

[Garden]

Cultivating an artist's eye

By trading the trowel for a pencil, gardeners can see their plants in a whole new light

By Margaret Littman
SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Wendy Hollender was a textile designer who became interested in making her own botanical sketches after leafing through old prints of exotic flowers and plants.

"I just fell in love with them," Hollender said. "I would see the water drop on a leaf and shading from the one light source, and it just made me want to study."

More than merely study, that trip through vintage botanic works led to major changes in Hollender's life. She wrote a book, "Botanical Drawing in Color" (Watson-Guptill, \$24.99), released last year, which teaches people to both draw realistic representations of plants and also how to choose naturalistic color.

Hollender bought an organic farm, moved to upstate New York and is drawing everything she grows for her next book.

Not everyone who picks up a paintbrush or pencil has such a life-altering reaction to the experience, but the combination of a spate of new books (including Hollender's) and reported increased interest in related classes at many botanic gardens suggests that the art of botany has a strong appeal for gardeners. The off-season holding pattern that gardeners impatiently endure may contribute to the interest in learning to sketch what they normally cultivate with compost and mulch.

What's more, drawing nature can improve your gardening skills, not only by increasing your understanding of botany and plant structure but also by providing new insight on color, form and shading.

"It is something very intimate, something that you cannot do on a computer," adds Sally Markell, a professional artist who teaches botanic sketching at the Memphis Botanic Garden in Tennessee.

Markell, Hollender and others empha-



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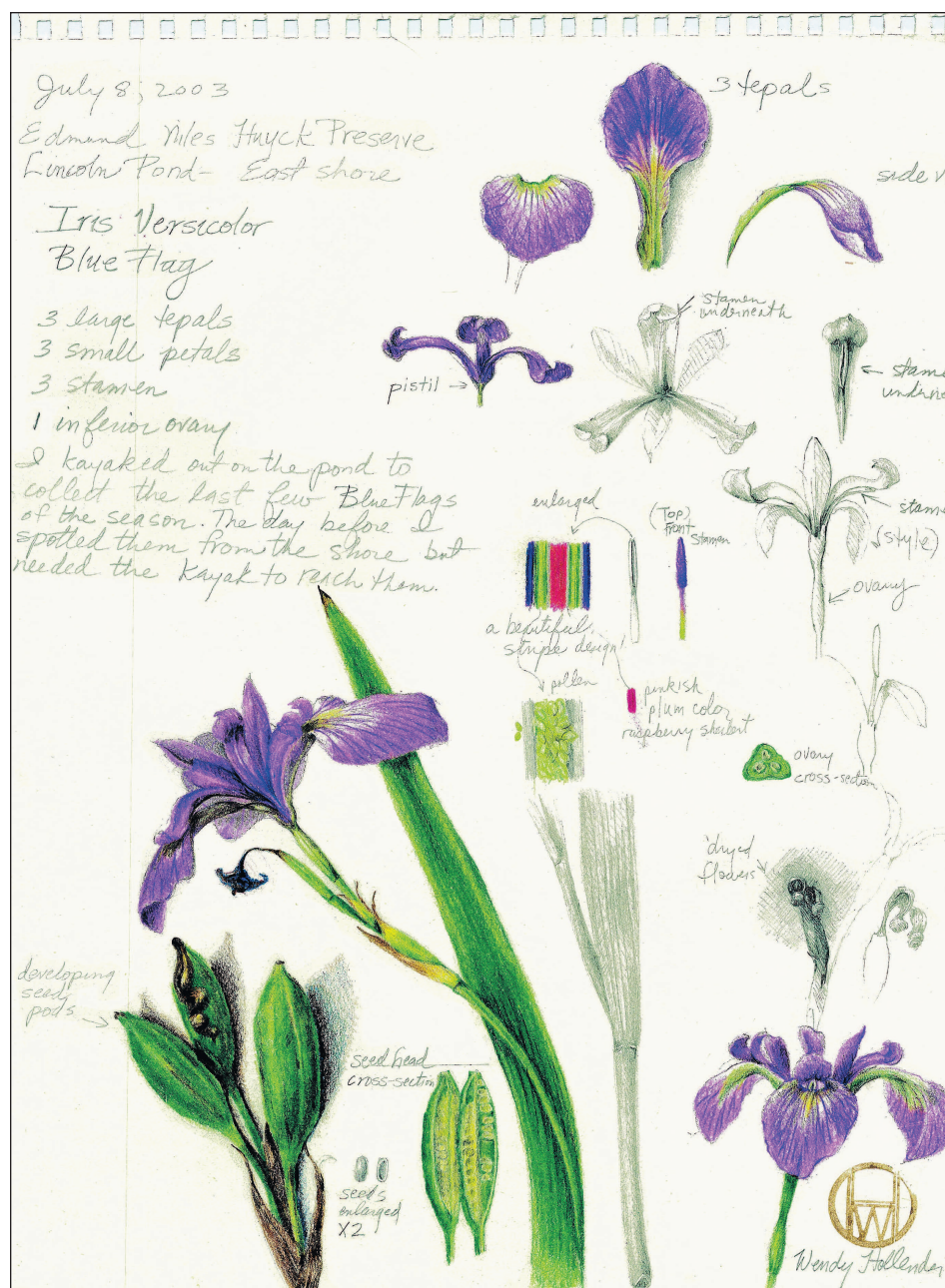
size that you do not need to be trained in perspective and shading in order to learn to put flowers to page or learn lessons that you can plow back into your yard.

