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Friel World

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Another Swath of Swarthmore

John Friel



As promised last month, here's Part II of October's Perennial Plant Conference at Scott Arboretum's, aka Swarthmore College's, lovely campus.

James Basson, Scape Design, France: "Enduring Beauty: The Role of Perennials in a Drier Mediterranean Climate."

The words "Southern France" whisper lush, gorgeous, colorful. But stark, barren, arid? That, too. James, gold medal winner at Chelsea and Philadelphia, designs landscapes that work in Provence's harsh highlands.

My perennial vocabulary is pretty extensive, but kudos to James for including plant names on his slides: many species, even whole genera, that he specs were totally unfamiliar. Do you know where to source *Piptatherum miliaceum* or *Staehelina dubia*? He does.

James calls himself "a designer of atmospheres." His world is "green and lovely" only in winter; in summer, it's "mostly rocks and dead stuff. I love it." He described his landscapes as "a series of vegetational events throughout the year." An ideal outcome is a garden that's mature in three to six years. Judging by his excellent images, it's worth the wait.

Kristie Lane Anderson, Longwood Gardens: "Meadows, Gardens and Meadow Gardens."

Ten years ago, Longwood opened an expanded 86-acre meadow. To make room, a state highway, Route 52, was shifted east, widened and equipped with a bridge allowing wildlife to pass safely below the road.

The meadow is a short walk away, and a world removed, from Longwood's spectacular formal gardens, where nature follows orders. The meadow is also carefully controlled, but the hand of man wears a velvet glove here, with a more natural, nuanced result.

My main takeaway: A neglected meadow reverts to forest within 40 years. Maintenance demands "disturbance," natural or manmade—i.e., agriculture and/or fire. Longwood uses both, with mowing and carefully controlled burns.

Kristie is a research specialist and hands-on technician with a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture. Is it just

me or is it inherently ironic that she strives to keep a large space looking like it just grew that way?

Author and teacher Linda Beutler grows a wide variety of plants in her Portland, Oregon, garden, but she's widely known as an expert on one. She's the curator of the Rogerson Clematis Collection and past-President of the International Clematis Society. Two of her three books focus on the genus, which I always loved to photograph and hated to handle and grow. However you pronounce it, clematis, especially climbing types, can't be ignored for more than a day or your neatly-trellised pots will weave themselves into an inseparable tangle.

On the plus side, typical clematis flowers open nearly flat, obviating every photographer's dilemma: depth of field. The distance from the farthest-out anther to the deepest recess of the throat is quite slight, meaning you can get everything in focus. Contrast that with, say, hemerocallis, or my beloved night-blooming epiphyllum, which require patient fiddling to get a clear shot.

I've often wondered how plants wrap themselves around supports. Linda explained it: Cells on the stem's underside are touch-sensitive. When they meet your trellis, that side stops growing while the outer part pushes on, resulting in the familiar essential-but-problematic curly tendrils.

David Mattern, Chanticleer: "Practical Gardening: Staking Perennials."

Chanticleer is a gem of a public garden in Philadelphia's old-money Main Line 'burbs. When PPA toured, attendees were reluctant to reboard the bus for the next stop: Longwood Gardens. Yes, it's that cool. Put it on your list.

David, an author, lecturer and teacher with a degree in design, is among the small, dedicated staff that keeps Chanticleer looking marvelous in three seasons. His peek backstage revealed the subtle scaffolding of carefully cut branches that keeps rambunctious plants shaped up almost invisibly, preventing flopping and bird-nesting.

This kind of how-to presentation enables the conference to offer continuing education credits. Employers, especially design/maintenance firms, might want to consider sending key personnel. **GP**

John Friel is a freelance writer with more than 40 years of experience in horticulture.