

## Horticultural News and Research Important to American Gardeners

### BERRIES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Just in time for the 100th anniversary of the first appearance of highbush blueberries on the market, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service is releasing a new cultivar called 'Baby Blues'. The



first harvest from agriculturally viable blueberry varieties—as opposed to wild ones—occurred in 1916. Since then, the USDA has developed scores of varieties geared toward both commercial cultivation and home gardeners.

“‘Baby Blues’ is a vigorous, high-yielding, small-fruited, machine-harvestable highbush blueberry with outstanding fruit quality,” says Chad Finn, a USDA geneticist at the Horticultural Crops Research Unit in Corvallis, Oregon, who focuses on berry crops. “It may thrive in milder areas where northern highbush blueberries are grown,” he adds. Releasing concurrently is ‘Columbia Giant’ a blackberry cultivar that Finn also developed. Its thornless, trailing brambles produce very large, firm fruit with a sweet flavor, and it is adaptable to regions where other trailing blackberries are grown, particularly in the Northwest.

### UNRAVELING SPRING FLOWERING TRIGGERS

After a long winter, it can be heartbreaking to gardeners when a spring cold snap zaps flower buds before they can open. Some plants use vernalization—a process that enables them to delay flowering until weather conditions warm sufficiently—to avoid this. Scientists have been studying how vernalization works for decades, and have recently discovered a key piece of the puzzle.

Researchers knew that a specific gene, called Flowering Locus C (FLC), represses flowering throughout the cells of the plant until warmer weather starts. As the temperature rises, the plant gradually produces proteins that deactivate this gene and allows flowering. No one knew exactly how this process worked, however, until a team at the John Innes Centre for Plant Science and Microbiology in Norwich, England, found the answer with the help of some mutated *Arabidopsis* plants that did not flower.

While investigating why these plants failed to bloom, the researchers discovered they lacked the piece of DNA in their FLC genes that recognizes VAL1, the key protein that deactivates FLC and allows the plant to flower. This research, published in the journal *Science* in July 2016, “provides the first glimpse of how regulators in a cell identify which target genes to switch off,” explains Caroline Dean, lead scientist on the study. “A specific sequence is recognized and without this sequence FLC won’t be suppressed and the plant will never flower.”

These findings may help in the development of plants that better tolerate climate change. For more information, visit [www.jic.ac.uk/news](http://www.jic.ac.uk/news).

### BURPEE DONATES \$2.5 MILLION TO PRESERVE WHITE HOUSE KITCHEN GARDEN

The arrival of new residents at the White House often signals sweeping changes not only in policy, but in the look, style, and



Many plants, such as this witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), use vernalization to time flowering after the weather begins to warm in late winter and early spring.



Plants await fall harvesting in the White House Kitchen Garden, which recently added this gathering space with a table and benches crafted from numerous types of wood.

focus of the buildings and grounds. One of the notable additions to the grounds during the administration of President Obama was the White House Kitchen Garden, championed by First Lady Michelle Obama. Planted in 2009, it was the first kitchen garden on the White House grounds since Eleanor Roosevelt's Victo-

ry garden during the Second World War.

Recently the W. Atlee Burpee & Company announced it would provide \$2.5 million in funding to the National Park Foundation, which oversees the White House Garden, to ensure maintenance of the vegetable garden over a 17-year period. "Everyone at Burpee is proud of

the First Lady's 'Can-Do!' attitude," says George Ball, chairman and CEO of the Pennsylvania-based seed and plant supplier, "and we hope that a well-conceived, long-lasting version of the White House Kitchen Garden will be fully supported by ensuing administrations."

More information on the White House Kitchen Garden is available at [www.whitehouse.gov/interactive-tour/kitchen-garden](http://www.whitehouse.gov/interactive-tour/kitchen-garden).

### NEW NAMES FOR FAMILIAR GARDENS

In 2014 the Cleveland Botanical Garden and the Holden Arboretum in nearby Kirtland, Ohio, announced a merger. Following a rebranding effort, the joint entity announced recently it will move forward under the umbrella name of Holden Forests & Gardens. This new name is intended to link the mission and goals of both the 10-acre urban botanical gardens and the more rural 3,600-acre arboretum. Though these two sites represent very different landscapes, they share the common goal of public access to, and greater interaction with, green spaces in the greater Cleveland area. Learn more on Holden Forests & Gardens' new website at [www.holdenfg.org](http://www.holdenfg.org).



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Newly renamed Cornell Botanic Gardens in Ithaca, New York, encompasses the scenic F.R. Newman Arboretum.

In a similar move, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, announced in October that its arboretum, botanical garden, and 3,500 acres of natural area will now be known as Cornell Botanic Gardens. The site had been known as Cornell Plantations since 1944. The new name is intended to better represent it as a public garden that welcomes visitors to campus. It also more accurately

reflects the gardens' mission, which includes ethnobotany projects on the "biocultural conservation" of plants central to cultures around the world. Visit [www.cornellbotanicgardens.org](http://www.cornellbotanicgardens.org) to learn more.

### GARDEN CONSERVANCY AIDS RESTORATION OF JENSEN GARDEN IN CHICAGO

After over a century of use and visitation, a historic Chicago garden completed in 1908 is in need of a makeover. Nestled in the city's Humboldt Park, the Jensen Formal Garden was designed by Jens Jensen, an influential American landscape architect who helped popularize the use of native plants.



Plans are underway to renovate the Jensen Formal Garden at Humboldt Park in Chicago.

Its circular design included flower beds filled with richly colored annuals and perennials. Created in the period when urban areas were becoming densely populated, it was intended to enrich the lives of those without gardens of their own. But over time the garden's infrastructure and plantings have slowly deteriorated.

To give the garden the attention it needs, the Chicago Park District and Chicago Parks Foundation have partnered with the Garden Conservancy, a national non-profit organization dedicated to preserving historically and culturally significant gardens. The plan is to replace or renovate the garden's pergolas, walls, and walkways. While emulating Jensen's original planting plan, annuals will be replaced with herbaceous perennials and grasses that offer wildlife habitat and interesting features in all seasons. The garden renovation also will include installation of new paths to make it accessible for persons with disabilities, along with new urns, benches, and a rehabilitated reflection pool.

News written by Editorial Intern Lynn Brinkley and Associate Editor Viveka Neveln.

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