by the Royal Horticultural Society of Great Britain, "for outstanding contribution to advancing the science and practice of horticulture." Together with Robert Jones, he established Windcliff, a highly lauded garden located in Indianola, Washington. Dan's lecture, "Take Two," will illustrate how the highly destructive winter of 2024 forced his hand to reimagine a space that was already primed for reimagining, both philosophically and aesthetically.

Visit northwesthort.org for tickets and more information. Plants will be available for sale by Windcliff Plants and the Hardy Fern Foundation.



Narcissus 'Thalia'
(courtesy Richie Steffen)



Daffodils that Charm

*Text & Images by Maggie Rutherford
(unless otherwise noted)*



Narcissus 'Thalia'

W

hen I wax poetic about my love of daffodils, I sometimes get funny looks from the *Narcissus*-uninitiated. More often than not, they are picturing the common, canary-yellow trumpets that dot roadsides and pre-packaged bulb containers in front of grocery stores every springtime. While bright and cheerful after winter's gloom, these cultivars tend to be rather one-note and might not inspire much enthusiasm in the garden. But there is so much more to *Narcissus* than this!

One of the first *Narcissus* that I fell in love with was 'Thalia', a pure white triandrus daffodil that features 2 to 3 flowers per stem, elegantly tapered petals, and a mild fragrance. This sophisticated cultivar is a classic that has stood the test of time—it was first introduced in the early 1900's. Just as graceful as 'Thalia' is *Narcissus poeticus* var. *recurvus*, as well as its look-alike *Narcissus 'Actaea'*. Sometimes referred to as poet's daffodils, these *Narcissus* feature icy white petals and diminutive, flat cups that are lemon-yellow edged in orange.



Narcissus poeticus var. recurvus



Narcissus 'Blushing Lady'



Narcissus 'Pink Charm'

'Pink Charm' is a large-cupped cultivar that, as its name implies, has an almost ombré salmon-pink cup that brings a unique pop of color to the largely still gray and brown landscape of early spring. *Narcissus 'Accent'* is a similar cultivar whose cup is more uniformly pink.

If you're looking for tiny-flowered daffodils, cyclamineus forms like *Narcissus 'Snipe'* and 'Jack Snipe' are charming, early-spring bloomers with distinctly recurved petals and elongated cups. Another enchanting small-flowered variety is 'Sailboat', a jonquilla form with white petals and the palest butter-yellow cups; it flowers in mid spring, and a thick drift of this looks ethereal in the garden. Two other jonquilla forms I adore are 'Blushing Lady' (not to be confused with the tulip of the same name) and 'Prosecco'. 'Blushing Lady' often produces 2-3 flowers on each stem, with cups that open yellow and gradually "blush" to a salmon pink as the season progresses. 'Prosecco's coloring is hard to describe; creamy petals with the palest whisper of pink to them paired with cups that are the color of ripe apricots. The petals have a slight iridescence that makes them almost glitter in the sun. 'Prosecco' also has a distinct fragrance that reminds me of root beer (a good thing, in my book). If this all sounds like a bit much, let me assure you that it is not—everything about 'Prosecco' is subtle enough to make it a lovely and unique specimen. Both 'Blushing Lady' and 'Prosecco' are extremely late-season bloomers, often still lighting up the garden as late as the first weeks of May.

For more dramatically-sized blooms, trumpet forms such as *Narcissus 'British Gamble'*, and large-cup cultivars like 'Salome'



Narcissus 'Jack Snipe' (courtesy Richie Steffen)



Narcissus 'Prosecco'



Narcissus 'Mt. Hood'
(courtesy Richie Steffen)



Narcissus 'Acropolis'

and 'Ice Follies' are all lovely, with creamy petals and bold cups that feature variations of soft peachy, pink, and gold tones. 'Mt. Hood' is another well-loved classic, with white petals and cups that open up with a hint of yellow, but age to white. Many gardeners turn their noses up at the ruffled double forms, but I will never not grow *Narcissus 'Acropolis'*. It reads as mostly white, with hints of copper smoldering within its overlapping center, but its fragrance alone would make it worth planting, regardless of its looks—a single bloom dropped into a vase is enough to perfume an entire room!

