

AHS 2021 Great American Gardeners National Award Winners



THE American Horticultural Society (AHS) is proud to announce the recipients of the Society's 2021 Great American Gardeners Awards. These individuals and organizations have contributed significantly to fields such as plant research, garden communication, landscape design, youth gardening, and teaching. The awards have traditionally been presented at River Farm, the AHS's national headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, in mid-June. Anticipating continuing COVID restrictions, we are unable to proceed with an in-person awards ceremony again this year. We look forward to sharing more information about the honorees and celebrating their work online and via our social media channels.

LIBERTY HYDE BAILEY AWARD

The American Horticultural Society's highest award, the Liberty Hyde Bailey Award is given to an individual who has made significant lifetime contributions to at least three of the following horticultural fields: teaching, research, communications, plant exploration, administration, art, business, and leadership.

Named after Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858–1954), horticulturist, educator, author. First awarded in 1958.



IT'S HARD to sum up **Lucinda McDade, Ph.D.** in a pithy sentence because this accomplished botanist, researcher, plant explorer, professor, and public garden administrator has worn so many hats over the course of her 40-plus year career. McDade, the recipient of this year's Liberty Hyde Bailey Award, is currently executive director of the California Botanic Garden (CBG) in Claremont. She also oversees the garden's research program and is the chair of the botany department at nearby Claremont Graduate University (CGU), where she teaches classes.

Before joining CBG, McDade was an assistant professor and herbarium curator at the University of Arizona in Tucson from 1992 to 2000, then served as associate curator and chair of botany at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, until 2006.

FORGING A CAREER PATH

During childhood in Miami, Florida, McDade says she was always outdoors. "I sort of feel like I've always been a biologist—even as a small child, I just wanted to play outside with living things," she recalls. Yet when she started college at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, she was not really aware of all the professional options available to biologists. She credits her first biology teacher for saving her from a career in medicine. "I would have made a very bad doctor given that other people's pain and blood make me squeamish," she says. "Fortunately, Arthur Weldon, the professor of my first plant biology course, asked me if I had thought about plants as a profession. Of course, I had not, but the rest of the story turned into the rest of my professional life."

At Tulane, McDade discovered Liberty Hyde Bailey's magnum opus, the *Manual of Cultivated Plants*, while working on a project about the cultivated plants on the Tulane campus. "His *Manual* was—still is—a complete marvel. I have no idea how he did it," says McDade. "I turned to uncultivated plant diversity for most of my subsequent work but have maintained an interest in cultivated plants and my copy of the *Manual* is never far from hand."

While working on her Ph.D at Duke University in North Carolina, McDade happily immersed herself in plant research work in the tropics. "In graduate school, I had a lot of terrific experiences, including driving to Panama twice from North Carolina and living in the tropics—mostly Costa Rica—for a year," she says.

Her dissertation research focused on the genus *Aphelandra*—which is part of Acanthaceae, or the acanthus family—



Lucinda McDade, left, and Claremont Graduate University colleague Carrie Kiel collect leaf specimens in Costa Rica.

native to Central America. "It is a fascinating group that still fascinates me," says McDade. "I have continued to work on the family—some 4000-plus species strong, and worldwide except high latitudes and high elevation." Her field research has taken her to Andean South America and Brazil, and to southern Africa and Madagascar, among other places. According to McDade, many American gardeners may be familiar with the most widely cultivated *aphelandra*, which is zebra plant (*Aphelandra squarrosa*). "It is beautiful, with striped leaves and yellow inflorescences," she says.

In addition to Weldon, McDade's mentors include another Tulane botany professor, Joseph Andorfer Ewan, and her doctoral advisor Donald E. Stone. McDade also credits Mildred Mathias, a California botanist and conservationist who was on faculty at UCLA in the 1960s and early 1970s and directed the university's botanical garden, which was later named for her. McDade says Mathias "was probably the first high-serving woman in plant sciences I encountered. She was retired by then, but still super active and inspirational."

TEACHING AND MENTORING

As chair of CGU's botany department, McDade is now paying it forward by becoming a mentor to students in the schools' master's and doctoral degree programs. "Working with graduate students has been among the most rewarding aspects of my career," says McDade. "I am happy to call all of my former Ph.D students friends and colleagues."

