

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, Autumn 2018

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

Tens of thousands of Chinese medicinal plants including trees are planted in New York and Virginia! The experiences of the past twenty-five years, and especially the last six years, have taught us a whole lot about their production. But propagation, cultivation and harvest are only the beginning aspects of production. In addition, our human resources must be adequate to sustain the growers networks over the decades of time required to produce these perennial plants and bring them to market. Commitment to this long-term purpose requires maximum capacity to cooperate, win allies, and come together. This is the main challenge. Contribute your ideas! Email Jean at hfg@capital.net.



First-year American ginseng seedlings, from stratified seed planted last fall at a farm in upstate New York. Yes, when they first emerge the plants have three leaves.

****** Domestic production proceeds despite obstacles ******

The New York group of 42 active farms works to establish perennial polyculture settings. Some of our seeds take two years or more to germinate, and then the plants must be kept in nursery conditions until they attain a root volume suitable for planting. Sometimes we wait five years before the plants can go into the ground, and then five, ten or more years before the harvest.

The American ginseng pictured above is a case in point. Even if the farm can grow ginseng, and certainly not every farm in Appalachia is suitable, ten years is the absolute minimum before true wild-cultivated roots reach harvest size. The patch must be developed first, with fruiting grandparents, younger plants and seedlings in a mixed-generation, self-propagating array. The farm's goal is to grow a self-sustaining, healthy patch, rather than to sell off every root as soon as it's big enough. September is the ginseng month. We have workshops in New York – three this year -- and those who are cultivating buy stratified seed and add to their patches.

The Virginia group of 54 farms, in addition to planting perennials, also produces some annual crops like *Mentha* (bò hé) and biennials like *Isatis* (běi bǎn lán gēn). Yes, beautiful herbs are still being sold at [Appalachian Herb Growers](#). However, if you check their website you'll find they have called a temporary suspension of activities. Even so, they are selling previously harvested herbs at a steady clip and have not even begun to advertise. Lack of demand is not the problem. Even now, sales are proceeding with volunteers completing orders at a slower pace.

The Blue Ridge Center for Chinese Medicine has been very successful in raising funds for its grower program from state and regional agencies. However, small nonprofits are vulnerable. They win grants but then must front the money for the program and wait for reimbursements, which are often delayed. Funding agencies want nearly immediate results – tangibles like facilities, equipment and jobs, jobs, jobs. While this attitude might support crops harvested in a one-year turnaround, it fails to account for the realities of perennial polyculture let alone the labor-intensive nature of ecological agriculture.

Other grower initiatives besides the Blue Ridge Center and High Falls Foundation are also trying to find a means to finance long-term production needs. We have explored private equity investment but the return (ROI) is not quick enough to attract most investors who, in addition, are reluctant to finance start-up businesses. To date, we have over \$1 million invested in the project from grantors and contributors, and cannot let our progress cease. We are planning our next moves now. But don't wait! Let us know that domestic production is important to you -- hit the DONATE button to the lower left!

Would you pay \$5/month to assure a future supply of fresh, clean Chinese herbs?

Many AOM/TEAM people use Paypal for automatic monthly donations. These add up and are important to our work.

[DONATE](#)

Your tax-deductible gift to HFF supports the grower groups, Shen Nong Society, and Botanical Studies for AOM/TEAM.

After all, our farmers have already made a deep commitment. They are investing sweat equity which, if monetized, would amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars – per farm, in some cases – and millions in total. This is how we regenerate our soils, diversify our fields and forests, and produce the medicine we need for the future.

****** A second successful annual meetup for SNS ******

The Shen Nong Society, a new professional association for practitioners of East Asian Herbal Medicine, held its second conference on March 24, this time in a 1927 Georgian mansion on East 55th Street (the State University of New York's Global Center). Five speakers addressed different aspects of the medicine and kept the audience enthralled all day long. Many thanks to Sally Rappoport, Caroline Radice and their team. If you practice, you need this excellent new resource for learning and information exchange. Join us [HERE](#).

