

2023 Year-End Update

*This is a new year. A new beginning.
And things will change (T. Swift)*

2024 is a new year and a new start for Metro Hort Group as we welcomed 7 new Board members who begin their 3-year terms. It's an exciting time to be involved with MHG, as with a new group of officers led by incoming president Stephanie Lucas, the changes will keep the organization as a leader in the NYC green industry, and with a high-profile image in the coming years, as we continue with our successful in-person and online programs, building our great network and increasing outreach.



Current, past and future presidents of MHG.

JULY – DECEMBER, 2023

Monthly Meetings: The speakers below all delivered excellent talks; 3 of them spoke at the Arsenal and one spoke virtually on Zoom.

- September 18 – Christopher Bivens, Katie Bronson, Bella Ciabattoni, Malcolm Gore, Scout Kerensky-Coodley, Fara Mosley & David Torres, [We're Growing: Voices from the Field](#)
- October 16 – Ryan McEnaney, *The Journey of New Plant Introductions: A Behind-the-Scenes Look*
- November 6 (Zoom) – Karl Gercens, III, [Perennially Inspired: Inspirational Itineraries for Galloping Gardeners](#)
- December 4 – Don Gabel, [Here Comes Troubles! A look at the effects of climate change on the landscape.](#)

These speakers' slide presentations may be viewed directly in the links, in addition to all past speaker presentations found on our [Archives web pages](#).

FIELD TRIPS:

Two field trips were held since July 1st:

July 18 – Oko Farms, Brooklyn

Founder and Director Yemi Amu and her team hosted 35 members at the largest outdoor aquaponics farm in NYC located on the Brooklyn waterfront. Yemi demonstrated several types of aquaponic systems and explained how they leverage the symbiotic relationship between the cultivation of plants and fish. We strolled the "fields" and enjoyed the wide variety of vegetables, herbs, fruits, medicinal plants and flowers. Yemi also provided an overview of Oko Farms' wide array of programs, including education, community outreach and design/build projects.



September 28 – Green-Wood Cemetery

Twenty-eight members braved the weather and were treated to an educational and inspiring presentation by Joe Charap, V.P. of Horticulture (and new MHB Board Member!), and Sara Evans, Senior Manager of Living Collections and Curator. We saw several locations around the 478-acre cemetery, visiting recently established meadows, and trial areas with evaluations of plants/seed mixes. Joe and Sara briefed us on other initiatives including reductions in the use of herbicides, carbon emissions reductions through reduced mowing, a wood-waste program where they share wood chips with many organizations and a stormwater program that utilizes the cemetery's lake and helps to refill underground storage caverns.



MIXER: NOVEMBER 9

Metro Hort Group hosted its first Mixer at Urban Space in Union Square. Attendees enjoyed food and drink from 12 restaurants in a fun and casual atmosphere. It was a great opportunity to catch up with friends and other industry members. Stay tuned for more Mixers in 2024!



CHANGING OF THE GUARD: 🙌

Metro Hort Group could not exist without the dedicated volunteer service of its Board of directors and committee chairs. To that end, we recognize the many years of service from these Board members who are stepping aside at the end of 2023. Together, the Board members below have volunteered for a combined total of 680 years of service!

Mark Davies (2018–2023)

Gwenn Fried (2002–2023)

Kean Teck Eng (2018–2023)

Andi Pettis (2018–2023)

Sabine Stezenbach (2006–2023)

* Pamela Moulton (2014-2017; 2018-2023 as Secretary)

* Charles M. Yurgalevitch, Ph.D. (2004; 2005-2017 as Secretary; 2018–2023 as President)

* Will remain as Emeritus Board member



UPCOMING IN 2024

28TH ANNUAL PLANT-O-RAMA @ BROOKLYN BOTANIC GARDEN

Now in its 28th year, MHG is excited to bring you another Plant-O-Rama event focusing on designing natural landscapes at BBG with 3 featured speakers, 2 panel discussions, Trade Show, Jobs Fair, BBG Guided Walks, Garden Book Sale, Lunchtime Activities and our Closing Party.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 9 AM – 4 PM @ BBG

