

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, AUTUMN 2010

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,



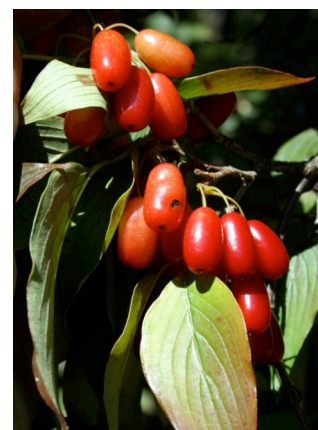
Gentiana macrophylla Pall.
Source of qin jiao

As autumn begins, let me present you a “State of the Garden” report, noting our intentions toward all these lovely plants that raise their leaves in praise to the sun. We have been well accompanied all the way on this long road, for seventeen growing seasons, by many friends and compatriots. Now we all sense major change a short distance ahead. So much effort, so many resources are being expended to prop up old, non-viable systems. And yet people are being called, one by one but steadily, to the [Great Work](#). It only seems we have “lost our wealth” when what’s happening is a redefinition of wealth. With this newsletter I want to lay out, as clearly as possible in my present understanding, what our function is – what we do for you. In return, I’m calling you to respond with annual membership support (tax deductible) of High Falls Foundation, Inc. [Donate now!](#) You are defining our path along with me, you are finding your own place, and your participation is necessary to our journey. If one thousand people make this commitment – with annual donations and/or participation in our programs – in five years we will get past the big bump in the road, otherwise known as the paradigm shift. Our culture will look very different then, and perhaps “the last shall be first.” Send me an email at hfg@capital.net. I want to hear from you!

**** *Keep the Dream Alive* ****

And what is this Dream? It’s to re-create authentic plant medicine, using all our collective historical experience. IMAGINE: Asian-style herbal formulas compounded from ecologically wild-cultivated, certified organic or biodynamic plants grown in your own region. Two hundred new specialty crops integrated into diversified fields, woodlands, drylands or wetlands. Homeowners who plow up their lawns and plant arrays of medicinal herbs and ornamentals. Seasonal tonic formulas offered as an add-on to your Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) share. Medicinal quality that’s grown by nature, rather than manufactured using reductive technologies. Local dispensaries that boil your herbs for you. Granulars made from local herbs, with growers and practitioners jointly owning the equipment and facility.

The economic aspect needs a big injection of creative imagination. How about a real health maintenance organization (the original concept *circa* 1970 resembled a CSA for healthcare) with acupuncture and herbs respectfully integrated? A local health cooperative, into which you sell your Shān Yú Ròu harvest (or substitute your favorite medicinal crop) for credits, the credits in turn buying you herbs or health treatments. Certified eco-growers and wild-stewards who are rewarded for maintaining high standards (with parity prices, defined as cost of production plus a small profit). End-users who disdain to use uncertified products because they’re a threat to conservation of wild plants. Herbs that cost more than current imports, but far less than pharmaceutical drugs – along with widespread recognition of how the real costs of pharmaceuticals are externalized.



Cornus officinalis Sieb. & Zucc.
Src. of shān yú ròu / shān zhū yú

**** *Develop a Group of Plant-Literate OM Practitioners* ****

Yes, a squad of Oriental Medicine plant geeks – are you one of them? We know the clinical and medicine-materials educational tracks are separated in the People’s Republic of China, and have been for the past 60 years. In the U.S., at present, we have only the clinical track. North Americans, however, with indigenous herbal traditions and cultural memories from other lands kept alive, are insisting on some contact with the plants. The clinical medicine cannot flourish and remain true to its roots without at least one cohort of people who know their plants. The necessities of proper herb identification and quality analysis require plant knowledge. That more native species will be integrated into the Chinese *materia medica* seems inevitable, and plant-literate OM practitioners will lead the way in building this consensus.

If we hope to promote domestic, ecological production of the Asian and North American herbs, then some OM practitioners must become fully engaged with the development process. Right now, in New Mexico, several practitioners have completed NMSU’s Asian Medicinal Herbs training program (<http://aces.nmsu.edu/medicinalherbs/>) and are in a position to provide deep support to the growers. Similar interdisciplinary effort is underway in western North Carolina; we envision a

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task force for the Northeast and the Northwest. To understand the growers' needs (the risk, planning, agronomic and economic constraints) is to help ensure quality production. Not all OM practitioners, by any means, need attain this level of understanding. But an active cohort will ensure the future of herbs for all. Years of devotion are required, in addition to clinical practice. In my experience, people who hear the call to the plants overcome great odds to follow this path.

