



AHS Hosts Soil Remediation Pilot Project

COULD A SUBTROPICAL fern provide a future way to remove toxic arsenic from soil? That's the dream of a Virginia-based company called Edenspace Systems Corporation, which is collaborating with AHS and members of a regional garden club group on a pilot study that will test the fern's effectiveness in taking up arsenic from the soil.

Edenspace, which specializes in the growing field of phytoremediation—using plants to remove soil contaminants—has acquired the rights to a fern that University of Florida researchers discovered has the amazing ability to soak up high concentrations of arsenic from soil it is planted in. This finding yields hope that the fern could be used to clean up sites contaminated with arsenic from dumped or spilled pesticides, munitions, or mine waste. On a smaller scale, Edenspace researchers believe the fern could help gardeners clean up arsenic that might have leached into soil from pressure-treated lumber (see related article on page 15).

The fern, which the company calls edenfern™, is a brake fern (*Pteris vittata*), part of a genus of some 280 species of ferns found mainly in tropical and subtropical forests worldwide.

The trademarked edenfern is being evaluated at River Farm to determine its effectiveness in removing soil contaminants.



Hardy to USDA Zones 9 to 11, it grows best in neutral to slightly alkaline soil in part shade to full sun.

At a meeting held at River Farm in April, 38 members of the National Capital Area Federation of Garden Clubs (NCAFGC)—whose 4,000 members include gardeners from Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia—were given three ferns and a soil test kit. They were asked to select a site in their gardens, preferably near a deck or retaining wall constructed of pressure-treated lumber, to plant the ferns. They were also asked to take a soil sample from the site before planting so that a baseline level of arsenic in the soil could be calculated.

In September, the study participants will clip fronds from their ferns and send those to Edenspace for testing to see what levels of arsenic they contain in comparison to the soil sample. **Betty Mosher**, president of NCAFGC, says the group is proud they were asked to be participants in the pilot study. “We’re a very environmentally conscious organization,” she added, “so our members embraced this idea in the hope it could lead to a significant environmental breakthrough in the future for gardeners.”

Edenspace’s ferns are also being tested in the gardens at AHS’s River Farm headquarters. “This is just another way River Farm can serve as an educational model for American gardeners,” says AHS President Emeritus **H. Marc Cathey**.

Time is running out...

But you can still register for this year’s AHS National Children and Youth Garden Symposium if you hurry. To sign up for the symposium, which is being held August 1 to 3 in San Francisco, call (800) 777-7931 or look for details on the AHS Web site at www.ahs.org.

NaturaLawn Takes Over River Farm Turf

VISITORS TO River Farm ooh and ah over the flower beds, meadows, and children’s theme gardens, but the lawns that surround these gardens are just as important for both aesthetic and practical reasons: They provide a framework and backdrop for the flower displays and serve as a perfect place for adults to plop down on a blanket for a picnic and for children to run off excess energy. Now River Farm’s lawns will be even more inviting, because the Society has worked

out an arrangement to have its turf maintained by NaturaLawn of America, a company that specializes in organic-based lawn care programs.

“This is a perfect alliance for us,” says AHS President **Katy Moss Warner**, “because NaturaLawn and AHS share the philosophy that gardening and taking care of the earth go hand in hand.”

Headquartered in Frederick, Maryland, NaturaLawn currently has 55 fran-

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Paul Ecke, Mr. Poinsettia, Dies at 76

Paul Ecke Jr., a stalwart of the floriculture industry who many credit with transforming the poinsettia from a novelty into a holiday mainstay that is now America's best-selling potted plant, died of pancreatic cancer May 13 at his home in Encinitas, California. He was 76 years old.

"Paul created a whole new standard for the poinsettia industry," says AHS President Emeritus **H. Marc Cathey**, a long-time friend of Paul's who served as master of ceremonies during a memorial service held May 17 at the Magdalena Ecke YMCA in Encinitas. "With his marketing genius, the Ecke poinsettia name was like diamonds from Tiffany."

Focusing on Poinsettias

Paul succeeded his father, **Paul Ecke Sr.**, as president of the Paul Ecke Ranch in 1963. By focusing on innovative breeding and marketing programs, over the next three decades he turned the southern California nursery into an international institution. He hired the best and brightest plant breeders to improve poinsettias through such developments as extending the peak period of color in the attractive, flowerlike bracts and increasing the sturdiness of the stems. He also pioneered the growing of poinsettias in greenhouses rather than in open fields—a key development that led to the production of cuttings with compact roots, which could be economically shipped by air. This opened up the global market to Ecke poinsettias. Today, more than half the poinsettias sold worldwide are varieties licensed by the Paul Ecke Ranch.

Industry Pioneer

In addition to his success story with poinsettias, Paul was widely known for his support of the floriculture profession as a whole. "Paul's passion for floriculture was contagious and his contributions to the industry were enormous," says **Terril A. Nell**, chair of the environmental horticulture department at the University of Florida in Gainesville. "He inspired the nation to enjoy flowers thorough his interest in poinsettias and other beautiful plants. He provided us with the enthusiasm and encouragement to do valuable research and to share information with the floriculture in-

dustry and the public in brief, clear, and meaningful ways. And, above all, he encouraged me and many others to excel in every aspect of our personal and professional lives."

History of Service

After serving as president of the Ecke Ranch for 28 years, he handed the reins over to son **Paul Ecke III** in 1991, but continued to serve as chairman. Less involvement in day-to-day operations freed up time to devote to volunteer work. A longtime supporter of AHS, he served two consecutive terms on the Society's Board of Directors in the 1990s and continued to be an active member of AHS committees up until a few months before his death. He also served on boards or committees for a variety of other organizations, including the Ohio Florist's Association, the Society of American Florists, and three different California universities.

