

Spring 2026 Newsletter



To our Members and Friends,

Finally, spring is on its way! We have a lot planned, so mark your calendars as you read this newsletter.

Thank you to Shiva Sarram for arranging the terrific March program, which highlighted the history of peonies and offered excellent advice on growing them. Holding the program at the New Canaan Library and opening it to the public gave us wonderful exposure to a wider audience—more than 90 people attended!

Special thanks to Mo Flanagan for setting up the information table, and to Betsy Sammarco, Sara Hunt, and Susan Holland for greeting guests and providing name tags. And thank you to the hospitality committee for the wonderful spread, and to Susan Bergen for creating the gorgeous centerpiece. It was truly a team effort.

Our monthly Garden Visits begin in April. Please mark the dates on your calendar—you won't want to miss them!

Geri Rhoades and Deborah Shaw are planning many surprises for the April Luncheon. Be sure to sign up early, as attendance at Lapham is limited to 85 people. One guest only. Prepare to be delighted!

If you have family visiting on Mother's Day weekend, bring them to Lee Garden's annual Azalea Festival on Saturday, May 9, from 1–4 pm. They will be amazed by the beauty of the garden in full bloom.

The Program Committee has organized a special tour of Prospect Gardens in Westport for members on May 20. This free tour is limited to 40 members, and carpooling will be necessary. Details are on page 3 of the newsletter. (Note: This information has changed from the Green Directory due to the extra-cold winter. Please check the NCBL website for the most up-to-date information.)

Another members-only event is a special tour of the historic Granger House. This is the **first time** the 1783 house will be open for a tour—one day only! Space is limited. See page 4 for details.

Our final program will be held on June 3 at the Nature Center from 9:30–11:30 a.m. "Spill the Dirt!" will be a lively and informative program to wrap up the year. Check the Green Directory or visit the NCBL website for additional details.

Looking forward to seeing you at these events!
Nancy Malling, President NCBL

Upcoming Events

Annual Spring Luncheon

Friday, April 24th, 11:30–2:00, Lapham Center

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The Azalea Festival at Lee Garden

Saturday, May 9th, 1:00–4:00 pm

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Tour of Prospect Gardens by Cindy Shumate.

Wednesday, May 20th, 9:15 am

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NEW: Historic Grainger House + Peony Garden Tour

Saturday, May 30, 2026, 11:00 am

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Annual Meeting:

Spill the Dirt! Soil basics for Gardeners with Greg Bugbee

Wednesday, June 3rd, 9:30–11:30 am
New Canaan Nature Center

Page 3

Garden visits: April 16th, May 7th,
June 18th, July 9th, August 13th.

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**WELCOME
NEW MEMBERS**

Lyn Sainz
Ashley Rosset
Susu Hamady
Linda Hamady

We're so happy you joined.

Celebrate Spring Buds and Butterflies Luncheon!

April 24th, 11:30 AM - 2:00 PM, Lapham Center



Spring is almost here, and we hope you'll join us for our Buds & Butterflies Luncheon—a relaxed, cheerful afternoon to reconnect with friends and welcome the season together.

For many years, our spring gathering has been our much-loved Victorian Tea. Since we enjoyed a tea together this past October, we thought this spring was the perfect opportunity to try something a little different. The Buds & Butterflies Luncheon keeps the heart of that tradition—friendship, conversation, and shared hospitality—while giving us a fresh way to celebrate the season.

The Buds & Butterflies theme is centered on friendship and growth. Buds remind us that relationships often begin quietly and deepen over time, while butterflies symbolize the joy and confidence that come from friendships nurtured year after year. This luncheon will celebrate the small but meaningful moments—shared laughter, familiar faces, and new connections—that help our community continue to bloom. As is our tradition, please bring a dish to share.

Suggested options include: (room temperature friendly)

- Main dishes: quiches, chicken or fish dishes, pasta, or vegetable entrées
- Salads: green salads, fruit salads, pasta or grain salads
- Sides: spring vegetables, potatoes, rice dishes, deviled eggs, rolls, or bread
- Desserts: cookies, bars, cakes, cupcakes, or lemony treats
- Beverages: iced tea, lemonade, sparkling water, or other favorites

In addition to good food and good company, we're planning a few fun surprises and simple activities—lighthearted moments meant to spark conversation, celebrate friendship, and add a little extra joy.

