

FEATURED GARDENER: Judy Zatsick, Site Director, Green Spring

An interview with Judy Zatsick, Green Spring Gardens, as shared with Anne Baldwin, Garden Club of Virginia Restoration Committee member.

What brought you back to Green Spring Gardens (GSG)?

I started at GSG as a gardener in 2006, worked as the Plant Shop Manager, and then as a Horticulturist. After 11 years, I left to take the Head Gardener position at Bunny Mellon's former residence, Oak Spring Farm.

Bunny Mellon created an estate in an exquisitely beautiful part of Virginia. Her residence is charming, the landscape delightful, and her half acre walled garden was a joyful place to work. However, the commute of 2.5 hours a day on 66 and the parkway was a killer. I also missed the dynamic horticultural programs, the gardens focused on history and sustainability, and the close community of Green Spring Gardens.

What was your background before that?

I have always had two passions, art and plants, and spent time trying to marry those interests in a career. I worked as a book designer for The National Wildlife Federation, created educational and marketing programs for the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, became a master gardener, worked as an Art Director, and a studio artist at the Lorton Workhouse. When I took the gardening position at Green Spring, I began studying horticulture at NOVA. I was able to combine my love of plants and art. All the work I had done in my artistic career, using shape, form, color, texture, and rhythm directly applied to garden design.

How has the pandemic impacted Green Spring?

The pandemic had a profound impact on Green Spring Gardens. Staff left, positions were vacant, and unfortunately, we lost many plants in our collection, both indoors and in our lovely landscape. At the same time, the gardens became a lifesaver for residents. Our expansive lawns were covered in blankets with guests picnicking and enjoying the fresh air. Hordes of visitors walked the quarter mile pathway around the lawn to chase away the pandemic blues and get some exercise.

What are your plans for the immediate future and longer term for this wonderful site?

My main goal in taking the position is to restore the gardens, to make Green Spring *green* again. One of my first initiatives was working with our Friends Group, the FROGS, in an annual appeal to do just that. The result was the largest annual appeal so far. But I also needed staff to help restore the gardens. We now have a talented new Head of Horticulture who is poised to help recreate and restore them. It's challenging to find staff, but I'm pleased that we have two new gardeners as well.

The staff at Green Spring are what makes our site so special and brings life to our efforts. Talented, enthusiastic, and hardworking, staff really work as a team united around our mission.

Can you tell us about the programming offered here?

One of the cornerstones of Green Spring is the incredible programming we do. Our mission is to share our rich cultural and natural resources through horticulture, education and stewardship. We are blessed with Debbie Waugh, our dedicated site historian, who awes us with her in depth presentations and delightful teas. Our Youth and Family team is offering a dynamic range of

programs and activities for all ages, including outreach in Spanish and Korean. We are keen to reach out to underserved areas of our community and are hosting a Juneteenth celebration this year.

Other programming you would like to introduce?

This year, renowned historian Judith Tankard awed us with details from new research on the first female landscape architect, Beatrix Farrand, who designed a garden space for the Strait family at Green Spring Gardens. I want to explore other garden influences in the history of Green Spring and create planting schemes to reflect them. Sharing our passion for gardens and history through our special partnership with the Garden Club of Virginia enables us to offer such programming, and I am grateful for your support.

Favorite plant or plants? Maybe say a little about the wonderful witch hazel collection.

Green Spring boasts a national collection of almost 200 witch hazels recognized by the American Public Gardens Association and the American Alliance of Museums. During the winter months, particularly January and February, they create a fabulous tapestry of color in warm shades of orange, yellow and burgundy hues. Visitors flock to view, photograph and enjoy their often-spicy scent. If mother nature allows, early magnolias, and hellebores join the spectacular show.

Following on the witch hazels, Green Spring's rock garden is the next showstopper. I have been involved with the North American Rock Garden Society for many years and although it's hard to choose a favorite plant, I find one genus, Pulsatilla, particularly beguiling. You'll need a rock garden or trough to grow it successfully, but it is a real gem and charms even the most seasoned gardener.

Whether it is a charming cottage-style border, a water-wise crevice garden, a native meadow, whimsical topiaries, or a container that changes with the seasons, gardening allows us to connect with the natural world, and find beauty when it sometimes eludes us.

Life is short, GO GARDEN!



Pulsatilla image by Manfred Richter from Pixabay