

# CCSS Newsletter

## Connecticut Cactus and Succulent Society

September 2009

### From the President

I HOPE THAT EVERYONE IS CAREFULLY CONSIDERING POSSIBLE alternate locations for our annual show and sale. It seems likely that Naugatuck Valley Community College will not be able to provide us with the sort of facilities that we require beyond 2010. Hang on to your August newsletters, in which **David Shultz** provided all of the details.



Some suggestions for show sites include Manchester Community College, the Aqua Turf Club in Southington, Briarwood College in Southington, Middlesex Community College in Middletown and Gateway Community College in North Haven. If you are willing to put in some time contacting a possible future venue, please coordinate your efforts with David.

August's picnic/meeting—graciously hosted by the **Loyas**—was fun, and quite a few people braved rainy weather and a long drive to attend. There was a lawn tent and a greenhouse in which to take shelter from the storm.

**The September meeting will be held on the second Sunday of the month to avoid the Labor Day weekend.**

The September meeting (held on the second Sunday of the month to avoid the Labor Day weekend) will be at Quackin' Grass Nursery, where nursery owner **Wayne Paquette** will speak on rock gardens and desert plants.

In October, **Judy Becker** of Lauray of Salisbury will host the CCSS, and provide a presentation on *Sinningia*, a genus of tuberous plants in the African Violet family.

### The Secretary's Report

Through heavy rain, fifteen of us—including two members from the Massachusetts Society—made it to the **Loyas** for the annual picnic.

**Once there, the rain did not matter.**

Once there, the rain did not matter. The **Loyas** had put up a roof-tent with tables, wicker armchairs and other seating; soon we were conversing and eating and laughing.

Jeanine had baked two trays of chicken, and provided potato salad, watermelon and interesting bottled drinks. Everyone brought food, as usual, but this time the menu seemed more diverse.

When the rain slowed we found the high spots around the puddles and explored going from vegetable garden to outdoor succulent garden to greenhouse, back out to side garden and the wonderful passionflower vines on the fence.

We had a short business meeting, mostly about the situation at NVCC and the need to find another place to hold the 2010 annual show, and, it is hoped, an Eastern Conference in 2012.

**“Thank you Loyas for making it easy for us to have a good time despite the weather.”**

We packed up our umbrellas, our dirty dishes, any plant material we had acquired and our smiles and made our ways home, in the rain again. Thank you Loyas for making it easy for us to have a good time despite the weather



## Agriscience Students Peddle Their Projects

By Susan Silvers, staff writer, Connecticut Post

The following is a reprint of an article that appeared in the Connecticut Post on April 8, 2009. The article, which features the work of our fellow member, Chris Allen, was submitted to the CCSS newsletter by former president, Frank Zapatka.

Permission for reprint was kindly granted by the Connecticut Post.

Everything is not exactly coming up roses at the Trumbull High School Regional Agriscience and Biotechnology Center this week. Instead they are coming up azaleas, hydrangea and tulips as the school hosts its annual Easter Plant Sale.

### Everything is not coming up roses . . .

Students said Tuesday they have been preparing for months for the event, which runs from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM through Saturday at the center at 536 Daniels Farm Road. After all, they have grown the 1,500 plants in hues of white, pink, purple, and bright yellow that are expected to brighten houses for the holidays.

Shoppers will be able to pick from a wide range of blooming or just ready-to-do-so specimens. But just because they are all part of the sale does not mean they all started the same way.

### "They can grow in test tubes."

"They can grow in test tubes." Danielle Hellthaler, a sophomore, from Trumbull, said with some awe as she recounted the way they take root, so to speak. Other techniques include making cuttings or using seeds, all methods the students study in their program. "I like learning the different ways to plant things," she said.

Showing off the Easter Lilies gracing the lobby, Ginger Triebwasser, of Shelton, another sophomore, noted that it was important to plant the bulbs right side up. This year's offerings include colored lilies, hyacinth, and New Guinea impatiens. And most of these are not

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## The Connecticut Cactus and Succulent Society

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The CCSS Newsletter is published each month except January. Annual membership of \$12.00 includes subscription to the newsletter. This membership includes all members of an immediate family residing at the same residence. Payment is payable to the Treasurer, Mr. Ken Mosher, 8 Bailey Road, Andover, CT 06232.