And she is energized with her work at CBG, which was formerly called Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden. "Although we are relatively small, we do a lot of terrific programming, including research and conservation of California native plants and development of cultivars and selections of native plants that will tolerate a typical garden landscape," she says. For example, she mentions woolly blue curls (*Trichostema lanatum*), an evergreen subshrub with blue flowers and foliage that gives off a delicious minty fragrance. "Everyone loves it and wants one, but it doesn't tolerate any water in the summer," says McDade. "It will promptly die if you water it." She says the garden is working on developing selections that tolerate more water if planted along edge of an irrigated area.

Another new CBG program that has taken off during the pandemic is an effort to "popularize some native plants for food," says McDade. Known as the "Taste Wild" series, the virtual tasting program features a custom box of food containing native plant ingredients prepared by a local chef. Participants pick up their box from the garden and then join in a Zoom session to learn about the plants from garden staff and the chef.

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

Among the other honors McDade has received during her career are Merit Award honoree, Botanical Society of America (2013); president, American Society of Plant Taxonomists (2003–2004); and president, Association for Tropical Biology (1995). In 2010, she became the first-ever chair of the Botanical Society of America (BSA) Advisory Council, the largest professional society of plant scientists in the United States. She is also a sought-after speaker who has lectured all over the world. She has published hundreds of research papers and articles in a wide variety of professional journals.

LOOKING AHEAD

While wearing so many hats keeps McDade hopping, she says, "I feel incredibly lucky to have been a child who played in the dirt with plants and animals, and still get to do that—at least when I'm not sitting at my desk with administrative duties! I very much enjoy my colleagues and the process of creating and sustaining a work environment here that is flexible and nurturing, while of course also getting the job done." As for her personal garden, she admits to being "pretty decent at growing plants—our front yard is devoted to California natives." She also tends a small vegetable garden and a feature she calls "Acanth Hill," which holds "as many acanths as I could get my hands on." 🌿

EMERGING HORTICULTURAL PROFESSIONAL AWARD

Recognizes significant achievements and/or leadership that have advanced the field of horticulture in America. First given in 2017.

A native of Columbia, South Carolina, **Keith A. Mearns** has always held a deep connection with plants and the natural world. While earning his degree at the University of South Carolina, Mearns worked with the university's herbarium collection, served



as the teaching assistant for several field botany classes, and spent summers alongside Roger Winn, "The Tomato Man" of South Carolina, on his organic farm. After graduating, Mearns worked at Riverbanks Botanical Garden as a horticulturist, where he was responsible for large areas of this dynamic and regionally acclaimed garden. Working for several years as the horticulturist and now over two years as the director of grounds at Historic Columbia, Mearns is responsible for the development, planting, and maintenance of all six of Historic Columbia's properties, as well as the creation and upkeep of the first publicly accessible online garden database in South Carolina. With support from the Darnall W. and Susan F. Boyd Foundation, Means is steering the planning and implementation of a significant garden expansion, site enhancements, and a forthcoming glasshouse project. Deeply ingrained in the community, Mearns is a board member of Slow Food Columbia and Columbia Green and works passionately to locate and preserve a number of "lost" southern heirloom crops and fruits.

For more than 50 years, the **North Carolina Botanical Garden**, a part of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has been engaged in native plant conservation and education. It has worked diligently to cultivate an international reputation

GARDEN STEWARDSHIP AWARD

This is the debut year for this new award, which is given to a public garden that embraces and exemplifies sustainable horticultural practices in design, maintenance, and/or programs.

as a garden that weaves a conservation ethic through all its programs. Each year, the garden welcomes more than 100,000 visitors. As the region's most comprehensive knowledge center on native plants, the garden manages over 1,138 acres of land containing 4,500 accessions and 2,500 species. It supports university classes through field trips, community engagement, research facilities, long-term ecological research, and ecosystem monitoring sites. The garden oversees the conservation and management of approximately 1,200 acres of natural areas and conducts research on ecological restoration and germplasm storage. It is a founding member of the national Center for Plant Conservation and holds genetic resources of 80 imperiled southeastern plants for use in restoration and as a safeguard against extinction in the wild.