Like Hollender's book, two other books on the topic published last year — "Botany for the Artist" by Sarah Simblet (DK, \$40) and "Botanical Sketchbook" by Mary Ann Scott (American Artist Books, \$24.95) — include detailed looks at stems, petals and stigma of flowers, as well as ferns, trees and even fruits and vegetables, with plenty of user-friendly techniques on how even non-artists can begin to draw them.

Steen Allard-Lawson, adult education manager at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, says his botanic garden recently scaled back on the upper-level drawing classes it offered and instead is offering more basic-level classes. In addition to the painting and drawing instruction offered at the garden, there are courses on garden design, which can help a budding landscape painter plant a garden that will create the most compelling still life subject matter.

Markell, who says she "had no childhood gift" for drawing, has another tip for selecting the right plants to draw: "The artist has to have a real hunger to draw it because she will spend many hours with it."

When creating her own projects, Markell likes to paint plants with movement, such as "a rose open like it is going to fall apart. I ask myself how can I get people to look at something they walk by (in) the grocery store and look at it differently, like an ear of corn that is stripped down."



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Drawing inspiration

The Morton Arboretum and Chicago Botanic Garden offer many botanic-themed art classes through their adult education programs — but don't rule out community colleges, art museums and other venues. Here are just a few of the classes available to gardeners with limited experience in art:

Chicago Botanic Garden: "The Elements of Botanical Drawing and Composition," 1-4 p.m. Sundays, Feb. 6-March 13 (\$312/ \$249 members); "Beginning Watercolor," 1-3:30 p.m. Tuesdays, March 1-April 5 (\$237/\$189 members); "Botanical Art: Sketchbook Studies of the Spring Wildflowers," 1-4 p.m. Saturdays, April 30-June 11 (no class May 28) (\$312/\$249 members). To register and find more classes, go to chicagobotanic.org.

The Morton Arboretum: "Begin to Draw," 6:30-9:30 p.m. Mondays, March 21-April 18 (\$187/\$160 members); "Botanical Art & Illustration: Pencil," 6:30-9:30 p.m. Mondays, March 21-April 25 (no class March 28) (\$187/\$160 members); "Beginner's Drawing Workshop: Colored Pencil," 10 a.m.-2 p.m. April 9 (\$50; \$45 members). To register and find more classes, go to mortonarb.org.

Like toiling in the soil, Markell says sketching gives gardeners another way to appreciate the natural environment.

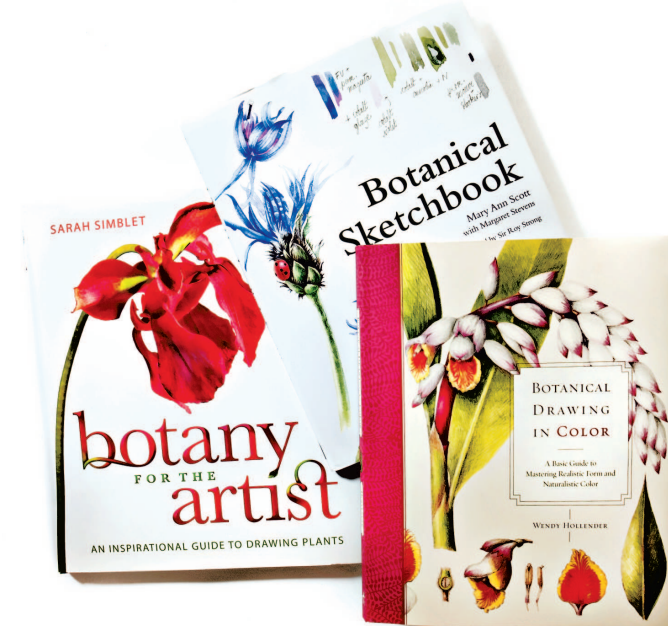
"It will reward you visually in ways you can't imagine," Markell says. "It helps you

look at the world differently. You get a great respect for all living things."

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Wendy Hollender's "Botanical Drawing in Color" offers her guided illustrations (including the iris, opposite page, and the parts of a tulip, left). Several new books teach the finer points of botanical art, which can sharpen a gardeners' appreciation of color and form.