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## Treasurer's Report

Income:	
Dues	\$ 20.00
Auction	43.00
Total Income:	\$63.00
Expenses:	
August Newsletter	\$81.15
Total Income (Expense)	(\$18.15)
Bank Balance	\$9,409.03



## Welwitschia Cones

By Matt Opel, Ph.D.

*Welwitschia mirabilis* is a gymnosperm (cone bearing, non-flowering seed plant) endemic to the Namib Desert in southwestern Africa.

*Welwitschia* is in a category of its own in the plant kingdom, morphologically speaking: seedlings produce exactly two foliage leaves before the shoot apex aborts. The resulting stubby trunk with a pair of strap-like leaves can live for centuries, gradually expanding by growing from the region where the leaves are attached.

There is an extensive mythology surrounding the cultivation of *Welwitschia*, but the plants are not as difficult as one might be led to believe. They do not actually need to be grown in tall, skinny drainpipes, and may in fact benefit from planting in a wide container (or in a ground bed in a greenhouse), which allows room for an extensive network of surface roots to develop. It is possible to transplant them, though *Welwitschia* roots are a bit on the delicate side. They can also grow fairly quickly: the large mature plants at the University of Connecticut in the photos are only about 12-years-old. For the past several summers, these plants have produced cones.



Cone on a male *Welwitschia*.

Photo by Matt Opel, Ph.D.

*Welwitschia* plants are either male or female (i.e., they are dioecious). So far here at UConn, we only have had fully formed cones on male plants, but the production of seed should be possible, eventually, as more of our plants reach maturity.

Certain aspects of the reproductive biology of *Welwitschia* and its relatives in the plant order Gnetales are

similar to reproduction in flowering plants, and for a time *Welwitschia* and the flowering plants were considered to be fairly closely related. More recent information on the evolutionary biology of plants has pretty well sunk this idea, though, placing *Welwitschia* and friends much closer to pines and other conifers. Likely fossil relatives of *Welwitschia*, with similar leaves and reproductive structures, are known from North and South America. Some of the fossil species were apparently tree-like, with branches. ○



*Welwitschia mirabilis* plants at the UConn greenhouses.

Photo by Matt Opel, Ph.D.

Dr. Matt Opel, the president of the CCSS, is Curator at the UConn EEB Plant Growth Facilities in Storrs, Connecticut.

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naturally occurring, but varieties developed in the type of laboratories that might eventually employ some of these students.

### "A lot of plant science is lab work," . . .

"A lot of plant science is lab work," said Chris Allen, their plant science teacher. He pointed out a variety called *Begonia hiemalis*. "Look at the size of the flowers on this thing." He said. "They are not like they were 15 years ago. Today's blossoms are much larger and more alluring for shoppers."

In an academic world that is increasingly focused on tests, Allen said, the sale offers students some real practical experience. "It is really busy, it is fast moving," said

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## Upcoming Events

**Sunday, September 13:** The September meeting will be held at Quackin' Grass Nusery at 16 Laurel Hill Road, Brooklyn, Connecticut. (860) 779-1732

**1:00 PM**  
**Bring Chairs**  
**Entrées: A-G**  
**Appetizers/Sides/Salads: H-S**  
**Desserts: T-Z**

**Sunday, October 4:** The October meeting will be held at Lauray of Salisbury, Salisbury, Connecticut.

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sophomore **Jen Panazis**, of Stratford, describing how students have to wait on customers as well as keep the supply of plants coming from the cooler to the lobby so the flowers are fresh and do not bloom too early. "It is good for the kids," Allen said, "maybe it is not rocket science, but it is hands on." ○

## Directions to Quackin' Grass Nursery

From points west, get onto Route 6 via I-84. The map below will suggest an efficient route from Hartford. Pick up I-384 at Exit 59 about 5 miles from Hartford. Stay on I-384 for about 8 miles where you will pick up Route 6, a right exit. Route 6 will take you all the way to Brooklyn.

The nursery is approximately 50 minutes (42 miles) from Hartford and about 20 minutes (16 miles) from Willimantic.

Keep a lookout for the Quackin' Grass Nursery/Connecticut Grown sign on the right side of the road.

Slow down—Laurel Hill Road is the next left turn. On Laurel Hill Road, Quackin' Grass Nursery is the second driveway on the right.

If you find yourself at the intersection of Route 6 and Route 169 (Brooklyn center) you have traveled exactly one mile too far.