We hope you'll join us as we honor a cherished tradition while embracing something new. The Buds & Butterflies Luncheon promises an afternoon filled with warmth, connection, and springtime cheer.

[Click Here to RSVP](#)

You will be asked to register your guests' names, email addresses, and what you're bringing.

Please bring food on a decorative plate or bowl, and please label ingredients.

Spring Programs: Members ONLY

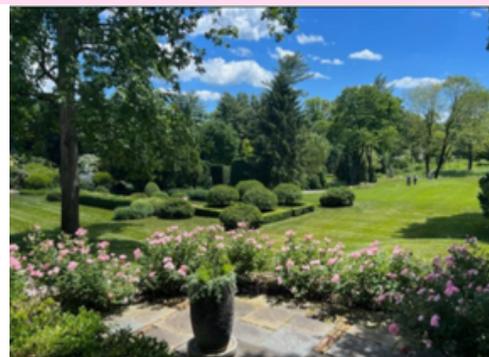
May Program: DATE CHANGE

Tour of Prospect Gardens by Cindy Shumate.

Wednesday, May 20th, 2026. 9:15 AM-Noon

FREE: members only! Rain or Shine.

Optional lunch following, at your own expense.



What a winter it has been! With the cold lingering longer than expected, gardens throughout our area are waking up a bit more slowly this year. By adjusting our date, we'll be able to experience this special garden in its full, beautiful bloom.

We're visiting Prospect Gardens, a stunning and multifaceted property in Westport. This remarkable garden features an arboretum, berry patches, a sunny perennial garden, a shady woodland walk, a Japanese-inspired meditation garden, and so much more. Each area offers its own distinct character and seasonal interest, making it a truly inspiring destination for gardeners and nature lovers alike. Our visit will begin with a brief introductory program, followed by a guided walking tour of the thoughtfully designed grounds. Participation is limited to 40 members and will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis. The program committee, which spectacularly managed its budget this year, is generously covering the cost. Please register [HERE](#). Because this program is expected to be very popular, we kindly ask that you register only if you are certain you can attend. If something comes up, please cancel at least two days in advance so another member may enjoy your spot. We will have a waitlist. We look forward to sharing this beautiful spring experience with you!

Attendees must meet at the Mead Park parking lot (at the bottom of the pond, right across from the baseball fields) at 9:15 AM for a carpool to Westport. Parking at the Garden is limited.



June Program: Spill the Dirt! with Greg Bugbee

Annual Meeting

Wednesday, June 3rd, 2026, 9:30-11:30

New Canaan Nature Center



Greg Bugbee, Head of Soil Testing at CT's Office of Aquatic Invasive Species (OAIS), will share what constitutes healthy soil, soil type, and pH levels.

Healthy soil is the living foundation of every productive and beautiful garden. Beneath the surface lies a vibrant ecosystem of microorganisms, organic matter, minerals, air, and water — all working together to support strong roots and resilient plants. When soil is balanced, gardens thrive with better blooms, stronger growth, and greater resistance to pests and stress.

In this program, you'll learn the fundamentals of soil science in clear, practical terms — from understanding soil structure and pH to improving drainage and building fertility naturally. Discover simple, sustainable steps you can take to nourish your soil, reduce reliance on chemicals, and cultivate a healthier, more vibrant garden season after season.

Don't miss this interesting program and ring in the 2026/27 year and the election of the upcoming board. 3

SPECIAL MEMBERS-ONLY OPPORTUNITY

Historic Grainger House + Peony Garden Tour

Saturday, May 30, 2026, 11:00 AM

(rain date May 31)

Limited to 40 Members

Purchase tickets [HERE](#)

As part of the national commemoration of America's 250th anniversary, The Glass House will, **for the first time**, open the 1783 Grainger House and its celebrated peony and iris garden for limited-access tours for one day only. The house sits on one of New Canaan's earliest registered land parcels and was originally known as the Finch House, named for the early New Canaan family who farmed the land.