HORTICULTURAL THERAPY AWARD
Recognizes significant contributions to the field of horticultural therapy.

Naomi A. Sachs, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the University of Maryland Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture and founding director of the Therapeutic Landscapes Network, has been an instructor at the Chicago Botanic Garden's Healthcare Garden Design Certificate Program since 2011. She has published and presented nationally and internationally on the positive role of nature in human health and well-being and is co-editor of the *Health Environments Research and Design Journal*. Sachs has been an active member of the American Society of Landscape Architects' Healthcare and Therapeutic Design Professional Practice Network (PPN) since its inception in 1999 and is also a member of the Children's Outdoor Environments and Environmental Justice PPNs. She serves on the Center for Health Design's Research Coalition; the Nature Rx@UMD, and Campus Nature Rx Network Steering Committees, as well as a Design Advisor with Nature Sacred. She also serves on Nature Sacred's and UMD's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion task forces. She is coauthor of *Dior in Bloom* (Flammarion, 2020).



Nominations for 2022 Awards
Help us give recognition to deserving "horticultural champions" by nominating someone you know for one of the 2022 Great American Gardeners Awards. Look for more details in the July/August 2021 issue of this magazine or online on our website at www.ahsgardening.org/awards.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN AWARD

Given to an individual whose work has demonstrated and promoted the value of sustainable horticultural practices in the field of landscape architecture.

In 1982, **Larry Weaner** founded Larry Weaner Landscape Associates, a Pennsylvania-based landscape design firm known for its work combining environmental science and the traditions of



garden design. He began New Directions in the American Landscape (NDAL) in 1990 as a national conference series dedicated to the study of natural landscape creation and restoration. NDAL's influential programs have developed a dedicated following within the professional landscape design and management community. His projects span 20 states and the United

Kingdom. They have been featured in regional and national publications and included in numerous prestigious garden tours. In 2008, one of his residential projects received the top three annual awards from the Association of Professional Landscape Designers and a Landscape Design Honor award from the Perennial Plant Association. An active guest lecturer and instructor throughout the U.S., Weaner also writes regularly for various professional landscape publications. He is an emeritus board of directors member and environmental chair of the Association of Professional Landscape Designers and also composes music.

MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD

Recognizes outstanding service and generosity in support of the American Horticultural Society and sustainable gardening.

Harry Risetto's long connection with the American Horticultural Society began nearly 40 years ago when he first came to the AHS's River Farm headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, to assist with a trial garden of dahlias planted on the grounds.



A resident of Falls Church, Virginia, Risetto became an AHS member and continued his regular visits to River Farm. In 2004, he joined the AHS Board, where he quickly became active on many committees and participated in Travel Study programs. In 2010, Risetto became

Chair of the Board, an office he held until 2013. He remained on the Board until 2019, capping off a 16-year tenure with the AHS leadership group.

In addition to his Board service, Risetto has represented the AHS and the American Dahlia Society (ADS) at a number of national plant society events, including serving as the AHS and ADS liaison at annual meetings of the Coalition of American Plant Societies.

Now retired following a long career as a lawyer, Risetto has received a number of awards for his volunteer work with plant societies, including the Lifetime Achievement Award from the ADS.

B.Y. MORRISON COMMUNICATIONS AWARD

Recognizes effective and inspirational communication through print, radio, television, and/or online media, advancing public interest and participation in horticulture.

A professional communicator with long experience in radio, television, and newspapers in Puerto Rico, **Perla Sofía Curbelo-Santiago** is a passionate advocate for gardening



and horticulture. She founded Agrochic.com in 2009, an agriculture, wellness, and gardening lifestyle website in Spanish that reaches around 50,000 mostly female users across the site and via social media in Puerto Rico and the United States. She is an active member of Garden Communicators International, the American Horticultural Therapy Association, and the BIPOC Hort Group. Curbelo-Santiago is a contributor to the Spanish Association of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture (AEJHST) as well as holds a Horticulture Therapy certificate from the Chicago Botanic Garden. She launched in 2020 a weekly podcast called "La verdura de hoy" (Today's Greenery), where she talks plants, gardening, and how to use horticulture for wellbeing, as well as "Agrochic en Casa" (Agrochic at Home), a virtual wellness program based on the therapeutic horticulture modality.

