



# News

*AHS Programs and Events*

## Excitement Builds for *The Growing Connection*

IT WAS A BUSY AND exciting summer for *The Growing Connection*, as the diverse components of this international educational program began to take shape. The Growing Connection was initiated by the American Horticultural Society (AHS), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and several other partners.

When the formal phase of the program debuts next year, 10 schools in the United States and 10 schools in the West African nation Ghana will be linked to investigate the science behind growing food plants and learn important lessons about nutrition and sustainability. The schools will be linked through state-of-the-art information technology so exchanges will be possible among students, teachers, and scientists.

Currently EarthBoxes™, the self-contained growing units that will be used to ensure experiments are conducted within a scientifically consistent framework, are undergoing preliminary testing at several schools in Ghana and the United States.

***The Growing Connection* demonstration garden at River Farm produced an abundant summer harvest.**



In Ghana, the EarthBoxes are already in use at the Jukwa Secondary School, the Cape Coast School for the Deaf, and Abeyee District Authority Junior Secondary School.

In the United States, the Garrison School in Garrison, New York, and the Louis B. Johnson Middle School in Bradenton, Florida, have been testing the boxes for several months.

### Participate in *The Growing Connection*

The formal phase of *The Growing Connection* begins in 2004, but youth groups can join in right now. To get involved with these exciting space-seed experiments, order one or more of *The Growing Connection* kits.

In addition to packages of seeds, each kit includes a self-contained growing unit called an EarthBox™, one bag of soilless mix, fertilizer and dolomite, and activity guides describing how to grow and conduct experiments on the plants—everything you need to start your children or youth group growing seeds and learning.

For each kit you purchase for \$59.95 plus \$15 shipping, one-third of your purchase price will be credited toward donation of an additional kit for the program. To order, visit the AHS Web site at [www.ahs.org](http://www.ahs.org) or call AHS at (800) 777-7931.

### SEEDS NEED MORE SPACE

The NASA balloon flight for *The Growing Connection* seeds, originally scheduled for this past spring, met with delays due to uncooperative weather and technical difficulties. During final testing before the balloon launch, NASA scientists determined that the seed packages were too air tight and would expand to five times their original volume by the time the balloon reached the upper atmosphere. This would have overloaded the capacity of the balloon gondola in which the seeds were to be carried.

By resorting to a low-tech solution—poking pinholes in individual seed packets—NASA employees were able to send about 200 seed packets up on an initial balloon flight. The remaining 2,500 packets are being launched this fall and early next spring.

After their return to Earth, the space-traveling seeds, along with packages of “control” seeds that were not sent up in the balloon, will be included in complete growing kits that are available to schools and youth groups for experimentation. Kits with a smaller proportion of space seeds are being shipped now.

## DEMONSTRATION GARDEN AT RIVER FARM

EarthBoxes are also being put through their paces at AHS's River Farm headquarters, where a demonstration garden for *The Growing Connection* was installed this past spring.

In a fenced enclosure, orderly rows of EarthBoxes successfully supported a variety of vegetables, herbs, and ornamental plants, ranging from tomatoes to peppers, basil, and marigolds. A low-volume drip irrigation system on an automatic timer kept the EarthBoxes watered during the hot summer months.

"One of our hardest challenges was groundhog control," says horticulture intern **Natalie Howell**, who monitored the garden. According to Natalie, burying the bottom of the chicken-wire fence and bending the top of the fence outward helped reduce the damage done by the groundhogs.

## BENEFIT CONCERT IN NEW YORK CITY

Funding for *The Growing Connection* is being raised through many sources, including a series of benefit concerts. The first of these was held in September, when jazz great **Bill Frisell** and his band, The Intercontinentals, played to a full house in the newly restored Judy and Arthur Zankel Hall at New York City's Carnegie Hall. In the audience were several members of the First Planters donor group, which includes individuals who have made significant initial financial contributions to *The Growing Connection* program.

Bill and the band later joined the First Planters and other supporters of *The Growing Connection* at an after-show reception.

## Youth Groups to Decorate AHS Holiday Trees

EACH YEAR during the winter holiday season, visitors to River Farm enjoy the colorful poinsettias and festively adorned holiday trees set up throughout the main building at AHS headquarters. Over the past few years, the trees have been decorated with heirloom ornaments on loan from the archives of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., but this year youth and school groups across the country have been invited to make thematic ornaments for the holiday trees, which will be on display from December 3, 2003, through early January 2004.

Requests for contributions of handmade ornaments made of flameproof materials have been sent to the many teachers and youth groups leaders who were among the more than 200 children's gardening experts at the 11th AHS Children and Youth Garden Symposium held at River Farm and other locations in the Washington, D.C., area this past summer. "We hope this will offer teachers and others who work with children's groups an opportunity to develop fun and creative projects for kids," says **Nancy Busick**, AHS children's garden coordinator.

The four themes for which ornaments are being requested are: Americana (red, white, and blue colors); Lewis and Clark (silver and gold); George Washington (blue and white); and plants and flowers (multicolored).

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Despite devastation from Hurricane Isabel, top, AHS Board Chair Kurt Bluemel, AHS President Katy Moss Warner, and Gala Committee Chair Lucy Hutchinson, above, could share a laugh at the 2003 AHS Gala. Right: One of the spectacular Gala floral arrangements.



## Gala Shines Despite Hurricane

IT TAKES MORE THAN a mere hurricane to deter the American Horticultural Society staff and the volunteers who worked so hard to make this year's annual Gala a rousing success. But things looked gloomy when Hurricane Isabel blew through the Washington, D.C., area on Thursday, September 18, felling thousands of trees and leaving thousands more homes and businesses—including River Farm—without electrical power for days.

Yet, two days later, the AHS Gala went on as scheduled, illuminated by candles and generator-powered strings of lights. More than 200 guests enjoyed a beautiful evening at River Farm under the stars, a poem reading by multitalented University of Georgia perennial plant expert **Allan M. Armitage**—who was honorary gala chair—and a chance to bid on garden-related items at live and silent auctions.

One of the biggest hits at the live auction was the opportunity to spend a week working with **Kurt Bluemel** at his Baldwin, Maryland, nursery. This auction item was so popular that Kurt donated a second week to the auction as well.

Behind the scenes, the AHS staff and members of the 2003 Gala Committee, chaired by **Lucy Hutchinson**, spent many hours removing fallen trees, cleaning up debris on the grounds, and calling guests individually to let them know the event was still on. "Given the devastation from the hurricane, what our staff and volunteers accomplished in two days was truly amazing," says AHS President **Katy Moss Warner**. 🌿

TOP: MARY YEE; CENTER AND BOTTOM: LOUISE KRAFT/COURTESY OF THE ALEXANDRIA GAZETTE

### Colonial Williamsburg Garden 58th Symposium

#### HEIRLOOM GARDENING

Join *Fine Gardening* contributing editor Scott Kunst, rosarian and heirloom gardener Bill Welch, and internationally known food historian William Woys Weaver and explore the roles that 18th-century vegetables, antique bulbs and heirloom flowers play in preserving our genetic heritage and in fashioning the new Green garden.

**April 4–6, 2004**

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Photo courtesy of Scott Kunst, Old House Gardens



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