Purchased in 1990 by David Whitney, partner of Philip Johnson, the house has been carefully restored to its 18th-century form. Whitney furnished the home with significant modernist art and design, elements that remain on view today, including a striking window etching by artist Michael Heizer. He also created a remarkable garden, planting a rare collection of perennial peonies and irises, and installing a sculpture by artist Alessandro Twombly.

Together, the house and garden vividly illustrate the dialogue between early American architectural traditions and the 20th-century art and design that define The Glass House. Parking will be at West School.



Credit: Peter Aaron

Garden Visits

It's hard to believe it, with piles of snow covering our lawns & gardens right now, but Spring will get here. Our group is already lining up gardens for this year's visits. We thank those of you who have kindly offered to share your gardens with us this coming summer.

We know everyone is very much looking forward to warmer, longer days, meeting up with old & new friends, and viewing gardens that will delight and inspire us. Sign up for the April and May tours [HERE](#). Sign up to be a greeter [HERE](#).

We are also looking for new committee members. It's not a big time commitment: occasional meetings, pre-viewing gardens, and greeting members on the day of the visit. Please contact Pam Yee (pamyee6@gmail.com) or Lally Jurcik (lgjurcik@gmail.com) if you would like to join our group.

We will start with an extra visit this year on April 16th to showcase some early Spring daffodils. The other dates will be: May 7th, June 18th, July 9th, and August 13th. All visits will take place on Thursdays from 9:30-12:00.



Garden Walls Brightened up our Dreary Winter

By Deborah Shaw

Go to our YouTube channel to see the entire presentation [HERE](#)

Ann Flinn and Zoom Admin Patricia Spugani brought us a lovely January program from Hal Thorne of GSky on Garden Walls. These interior or exterior "green walls" are living, breathing gardens that look stunning, help clean the air, reduce noise, improve human health and well-being, and support environmental goals.

Hal founded GSky when he retired in 2004, little knowing that garden walls would become his passion. The GSky team designs, builds, installs, and maintains walls in corporate and public spaces across 45 US states, every Canadian province, and four continents (so far). Corporate clients include Airbnb, SONOS, Crocs, Amex, Procter & Gamble, the Norwalk-based Van Dyk Recycling Systems, Longwood Gardens in PA, and the Royal Botanical Garden in Sydney, Australia. Hal is also starting to receive requests from homeowners wishing to improve their interior living spaces, and envisions a future in which living garden walls function inside private homes as part of the HVAC and air filtration systems.

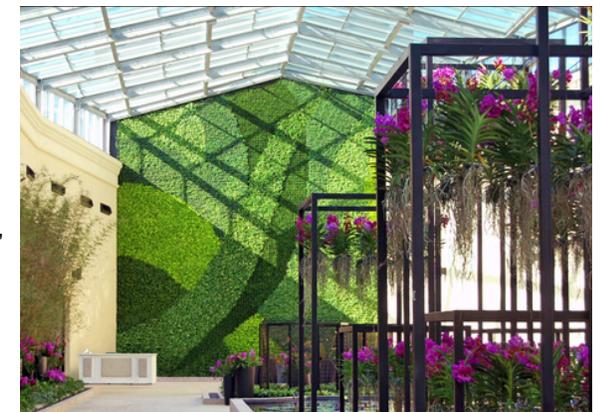
Just like our more familiar horizontal gardens, garden walls require judicious plant selection, consideration of water and lighting needs, and access for maintenance. GSky's unique watering system is designed so that no water is exposed to the air, preventing mold or mildew from forming. Some walls are mobile, introducing beautiful, live, biophilic panels that can be moved to reconfigure a space. As the use of traditional office space declines, demand for green walls has grown in educational and healthcare locations. Green walls may also be helpful in the important task of feeding the world, especially in areas with limited arable land.



Largest wall is in Australia



Private residence in Brooklyn



20,000 potted plants: completed in 30 days



What our Allee might look like

A Marriott Hotel



In the distant past, our world was a jungle with naturally occurring green walls. Now, our modern concrete jungles can be improved with breathing, living, and garden walls. The cost to install a wall starts at \$80 per square foot and increases based on design complexity and plant selection. A smallish installation can be completed for under \$10,000, and costs approximately 10% of the total initial expense per year to maintain.