As more universities, botanical gardens and other mainstream institutions seek to create gardens of Asian medicinal plants, we need trained OM practitioners who can recognize plants in the field and offer their services as tour guides and lecturers. Without them, we risk an uninformed, symptom-bound representation of the medicine, i.e. "this plant's for headache, that one's for hemorrhoids." High Falls Foundation is working toward a training program that will enable OM students and graduates to gain credits for field work in a variety of ways, then demonstrate their ability to identify plants. This program is still on the drawing boards. Meanwhile, however, you can rack up credits by completing [internships](#) at HFG, [Mountain Gardens](#), [Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm](#), or weed walks and other programs given by Z'ev Rosenberg or Robert Newman. Look for plant-positive [continuing education](#) programs -- coming soon to a college near you?

Though the path is long, the rewards are great and go way beyond the thrill of growing your own Dāng Guī. You will be part of collective action to ensure that these wonderful plants retain their healing capacities and remain widely accessible.

****** Train & Support Growers of Herbal Perennial Polycultures ******

We support all local, organic, biodynamic and ecological farming initiatives. And they're pushing the envelope toward a new kind of grower and land steward, something Old MacDonald never imagined. "Perennial polycultures" (the term given substance by [Wes Jackson](#)) are especially pertinent to the cause of domestic production of Asian herbs and other medicinal plants. Most of these species are perennials, and depend for their quality on ecosystems with a high level of biodiversity – a complex web of relationships among soil microbes and larger organisms – that provides the food for the plant. You can grow a medicinal herb in a reduced setting, but it won't offer the nutrition or healing potential of one grown in the undisturbed wild or in a setting managed for biodiversity.

This understanding is encompassed in the New Mexico State University training program, which we hope to duplicate in other regions. Right now, growers need advice on what to grow, how to experiment, and how to integrate herbs into their operations. We've set up [LocalHerbs](#) as a special web portal for OM practitioners to buy herbs directly from farms. But the supply side is growing only slowly, and needs training and active maintenance to thrive.

Whenever I find one OM practitioner contracting with one grower, I try to butt in and preach my sermon on cooperation. Two hundred-plus new crops made into formulas! This is not your grandmother's production research, and we cannot afford energy lost through fragmentation if we are to retain the essence of the medicine. Although regional task forces are taking shape already, these groups need to stay in constant communication and share information in an open framework. We want to assist everyone – from a landowner who wants to plant a few medicinal trees on an extra acre, to a certified organic farmer considering another level of biodiversity added to intensive intercropping systems.

****** Advance Science by Defining the Locus of Quality in Medicinal Herbs ******

Hello, scientists who want to investigate medicinal herbs. What if you could get over the pharmaceutical fixation, and not only in your funding sources? The impetus is with us. A national collaboration of land-grant scientists, of which High Falls Foundation is part, has submitted multi-million dollar proposals to USDA for production research on Chinese medicinal herbs. Although funding has not yet been obtained, the team is enthusiastic and dedicated to working together until we get the money. An Advisory Board of over 32 members, organized within regions and including OM professionals, has agreed to work with the scientific team.

Our proposals argue for quality definitions encompassing but extending beyond structural considerations, i.e. measurement of biochemicals in the plant product, the so-called "active ingredients" (this term now fading as an artifact of 20th century science). We intend to [Bridge Perspectives With Integrity](#). The human senses evolved along with our plants to detect minute flavor differences in food products. Even a glance at [Bensky](#) shows how the Chinese recognized differences in plants grown in separate regions of the country, reflecting the distinct properties of the ecosystem, and learned to prefer some over others. Food scientists have devised evidence-based means for achieving consensus on the meaning of taste differences. Dr. Craig Hassel, a member of the national collaborative, has prepared a lexicon for taste-testing of Chinese medicinal herbs. We expect to use both biochemical analysis and Quantitative Descriptive Quality Analysis in the testing of herbal products grown in different regions and compared to a Chinese standard product. Keep pushing, team! ☒