Paul served in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific during World War II and was recalled to active duty in the Korean War. In between, he earned a bachelor's degree in horticulture at Ohio State University (OSU)—the beginning of a lifelong commitment to horticulture and floriculture programs at OSU and other land grant universities.

Awards

Paul received numerous awards during his lifetime, among them AHS's most prestigious national award, the Liberty Hyde Bailey medal, in 2001. Shortly before his death, Paul was notified that he had been selected to receive the Ohio State University 2002 Alumni Medalist Award, the highest honor accorded by the university's alumni association. The award will be presented to Paul Ecke III at a ceremony to be held this fall.

Marc recalls with fondness Paul's fascination with color and his unquenchable thirst for information and ideas. "All Paul's letters were spiked with vivid colors, you could spot them from 50 feet away," he says. "As soon as one appeared in my mail I would immediately start wondering, 'What does Paul want to know this time?'"



"Paul created a whole new standard for the poinsettia industry. With his marketing genius, the Ecke poinsettia name was like diamonds from Tiffany."

—*H. Marc Cathey, AHS President Emeritus*

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chises in 24 states. Its lawn care strategy relies on integrated pest management, an approach that emphasizes use of carefully timed applications of organic fertilizers and biological controls rather than reliance on conventional synthetic



NaturaLawn's Rick Schwartz and River Farm's landscape gardener Peggy Bowers discuss options for implementing an organic lawn maintenance program on the property.

pesticides and fertilizers. NaturaLawn also sells a line of natural lawn care products for do-it-yourselfers.

At River Farm, NaturaLawn will be instituting a pesticide-free program, which is particularly important at a site where so many children play. "Our goal is to develop a totally organic turf-care program while at the same time maintaining a high quality lawn," says **Rick Schwartz**,

branch manager of the Northern Virginia region of NaturaLawn.

Warner to Speak at International Conference

AHS PRESIDENT **Katy Moss Warner** will be one of the keynote speakers at the XXVI International Horticultural Congress and Exhibition to be held August 11 to 17 in Toronto, Canada. The congress's theme, "Horticulture: Art and Science for Life," represents the intertwining of horticultural arts—industrial, decorative, and therapeutic—with human health and quality of life issues.

Katy is part of an illustrious lineup of speakers—including renowned Harvard biologist **E.O. Wilson** and garden designer and author **Julie Moir Messervy**—who will make presentations during the signature colloquium titled, "Applying the Art and Science of Horticulture to Improving the Quality of Human Life."

"This is a wonderful meeting because

it brings together hundreds of horticultural scientists from around the world—these are the researchers and plant breeders on which gardeners depend for improving all our food and ornamental plants," says Katy. "One of things about this year's congress that is particularly exciting for me is that all these horticultural scientists will get a chance to learn about the terrific research that is being done to document the critical importance of people-plant relationships."

The conference opens with seven "big-picture" colloquia of general interest, followed by 23 symposia devoted to more technical presentations. Workshops and other activities will be held in the evenings. The extensive program of activities also includes three pre-congress and 18 post-congress tours that highlight the horticultural features of Toronto and the surrounding area.

The Congress is being held at the Metropolitan Toronto Convention Centre. The complete program, fee schedule, and registration details can be viewed at www.ihc2002.org.

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River Farm in the News

THE GARDEN at AHS headquarters here at River Farm was among several prominent public gardens in the Washington, D.C., area that were profiled in a summer travel feature in the June/July issue of *Garden Design* magazine. River Farm was featured along with Mount Vernon, Dumbarton Oaks, the U.S. National Arboretum, the newly renovated Conservatory of the U. S. Botanic Garden, and several gardens that surround the museums on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

So if you visit River Farm this summer and it looks a little more crowded than usual, you'll know why!

Seed Exchange Time

If you haven't already started collecting seeds to submit for the AHS's Annual Free Seed Exchange, now's the time to start checking your plants to see which ones have seeds ready for harvest.

By participating in the seed exchange—a valuable AHS member benefit—you not only get to share seeds of your prized plants with other AHS members, you also get a chance to choose from hundreds of different kinds of seeds submitted by other avid gardeners and seed companies.



All you have to do is collect ripe seeds from your plants this summer and fall and store them in a cool, dry place. Then look for the seed exchange information and donor form that will arrive with the September/October issue of *The American Gardener* and follow the instructions. A list of available seeds will be mailed to you in January.

Members who donate enough seeds to fill 100 orders get first choice of seeds.

CAROLE OTTESEN

Leave a Legacy

Remember the American Horticultural Society in Your Will or Trust

AHS provides reliable, up-to-date information on issues of immediate concern to gardeners and the greater community. The Society's mission is to nurture the active development of the United States as a nation of successful and environmentally responsible gardeners.

You can help support us in our mission by making gifts to AHS during your lifetime or under the terms of your will through what is known as planned giving. Let AHS recognize you now for the gift you have planned by joining the **Horticultural Heritage** today.

To learn more about how you can support AHS, contact our Development Office at 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308-1300, (703) 768-5700 ext. 115.



We urge you to consult with your legal and financial advisors to assist you in arranging the best method of contributing. The American Horticultural Society is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Service Code. Contributions to AHS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law. AHS is also a registered charitable organization under Section 57-49 of the Virginia Solicitation of Contributions Law; a financial statement is available upon written request from the State Division of Consumer Affairs.