



Quail's Tales

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Hill and Dale is a member of Michigan Garden Clubs and National Garden Clubs

December 2012

President's preface

Can't believe it's December. I have to admit I'm not at all ready for Christmas. I did finally put my Christmas wreath on the front door. I'm sure all the children are excited to see what Santa brings them. I hope I get the merry spirit soon!

I finally finished my treatments (with a few snags), but I'm trying hard to get back to normal. Almost there! Yahoo!

Hope everyone has a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. --Kathleen

Ed. Note: Of course there's Festivus (for the rest of us).

December 13 meeting

Get those creative juices flowing, and your baking and cooking skills spiffed up. Sally Ouellette will oversee creation of a holiday centerpiece. Bring your own greens and decorations and call Sally if you want to buy some hardware for the centerpiece. Katie will also have wreathes (she brought them to last meeting if you were there you know the assortment)

Bring whatever you wish to create or purchase at meeting. But we recommend you bring 36 to 48 greens tips: 12 cedar, 12 fir, 12 white pine, 12 port orford cedar, 6 incense cedar or 6 pieces blueberry juniper are possible combinations.

Steinkopfs sells them by the pound you can share and/or bring your own

Port orford cedar	2 lb bunch	\$6.99
Incense cedar		\$4.99 lb
Berried juniper		\$4.99 lb
Variegated holly		\$ 8.99 lb

Clippers ,plastic bag ,cute ornaments,ribbon are things you might want to remember .(maybe gloves)

Too, bring your favorite dish or snack for the annual holiday nosh. And perhaps bring a friend. Jeannine's friend Daphne came to last meeting and sent a thank you for the memorable time she had.

November 8 minutes

The meeting was called to order by President Kathleen Postema at 7:30 p.m.

The minutes were reviewed and approved. The Treasurer's report was presented and approved. Hostesses for the evening were Jeannine Gundle, Katie Wemyss and Amy Langdon.

The December 13 meeting was discussed. Sally Ouellette will lead us in creating a Christmas table arrangement and we will have a potluck dinner afterwards. If you haven't gotten your supplies from Sally please call her to make arrangements to do so.

Ann McMinn asked for a volunteer to work with the other two area garden clubs on the idea of a Flower Show in the spring. After a long silence Ann determined that we were not interested and will pass that on to the other two clubs. If you have reconsidered, please contact Ann.

The meeting was followed by a chocolate making demonstration by Connie Marcangelo. It was very informative, fun and delicious.

The next meeting is December 13. —Joanne Bryngelson, Secretary

Special call for the February meeting!

Like our gardens, we rest in January. No meeting. See you back on February 14 for Valentine's Day and a program featuring four table settings. Nancy Adams is in charge of the program, which will be "Afternoon Tea with Your Favorite Book Characters." Here's a chance to set a table for Scarlett O'Hara, or Alice in Wonderland or????



Valentines buffet



Christmas service for 4

Nancy is seeking four volunteers to design the tables. While there standards for setting a table for a garden club presentation (see Katie Wemyss or Jeannine Gundle for the rules), Nancy hopes that your creativity will soar, given the theme and a certain flexibility for our first mini-competition in years.

David and Jan Henry and Mar Sclawy will provide hospitality.

This 'n' that

- Angela needs Hill and Dale business letter size envelopes if anyone has some
- Catch our own Lisa Steinkopf, writing about plants in the home, in the December issue of Michigan Gardener. Her bio will also point to other online sites where Lisa's horticultural knowledge is available.
- Junior gardeners are doing a centerpiece at the library on the 15th
- Board will recommend a \$50 contribution to the Belle Isle Conservancy
- Next bagging will be at Angela's on Jan 2
- No Meeting in January



- Horticulture—Pomegranates

Sure, it's December and you were expecting a column on poinsettias. Or maybe Christmas cactus. Perhaps even amaryllis. All three beautiful seasonal plants that just never seem to repeat to their original splendor.

So this December the subject is pomegranates (*Punica granatum*), which have no hope of reblooming (or even surviving) in this part of the world. Looking somewhat like an apple, this tangy fruit is native to Iraq and Iran, formerly Persia. References to it exist as far back as the Bible and Quaran. Ancient Egyptians and Greeks wrote lovingly of the pomegranate and ascribed to it mystical powers. They used its form in their art. They also ate it.