*To get on the High Falls Gardens email list, please send an email to hfg@capital.net.
We never sell or rent our list.*

****** New archive of Chinese medicinal plant photos at #highfallsgardens ******

To celebrate 2018, the 25th anniversary of High Falls Gardens and the 10th anniversary of High Falls Foundation, we created an Instagram archive of over 200 plant photos. Before posting, we checked each Latin binomial with Flora of China to make sure the plant name is up to date. (Taxonomists have been busy changing the names of species, genera and even families to incorporate new findings in phylogenesis, rendering several Bensky listings obsolete.)

You can search via Pinyin name such as #zhimu, but that can bring up entries from dubious sources. To see only High Falls Gardens' photos, add "hfg" to the Pinyin name, i.e. #zhimuhfg. We hope to show the plant at each stage of its life cycle. Enter #harvestshfg to see several species at that stage. This archive will grow seasonally, as we encounter new opportunities to photograph these beautiful plants.

****** Honeybees grace the garden again ******

Our website is so out of date, please be patient. It's undergoing a complete overhaul, and with too many other priorities we are slow. Some of you may not have heard the news that High Falls Gardens (my farm operation, a sole proprietorship) closed its three-acre leased field a few years ago. I now concentrate on nursery work and planting at other people's farms, besides helping to manage the nonprofit High Falls Foundation programs including the New York grower group.



But I still keep a few experimental plantings at our one-hectare private residence in upstate New York, where ancient sugar maples reign supreme. And I still keep honeybees, or at least try to keep them. Here in the Northeast, even in rural areas where pollution is minimal, beekeeping is a big challenge. In our area most people lost bee colonies last winter and the year before, perhaps because of winter daily high temperatures below freezing for weeks and even months at a stretch. No typical January thaw occurred, when 50F temperatures allow bees to come out of the hive and defecate. The low temperatures have been higher than usual and the high temperatures lower, with not as much variety in the weather pattern.

One of our two new Carnolian honeybee colonies. See videos on the High Falls Gardens Facebook page.

One strategy to develop a healthy colony is to buy a starter from another beekeeper with over-wintered queens and her progeny. In the past I've gotten bees from Kirk Webster, Champlain Valley Bees and Queens in Middlebury VT that have lasted for years. But Kirk has a long waiting list. So this past spring, I was happy to learn that New York beekeepers were offering "nucs," a nucleus package with a local queen and five full frames of bees. These are brought home and transferred into a full super with five extra blank frames.

These are Carnolian bees from eastern Europe with a reputation for gentleness and hardiness. Ours haven't stung anyone even once! (Honeybee stings are usually pretty low-impact anyway, unlike wasp or yellowjacket stings to which some people react.) Now let's hope for the best this coming winter.

****** Botanical Studies ******

People ask where they can see Chinese medicinal plants under cultivation. The identities of our farms are held confidential, ginseng theft being only one of several hazards that can inhibit farmers. However, other display locations are under development. The Chinese Herb Garden at the 250-acre campus of New York Chiropractic College in Seneca Falls is our main NY display garden at present.

The best sites to see beautiful mature specimens are still Harvard and Berkeley. Harvard's Arnold Arboretum is in Jamaica Plain, MA outside Boston. Ask at the desk for the Chinese Medicinal Plants map, a co-production of New England School of Acupuncture and HFG. The Chinese Herb Garden of the University of California's Botanical Garden at Berkeley is the oldest site designed specifically to display Chinese medicinal plants.

Other valuable educational sites include: the National Arboretum in Washington DC (Herb Garden and Asian Gardens); Morris Arboretum in Philadelphia; Quarryhill Botanical Garden in Glen Ellen, CA; The Learning Garden on the grounds of Venice High School in the Los Angeles area; and Jim and Peggy Duke's Green Pharmacy Garden in Maryland, now operated by Maryland University of Integrative Health. Additional collections associated with graduate schools of AOM/TEAM include gardens at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco and the Bastyr University gardens in Kenmore WA. ☒