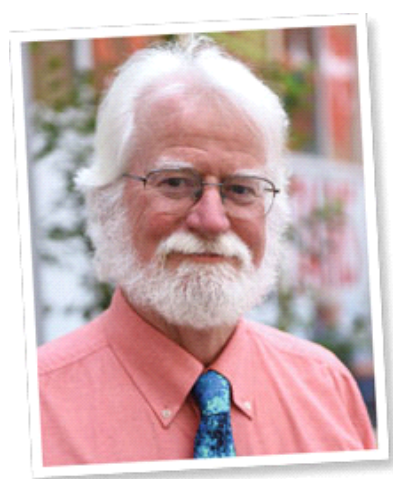


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A Sense of Place: Three Vignettes

John Friel



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I've lived, worked and played in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for half a century. It's a good place that shares many aspects with wherever you call home.

Wildlife

Much of Lancaster County is farmed, and an appalling amount is paved, but we've still got habitat—woods, streams, lakes, hills, rivers—for wildlife, especially birds. Birds have given me tremendous pleasure over the years. I recently got a chance to repay one species in a small way.

I got a call from a gentleman who lives near a black-crowned night heron rookery. When a chick falls from the nest, as they do, it's doomed. It can't fly, can't feed itself and gets no help from its parents. Only human intervention can save it. This time, he had two birds, already boxed for their protection and mine. These gangly, ugly-cute critters with large appealing eyes have

piercing beaks, reptilian reflexes and razor-sharp claws. They can inflict serious lacerations.

My role: Get them to a wildlife rescue center in the next county where they'll be nurtured until they're ready for release into the wild. Will they survive? No telling. But they have a chance.

Retail Garden Centers

As is my wont a few times each year, I visited an independent GC and a box store. Plants were neatly displayed and well-maintained at both, hardly a blemished leaf in sight. At the box, a merchandizer was tidying the shrubs.

Grasses were disappointing at both stores, but I'm used to that. The indie had, as expected, the wider assortment, including newer introductions like golden pennisetum, and several examples of the 2022 Perennial Plant of the Year, *Schizachyrium*. The box store? Just six varieties in three predictable genera.

Few retailers, large or small, display ornamental grasses among other perennials. Both stores had them in solitary confinement on a bench or two with nothing else. Which is, admittedly, efficient: If a customer wants grasses, all you need do is point.

But that's not how anybody's garden grows, is it? Mix them in! It needn't be an elaborate border mockup; just mingle a few potted grasses with your rudbeckia and echinacea. Please?

National Attention

This Space often recaps events just past, like the Philadelphia Flower Show, which I missed for maybe the third time in 30 years. 2022 was outside again, but the 2023 edition? Back indoors. Here's a cautiously optimistic "Yay!"

A major shindig, Cultivate'22, is over as you read this, but still on the horizon as I type. I hope we saw you there, but if not, you'll have read all about it by now.

It's a rare pleasure to spotlight an event that's still ahead—barely. The Perennial Plant Association's National Symposium runs August 1-5. It was scheduled for 2020, then 2021, but, well, you know.

It's finally happening—right now. If you're reading this August 1, I'm prepping our booth.

This year's Symposium is here in Lancaster. People sometimes have wildly inaccurate ideas about Lancaster. Just a few years ago, someone asked if we had an airport, and if so, was it paved? Ahem.

Air Force 1 and Air Force 2 have both visited here repeatedly. And yes, wise guy, they managed to take off, too. These weren't emergency landings; they were Presidential campaign stops. We're a red/blue battleground area.

Another shocker: We don't all drive buggies. We even have that Internet thingy. Forgive the sarcasm, I get a little defensive about my adopted homeland.

August 1 is Education Day, giving folks not in the green industry—AKA gardeners—a peek behind the scenes, an inkling of how all those wonderful plants magically materialize at retail every year. It's fun and informative for both civilians and cognoscenti.

The remaining four days are for perennial professionals, i.e., growers, educators, designers, breeders, retailers, propagators, etc. There will be lectures, tours and a modest trade show. If you've attended a PPA Symposium, I think you'll agree that nobody does tours—or networking—better.

Never been? Do yourself a favor: Budget for Niagara Falls in 2023. You won't find shoo-fly pie, but it's an interesting place anyway. I hear there's a cool river feature. **GP**

John Friel is marketing manager for Emerald Coast Growers and a freelance writer.