

INSPIRATION FROM OUR SPEAKERS

By Ronnie Brancazio

At our monthly LI Hort Members' Meetings we have a lot going on - Raffles, Competitions, Exhibitions, Special Sales, Major Events, and of course Refreshments - which keep us educated, entertained and in conversation with our fellow plant-lovers.

But it is our Speaker Program which is the backbone of each meeting and which most directly fulfills our mission as an Educational Organization. Recently I began reflecting on the many Speakers I have been privileged to hear during my years as a LIHS member, both in live presentations and in Webinars during the terrible time of Covid isolation.

I can honestly say that every speaker has had something of interest to offer which contributed to my knowledge and appreciation of gardening, horticulture, and the natural world. However, rather than carefully researching our speaker list, I just let my mind wander and pulled up memories of those presentations which had the greatest impact on me and most changed or influenced my own garden practices. And - true confession - that has often meant lots of shopping! But it has also meant changing my approach to gardening and to the place of my tiny garden in the grand scheme of nature.

Here is a brief and very personal list of the Speakers who have come to mind for one or more reasons. This is not to say that they are the best or the most important, but that they said something directly to me that "shifted my needle" as a gardener.

I am grouping them into two categories: "Practical" Gardening and "Philosophical" Gardening (you'll see what I mean!)

PRACTICAL GARDENING

1. A recent presentation on **Compost** reminded me how lazy I've become in that department! I have two compost bins which are pretty full, but do I ever turn it, check it, or spread it on my garden? Not lately! Nor have I been that good about kitchen scraps, especially during the long hard winter we had. So this was an excellent "kick in the butt" for me to mend my ways!

2. Another recent talk which I found especially helpful was our **Tree Expert** who answered so many of my questions about the trees in my area. I don't have enough land to do any additional tree planting but I was happy to learn that my newly-planted Japanese Maple was a good choice! I also learned that my neighbor's Redbud, which is so beautiful and which spreads over my fence so I can enjoy it, is an excellent tree.



3. The speaker who taught us about **Figs** was of special interest to me, since I have been nurturing one small fig tree in a container for several years now and wanted advice about how to select a few more and thus develop a collection. To me figs are the stars of the summer fruit fest, so I appreciated all the good advice. And yes, this one cost me a bit - I just ordered two varieties which promise me a small but steady crop of delicious fruit. I'll let you know!



4. I think all will agree that one of the most important and influential presentations was by Ellen Federico, The Butterfly Lady, who spoke passionately about **Monarch Butterflies**. Ellen is the reason we have created our own Monarch Butterfly Garden at PFA, which has generated so much interest and enthusiasm among our members, not to mention the hard work involved in planning the garden, selecting plants, preparing the ground, and getting everything planted!



5. Our outstanding speaker on the design, planting, and maintenance of **Little Island** in NYC opened my eyes to what is involved in such a complex, multi-functional and visually magnificent urban project. This was one of the most absorbing, amazing and exciting talks I have ever heard! The only direct application I can make is to get myself over to the garden this summer and see it for myself!

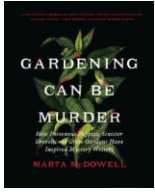
<p>Signe Nielsen</p>	<p>Little Island, NYC</p>

PHILOSOPHICAL GARDENING

1. It was during Covid that we watched a Webinar on the importance of creating a **Haven** for ourselves in our gardens - a place to sit and enjoy the beauty of what we've created, and use it to just rest, or meditate, or restore ourselves. I don't remember the details, and may even be combining parts of a couple of different talks, but this message was very important to me and I still strive to follow it. I've tried to make my tiny garden into a place of beauty and peace -

even though that means tuning out traffic, airplanes, and other urban annoyances! You'd be surprised, but I manage.

2. I'm not sure how to categorize the presentation on "**Gardening Can Be Murder**", but I just loved meeting the author and enjoying her wicked approach to how gardens have been used by mystery writers. I think I am calling it "philosophical" because it helped me consider the many ways that gardening can be used creatively and whimsically to enrich our lives!



3. I have been especially moved and inspired by the presentations by **Members** of our own organization who have shared their gardening and nature experiences and knowledge with us. Bill Barash, Barbara Levine, Millie Hendricks and Pam Flamm have each conveyed the sheer joy of observing nature, whether through travel, art, research, or their own gardens!



4. I am also including the two presentations we had on the Japanese art of **Ikebana**. I am calling this topic "philosophical" because it shows us how to create beauty with simplicity, in an atmosphere of calm. I personally find this a very necessary message which I am trying to incorporate into my own life. It is also a skill I would like to learn, in keeping with my motto that "you can't have too many hobbies"!



Chiaki Torisu



Hiroko Uruga-Senese

As I said, this is a very personal list and in no way reflects on the value of our many other speakers! They are simply the ones that have stayed in the front of my mind. I would love to hear from my fellow LIHS members about the presentations which meant the most to you. Let's talk about that at our June meeting!