

The
View
FROM

高溪園
HIGH FALLS GARDENS

Dear Friends of High Falls Gardens,

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NAOMA Presentation

This past autumn and solstice have borne more than the usual nostalgia, being loaded with all that cumbersome, end-of-an-era baggage. Even the confusion over when the twentieth century actually ends — this past Dec. 31st or next? — seems part of the pervasive magical thinking that's pumping up the Internet stocks. Although those of us in the medicinal plant cultivation world are already facing the painful realities of the future, perhaps as the broader collective we are still looking backwards, trying to anchor ourselves with familiar ways of seeing while feeling the ground shift under our feet.

Despite the dangers that lie ahead, we have been heartened by the rapidly growing strength of the organic farming and community-supported agriculture movements as well as by the resistance to irresponsible commercial applications of biotechnology. The establishment media like to portray the resistance as a ragged band of hippies, Luddites and children in monarch butterfly costumes battling against men in white lab coats. The strength of the resistance, however, is based on superior science — science that is more faithful to Mother Nature — and over the long term our arguments will prevail. Whether any of us will be around to share the prize is another issue.

As The Hive Turns

At the end of the last episode of our ongoing apiarian cliff-hanger, all the heroes were dead. But it seems this story is magical realism and not tragedy. Believe it or not, over the summer the HFG supers were replenished despite our ineptitude. Nature in her beneficence rewards even novices.

Readers may remember that our lovely first colony failed to thrive, having succumbed (probably) to Varroa mites and dwindling down to nothing by June. The supers, containing frames with honey still in them, were taken out of the field, dragged back to the house and stacked right outside the barn/garage. Over the summer we noticed bees working those supers, but we just assumed they were cleaning out the frames and taking the honey back to their own colonies. And besides, we were too busy to pay close attention.

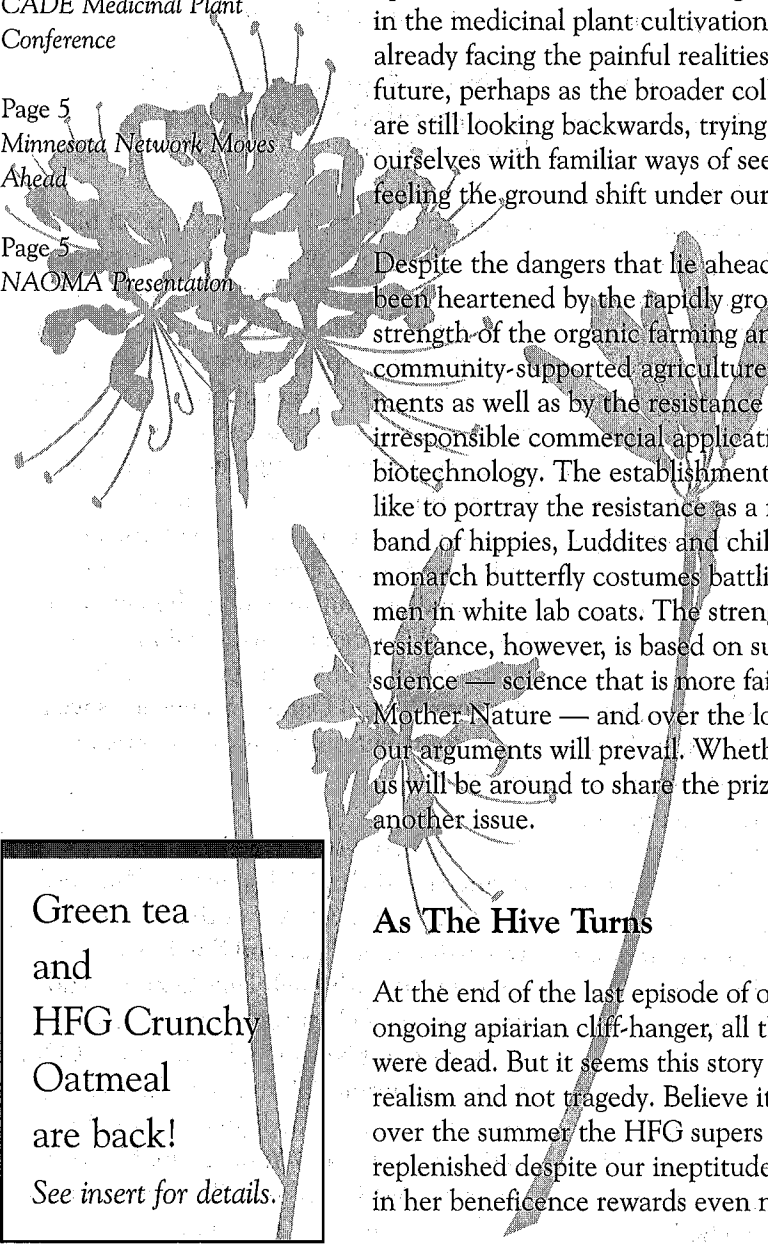
We consoled ourselves by phoning Champlain Valley Bees and Queens in Middlebury, Vermont, and reserving two colonies for May 2000. "Most of our customers come on Mother's Day to pick up," explained owner Kirk Webster, "We try to make a workshop out of it." Sounds like fun!