And if all of these cultivars are in too good of taste for you, there is always the gaudy monstrosity *Narcissus 'Petit Four'*. Is it completely over-the-top? Yes. Does its immensely heavy, flouncy bloom often flop to the ground under its own weight after spring rains? Also, yes. But I must own up to planting this poor garden grower in a few containers that I tucked against my house for protection and treated as a cut flower. Bringing a bouquet of these bizarre charmers inside where I could marvel (and shake my head) at their frosting-like frills and little "teeth" up close certainly brought a smile to my face as I waited for the rest of my spring garden to wake up. So if you have never given much thought to growing daffodils or simply dismissed them out of hand for being too "basic," perhaps it's time to take a second look—there is a size, shape, and color for everyone! And springtime just isn't as joyful without them. 🌷

Maggie Rutherford is assistant gardener at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden.



Narcissus 'Salome'



Narcissus 'Mt. Hood'
(courtesy Richie Steffen)



Narcissus 'Ice Follies' (courtesy Krzysztof Golik
CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons)

Tsuga canadensis: **Cultivars** with **Character**

Text and Images by Richie Steffen



Tsuga canadensis 'Pendula'



The Miller Garden is filled with interesting conifers. Some of these are recent additions to the garden while a number are choice species and selections planted by Mrs. Miller. Their beautiful texture and striking form have made them instrumental in providing structure to the garden. My favorites are the weeping hemlock cultivars. We have three cultivars, all planted by Mrs. Miller, and each are well-placed to show off the beauty of the mature plants.

Growing up in Maryland, I learned about dwarf conifers as I studied horticulture at the University of Maryland. Dwarf and weeping forms of Canadian hemlock featured prominently

and frequently. As my interest grew in dwarf conifers, it led me to the well-known Gotteli collection at the National Arboretum in Washington, DC. I spent many hours walking through this collection in awe of the mature specimens of dwarf conifers. Later, after I moved to Seattle, I worked at Sky Nursery as their nursery manager and woody plant buyer. In this role, I visited the famous Iseli Nursery in Boring, Oregon. This huge wholesale nursery had an amazing collection of dwarf conifers with many selections of tight mounding and weeping forms of Canadian hemlock. Around the same time, I purchased an edition of *The Cultivated Hemlocks* by John C. Swartley which solidified my love of dwarf and weeping Canadian hemlocks.



Tsuga canadensis 'Cole's Prostrate'

When I started working at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in the fall of 2000, I was enamored with the beautiful mature specimens of weeping hemlock being grown in the garden. Over the years, I have learned more about these gorgeous plants and how to work with them in the landscape. The three weeping cultivars grown at the Miller Garden are *Tsuga canadensis* 'Pendula', Sargent's weeping hemlock, *T. canadensis* 'Cole's Prostrate', Cole's spreading hemlock and my favorite, *T. canadensis* 'Valentine's Weeping'.

The most well-known of the three is *Tsuga canadensis* 'Pendula', Sargent's weeping hemlock. This cultivar was discovered by a farmer in the 1850's but not distributed by nurseries until 1874. The Arnold Arboretum's publication *Arnoldia* has a detailed account of this hemlock's origin and shows how petty competitive gardening can be! ([https://arboretum.harvard.edu/arnoldia-stories/closing-the-](https://arboretum.harvard.edu/arnoldia-stories/closing-the)

[book-on-sargents-weeping-hemlock/](https://arboretum.harvard.edu/arnoldia-stories/closing-the-book-on-sargents-weeping-hemlock/)) It was written by Peter Del Tridici, who has served in several horticultural positions at Harvard University and the Arnold Arboretum, and he also wrote a book detailing the history of this plant called *A Giant Among the Dwarfs: The Mystery of Sargent's Weeping Hemlock*. There are three mature specimens at the Miller Garden with the most beautiful and dramatic specimen placed on a bank above and facing the Miller House where the graceful pendulous branches can be easily admired. These specimens were likely planted in the late 1960's to early 1970's.

Our specimens of Sargent's weeping hemlock are about twice as wide as they are tall. The growth is mostly weeping with small amounts gained in height every year. These

plants will continue to spread wider every year with small, incremental increases in height. Our largest specimen is 15 feet tall, 15 ½ feet wide and 23 feet long and was likely planted in the late 1960's. As these plants grow, they have a flattened top with cascading branches that will touch the ground if allowed. I have one young plant in my home garden as a small immature one-gallon sized plant in a wooden box, then transplanted into a ceramic container. Even though it can attain a large size, it can serve as an interesting container specimen for well over a decade. This year, I am looking for a place in the garden to allow it to grow to its full potential.