A Gardener's Toolkit with Jessica Schuler

Joint meeting with NC Garden Club

By Betsy Sammarco

Members of both the New Canaan Beautification League and the New Canaan Garden Club met at the library in early February for an informative presentation by Jessica Schuler. Attendees were greeted with an incredible spread of food that was not only delicious but beautifully presented, too! Many thanks to our Hospitality Committee: Cindy Bamatter, Marianne Grandin, Robin Miner, and Anne Tropeano for pulling this together. Thank you to those who baked and brought food for this gathering. One of our members remarked that her husband was hoping she would eat breakfast before leaving for the meeting that morning. She sent him a photo of our spread of food and texted, "Not too worried about my breakfast!"

Jessica Schuler is a horticulturist and ecological restoration practitioner. She is the director of the nearby **Lasdon Public Gardens** in Westchester County. Her presentation focused on invasive species and included definitions, identification of invasive plants, management plans, methods of disposal, and restoration. Although the scope of Jessica's practice and her presentation concentrates on information from New York state, Jessica reminds us that "nature does not know state lines", and the information that comes from New York is extremely helpful in our state of Connecticut also.

Susan Bergen provided the spectacular floral arrangements of red tulips in hurricane lanterns with glass beads. "They were lovely," said member Anka Jones.



Olivia English, NCGC co-President, NCBL President Nancy Malling, Jessica Schuler, and Dao Engle, NCGC co-President.



Jessica shared many resources with us. Here are a few that you may want to explore:

Mistaken Identity? Invasive Plants and Their Native Look-Alikes, published by the Delaware Department of Agriculture: Although this publication covers the Mid-Atlantic region, it also applies to our region. Two of our members recently used this reference to solve an identification mystery on NC Land Trust property. Download for free [HERE](#)



Native Species Planting Guide for New York City: This 500+ page resource lists native plants for a variety of soil types and ecosystems, plants appropriate for properties near natural areas, invasive plants that need to be avoided, and so much more. You'd be very interested to read the list of species being labeled as problematic. These are plants that are not yet formally labeled as invasive, but are escaping from cultivation and naturalizing in other areas. These plants may become invasive in the future. Did you know that butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*) is on this list, along with other common garden plants? You'll also find a section on native alternatives to common invasive plants, and the reference finishes with detailed information on individual native species. You can download it for free [HERE](#).

The Forest Identification and Restoration Selection Tool (FIRST): Interested in forest restoration? Jessica introduced us to a resource for land managers of urban forests. This online tool will suggest tree species appropriate for that type of forest. You can find this tool at the link [HERE](#).

Jessica also suggested becoming familiar with the **iNaturalist website and app**, particularly to help with plant identification. You can access that website [HERE](#) and can also download the apps (both iNaturalist and iNaturalist Classic) to your mobile phone. I suggest trying both the desktop website and the mobile apps, as each has its own benefits.

Jessica stressed the importance of preserving plants specific to a region's ecotype. She mentioned Hilltop Hanover Farm as a nearby nursery that specializes in growing our local ecotype-59 species. If you haven't yet visited [Hilltop Hanover Farm](#), you must!

If you missed the program and would like to hear Jessica Schuler speak, check out this YouTube video from 2021. Some of the topics she covers in this video were also covered at our presentation: [See Video Here](#)

Thank you to everyone at NCBL and at NCGC who made this program possible!



Peonies Take Center Stage at March Program

by Deborah Shaw



The March 4 program on peonies was open to both the NC Garden Club and the general public. Dan Furman of Cricket Hill Garden, invited by NCBL's Shiva Sarram, presented *A Journey into the World of Peonies*, featuring stunning slides and fascinating horticultural history and advice. Dan's parents founded Cricket Hill Garden, Thomaston's six-acre "peony heaven", in 1989. Their magnificent peonies are grown without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides. Genus *Paeonia* comes in three types:

1. *tree peonies*, which are actually woody deciduous shrubs
2. *herbaceous peonies*, familiar green-stemmed, heavy-headed blooms
3. *Itoh peonies*, a hybrid of the two above types.