3 Featured Speakers:

- [Thomas Rainer](#), *Translating the Wild: Practical Design Strategies for Evocative Urban Landscapes*
- [Claudia West](#) & MaryKatherine Green, *Smart Planting Management*

2 Panel Discussions:


- **Urban Ag in NYC:** Anastasia Cole, [Brooklyn Grange](#); Sheryll Durrant, [Kelly Street Garden](#) and [New Roots Community Farm](#); Nathan Hunter, [Bronx River Foodway](#); Annie Wu, [Farm.One](#); Qiana Mikie, [Exec. Dir., NYC Mayor's Office of Urban Ag](#) (moderator)

- **Next Generation Nursery Growers:** Tristan & Ryan Keil, [Emma's Garden](#); Carl Hesselein, [Pleasant Run Nursery](#); Tom Knezick, [Pinelands Nursery & Supply](#); Bob Hyland (moderator)

Plus, all-day Trade Show, an extended Jobs Fair, Lunchtime Activities, BBG Guided Tours and Closing Party w/ [D.J. Star Dao](#).

To buy tickets, go [HERE](#)



 **MHG BOARD: WE'RE GROWING!** We are happy to welcome 7 new board members whose 3-year terms begin in 2024.

- **Joseph Charap** is Vice-President of Horticulture at The Green-Wood Cemetery, in Brooklyn, N.Y. He is responsible for the leadership, oversight, and guidance of all horticulture operations at the National Historic Landmark, and the development of its living collection. He joined Green-Wood in 2014 as an intern, became Curator of Plant Collections in 2015, Director of Horticulture in 2016, and Vice-President in 2022. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Urban Forestry Council, Chair of *Public Garden Magazine's* Editorial Advisory Group, and a member of the Leadership Team of Forest for All NYC. He is a graduate of the New York Botanical Garden's School of Professional Horticulture and holds a Masters in English Literature from Brooklyn College.
- **Ben Flanner** is co-founder and CEO of Brooklyn Grange, a rooftop farm, sustainable events venue, and landscape design, build and maintenance company based in NYC. He is recognized as a pioneer for his groundbreaking model, which adapts established green roof technology to support intensive agriculture. Ben has shared his unwavering commitment to develop the urban farming industry and focus on growing an exceptionally *green* and community-minded business with audiences and consulting clients across the globe. Prior to founding Brooklyn Grange in 2010, Ben worked briefly in management consulting and marketing before pursuing farming. He has a degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Wisconsin.
- **Duncan Himmelman** recently retired from Mt. Cuba Center (Delaware) as the Education Manager wherein he was responsible for the development and delivery of all adult education programs, including their signature *Certificate in Ecological Gardening*. Prior to that he was the Program Manager for Continuing Education at NYBG, responsible for the development and delivery of all certificate and non-certificate offerings. Duncan spent 24 years teaching Horticultural Science at both colleges and universities in Canada and the United States. He holds an undergraduate degree in Botany from Hobart College and a Ph.D. in Horticultural Science from Cornell University.
- **Matthew Morrow** is the Director of Horticulture in the NYC Park's Division of Environment & Planning. Since 2019, Matthew has overseen several horticulture programs within the agency and is at the forefront of moving agency horticulture operations in an ecological direction. Matthew is a lifelong gardener, having worked professionally for 20 years as a landscaper, gardener, propagator, greenhouse manager, and operations manager for a number of private, non-profit, and public institutions in NYC and other states. Matthew studied fine art at Pratt, and seeks to blend the worlds of art, poetry, philosophy and science into horticulture.
- A Brooklyn native, **Rashid Poulson** is the Director of Horticulture at Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation. Rashid's career in horticulture began as a Million Trees Training Program alumnus, where he studied and practiced arboriculture, urban landscape design, and ecological restoration. His current role as director focuses on the management, training, and development of the Horticulture staff and spreading the lore of the Park's horticulture through tours, presentations, and community engagement. Additionally, he manages and experiments with the Pier 5 Uplands Berm allowing him to maintain a connection with his staff, the community and the landscape he has been connected to for over a decade.
- As Managing Partner of international landscape practice Martha Schwartz Partners, **Kimberly Tryba** manages the strategic planning and global business development efforts for the firm's three offices in New York, London and Shanghai. Active in ASLA since 2012, she's a board member of ASLA-NY and chairs its Advocacy Committee. Kimberly co-chaired the 2021 and 2022 NJASLA annual meetings, and was a committee member since 2014. Kimberly also sits on the board of NYSCLA and the Steering Committee of the PDC's Designing New York: Streetscapes. A 2018 MLA graduate of Rutgers University, Kimberly also teaches landscape design at NYBG and BBG.
- **Toshi Yano** is the Director of Perfect Earth Project, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating, engaging, and inspiring individuals, land care professionals, and decisionmakers to adopt the toxic-free, nature-based, and climate-responsible land care practices. He is a Director At Large at the APGA, where he chairs the *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility Committee*; a co-founder of BIPOC Hort, an advocacy group for people of color working in designed landscapes; and the Landscape and Garden Advisor at Wethersfield Estate & Garden, where he previously worked as Director of Horticulture. Toshi enjoys spending his spare time searching the woods around his home for the smallest, most secret plants, and is the proud father of a perceptive girl who helps him find the especially small plants that elude his eyes.

