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BY TOVAH MARTIN / *Roxbury, Connecticut, USDA Zone 4*

LOCAL EVENT

FEBRUARY 11 Berkshire Botanical Garden's Annual Winter Lecture *Great Barrington, MA* 413-298-3926
www.berkshirebotanical.org

The Berkshire Botanical Garden's annual winter lecture is just the ticket for antsy Northeast gardeners. This year the featured speaker is William Cullina, who will talk about great native plants for the Northeast with an emphasis on incorporating native wildflowers, groundcovers, vines, shrubs, and trees into home landscapes. A book signing and reception provide the rare winter opportunity of horticultural hobnobbing.

Guildy Pleasures

It all began with a note in the door, Martyn Jack happened to be in Give Lodge's northwestern Connecticut neighborhood. Like Lodge, Jack is an estate gardener, born and trained in Great Britain. He scribbled a note introducing himself, hoping the two might get together, talk shop, share ideas, that sort of thing, and stuck it in the door of the gardeners cottage. Lodge rang him right up and, once they began chatting, both realized how lonesome they were for camaraderie.

In Britain, Lodge and Jack were both members of the Professional Gardeners' Guild (PGG), an organization dedicated to addressing issues and concerns of professional gardeners. Here, they spend long, sweaty, fulfilling days double digging, shearing hedges, and laying mulch, but they rarely find opportunity to share experiences and bounce around ideas with fellow professionals. And so they decided to forge a North American version of the PGG. Launched four years ago with a mere 13 members, the ranks of the North American branch have swollen to 50, and spread to Colorado, California, and Canada. Members receive the organization's quarterly magazine from Britain, and they are invited to contact and visit other members in Britain and North America, giving them entrance into some of the world's premiere gardens.

Originally, British gardeners learned the ropes through apprenticeship, and Clive Lodge is a case in point. When he first entered the profession at age 15, it was through a five-year municipal parks program. He spent six-month intervals working in greenhouses, on golf courses, and in a tree bank, among other settings. "You don't really learn by being told, you learn by being shown," Lodge says. "I learned how to prune, for example, actually seeing it and feeling it. By working with the head gardener, I learned how to hold the tools." In Britain today, few programs provide a similar show-and-tell education, but the PGG sends promising students through training sequences mentored by head gardeners at noteworthy estates and public gardens. North American trainees have held these internships, and there's hope that a similar mentoring program can be begun here.

On this side of the Atlantic, geography has been a bit of a stumbling block. The greatest concentration of members remains in the Northeast. "We're working around a huge divide," Lodge points out. "Until we have a regional presence, we can't hold mini informal meetings. What we need is the odd barbecue that will pull in a dozen people all working in the same area." (Anyone, anywhere, interested in joining the North American branch may write to Clive Lodge, P. O. Box 262, Kent, Connecticut, 06757, or cjldodge@cs.com.)

In the meantime, while working up the membership numbers, the grassroots offshoot organization has managed several field trips. Of course, they're busman's holidays. They pick a location and spend the day seeing great gardens—but they do it together, and learn from each other, which is what the PGG is really all about.

TO DO IN THE GARDEN

What do professional gardeners do in winter? The weather alone can keep Clive Lodge busy until midnight, chipping ice and clearing little paths for the dogs. Then there are greenhouses to paint and maintain, tropicals to water, gardenias to prune, and the orchid collection to make ready for display in the house. All the garden furniture gets freshly painted. The mowers, tractors, and other machinery are serviced. Lodge plans the vegetable garden, places seed orders, and updates plant lists. "When ail is said and done," he admits, "we barely have time to kick up our heels." H

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