

THANK YOU GEORGE LEE

MARCH 2003 by Joan Sargent

I knew nothing about plants that elish shade until I became a volunteer in Lee Garden almost twenty years ago [almost 30 yrs ago now].

My gardening had taken place in full sun with a large vegetable and cutting garden space, an orchard of old apple trees with a small group of dwarf fruits, some soft fruit, several perennial borders, roses on a split rail fence and a greenhouse attached to the house where I could start seeds and have cut flowers for the house all winter long.

Walking into Lee for the first time as a worker I was confronted with a whole new group of shade loving plants, many I had never seen, let alone grown.

I had every May noticed the burst of color on Chichetser Road and when George Lee was alive I had gone to buy plants from him, he ran a small nursery called The Mousetrap, we shared a great interest in Primroses and he was President of that Society and the Daffodil Society as well. He also grew all the hardy Azaleas known at the time. George knew about Hellebores and grew them years before they became the popular plant they are today. George knew about Epimediums, now everyone agrees that they are the world's best drought-proof groundcover. George knew that Snowdrops and Aconites should be moved and divided right after bloom and not bought as dried bulbs in September. George kept copious notes, as I do today, of when his plants bloomed and for how long.

Today, those of us who have given a little time to the garden will have some or all of these in their gardens, I did have Pulmonarias with spotted leaves, but George had an unspotted one with electric blue flowers early in the spring, I did know quite a lot about Primrose but I had never seen the Japanese variety sieboldii, it is by far the best type grown here, crinkly leaves and flowers in pink or white with tall stems, perfect for cutting, it goes dormant in the summer and does not need watering. If I ever had to make a list of my ten favorite plants, at least four would be those I learnt about and took home from Lee.

I don't think I knew there were native Azaleas that bloomed much later than the Asian types that we all grew, some have wonderful fragrance and bright orange and yellow flowers. I had never seen a Halesia, the Silver Bell tree, now I have two of these beautiful natives in my garden.

Now we need a new generation of Garden Center [NCBL] members to benefit from the Garden and to gain all the benefits that those of us who volunteer today enjoy. If you have a shady garden or just a little piece of shade under a tree, if you enjoy chatting with like-minded people, novices and experts alike, if you want to see how all the good plants that George used so well grow and share in some of the beauty, won't you come and join us for an hour once a week starting April. I look forward to seeing you there.

Ed. note: *We also echo the need for new volunteers!
We have tried to find photos for reference.*



Native R. calendulaceum in Lee.



Above, Primrose sieboldii, G. Lee photo c. 1967



Helesia Silver Bell tree



Epimediums lining the paths at Lee.