



Fall, 2020

## *President's Letter*

By Kathy Kircher, President

Wow! It's Fall. And it's been great so far with lots of perfect days for being outside. Summer flew by and left us with many memories of the beauty of nature and the joy of welcoming sites at **Brookside Gardens**. I hope you were able to store away memories of good times with family and friends outdoors at our magnificent park.

**FOBG** ended the summer with its **Annual Plant Sale** which was held using online ordering and curbside pick-up. If you bought plants at the sale – **Thank You!** It was one of our best sales ever. I have to say that there were times when I thought it might not happen. But with lots and lots of hard work and dedication by many, it did - spectacularly. Thank you to everyone who made it happen.

Some **sad news** - **Betsy Thomas**, a past **FOBG President** and long-time **FOBG Board Member**, passed away in early September. She was creative, smart, a good friend, and dedicated to supporting **Brookside Gardens** and **FOBG**. We will miss her.

**It's membership renewal time.** Every year **FOBG** memberships end on October 31. Many of you have already renewed and we are off to a good start. If you haven't renewed yet, please do. You can send us your renewal reply, renew online [here](#), or print a

renewal form [here](#) and mail it in. This year **FOBG** was able to donate funds for seasonal gardening staff for **Brookside** to help maintain the gardens. This was especially valuable because many more people have visited Brookside, and private events that **Brookside** uses for funding could not be held. **Please help support the gardens now.**

Fall and the holidays remind us to **be thankful** for so many things at **Brookside Gardens**. Some of mine are the nature workshops and activities they hold for children; the Japanese Garden and the restful views of the surrounding pond and plantings; time we spend here with our families and friends; the many classes available to learn about plants and conservation; space to walk, exercise, relax, and celebrate; the dedicated and talented staff that make it all work; and the support from **Montgomery County** and the **Parks Department**. I'm sure you have many more that are important to you.

Be sure to check out the **Chrysanthemum Show**. It's amazing. It's outside the Visitor Center this year so you can visit safely. I hope you get to come to **Brookside** often this fall and winter. There's always something interesting to experience.

**See you in the Gardens!**



Please note that the “**News from Brookside**” column will return in the **Winter 2021** issue of **The Brooksider**.

## ***Time to Renew***

**By Kathy Kircher, President**

Most **FOBG** Memberships are about to expire on **October 31, 2020**. Please renew now. Your **FOBG** membership makes a difference! You can see your donation at work – right here and right now! Members make a difference in the lives of all who visit **Brookside Gardens** to celebrate, learn, exercise, create, relax, or renew.

This year has brought many challenges and next year will bring them too. Visiting **Brookside Gardens** is a respite from the daily monotony of seeing the world through your living room window. Come see the difference you are making. **Brookside** continues adapting to keep the gardens safe and available for all of us. Many **Brookside Gardens** events, including those sponsored by **FOBG**, have been modified or moved online. Children’s Day was modified so children could still attend safely. The **Speakers Series** and **Greenscapes** (formerly Green Matters) **Symposium** are being offered as virtual online lectures. Check them out in “[Cultivate](#)”.

As a member, you are also entitled to the following benefits:

- 10% discount at **Brookside Gardens’** gift shops on non-sale items
- 10% discount and early entry to **FOBG's Annual Plant Sale** in September
- discounts on many **Brookside Gardens’** classes and lectures
- discounts at several local garden-related businesses and **Washington Gardener Magazine** subscriptions

You can renew online [here](#), print a renewal form [here](#) and mail it in, or use the renewal form you received in the mail.