Tree peonies, which Cricket Hill is known for, are native to China. They are traditional Chinese garden elements and symbols of wealth and status. Peony roots are also considered a yin element in the yin/yang balance of traditional Chinese medicine.

Peonies first emerge in April, blooming in mid-May with either single, semi-double, or the showiest double blooms. Their blooming season is short, ending in mid-June, and Dan pointed out that climate change will likely shift this over time.

Two common issues with peonies are how to support the heavy blossoms and how to bring the cut blooms indoors without also bringing in battalions of ants. Dan told us that tree peonies experience neither of these issues, which occur only among the herbaceous varieties. But for herbaceous peonies, we learned that cutting them earlier, when they are at the "soft marshmallow" stage, will avoid the ant problem. Our own Shiva Sarram also told us she cuts them at the same stage, wraps the nascent blooms in dry paper or paper towels, and places them in a zipper bag in the refrigerator. This method allows them to be added to water weeks later.

All peonies will thrive in full sun, but woodland peonies can be planted beneath trees, while tree peonies tolerate dappled shade. Peonies hate heavy, wet soils. They thrive at a slightly alkaline pH, which can be achieved by adding lime or azomite to the soil along with compost.





Janet Foss, President, Nancy Malling, Speaker, Dan Furman, Program Organizer, Shiva Sarram, and Deborah Shaw.



Thank you, as always, to Hospitality and Susan Bergen for the lovely centerpiece.

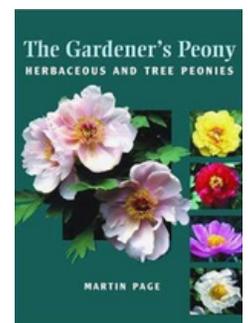
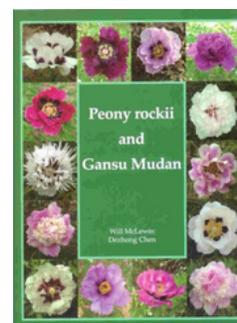


Tree peonies are less fussy than herbaceous varieties, which should be cut to the ground in September. Tree peonies are also initially more expensive because the bare roots have to be carefully harvested for fall planting. We thank Cricket Hill Garden, however, for offering a discount specifically to NCBL members (see flower above).

To learn more about these gorgeous, fragrant, fascinating garden additions, check out Dan's website: www.treepeony.com.



Additional Resource Recommendations



The Library's Volunteer Fair Brings Members to NCBL

By Maureen (MO) Flanagan

Spring blooms brightened our table at the first-ever Nonprofit Volunteer Fair held at the New Canaan Library on Jan. 10. The library and New Canaan Community Foundation organized the event to inspire more people to volunteer and support their community. The New Canaan Beautification League was among 41 local nonprofits at the event, which attracted 400 visitors, far surpassing expected turnout.

"What a terrific start to the new year!" said NCBL President Nancy Malling. "It was a great opportunity to chat with garden lovers about what we do to beautify New Canaan and how they can join our team." NCBL volunteers passed out membership brochures and perennial seeds to attendees who stopped by our table. We've already welcomed one new member who joined NCBL after visiting us at the fair.

Organizers credit the nonprofits for making the event such a huge success, saying, "Nonprofits play a vital role in making our town and region vibrant, innovative and worthy of affection." The library plans to hold another volunteer fair next January.



Committee Members Needed for all areas!

As we put together our board and committees for the 26/27 year, we need more help in all areas. If you want to get your hands dirty, we've got weeds for you! Or, if you like marketing, social media, membership, programs, events, etc., we have great opportunities. Please contact Jill Ernst at jrvernst@gmail.com and let her know what you're interested in. Or, if you're not sure, she'll fill you in on what we all do! It takes many hands to make NCBL successful.

Be Part of the Appeal Momentum

We're excited to share that this year's Annual Appeal is off to a great start! Moving the campaign to the fall has brought new energy and helped more people in our community learn about—and support—the work of NCBL.