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PHOTO

Singular start

Author Wendy Hollender suggests that newbies start with simple flowers that have tubular shapes, such as daffodils and tulips. These shapes are relatively easy to learn, she notes, and each plant has just one blossom.

Move onto more complex flowers, such as a hydrangea, but only after taking the time to observe the plant's structure.

One flower may take hours, weeks and even months to draw, which is the botanic artist's greatest challenge, because drawing a living thing means that it will be different tomorrow than it is today. Hollender and others caution against drawing solely from photographs, although photos can be used to supplement the real thing. Snap a picture to capture the light, the position of the petals and how the flower looked when you first arranged it and started drawing.

Although gardeners new to art may imagine themselves standing in a romantic

setting, with an easel in their garden as they start to sketch, experienced teachers say working with a cut flower indoors is the better approach: This allows you to monitor the light and angle — as all gardeners know, it is impossible to manipulate sunlight. It also assures that you are in a comfortable position to draw or paint for hours on end.

Planting and selecting the right flower to start drawing is important. Hollender recommends choosing something you can replace easily, so that you can set up your stage again if one wilts before you're finished. Draw the flower off one picked bud, and then the leaves and stem off another, she suggests. Planting flowers that remain in bloom for an extended period of time also can help your success as a budding artist.

— M.L.

Winter landscape provides blank canvas for planning a path

By Laurie Casey
SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

After perennials have died back and foliage has fallen, your yard's basic architecture comes into view, making it the perfect time to design a new path. Come spring, you can build a useful, attractive path that's plant-friendly and water-wise.

"When planning a path, consider the needs of people and how fast they need to get to where they're going," said Susan Jacobson, landscape architect at The Morton Arboretum. Ask: "Who are my most common visitors? Where they are coming from — the street, sidewalk or driveway?"

Paths can be straight or curving, formal or casual. When Jacobson noticed her letter carrier walked diagonally across her front yard, she placed a trail of stepping stones to accommodate him. "My neighbors use it, too, when they stop in," said Jacobson.

Some paths are purely decorative: "Create a curving path along a narrow, shady side yard to make the most of leftover space where not much grows," said Jacobson.

Give trees and shrubs plenty of clearance to allow for growth, reduce pruning and lessen the chance that roots heave the path. Along the path, consider planting low, slow-growing perennials, ground covers and dwarf shrubs.

To create visual interest, choose a material that complements rather than copies your home's exterior. "If you have a red brick house, use blue stone or flagstone, or neutral tone pavers edged with brick," said Jacobson.

Whenever possible, use water-conserving permeable paving, which slows pollution runoff into waterways.

These include loose stone, crushed gravel, stone pavers set into gravel and porous concrete.

Even certain ground covers can take light foot traffic.

For free advice about designing tree-friendly paths and permeable paving, contact the Plant Clinic at plantclinic@mortonarb.org, call 630-719-2424 or visit mortonarb.org/tree-plant-advice. Laurie Casey is a staff writer at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle.

Q&A

Removing snow from shrubs requires a gentle touch

By Tim Johnson
SPECIAL TO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Q Should I remove snow from my shrubs?

— Alan Tucci, Naperville

A Heavy snow can sometimes build up on shrubs and break branches. Evergreens are especially vulnerable because their needles catch and hold snow that would fall right through the leafless branches of a deciduous shrub.

Branches that slant upward from the trunk, such as those on tall, narrow junipers and arborvitae, are most likely to break from the weight of snow.

It is best to gently brush off the snow while it is still falling to keep it from building up. You can use a broom to very gently shake or brush the bush or tree. Don't do this if the temperature is below 20 degrees; deep cold makes the wood brittle and branches may break.

If snow freezes on the shrubs, leave it alone and wait until it melts off. Trying to remove it at that point would likely damage the branches. Most of the time, evergreens survive heavy snowfalls without harm.

To prevent future snow damage to tall, narrow evergreens, you can tie the branches loosely together with strips of soft cloth or bungee cords. It is important



Evergreens are especially vulnerable to heavy snow buildup because their needles catch and hold snow. ROBIN CARLSON/
CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN PHOTO

that the ties be slack enough so that the tree can flex in the wind. Do this when there is no snow on the branches.

Snow is actually beneficial to evergreens, especially those that were planted last spring or fall and have not had time to establish a substantial root system. Snow insulates their roots and, when it melts, provides important moisture.

Evergreens need more water in their roots, stems and needles through the winter than other trees and shrubs. Without it, needles and small branches often dry out in the cold wind and die. This winter, dieback is often the cause of brown patches in the spring. If the dead branches are pruned out, the shrub will usually fill in the space with new growth in time.

Tim Johnson is director of horticulture for the Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (chicagobotanic.org). Send questions to: Gardening Q&A, Sunday, Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611-4041; e-mail to sunday@tribune.com.