**Thank you for renewing! Your gift makes a difference!**

# Virtual Plant Sale 2020

By Nithya Raghavan, Joan O' Rourke and Taffy Turner

The [FOBG Plant Sale](#) this year went VIRTUAL with a CONTACTLESS plant pickup during the first two weekends in September. While ordering on-line, every customer had to pick a specific date and an hour time slot to pick up their plants. How to sell the plants under quarantine regulations was uncharted territory for **FOBG**! The plants for the sale had started arriving in April when the lockdown began. Volunteers were not allowed to work at the **Brookside Gardens'** hoop house due to Montgomery Parks' guidelines and restrictions. The **Brookside** staff rallied together under the leadership of its Director, **Stephanie Oberle**, and potted, watered and nurtured the thousands of plants, shrubs and trees for **FOBG**. A limited number of volunteers were then allowed in to work at the hoop house in mid-August under strict **CDC** guidelines. With the combined efforts of the **Brookside** staff (without whose help the plant sale would not have happened), the plant sale organizers and the tireless **FOBG** volunteers, the Virtual Plant Sale was a resounding success! The **Plant Sale Gross Sales** including tax was **\$25,113.52**. The **Plant Sale Refunds** including tax was **\$739.88** and the **Final Gross Sale Revenue** including tax was **\$24,373.64** (\$22,994 revenue +1379.64 owed to the state).

Our plant sale list was posted on the website in July and the online store went live to **FOBG** members on August 12<sup>th</sup>. As a members' benefit, **FOBG** members were allowed to select and purchase their plants online one week prior to the general public. In lieu of the 10% discount offered to all members during the plant sale, members received a free plant at the time of pickup. The **FOBG** Board had to make this decision to help **Brookside Gardens** during these financially difficult times and budget cuts. Everyone who has enjoyed and continued to use **Brookside Gardens** were very willing to forgo their 10% discount in order

to support their favorite public park! The store was open to all including the general public on August 19<sup>th</sup>.

The plants that were available for the sale were vast and varied. We had 51 varieties of [perennials](#), seven of the [ferns](#), 30 of the [shrubs](#) and seven of the [trees](#) making it a total of **95 varieties of plants**. Many plants sold out very early to the members who purchased their plants within a few minutes of the store opening! There were **257 on-line orders** in total of which 174 were members and 83 non-members and 2000 plants sold! Most of the orders came within the first 10 days of the store opening and continued till the day before the store closed on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Unlike the previous years when we had a traditional plant sale where folks could come and select their plants, **FOBG** had to make different decisions regarding the sale. For example, we never had to offer refunds since if a plant did not look good or if it was dead, nobody bought it. However, when on-line orders were placed one could not assume that all plants would thrive until the time of pickup in September. Refunds had to be provided for the *Blechnum*, *Ajuga*, *Dianthus* and *Heliopsis* due to poor quality of plants and, also, due to the lack of survival of a few numbers of *Penstemon*, *Coreopsis* and *Echinacea*.

Free plants that were provided to **FOBG** members (one per member) included species of *Carex*, *Phlox*, *Baptisia*, *Tiarella* and *Salvia*. Orders were pulled and quality controlled on the Thursday and Friday before the pickup weekend.

Everything was not smooth sailing. Heavy rains caused saturated, limp cardboard boxes from the pulled orders despite plastic tenting but this problem was not unmanageable. Volunteers had to replace the boxes and repackage the orders



early before the first vehicle pulled up to pick up an order. The greeters, the loaders and the hoop house organizers worked together for a smooth pickup while the **Brookside** staff helped guide the vehicles to the pickup point.

What seemed like an insurmountable hurdle at the beginning of the pandemic - the logistics that had to go into planning the plant sale and help from the **Brookside** staff and volunteers - all worked out seamlessly in the end. **FOBG** members and the general public were aware of the difficult circumstances we were operating under and were

very understanding regarding the changes, refunds, swapping of plants, etc. The online team was kept bustling with moving inventory, contacting the members and the public regarding refunds, swapping plants, accommodating changes in pick up times for those who needed to do so and other constantly evolving situations. It was a **TEAM EFFORT** and what a team it was! Thank you all for helping **FOBG**, volunteering with us and organizing the **2020 PLANT SALE**. We would especially like to thank **all FOBG members and non-members** for supporting **FOBG** and purchasing a truly amazing collection of plants.