Many first time pomegranate eaters try taking a chomp out of its hide. They never do it twice. The skin is merely a protective coating for those lovely juicy red seeds (*arils*) that populate much of the fruit's interior. Getting the seeds out of the pomegranate can be trying. It's not a bad idea to wear old clothes or an apron when embarking on the task. The red juice stains like crazy. My college Shakespeare book is splattered with pomegranate juice, a sweet reminder of my mom's sending me a pomegranate every fall while I was in college. There are all sorts of health claims abounding for both the fruit and the juice. Just Google pomegranate (which is where I started on researching this article) for a sampling—and a bunch of ads for pomegranate products that will help you avoid having to deal with the fruit first hand. Still, there's nothing like digging into the top of a pomegranate and peeling back the skin to reveal all those red arils just waiting to be consumed—right then or plopped into a dish for snacking later.

In the northern hemisphere pomegranates are in season from around October to February, so now is such a wonderful time to pick up one or two at the local grocery. Those arils are stunning when sprinkled as a ruby garnish on your holiday turkey or lamb. Or in salads. Or...(the list goes on).

(Thanks to Wikipedia for historic and biologic info.)

Critter Spotting— Flyover time on the marsh

This fall was well underway when Steve and I got back in town at the end of October. Superstorm Sandy was pummeling the east coast, but the weather here was pretty fine as I finally got fall garden cleanup underway.

There's always that challenge: what to chop and what to leave for the critters to munch on in the winter. The asters were goners till I spied this tiny bird flitting among them. It was a bitty thing, a few inches long, with a golden streak in the middle of its head. It furled and unfurled (is that what birds do?) its wings as it pounded down those aster seeds. A quick consult with the *Smithsonian Handbook's Birds of North America* identified the nosher as a golden crowned kinglet (appropriately enough). Turns out that Michigan is mostly on the edge of the interface between its summer and winter territories, though I'd never seen it before.



And so began a fall of amazing (to me, anyway) avian arrivals in the neighborhood. We always have buffleheads, ring necks and similar diving ducks passing by in the fall and spring. They were back. But in the mix were two kinds of mergansers as well: the common merganser and the hooded merganser. The fellas were tricked out in their best black and white plumage, the hooded guys flashing an extra fluffy white fan crest. They could have been buffleheads if it hadn't been for the females. There is no mistaking that crazy stuck-my-beak-in-a-light-socket plumage they were sporting as they paddled along with the males.

Mergansers are diving ducks. But what were those mallard-looking critters that were diving along with them? Well, mallards, it turned out. Back to the bird book which revealed that mallards, usually dabblers (butt in the air feeders), can also dive. They were diving this fall, perhaps inspired by all the new birds in the neighborhood.

I reported last spring that a black duck with a raucous call was in the mix. Since they will breed with mallards (they look similar too), I awaited hatchlings with a quack that announced that one of their parents had stayed around to join the mallard clan. No such quack. But this fall, there was quacking. If she didn't stick around for the summer, she returned—still with a full head of steam, roistering with the more subdued mallards.

Divers and dabblers all get along pretty well. However, the muskrat, which had been less trouble than usual this season, took exception to something those ducks were about and began attacking. It swam at the ducks, which swam away, muskrat in pursuit. Do muskrats eat ducks? That isn't covered in my bird book.

According to the Minnesota DNR website, muskrats are herbivores. That means “plant eaters” in my book. But the site goes on to expand on that diet, noting that “even though the muskrat is mainly a plant eater, it also eats small fish, clams, snails and even turtles.” Turtles? That’s a long way from the plant eater category, I think. And from the way that muskrat was pursuing the ducks, it appeared she was ready to expand her diet to include waterfowl.

As the ducks tried broken water evasion tactics, the muskrat kept right on them, until they finally picked up and flew away. Now it could be that the muskrat was protecting her den (females can have up to three litters a year—all trying to move into our seawall), but I can find no literature to suggest that ducks will eat muskrats, even baby muskrats (though I wish they would).

We can only hope that the muskrat settles down and the diving ducks don’t give up on their visits here in fall and spring. We look forward to them, coming and going, harbingers of another change of seasons. —Mar Sclawy

The members who went to the Holly Berry Brunch had a good time!!!!

Chris was a big winner as well as Gretchen ,Sally and Marlene!