FRANCES JONES POETKER AWARD

Recognizes significant contributions to floral design in publications, on the platform, and to the public. Named for Frances Jones Poetker, floral designer, author, lecturer.

Lisa Waud creates public art in the form of large-scale installations using botanic materials. Drawing inspiration from a childhood spent with nature in northern Michigan, land art and large-scale installation artists such as Christo and Jeanne-Claude,



and professional experience as a gardener and floral designer, Waud has produced immersive public botanical art that create space for viewers to reflect and reset. Her projects include Pat Lane Park, a public

park in the New Center area of Detroit, Big Flower Friend—a six-week series of installations in places of Black historical and cultural importance in Detroit, and Flower House Detroit, which brought life back to a derelict home via 36,000 flowers. Collaboration is a constant in Waud's work, as are inclusivity and accessibility. Striving for zero waste throughout her practice, Waud sources from local growers and vendors, utilizes foraged natural items, and composts organic matter.

JANE L. TAYLOR AWARD

Given to an individual, organization, or program that has inspired and nurtured future horticulturists through efforts in children's and youth gardening. Named for Jane L. Taylor, youth advocate, horticulturist, educator.

Washington Youth Garden (WYG), the youth education and outreach branch of the nonprofit Friends of the National Arboretum, was founded in 1971 as one of at least 50 youth gardens across the District of Columbia designed to “teach city children the appreciation of nature.” WYG is the only site from this initiative that has offered unbroken programming for 50 years! At the one-acre Demonstration Garden on the grounds of the Arboretum, local youth can come dig in the dirt, taste honey from the hives, and



plant the seeds that cultivate a lasting relationship with nature and healthy food.

WYG serves thousands of students each year from 68 different schools through its SPROUT field trip program. Through the Green Ambassador Program, high school students gain skills needed for college and career advancement and grow as “green” leaders. Many continue as Guild members, who execute a service project that makes positive change in their community, and/or become Crew Leaders who guide and mentor new interns. WYG also brings a piece of the Arboretum to local schools through its school garden programs and professional development for educators and administrators.

TEACHING AWARD

Given to an individual whose ability to share his or her horticultural knowledge with others has contributed to a better public understanding of the plant world and its important influence on society.

A seed saver, farmer, author, storyteller, and educator, **Rowen White** is the educational director and founder of Sierra Seeds, an innovative organic seed stewardship organization focusing on local seed and educational programs, based in Nevada City, California.



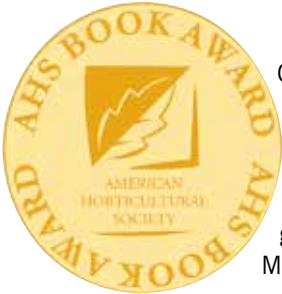
Known as a passionate activist for indigenous seed preservation and food sovereignty, White is a seed keeper/farmer from the Mo-hawk community of Akwesasne. She also serves as the national program coordinator for the Indigenous Seed Keepers Network, which is an initiative of the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance, a non-profit organization that actively promotes and supports tribal food sovereignty projects.

As part of her role, White facilitates creative hands-on workshops and strategic conversations and community organizing focused around seed/food security within tribal and small farming communities nationwide. She has a deep commitment to approaching food systems revitalization through a cultural context. Her moving stories of seeds, food, culture, and sacred Earth stewardship can be viewed on her blog, Seed Songs.

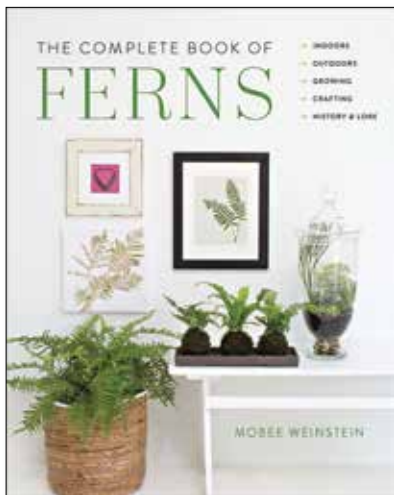
She is currently chair of the Board of Directors of Seed Savers Exchange in Decorah, Iowa, the largest public access seed bank in North America.