# Remembering Betsy Thomas

By Suzanne Carbone and Barbara Waite-Jaques

It is with sorrow that we inform our members that **Betsy Woods Thomas**, past president of the [Friends of Brookside Gardens \(FOBG\)](#), and a longtime volunteer of **Brookside Gardens**, died quietly in her sleep on September 11, 2020 after a short illness at age 80. She will be missed by all who knew her and remembered as the person who rescued FOBG when the founding president, Joan O'Rourke was unable to continue as president.



Betsy had volunteered at Brookside for many years, and the sculpture show that she and her longtime friend Audrey Katz mounted in the conservatory caught the eye of David Vismara, who was then the director of Brookside. A letter was sent to **FOBG** members stating that the **FOBG** organization would have to be dissolved if there was no one who would step up to take on the role of President. David approached Betsy and she agreed to try to fill Joan's big footprints.

As President, she brought new life and diversity to the organization by recruiting friends from many parts of her life to join her on the Board. She oversaw the creation of the bylaws which guided **FOBG** and she became the unofficial parliamentarian in interpreting the bylaws after her terms as President were over.

Betsy leaves her daughter Marci, her nieces Alison Beckwith and Michelle de Alberich, her nephew Riley Gilroy, and her great nieces Lauren Beckwith, Kristin Beckwith, Mckenna Gilroy, and Emma Gilroy.

To read a complete *Baltimore Sun* obituary, please use this link: <https://legacy.co/307BS4v>

In lieu of flowers, please donate to Friends of Brookside Gardens in memory of Betsy Thomas <http://www.friendsofbrooksidegardens.org/donate>.

A memorial will be held later when it is safe for people to gather.

## Tributes from FOBG colleagues:

**From Judy Sturtz, former FOBG Board Member recruited by Betsy:** I met Betsy when we first moved here and our husbands were both Vice Presidents at the University of Maryland, College Park. Through the years we attended a lot of university functions, lunches, dinners, and receptions. For football games, we sat in the President's box and for basketball games, we sat court side. Both of us enjoyed these events and the many friends we made. We went to Bowl games and ACC basketball tournaments. Sometimes we went to four basketball games in a day at the tournament. If there was a half-day break, our husbands headed for the golf course and Betsy and I scouted out shopping - and laughed about how many times we got lost in Greensboro or Charlotte. We lived in the same neighborhood and we would often head out to Larriland Farm to pick strawberries or to a designer show house in the area.

Betsy and Bud loved to entertain. Their election night parties could be counted on every four years. If the Pittsburgh Symphony went to Deep Creek to play at Wisp in the summer, they invited folks for dinner and the concert, hosting at their mountain house.





Betsy was an extremely talented folk-art painter. Friends looked forward to her yearly craft show in her home, where she included other craftspeople and you could find wonderful gifts or things for your home. When we moved to our present home almost 30 years ago now, she painted the soffit in our dining room - in blue and white (we both loved those colors) and she painted " Love, laughter, and friends are always welcome" along with lovely designs to go with. It is still there and will always remind us of her friendship.

**From Nithya Raghavan, current FOBG Board member:** Betsy was a warm and caring person, yet full of spunk and a wicked sense of humor. Whether it was a ten-minute conversation, or a half-day spent exploring an art show, Betsy's insights were funny, thoughtful and at times had you rolling with laughter. You never knew when Betsy would come up with what I called "Betsyisms", a little tongue in cheek quip one had to be very quick to catch. I will miss her witticism and her thoughtful insights about life. She was of the belief that when life threw you a curve ball one had to catch it and run with it as if one's life depended on it. She was a wonderful friend, who cared and nurtured friendships and was always willing to help. My world has shrunk a little without Betsy in my corner, but various pieces of her brilliant artwork adorn various parts of my home. Betsy lives on in memories and through her art.

