

# SECRET NEWSLETTER

All things Secret

July 2021

## From the Curator...

As summer swelters on, it's a good time to take a moment to reflect on the accomplishments of spring and even look forward to autumnal pursuits. My recent articles have taken the proverbial 30,000 foot view, but this will be a chance to get back into the weeds—where most of us operate on a day to day basis. Despite a tumultuous spring that saw seesawing temperature fluctuations (but much less rain than previous years), the Secret Crew made a dent in several important projects and set the stage for others to come.

First, we were honored to assist Wooster Rotary by providing a number of large trees for relocation to Oak Hill Park. Secret still harbors an abundance of trees planted in 2010 and 2011 during the tornado recovery era. Many have reached proportions requiring that they be selectively thinned or moved to a new home as not to crowd or damage nearby plants. In a very rewarding win-win opportunity, over twenty oaks, maples, redbuds, hawthorns and friends escaped the chainsaw and will thrive for decades to commemorate Rotary's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



A second spring project consisted of thinning several trees and shrubs within the Streeter Garden Amphitheater to ensure a good view from every seat. This hopefully improved the experience for those who attended the first “Music in the Arboretum” concert on June 25<sup>th</sup>. We hope you will join us for the next two shows on July 30<sup>th</sup> and August 20<sup>th</sup>. I am grateful for the budding partnership between Friends of Secret and the Ohio Regional Music, Arts, and Cultural Outreach (ORMACO) to bring music back to the amphitheater!

Now for some statistics to recap spring's curatorial accomplishments: From March through June, Secret staff and volunteers planted a total of 359 trees, shrubs and perennials to beautify and diversify the gardens. The new additions consist of 208 unique species or varieties representing 98 genera and 55 families.

Several of these can be found in the renovated Seaman Orientation Plaza at the southeast corner of the Welcome Center. This garden has been reincarnated as a concentrated collection of fragrant landscape plants such as lilac, mockorange, sweetbay magnolia, butterfly bush, and many others of olfactory interest. I invite you to gently stroke the two varieties of calamint (*Calamintha* sp.) and be reminded

that notable plant scents are by no means relegated to flowers. Look for additional sniffer-friendly varieties to join the lineup in the coming months.

Returning to the subject of the sizzling summer heat, recent temperatures are bringing out the best of the new trial garden (aka the Landscape Plant Evaluation Garden, or LPEG—because OSU needs more acronyms). Scores of coneflower varieties have begun flowering over the last few weeks and their shrubby neighbors, the panicle hydrangeas, are readying for their collective display from now through early fall.

This is the second summer of data collection in the coneflower trial and weekly observation of the 59 commercially-available hydrangea cultivars will begin next summer and continue through 2026. In other plant evaluation news, the next plant group on trial will be the many iterations of our native ninebark, *Physocarpus opulifolius*. From green to gold to deep burgundy, this once obscure shrub has generated a flurry of breeding activity and achieved landscape stardom over the last decade. Approximately 30 colorful cultivars will be planted in the southern portion of the LPEG this fall.

Finally, a handful of additional endeavors are on the horizon at Secrest: I am currently in talks with campus IT staff to add live web cameras to the roof of the Welcome Center. I am hopeful that by next spring anyone with an internet connection will be able to observe the ebb and flow of Secrest's crabapple season and myriad horticultural happenings throughout the year.

I am also hoping to begin replacing our collection of old concrete and wood benches with more durable, maintenance-free recycled poly models. I assure they will be easy on the eyes and just as easy on the buttocks.

Finally, we continue our grueling march toward the eternal banishment of blue plastic outhouses. I hold out hope that we will eventually secure the approval and funding needed to install state of the art composting toilet units in a number of spots—the first being adjacent to Miller Pavilion. It is high time we provide more convenient, sanitary, cost-effective and environmentally responsible outdoor restrooms. And now comes the portion of my literary rant in which I respectfully ask that anyone interested in underwriting this revolutionary project please contact me or the nearest Secrest employee. A less putrid renaissance lies ahead!

--Jason Veil

## **Upcoming Events**

The tree walks are happening the second Wednesday of the month at 1 PM. Registration is free but required. It can be found on our website ([secrest.osu.edu](http://secrest.osu.edu)).

Six-legged Friends workshop; OSU Extension, August 11<sup>th</sup>  
Information to be announced.

## The Wonder of Trees

Have you ever sat in the refreshing cool of a tree and simply wondered at the organism above and below you? Trees from the outside are seemingly simple organisms, consisting of a few parts: roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and fruits. But the systems that make up these organisms are so complex, like the intricate protein system that is photosynthesis, that we don't fully understand how they work.