Mrs. Miller's favorite of the weeping hemlocks was the extremely compact *Tsuga canadensis* 'Cole's Prostrate'. This can regularly be found in our regional nurseries and is much slower and lower growing than Sargent's weeping hemlock. 'Cole's Prostrate' forms a dense low mound that increases in height by only one inch a year and in spread by about 3 to 4 inches a year.

Over the many years these plants have been in the ground, our largest specimen reaches about 3 feet tall, 6 feet in width and 8 ½ feet long. The plants were likely added to the garden in the early 1970's. These mature specimens are stunning, forming a mounded shape composed of multiple hummocks cascading to the ground reminding one of a sculptural boulder of well-weathered rock with softened edges and an anchoring form. I am sure Mrs. Miller saw this as she planted several plants along a well-used gravel pathway. These dark green mounds acted as large boulders on the edge of a "stream" composed of gravel. This effect was spectacular for many years until at last the hemlock "boulders" grew and choked the gravel pathway. We eventually had to relocate several plants to other areas nearby. Most of these were transplanted successfully and continue to grow in the garden today. I can see why Mrs. Miller liked this plant so much.

The final and rarest weeping hemlock in the Miller Garden is *Tsuga canadensis* 'Valentine's Weeping'. This is my favorite of the three. I have seen two specimens in person and one in images only. The first specimen I saw was in the Gotelli collection. This large, old plant grew with three broad, spreading arms draped in weeping branches. It reminded me of a scorpion with its arms spread, and it loomed a bit ominously against two other dwarf conifers. My fondness for



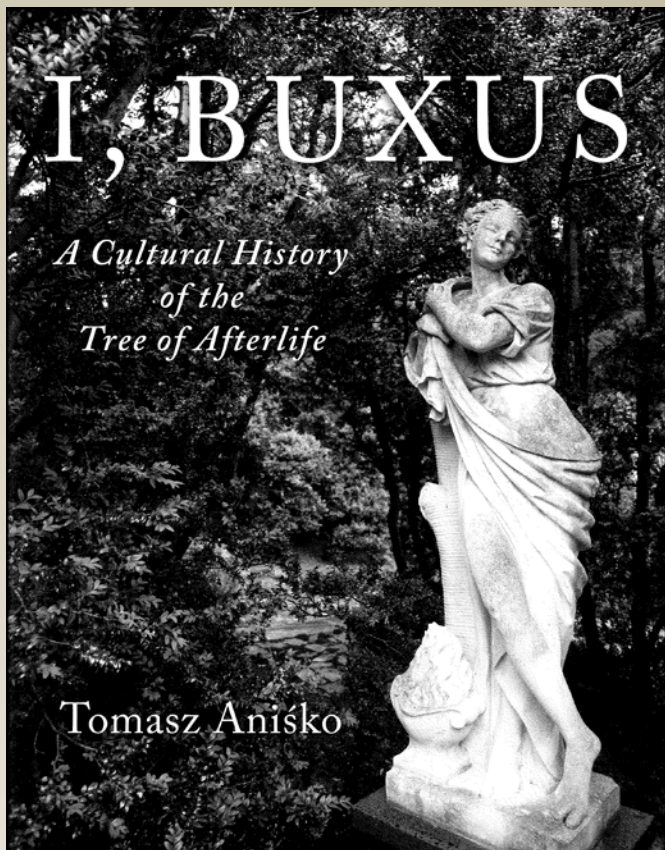
Tsuga canadensis 'Valentine's Weeping'

this tree did not start until I saw the Miller Garden specimen. One leaning trunk rises up to about 12 feet tall, forming an extending arch that reaches about 32 feet long with 14 feet of width today. A curtain of weeping branches hang from either side of the trunk, and it is a picture of grace and beauty. This was likely planted in the Miller Garden in the early 1970's. Over ten years ago, I took cuttings from this tree with a few rootings. One of these cuttings is now a young sprawling plant in my home garden begging for more space to fully develop. I have it on my list to transplant this winter.

Interestingly, the original plant of 'Valentine's Weeping' grows very differently than the specimens I know. The original tree is located near the Dwarf and Unusual Conifer Collection at the University of Tennessee Arboretum. It was moved to the Arboretum in 1966 from the nursery of William L. Valentine, who discovered the seedling in a forest near Crosby, Tennessee in 1940. I have not seen this plant in person, but the photos of it show a widely spreading specimen about 5 ½ feet tall and 30 to 40 feet wide, less than half the height of the Gotelli or Miller Garden plants.