**From Joan O'Rourke, founding president of FOBG:** A recollection of Betsy's humor is a little story that starts with my volunteering for **Brookside Gardens** in the Children's program prior to starting **FOBG**. One day while leading a group of young boys, we came upon a bird box full of baby birds and very anxious, parent birds that were raising a racket. That drew everyone's attention including the gardeners who



happened to be working close by. Upon inspection, the gardener noticed a large snake in the bird box that he pulled out to the utter delight of the children and to my absolute horror. The garden romp turned into a Q & A about the snake and the boys enjoyed a better tour and learning experience than I could have given! Later, I mentioned this story to Betsy who never forgot it. Many years later, after stepping down as the president of **FOBG** and Betsy taking over the next board meeting, she presented me

with a plush toy snake saying how much she enjoyed the story that had evolved into the beginning of **FOBG**. She also said that the plush snake would make the story even better as a "Show and Tell" and hence the gift!

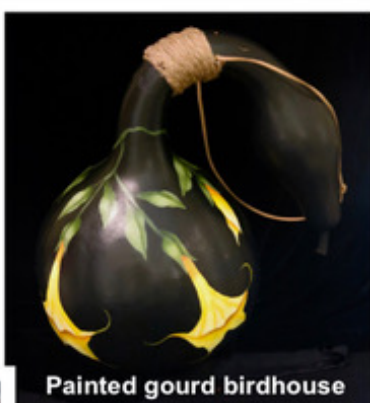
**From Joe Ann Stenstrom, former FOBG Board Member:** Betsy had such a wonderful, dry sense of humor; she was able to put a humorous twist on something that always made me laugh. I will miss the lightness she could bring to a situation. Working on the revision of the bylaws, dull as it might seem, was fun. Her parliamentary guidance was excellent. So many times, we could have "messed up" except for her eagle eye on what was correct. We missed that after she could no longer meet with us.

**From Ann Davis, former FOBG board member recruited by Betsy:** I'd known Betsy Thomas for over 20 years, and I know that she was a devoted member of **FOBG**. We painted together on many projects that were donated or demonstrated or shared with both adults and children at **Brookside**. One of her favorite projects was when we did leaf printing on shirts with children at the Garden. With one of our painting groups, she always taught a class with the pieces to be donated to the Garden. Most times, we

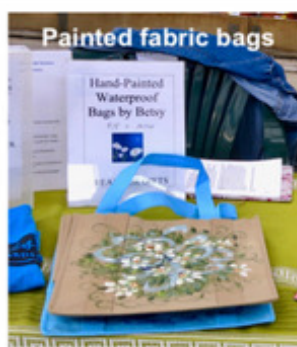
painted flowerpots or bird houses or gourds. She also painted many items for the FOBG Silent Auction and encouraged others to paint and donate as well. Our local painting chapter will carry on her tradition of donating to the Gardens in her memory with painted items. I was on many boards with her and she was a hard-working member and a leader of most Boards and I know many groups will miss her presence. She always gave freely of her time and painting talents so others could learn and enjoy artwork, in all different ways. She was willing to demonstrate or teach or just be available to answer questions or collect items for donations or sales for many groups including **Brookside** which became one of her favorite places.



Painted pumpkin



Painted gourd birdhouse



Painted fabric bags



Painted bench top

*Artwork by Betsy*



Painted table and chairs



Painted watering can



Painted table lamp



Wall Art in Betsy's living room

# Garden Guardian

By Dr. Dick Hammerschlag, Master Gardener, Howard County

## Taking a Bite Out of Chestnut Blight

As we know, the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) has been pretty much obliterated from the American landscape since the chestnut blight fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) was introduced into the U.S. in the early 1900s. The fungus causes a stem/trunk canker which often girdles the tree at the level of infection. The tree may remain alive in the form of basal sprouts since the chestnut fungus is inhibited by competing micro-organisms in the soil. Since the sprouts are genetically identical to the original tree they too will succumb. Thus, though the forest may support recurring saplings, no new genetic tolerance can develop (no new gene recombinations). Also, the fungus can use white oaks and scarlet oaks as hosts so the fungus remains prevalent. But there is new hope as a result of scientific research. Following are steps taken to save American chestnut trees:

