Throughout the efforts and generosity of several individuals, we have a “new and improved” garden feature! Robert McDuffie’s Landscape Construction class targeted the existing small pond on the west side of the garden for the hands-on portion of the course. Pump and liner problems had slowed water flow in the little pond and made maintenance difficult. Jason Coiner, a talented junior in our Horticulture program, shared his expertise (and much of the muscle) for the pond construction. His “bosses” at Village Garden Center & Landscape Services of Fishersville, Jeff Flint and Jef Naunchik (both VT Horticulture alumni), donated top-of-the-line Aquascape pond components, valued at $2,300! The planning committee of the 2004 VT Ring Dance donated their decorative bamboo gazebo. Alumnus Billy Boswell of Reed Lumber Co., Christiansburg, provided the treated lumber for the gazebo platform. The only costs incurred by the garden were for stone, gravel, and refreshments for some hard-working students!

Jason’s a big fan of the Aquascape Designs pond system. The system utilizes both mechanical and biological filtering to achieve a healthy, balanced ecosystem. Natural river gravel disguises the liner. No sterilizing chemicals or UV lights are used. The previously slow-moving pond is now a flowing water garden, with a 3000 GPH pump powering the waterfall.

The gazebo lends a tropical flavor, nestled between two mature Japanese Maples overlooking the waterfall. Aquatic plants and fish were added back into the pond, the froggies have returned, and our garden volunteers are in the planted colorful and exotic annuals and tropical perennials around the site. Unfortunately, University regulations may foil the Director’s scheme for a “Hort Garden Tiki Hut”, complete with refreshing tropical beverages for sale before home football games [Hey, we’re being encouraged to be “entrepreneurial”! - H.S.].

Considering a garden wedding? Some late summer and early autumn weekends are still available!

Time to Join or Renew as a Friend of the Garden!

We’re in year three of our Friends of the Garden membership program, and our heartfelt thanks goes out to the many individuals, couples, and families that have contributed to the Friends of the Garden campaign. The garden’s looking better than ever with the help of these crucial operations dollars. And now this year— we held a special Friends of the Garden Seminar, free to our members. We’re completely dependent on memberships, plant sales, seminars, and other gifts to help us run the existing 2.4 acres of garden (yes, it’s that big!). The 2003-2004 memberships expire at the end of June, so please consider rejoining. And if you haven’t been a member, consider the benefits:

• Discounts at our educational programs, special events and plant sales.
• A reciprocal (i.e. free) admissions program to over 100 botanic gardens and arboreta across Virginia, the U.S., and Canada, courtesy of the American Horticulture Society. Think of the money you’ll save!
• The good feeling that comes from helping support the Horticulture Garden— we depend on gifts and memberships to pay operating costs, and 100% of your membership dollars goes to work.

The garden serves as a living laboratory for students of Horticulture and several other departments and disciplines. It’s also a great resource for Virginia Tech and the New River Valley community. Several levels of giving are available and all are tax-deductible. Memberships run from July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. Check out the enclosed details. Also, there’s a printable membership application at our website (www.hort.vt.edu/vthg) or call (540) 231-5970. Become a Friend of the Garden and help us grow!
Maroon, gray, and cream aren’t exactly eye-popping flower colors. “Honey Garlic” sounds like a home remedy for a cough (bleh!). And I’ll admit the scientific name is a bit tricky to pronounce. Doesn’t sound like “Pin-up Plant” material, but in this case I’ll make an exception–this is one cool plant.

Individual flowers cascade on their pedicels, nodding like upside-down urns. On a late-May evening in my own garden, a ruby-throated hummingbird visited each and every flower cluster, his head completely disappearing up into the blossom. After pollination, as the flowers set seed, they turn upright into a decorative cluster of pointed “turrets” that persist into the summer.

Many members of the Liliaceae family might as well be labeled “Deer Chow” - Hosta and Daylily, for example. But as a close relative of Allium (onion), the pungent sulfur compounds keep deer and other flower-munching mammals from taking a second bite. Taxonomically, it was just recently separated from the ornamental onions and some catalogues still identify it as Allium bulgaricum. It makes a wonderful cut flower, but you’ll get a strong whiff of garlicky-onion at the end of the cut stem. The flowers themselves are not scented.

Flowers rise up to 3’ tall from interestingly twisted gray-green foliage. Native to Eastern Europe, it’s hardy from USDA Zones 4 to 8. Best in full sun, try planting N. siculum bulbs among lower-growing perennials such as Geranium sanguineum. This is a fascinating plant that’s easy to grow yet tough, and guaranteed to attract attention. Our favorite bulb source, Brent and Becky’s Bulbs, of Gloucester, Va., offers 10 for $4, or even better, 50 for $17 (www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com). - H.S.