Consider that trees seem to appear out of nowhere. Observe a tree and you won't find a depression beneath as if the tree is consuming soil. Yet, trees are using soil nutrient molecules, water, and carbon dioxide to grow. These massive organisms rise up out of the soil and are mysteriously one with it. They don't eat soil but gently remove what they need each season (we could learn a thing or two from the trees). Trees partner with mycorrhizal fungi to become more effective at removing the nutrients they need from the soil.

The addition of annual rings is an incredible thing as well. Dr. Alex Shigo of the US Forest Service, the father of modern arboriculture, saw trees as a tree within a tree. That is, as trees grow, they replace themselves, adding a new layer of tissue over top of last year's. Layer stacked upon layer (think of Russian nesting dolls). You may think of them as annual rings, or you could see them as separate trees yet one tree simultaneously. Then comes the incredible way that trees transport water and mineral nutrients to where they are needed. Or how plants allocate resources

based on where they are needed most. We could talk about the impressive system of pollination both by wind and by insects and the development and dispersal of fruit. The trees are full of wonder.

We could learn from the trees. Trees stand in opposition to our fast-paced society. They take time to develop and mature in contrast to our world of instant communication and Amazon Prime. Trees remind us to slow down and to appreciate the slow things of life. They teach us to be more generous people. You see, trees return nutrients back to the soil in the form of leaves in the fall (yet if we keep removing the leaves how are nutrients returned to the soil?), they provide cool shade, intercept storm water, provide food and shelter to over organisms. What lessons can you learn from the trees?

This summer, pause and wonder at the trees. Come to Secrest and sit in the shade of our trees. Rest in the quiet stillness of a cool morning because trees, in and of themselves, are nothing short of a miracle. You are invited to rest under and care for these miracles. Take time to ponder what trees can teach us.

--Paul Snyder

## Featured Plant of the Season



Our feature plant for this issue is the golden rain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*). It is a medium-sized deciduous shade tree with blue-green foliage and loose branching clusters of flowers called panicles. The flowers are followed by attractive, papery, lantern-like seed pods later in the season.

The leaves of the golden raintree begin as a pinkish bronze to purplish in spring; they then become bright green in summer and turn yellow in fall. Bright yellow flowers about a ½ inch wide appear in early summer. When the blossoms eventually fall from the tree they can form an attractive golden carpet under the tree -- perhaps the inspiration for the name golden rain tree.

The seed pods which eventually form resemble Chinese lanterns. In China this tree was commonly planted to mark the graves of important officials, and it's often found on temple grounds throughout eastern Asia and Japan.

The tree is an Asian native but was introduced in the United States over 250 years ago. It was a familiar sight even before the American Revolution.

The tree is very versatile for landscape usage since it can tolerate a wide range of conditions and can handle a variety of soil types. Once established, it tolerates drought well. The plant prefers a sunny spot but supposedly will bloom with only six hours of direct sun each day.

We have several examples of golden rain tree on the OARDC campus. One of the easiest to spot is located at the northeast corner of the ATI parking lot.



## Plant Trials 2021

The plant trials at Secrest continue in 2021. We are in the second year of data collection for the three-year *Echinacea* trial. A group of fantastic Master Gardener Volunteers is assisting with the data collection once again this year. Already this year we are noticing which plants may not be in it for the long haul. Some replications didn't make it through the winter while others have very weak growth.

The *Hydrangea paniculata* trial which was planted last fall, was slated to begin data collection this summer. Yet by early June it was clear that the plants needed a season to establish before collecting

data. If we began data collection this year, the data may not have been an actual reflection of a given cultivar's performance. To date, this trial consists of three replications of 60 cultivars.

We're currently assembling plants for a *Physocarpus* trial which will be planted this fall.

## Thinking Out of the Pot

Our goal is that the ideas featured will inspire you, our readers, to share fun and novel ways that you create interest in your spaces, perhaps with reused or repurposed items, plants in unexpected locations or unusual combinations.

Featured this time are submissions from Sue Cook and Sue Corl. We hope to see your ideas featured here in the next edition!



A cracked bird bath is repurposed as a planter.



Chair salvaged from curbside finds new life.

Not all bikes are for riding on the Holmes County Trail.



Our creative Wayne County Fair Gardeners

### **“...Getting from There to Here”**

The path through life contains many twists and turns. However, a sudden insight can focus an individual’s purpose and be the impetus for his or her life’s work. A conversation with Secret Arboretum’s Curator Jason Veil always proves to be enlightening and entertaining. His knowledge of plants and their characteristics reflects an individual who takes the natural world seriously and who enjoys sharing his insights with others. During our recent discussion, it became evident that, indeed, Jason Veil is a gardener whose horticultural path has had significant moments.