Unfortunately, this story does end with a sad tale. In their native habitat, Canadian hemlocks are dying off at an alarming rate. The native pest, hemlock wooly adelgid (*Adelges tsugae*), has dramatically increased in numbers, weakening the tree and making it susceptible to various environmental stresses and climate change. Although this pest does occur in the Pacific Northwest, it does not seem to create the havoc here that it does on the East Coast. Because of this, I encourage Northwest gardeners to plant a few dwarf cultivars of Canadian hemlocks, the rarer the better. Without the efforts of gardeners to preserve these cultivars, they will be lost. Keep an eye out when you are out shopping in local nurseries or online and give these plants a try. If you do not have space in your garden, remember that many of these dwarfs can thrive for years in containers. I hope you find the joy that I have in these plants and play a role in the future conservation. 🌲

Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and member of NHS.



LITERARY NOTES from the Miller Library

Brian Thompson

I, Buxus tells the story of common boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*) written from a most interesting perspective: a first-person narrative by the plant itself! She (her chosen pronoun dating to Roman times) laments that, “few people know about me much more than the fact that I make a fine garden ornament.”

Buxus, assisted by author Tomasz Aniśko, describes her book in the sub-title as *A Cultural History of the Tree of Afterlife*. It is an engaging story.

She is very proud of the order she brings to a garden, “acculturating the unruly flowers” and is often found edging gardens of all types. Because of slow growth, she rarely outgrows her intended size. The use of boxwood for topiary dates back to antiquity and has been especially popular in European cultures since the Renaissance.

Groves of boxwood planted in cemeteries or surrounding sacred shrines is common in both Christian and Muslim traditions. While trees in the surrounding countryside might be harvested, those in these spaces are considered holy, and are let be.

The very dense quality of her wood has made boxwood very useful for small tools, especially those associated with spinning and weaving. Throughout the 19th century, engraved boxwood plates of plant illustrations, cut across the grain, were considered by book printers the equal, and for some purposes better, than the more common copper plates.

While Buxus is sharing her cultural history, she does not address the several threats — alas — to her well-being. Especially worrisome are the box tree moth (*Cydalima perspectalis*) and the boxwood blight (*Calonectria pseudonaviculata*) that have devastated many of her sisters, especially in Europe.

How *I, Buxus* came to the Miller Library is an interesting story in itself. Sold only through a source in Poland, our initial inquiry asked for our patience while “our government resolves the temporary stop in shipping to the USA.” Fortunately, that stop was resolved and we received the book in about six weeks.

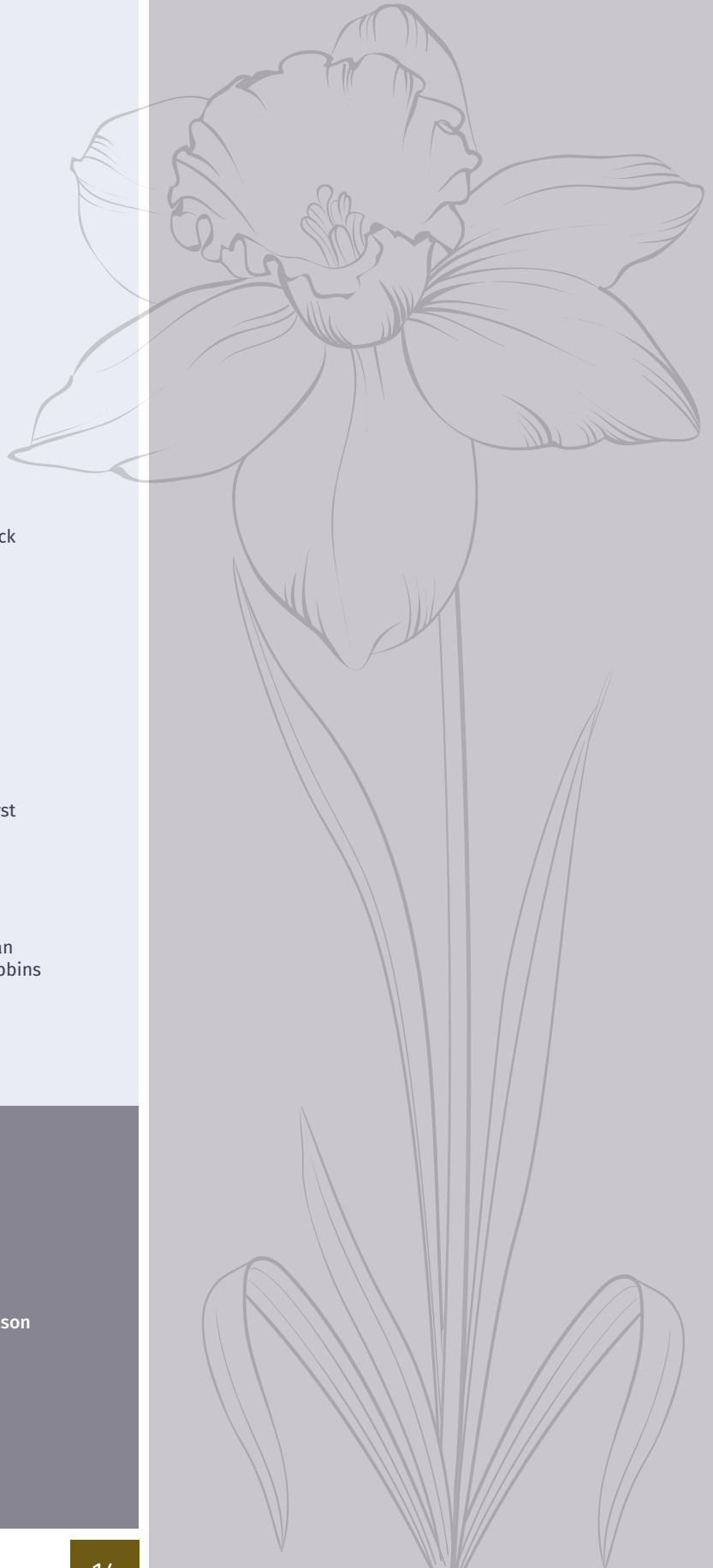
Because this book is scarce, it is not available to check out. However, I’m sure Buxus would appreciate you exploring her story in the comfort of the Miller Library on a dreary winter’s day. 🌿