1. An individual tree may be at least temporarily maintained by plastering soil (containing those competing micro-organisms) on every canker.....
2. Extensive efforts have been made back crossing the American chestnut with Asian chestnuts which have high tolerance to the disease (the fungus likely came to the U.S. on Asian imports). The main issue is that the Asian trees are spreading in form, not upright like the American chestnut and also the hybrids are not pure American. The challenge then is to keep backcrossing, trying to retain Asian tolerance, but gradually breeding out other Asian germplasm so that one gains an essentially disease tolerant American chestnut. This work is ongoing.
3. It has been found that there are hypovirulent strains of the fungus i.e., strains carrying a virus which make them less virulent than the wild type. The idea is to introduce this 'milder' fungus (biocontrol) and have it outcompete the wild forms. Although this technique can work locally with intensive inoculations, the hypovirulent strains do not spread well in nature. Also, the hypovirulent strains are incompatible with the wild type – so no hybridization.
4. Chemical treatments have not worked well, and even if so, would not be tenable in a native forest.
5. And now, the basis for bringing up this subject of restoring the American chestnut, is the recent work using transgenics. It has been shown that the fungus produces oxalic acid which kills the American chestnut cambium. So researchers ([Google "Chestnut blight transgenics"](#) for details and persons involved, etc.) have introduced an oxalate oxidase gene (using *Agrobacterium* to transfer the gene) from wheat. It oxidizes oxalic acid to hydrogen peroxide and carbon dioxide. The new transgenic plants (called Darling X plants after a benefactor) have been tested (stem/trunk inoculations, etc.) to have similar resistance as the Asian species. These new transgenic plants are now being crossed with wild type American chestnuts to increase genetic diversity. What remains is the staggering task of getting approval of this transgenic from the USDA, EPA, etc. for release to the public. This process could take years..... But there is hope!!!!



In this and future issues of *The Brooksider*, we will provide a listing of upcoming FOBG sponsored events and Brookside Gardens adult programs. The list will be updated as information becomes available. We hope this will be helpful in planning how you can take advantage of all that Brookside Gardens has to offer. Additional offerings, such as children’s programs, art exhibits and excursions can be found at: [Cultivate](#).

	<b>Brookside Gardens Adult and Children's Programs</b>	<b>Course #</b>
11/7/2020	Getting Your Garden Ready for Winter	87642
11/24/2020	Thanksgiving Centerpiece**	87646
12/8/2020	Festive Wreaths**	87648
12/9/2020	Festive Centerpieces**	87650
12/9/2020	Flower Buds Session II*	87444
12/9/2020	Herb and Spice Holiday Gift Workshops*	87328
1/16/2021	Kokedama – The Art of Crafting Living Mossballs**	87652
1/22/2021	Kokedama for Kids	87335
1/30/2020	Everything You Wanted to Know About Pruning	87643
1/28/2021	Brookside Gardens Winter Tour	87637
2/6/2021	Introduction to Plant Propagation – Tropical Houseplants	87654
2/12/2021	Crafty Valentine’s Heart’s-a-Bustin Workshop	87333
2/21/2021	Green Matters: Back to Our Roots: Leveraging Native Plants to Re-store the Environment	87621
3/9/2021	Philadelphia Flower Show – Habitat	87625

\* - Program Meets Multiple Days

\*\* - Program Meets Multiple Times Per Day



Brookside photo provided by Len Friedman



*Wishing you a Happy and  
Healthy Holiday Season*

Suggestions? Ideas? Let us know!

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