

HORTICULTURE HAPPENINGS

A Publication of the Colonial Williamsburg Landscape Department

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News Briefs

The staff is busy with seasonal tasks such as pruning deciduous shrubs, mulching shrub beds, renovating shell walks, performing equipment preventative maintenance, sowing spring veggies and inventorying seeds and plants. Did I mention putting all the Christmas Decorations away??? Projects include our annual tree planting, preserving the Palace Green Streetscape and renovating the 18th-century ice mount behind the Governor's Palace.



*Left to right, top to bottom: **Dave Stull** repairs a rototiller; the red maple in front of Wetherburn's Tavern is one of the 27 trees planted this winter; **Goldie Daniels** inventories seed for the Historic Area and her trial beds and **Melody Mosbauger** does final cleanup at the Christmas design studio. We had two milestone anniversaries – Horticulturist **Pat Nee** with 30 years and Nurseryman **Scott Hemler** with 25 years! Pat's attention to detail and sense of humor is welcomed by his colleagues and we all appreciate Scott's flexibility as he propagates plants, gives programs, and decorates the town for Christmas.*



Restoration of the Ice Mount

Over time, guests visiting the ice mount behind the Governor's Palace have taken short-cuts through the ivy to get from the top of the original 18th-century mound to the door on the backside below, resulting in large areas of bare, compacted ground. Without vegetation, heavy rains rush down these bare areas, carrying mud, debris and water through the door into the bottom of the pit. As a result, tree roots were exposed and the infrastructure of the ice mount was compromised.



The funding for the planning and project were gift funded from the **Mary Morton Parsons Governor's Palace Grant**. The scope of work included the installation of an earthen retaining wall using the product *Flex MSE*, a geotextile earthen bag retaining wall system that can be sprigged with groundcover to camouflage the wall. The bags were filled with the soil that was excavated to lower the grade 6" – 8" to the original grade.



The debris in front of the door in the images on the left are from foot traffic eroding the ice mount. The soil removed during excavation to the original grade filled the geo-textile bags, shown on the right, that now stabilize the mound.



A comprehensive drainage system was designed to divert the water away from the mound so it no longer funnels into the ice house. A drain in front of the door is concealed by shell.





The Ice Mount: The brick steps and shell pad on top, both added to the original 18th-century ice mount by landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff during the Restoration, have been replaced with new material as part of the ice mount's restoration. The fence on top of the mount will also be replaced and signage added to discourage visitors from walking down the slope. As in Shurcliff's 1930's design, mature American hollies were planted with flowering quince between. The landscape department's arborists and tree steward volunteers pruned limbs, removed underbrush and the ivy growing on the trees to open the view from the top of the mound.



Did You Know?



- California monarchs are on the verge of extinction?
 - o 1980's annual population = 4.8 million
 - o 2018 & 2019 population = 30,000
 - o 2020 population only 2,000
 - o Pesticides are among the top three reasons we are losing them.
- Full article: <https://xerces.org/western-monarch-call-to-action>

We are doing our part to protect precious pollinators:

- We practice integrated pest management (IPM) and have a licensed technician on staff.
- We plant native plants that help native pollinators, birds and other wildlife.
- We use a variety of native perennials that bloom from spring through fall to provide pollen and nectar across the growing season.
- We include host plants for larvae.



A pollinator garden was planted as part of the Capitol Streetscape project (above). Garden Apprentice **Goldie Daniels** (below left) worked with the Palace horticulture team in selecting pollinator friendly plants for the newly renovated perennial beds at the Palace.



Active in the Arboretum

Preserving the Boynton Oak

The Boynton oak (*Quercus Boyntonii*) is listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list as one of the United States' most endangered trees.

(<https://www.iucn.org/resources/conservation-tools/iucn-red-list-threatened-species>)

Colonial Williamsburg arborist, **Charles Gardner**, first learned of this tree after reading about Auburn University's efforts to conserve the species by distributing its seed to gardens so it would become part of the garden's permanent collections.

Wanting to help preserve the tree, Charles contacted Patrick Thompson, a specialist at Auburn University Davis Arboretum and Chair of the Boynton Oak Conservation Project. In the fall, Charles received 30 acorns which he immediately gave to our nurseryman, **Scott Hemler**, to plant at our landscape nursery. Eventually the trees will be planted on our Arboretum's Hospitality and Business properties. We are proud to help preserve this endangered tree and increase the public's awareness of it

(https://www.auburn.edu/cosam/arboretum/apca/projects/boyntons_oak.htm)



We were happy to have summer intern, **Will Olson**, return to help our arborists during his winter break from the University of Mary Washington. Thank you Will! Thanks also to the donors that make garden internships possible!

Shannon Chiles Holly



Joe and Louise Chiles found an American holly seedling among their foundation plantings which matured into an impressive female specimen with large, bright red fruits. They registered the tree in 1998 with the Holly Society and named it 'Shannon Chiles' in honor of their late daughter-in-law. Joe graciously donated trees to us which are now planted behind the Carlton Coffee House. We have since taken cuttings in hopes to plant more 'Shannon Chiles' hollies in the Historic Area.

(Registration 4-98, Holly Society Journal, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 26-27, 1998)



Final Greetings from This Editor



*As a newly hired gardener
in Spring 1982.*



*With Joanne waving good-bye
to our volunteers, winter 2021.*

By the time you receive this newsletter, I will be into my first month of retirement. I want to thank all of you for the support you have given me and the landscape department during my time at Colonial Williamsburg.

I know that like me, you care about the gardens and our staff, so I am delighted to tell you that **Joanne Chapman**, the Landscape Manager for the Historic Area, has accepted the Landscape Director position. Those of you that know Joanne are familiar with her attention to detail and her commitment to our staff and the integrity of the gardens.

Filling Joanne's manager position is **Melissa Sharifi**. Originally hired as a Senior Gardener, Melissa was later promoted to IPM Technician. I am confident she will continue to be as diligent and creative in her new role.

The responsibilities of Landscape Manager **Jon Lak** have increased to include overseeing the BrightView landscape contract and managing a broader range of Foundation projects. We are fortunate to have Jon's landscape construction knowledge and expertise in our department.

Congratulations to Joanne, Jon and Melissa! I am grateful they will be leading our fantastic staff and wonderful volunteers in their efforts to preserve our gardens and arboretum. I am also thankful for the leadership of our Vice-President, **Robert Underwood**, and President, **Cliff Fleet**. I can retire knowing the landscape department is in excellent hands now and in the future.

Thank you, *Laura Vancour*



Joanne Chapman
Landscape Director



Jon Lak
Landscape Manager



Melissa Sharifi
Landscape Manager