Growing up on acreage in Beaver County, Pennsylvania, just east of the Ohio state line, Veil and his younger brother spent their youth exploring the woods and building forts and bases. He describes his parents as “a-horticultural” with little interest in the natural world. He recalls spending many summer evenings sitting at the dinner table coated in calamine lotion in front of a fan to cool his raging poison ivy. Despite this, the outdoors was his playground and still is.

Jason Veil began his college career as an English major and Patriot League football recruit at Lehigh University. Participating in college athletics is a full-time job, requiring sacrifice and discipline and allowing little time for exploring personal interests. To set aside more time for study and personal activities, he transferred to lower division Allegheny College.

During the first month of football practice at Allegheny, Jason noticed an unfamiliar tree outside his dormitory. What could it be? Curiosity about that tree sent him to the college library where he discovered a collection of tree books. Leafing through an old volume, he found the tree in question and identified it as a honey locust. For Veil this pursuit was fascinating. The unfathomable treasure trove of

plant information was the hook, and Jason was caught. His immediate move was to transfer to Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) and to enter their forestry program. Studying forestry opened the door to taxonomy, botany, and biological and ecological concepts which fascinated Veil. He graduated in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in community and urban forest management and a horticulture minor.

However, cutting down and managing trees did not satisfy him; instead, he was fascinated with plant collections, preservation, and educating the public about plants. As a result, he spent ten years in the nursery industry throughout Connecticut and Maryland, working for a time with Foxborough Nurseries. This experience added to his knowledge of woody and ornamental plants, but sales was not his ultimate goal.

Through a series of fortunate incidents, he was given the opportunity to work as a graduate assistant under Dr. John Frett at the University of Delaware Botanic Gardens (UDBG). From 2013-15 as he pursued his master's degree in plant curation, Veil had many responsibilities. He was acting curator of UDBG, he served as Dr. Frett's graduate teaching assistant, and he led the renovation of the UDBG holly collection, transforming it to The Hydrangea Garden. In addition, he researched how university botanic gardens can better serve horticulture students.

Following graduation from UDBG, he was hired by a non-profit organization in Massachusetts, The Trustees of Reservations. His role there was to develop public gardens on 11 of their 100 properties throughout the state. The job required the skills of a curator: plant recording, policy creation, collection creation, and overseeing garden maintenance.

He sees an irony in the fact that his next move with his wife, Carla, and four children was from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Wooster, Ohio. Carla currently teaches fourth grade at St. Mary's in Wooster. In October, Jason and Carla Veil will celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary. They are the proud parents of Ethan (17), Elliot (16), Evelyn (14), and Faith (10).



Jason's path to Secret Arboretum in Wooster has been challenging and rewarding. Since his arrival at the arboretum in 2018, Veil has worked tirelessly to polish and renovate the Secret Arboretum gardens into show pieces and to improve the arboretum's value to the public and the university. He recognizes the arboretum's great potential for the future. Labeling plants in order to provide information for those who use the arboretum is a first step, and this labor-intensive process is underway.

Promoting horticulture at the Agricultural Technical Institute (ATI) is another goal. He would like to improve the connection between Secret Arboretum and horticulture students at ATI as the arboretum can provide a link between theory and practice for them. He sees Secret as a place to develop unique

national plant collections and as a laboratory for plant trials. Currently, the arboretum is involved in both an echinacea trial and a hydrangea trial. He foresees the potential of expanding the Wellness Garden by providing greater access for the handicapped. The arboretum is a public place of beauty that will continue to promote plants and strike a balance between beauty and practicality for those who use it.

Jason is goal-oriented and likes to see a job completed. He claims he has three of the best employees in Paul Snyder, Matt Shultzman, and Gwen Zimmerly, “Their collective skill and passion make us able to do what we do. You can’t train people to care. They care about what happens to the arboretum.” Of Gwen, Jason states, “We are fortunate to have Gwen Zimmerly who acts as a glue that holds all the pieces together.”

He also praises the advocacy of Friends of Secret Arboretum and the tireless efforts of the Master Gardener Volunteers, “We wouldn’t be where we are without their help. It takes a group to get things done.”

Jason is inspired daily by knowing the potential of Secret Arboretum and by doing what he can to achieve it. This is a glimpse of how Jason Veil got “from there to here.”

—Pat Warner

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