However, by the end of August it was obvious that the supers left in the driveway had been colonized. Yes, someone else's bees had swarmed or split off and had been attracted by those honey residues. Expert beekeepers affirmed that bees can smell honey from miles away. It was a gift from heaven! The only problem is, they're right at the top of the driveway, and inside the Village where zoning laws prohibit "farm animals," including honeybees. Consulting the experts again, we learned that the colony cannot be moved during the season. The precise location of those supers is imprinted in the field workers' brains, and they will navigate by the sun and return to that exact spot until their death. The solution is to move the supers in the middle of winter, when the bees are dormant and right before the queen starts laying again for

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Green tea
and
HFG Crunchy
Oatmeal
are back!

See insert for details.



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DEAR FRIENDS

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spring buildup. Then, the next generation of field bees will imprint on the new location.

Three Winners Bear Fruit

Among the most exciting Garden events this past autumn, the *Schisandra chinensis* and the *Trichosanthes kirilowii* bore fruit for the first time, while the *Lycium chinense* bushes were absolutely loaded with berries. These three are especially interesting crops and, while the potential for commercial production is yet to be determined, the appearance of plump fruit seems promising.

This past year was the third season in the garden for these plants. The *Schisandra*, *wu wei zi*, "five-flavor seed" or magnolia vine fruit, is dioecious and a climbing vine that bears on old wood. HFG received unsexed plants from Forest Farm Nursery in Washington state and was fortunate. The cluster of berries was near the ground, indicating that the vines have to be protected from winter kill and should perhaps be trained on low trellises, like grapevines. The fruit has a complex flavor that is said to encompass all the tastes recognized in Five Element Theory; however, in treatment it is categorized as Sour and Warm, used to Stabilize and Bind, and has Heart/Kidney/Lung channel affinities.

The *Trichosanthes*, a perennial cucumber, bloomed for the first time in 1998. Its large white cucurbit-style flowers with lacy edges and a heavenly scent seemed to go unrecognized by our pollinators, so this year we tried hand-pollinating. There was more fruit than merited by our efforts — obviously someone else figured it out. This marvelous plant yields four medicinal fractions — seed, skin/husk, fruit pulp and root.

The *Lycium*, known as wolfberry or matrimony vine, is the source of two medicinals — the bright red berries, *gou qi zi*, sold like raisins in Chinese supermarkets, and the root bark, *di gu pi*, "earth bone bark."

Most of these medicinals in commerce are *L. barbarum* from south China. We tried growing material from several sources, including cutting open the red berries from the Chinatown pharmacy, removing the seeds and sprouting them. However, our most productive plants are from material collected by Robert Newman in Suzhou, at Zhou Zheng Garden. This is *L. chinense*, the species grown in northern China. Pruning of the bushes is important to stimulate fruit production — yet another of the many cultivation arts to be learned. Although classified as Sweet, Neutral and used to Supplement the Blood, the berries have a mild taste and are good for snacks while working in the garden.

Chinese Agronomist's Visit Rescheduled for May and June of 2000

As we go to press, Wu Zhongfa is on his way to the U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, current paperwork in hand, to claim that visa denied him last year after the embassy bombing. (See Spring/Summer 1999 issue of *The View*.) His team of hosts in the U.S. is once again putting together an awesome itinerary designed to significantly enhance international cooperation in medicinal plant conservation and cultivation. The visit is on for this coming May and June, with funding contributed by the Guangxi Botanical Garden of Medicinal Plants, where Mr. Wu holds the post of Senior Agronomist and Garden Manager, as well as by contributions from the American group.

The University of Massachusetts at Amherst is the official sponsor of Mr. Wu's visit. Dr. Lyle E. Craker of the UMass Department of Plant and Soil Sciences is cooperating with High Falls Gardens and its network of plant specialists centered around Robert Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.O.M., to plan a substantial number of activities, including tours of medicinal plant cultivation areas in New York, Ohio, Missouri and the West Coast as well as excursions to see native species in the wild.

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