One of the most encouraging things we're seeing is that nearly 30% of our donors this year are brand new supporters. It's wonderful to welcome so many new faces into our giving community. We're also touched by the growing number of tribute gifts made in honor of fellow members—a meaningful way to celebrate friendships and show appreciation for one another.

This success truly reflects a team effort. Our heartfelt thanks to the Annual Appeal Committee—Mary Ann Henry, Kathleen Murphy, Karen Ferguson, Karen Hanson, and Lisa Ferrante—for their dedication and leadership, to the Marketing and Communications team for helping share our story so effectively, and to Robin Busch for her amazing data analysis and insights that helped guide this campaign.

Our goal is 100% member participation. We are grateful if you have already made your gift, as everyone helps keep NCBL stronger. While the new launch is in the fall, we welcome donations year-round.



Read About the Garden of Members Steve Zatz and Deborah Shaw in Bedford and New Canaan Magazine

A staple on our garden tours, the rest of the world gets to see the beauty and care of this lovely garden. Read more [HERE](#). Congratulations Steve and Deborah for your well-deserved recognition.

Waveny Care Flower Arrangers Would Love to Have You!

Love making flower arrangements, or want to improve your skills? Join the best flower-arranging crew in New Canaan! We make about a dozen arrangements each week for the residents and staff in June, September, October, and December. We welcome new volunteers and will happily onboard rookies this spring. All are welcome -- sign up here: [Waveny Care Center Flowers 2026](#)



Lee Garden Azalea Festival

Saturday, May 9th, 1-4 pm

Come celebrate the legacy of George Lee on Saturday, May 9, from 1-4 pm at beautiful Lee Garden. Volunteers will be on hand to offer guided tours and answer questions as you explore the garden at peak bloom. Enjoy refreshments on the magnificent patio overlooking the season's lovely flowers. The park is open daily from dawn to dusk, so be sure to visit often throughout this spectacular bloom season.



Parking:

- Available in our parking lot and on nearby side streets
- Please do not park on Chichester Road

LEARN AT LEE WHILE VOLUNTEERING

Come learn about the plants at Lee, and what can grow in your garden, or just volunteer in a lovely outdoor setting. George loved sharing his garden. Learn about epimediums, the many different ferns, hellebores, blue-eyed Mary, pipsissewa, Oconee bells, silverbell, and more. We can add your email to our Lee volunteer list to let you know which days we will be there, usually Monday and Wednesday mornings. Send an email to faithkerchoff@hotmail.com



TRAVELING TROWEL FRIDAYS

Traveling Trowels returns in March — once the snow melts! Join our volunteer gardening group and help care for some of New Canaan's most visible public spaces while enjoying great gardening conversation and sharing tips with fellow plant lovers.

Sign up to receive weekly updates on locations and schedules. Email faithkerchoff@hotmail.com to be added to the list.

Please bring: clippers and gloves.

Gardening locations include:

- Mead Park Plaza on Richmond Hill Road
- Park entrance garden off Park Street
- The Train Station
- The Mailboxes on Pine Street

You'll enjoy hands-on gardening, helpful plant conversations, and you can ask all your garden questions along the way. As a thank-you, NCBL will provide you with one of our green t-shirts — gratis!



Two chances to show your pride.

As we do every year, we'll be marching in the popular Memorial Day Parade. Last year we had a great showing and hope to top that.

Also, this year is a special parade to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It will take place on June 27th, starting at 9:30am. The route will be down South Avenue to the high school.



Marchers in the 2025 parade

We will be doing something different for each one. More information will be coming about truck decorating and marching. Get ready to rumble!

“Spring” by Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)

Frosty winds made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.
Then came Spring with gentle cheer,
Sunlight soft and skies made clear;
Birds awoke with sweetest song,
Days grew warm and bright and long.

**Don't think you're getting all our communications?
Check your promotions tab. Sometimes our EBLASTS end up there.**

New Canaan Beautification League

[Visit our website](#)



Our NCBL Newsletter distributes information regarding NCBL activities and announcements that pertain directly to our stated mission. The newsletter shall not be used for political issues or the promotion of merchandise or services unless such merchandise or services are part of a joint venture with NCBL.