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



NEW MEMBERS ▶

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GARDENnotes

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Dear NHS Members,

As you are reading this issue of Garden Notes, the days are already growing longer, though not yet very perceptibly so, and a new year has begun. This year the Society is celebrating its 60th anniversary. We continue to pursue our founding mission to provide a forum for gardeners and plant lovers to share their interests and learn about horticulture and to promote excellent horticulture for the benefit of people living in the Pacific Northwest. In the 60 years since 1966, the organization has evolved through focus, innovation, and adaptation. In 2001, one of the finest horticultural libraries west of the Mississippi, the Elisabeth C. Miller Library, was badly damaged by a fire set by arsonists in a nearby building. NHS members focused their energy to aid in rebuilding and re-equipping the library and supporting its staff in reconstructing the facility. Once again, people could make use of the collection and the lending library and enjoy the many other activities and services the library offers, and this invaluable educational horticultural resource was preserved. The COVID pandemic occasioned innovation. To accomplish the Society's educational effort when no in-person events were possible, NHS created an outstanding webinar program, now a common learning tool. Webinars preserved and expanded the organization's ability to share horticultural information and education. In 2024, long-time employee Karin Kravitz, who was instrumental in helping NHS achieve its mission, retired and the organization is adapting. Thanks to many NHS volunteers, and the savvy and commitment of our immediate past president, Sashi Raghupathy, the organization is adapting, better using what software can offer to enable intelligent decision making and employing an awareness of social and societal trends to realize opportunities in achieving the Society's mission.

In 2026, I invite every member to participate with the people who are on the board today and one another as we work collectively to continue to realize today the aspirations of those who had the courage and conviction back in 1966 to found an organization devoted to horticulture and its future. This year, as we continue to evolve NHS, we are increasing opportunities for members to volunteer to assist with classes and participate on the various NHS committees. If you have an interest, please email info@northwesthort.org. We will also be reaching out to learn your interests and include you. The Spring Symposium, celebrating our 60th anniversary, will include an exceptional group of speakers from the US and Britain and a presentation on some of the founders and the early history of NHS. Classes, workshops, webinars, and local tours are planned and registration available on the NHS website. We are planning an after-hour event for members at a nursery here in the Puget Sound Basin. Join in the adventure of gardening, learning horticulture, and promoting the practice of good horticulture by both gardeners and gardening professionals.

Tanya DeMarsh-Dodson
NHS President



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*"In all your gardening,
but particularly when
dealing with our native
plants, you should
become an amateur
ecologist."*

— Bebe Miles

Sarracenia cvs.
Image by Richie Steffen

