



# BULLETIN

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# Botanical Arts:

## GILDING THE ACORN FOR 25 YEARS



**Left:** *Fairy Couture* by Carole Bailey, Lynn Wilson, River Oaks GC, using corn husks, wax myrtle, white peppercorns, mustard seeds, onion blooms, soybeans, cilantro, Carolina jessamine vine, devil's claw, winged maple, and butterfly vine.

**Center:** *Nature in Action* necklace by Emilie Lapham, Wissahickon GC, using pine, oak, protea, grapevine, mustard seeds, coconut palm, nandina, and crape myrtle.

**Right:** *The Queen's Jewelry* by MaryEllen O'Brien, The Lenox GC, using red maple, anthurium, variegated croton, nutmeg, peppercorns, peas, broom corn, air plant, and yucca.

**L**entils nestled into andromeda pods painted to mimic diamonds. Almonds, carefully shaped and then coated with nail polish, resemble pearls. Through meticulous manipulation, the lowly seedpod can morph into the most ornate brooch or bracelet. Macadamia nuts get a beveled look with sanding; a dab of lacquer turns them into shimmering emeralds. The eye is briefly fooled into thinking common nuts and beans, cleverly painted to imitate dazzling diamonds, turquoise, and luminous pearls, are exquisite jewels; corn husks become a gilded fairy dress. These botanical creations become "trompe l'œil" at its finest.

With the help of ordinary craft tools, patience, skill, and a good dose of imagination, jaw-dropping works of botanical art are created using dried plant materials—seeds, twigs, foliage, pods, seaweed, even cactus needles. Thanks to the plant identification cards required at flower shows, reality returns and the treasure hunt begins to identify how ingeniously each dried item was used.

Botanical Arts is celebrating its 25th anniversary as a popular component in flower shows. Members of the Wissahickon Garden Club (WGC) are credited for bringing this unique form of floral expression from Europe—first to their club and then to a broader audience. Christine Smart, a former WGC member and

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—Leslie Purple

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—Bel Morian

current member of Georgetown Garden Club, became acquainted with botanical arts while living abroad and, upon returning to Philadelphia in 1992, shared her excitement with the club. Simultaneously, WGC members Joly Stewart and Ginny Simonin became fascinated by botanical jewelry at the Garden Club of Bermuda flower show. Their mutual enthusiasm for botanical artistry saw its successful addition to WGC's flower show, *Visions*, held at Woodmere Art Museum.

Stewart then urged Philadelphia Flower Show Director Ed Lindemann and Jane Pepper, head of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, to add a botanical jewelry division to Philadelphia's floral extravaganza. "The first exhibition was in 1993, and Botanical Arts has been a big draw in the show ever since," said Leslie Purple, a WGC member.

In addition to Smart, Stewart, and Simonin, early enthusiasts were WGC members Cindy Affleck, Alice Farley, Lisa Howe, Emilie Lapham, and the late Jane Kilduff—Lapham and Kilduff traversing the nation to educate many about this new GCA flower show division. Botanical arts spread to major flower shows, then through workshops, where it has inspired an increasing circle of talented exhibitors, including Magnolia Garden Club member Bel Morian,

**Top left:** *Gilded Artful Living* brooch by Sarah Boynton, Cohasset GC, using raffia, eucalyptus and andromeda pods, lentils, macademia nuts, soybeans, fox nuts, rhododendron seedpods, almond, and pokeweed seeds.

**Bottom left:** *Pearls of Wisdom* brooch by Amy Wickstrom, GC of Barrington, using sesame, mustard, green bean, and sunflower seeds, orange peel, allspice berries, and fir needles.

**Center:** *Van Gogh-Inspired* necklace by Nancy Linz, GC of Cincinnati, using lavender, sun rose, candytuft seed pods, and Oriental arborvitae.

**Top right:** *Nature's Flora* brooch by Karen Colini, Shaker Lakes GC, using swamp milkweed, fern, penstemon, paperbark maple, climbing hydrangea, New York ironweed, and wild grape. Photo by Sandy Bergsten

**Bottom right:** *An Eternal Thing of Beauty* Victorian hair comb by Marsha Cannon, GC of Jackson, using raffia, rattan, lentils, acorns, mustard seeds, crape myrtle twig, and soybeans.





**Top left:** *Flower Pearl Chain* necklace by Twig Murray, GC of Alexandria, using corn husks, coffee berry seeds, peony seeds, pine cone petals with inverted acorn caps, mustard seeds, pistachio shells, crape myrtle, and peppercorns.

**Bottom left:** Crown by Gail Atwater, The Garden Club of Honolulu, using date palm inflorescence.

**Center:** *Bay Bird* by Diane Hopper, Winchester-Clarke GC, using yew, arborvitae, clematis, maple, white pine, and hydrangea. Photo by Linder Suthers

whose interest was sparked by Kilduff via the workshops. “She was my mentor, along with Gay Estes and Betty Davis,” said Morian. “The Philadelphia Flower Show was also a great inspiration. My nose was always pressed against the glass in the Botanical Arts division,” she added. “The Jewelry and Embellishment sections of a flower show seem to garner greater interest from the public; they create a wonderful avenue to increase awareness of our world’s natural treasures.”

In 25 years, Morian said, Botanical Arts has evolved from pins and Fabergé eggs to hair combs, shoes and buckles, eyeglasses, fans, scepters and crowns, hand mirrors, purses, and even miniature dresses. Crafting tools include household tweezers, scissors, glue, and sandpaper, along with nail polish, metallic paint pens, and acrylic paints. Patience is desirable; imagination is key. How authentically a creation resembles its prototype is a bonus. Craftsmanship, three-dimensional design, texture, and scale are important, as well as the degree of difficulty.

By *Design* editor Maré Brennan said, “In every issue we try to feature an in-depth ‘Anatomy of Design’ article in which experienced floral designers or botanical artists share their thought processes and techniques behind an award-winning design. It’s a great resource for novice designers to seasoned pros.”

—Ouida Drinkwater, *The Garden Club of Jackson, Zone IX*

**Top right:** Gold and pearl brooch by Patricia Tenney, GC of Santa Barbara, Zone XII, using desiccated agave, raffia palm, garbanzo beans, bracken fern, split peas, white pepper, coriander seeds, eucalyptus seedpods, and willow twig. Photo by Loan Tran

**Bottom right:** *A Necklace for the Academy Ball* by Lisa Howe, Wissahickon GC, using peas, almonds, peppercorns, mustard seeds, and acorns.

All photos by the artists unless otherwise indicated