2021 AHS Book Award Winners

Each year, the American Horticultural Society recognizes outstanding gardening books published in North America with its annual Book Award. Nominated books are judged by the AHS Book Award Committee on qualities such as writing style, authority, accuracy, and physical quality. This year's award recipients, selected from books published in 2020, are listed below.



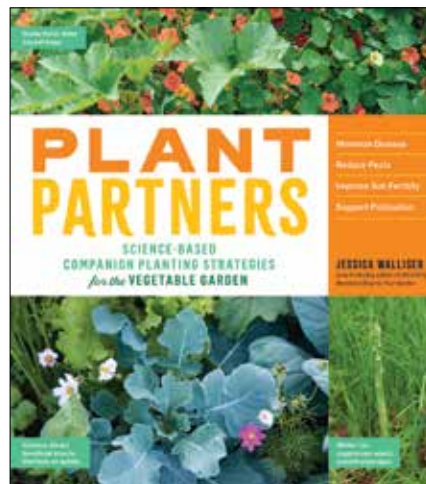
AHS's 2021 Book Award Committee was chaired by **William Aldrich**, past president and fellow of GardenComm, Garden Communicators International from Springfield, Missouri. Other members include **Kimberly Toscano Holmes**, a freelance communicator and professional horticulturist based in Stillwater, Oklahoma; **Susan Eubank**, an arboretum librarian at Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden; **Amy Campion**, a Portland, Oregon-based freelance writer and co-author of *Gardening in the Pacific Northwest*; **Viveka Neveln**, garden editor for BHG.com in Des Moines, Iowa; **Doug Oster**, garden writer, television producer, and host from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and **Caleb Melchior**, a Fort Myers, Florida based landscape architect, writer, and podcaster.



The Complete Book of Ferns

by Mobee Weinstein. Cool Springs Press.

■ Mobee Weinstein, foreman of gardeners for outdoor gardens at the New York Botanical Garden, offers readers an in-depth, yet not overwhelming, ode to the fern. Within its pages are sections on the history of the fern, botany, growing techniques, profiles of 70 different varieties, and even fern projects. Judge Amy Campion appreciated that the book includes both indoor and outdoor ferns contributing to its appeal to gardeners and houseplant aficionados alike. The judges were impressed by the beautiful photographs throughout; Viveka Neveln noted that making a book visually appealing when the plant photographs are mostly green is no small feat.



Plant Partners: Science-Based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden

by Jessica Walliser. Storey Publishing.

■ Bringing science-based evidence to the lore and old wives' tales, author Jessica Walliser brings a fresh approach to companion planting and eye-opening information about plant interactions above and underground. Susan Eubank, judge and botanical librarian, declared that the book, "made me happy" because of its practicality and ease of use. Kim Toscano Holmes commended the author for taking the time to "compile all the research and put it together in a really great package." She has found that there is a growing interest in this topic and feels comfortable pointing people to an evidence-based resource.

ADDITIONAL TITLES FROM THE COMMITTEE'S TOP 10 BOOKS OF 2020

In selecting this year's award winners, the AHS Book Committee also considered the following eight books that emerged as top candidates from the more than 50 books that were nominated for the award.

Growing Under Cover: Techniques for a More Productive, Weather-Resistant, Pest-Free Vegetable Garden by Niki Jabbour. Storey Publishing.

Growing Weed in the Garden: A No-Fuss, Seed-to-Stash Guide to Outdoor Cannabis Cultivation by Johanna Silver. Abrams.

Grow Your Soil!: Harness the Power of the Soil Food Web to Create Your Best Garden Ever by Diane Miessler. Storey Publishing.

Herbarium: The Quest to Preserve and Classify the World's Plants by Barbara M. theirs. Timber Press.

Nature's Best Hope by Douglas Tallamy. Timber Press.

Uprooted: A Gardener Reflects on Beginning Again by Page Dickey. Timber Press.

The Wardian Case: How a Simple Box Moved Plants and Changed the World by Luke Keogh. University of Chicago Press.

Windcliff: A Story of People, Plants, and Gardens by Daniel J. Hinkley. Timber Press.