And, congratulations to the new MHG officers: **Stephanie Lucas**, *President*; **Richard Hayden**, *Vice President*; **Scott Vonderheide**, *Secretary* & **Camilla McFadden**, *Treasurer*. **Onward and upward!**

MONTHLY MEETINGS:

Watch your emails and our website for dates and details of upcoming Monthly Meetings starting in February.

- February (online) - TBD
- Thursday, March 21st – *We're Growing: Voices from the Field, Part 2*
- Thursday, April 18 – TBD

In our continuing effort to increase accessibility to monthly meetings, we will be offering 1 online talk in the fall and winter, along with recordings of in-person meetings.

FIELD TRIPS & WORKSHOPS: Stay tuned for our 2024 schedules.

MHG Membership: Please renew your 2024 membership now to continue your access to monthly meetings, upcoming field trips, workshops and more! -

FINAL NOTE:

Since I first joined MHG in 2004 and the Board as secretary in 2005, being involved with this organization has helped me grow professionally through the diverse programming offered throughout the year. Each event gave me a new opportunity to network with others passionately involved in the green industry. As 2023 is my last year as president, I want to thank everyone for helping to make this organization successful, and for our many accomplishments that make us a leader in the green industry. It's been an honor and a pleasure to work with such a talented and dedicated group of Board members over the years. Exciting times are ahead for Metro Hort!

On behalf of the entire Metro Hort Group Board, I want to wish everyone a very happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year 2024!

Respectfully yours,

Charles M. Yurgalevitch

Charles M. Yurgalevitch, Ph.D.
President

Connect With Us

For the latest MHG happenings, follow us [**@MetroHortNYC**](#)





A MESSAGE FROM THE INCOMING PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

As 2023 ends, I am excited and honored to take on the new role as Metro Hort Group president. In 2010 I moved to New York City as a University of Connecticut Horticulture graduate with no big city horticulture connections. I will always remember how vital this community was in establishing my career in New York City. Metro Hort Group is an amazing community of green industry professionals who make our world worth living in. We create jobs, beautify spaces, and provide countless environmental benefits.

In my tenure as the Director of Horticulture and Park Operations at the Madison Square Park Conservancy, I've spent many hours thinking about the legacy of New York City's green spaces and green practices. Our work is incredibly challenging. The New York City metro area has incredibly high visual standards for our landscapes, and we face every challenge from workforce development, to storage constraints, to public interactions, and client expectations in our everyday work.

As we enter a post pandemic world, we've experienced a time of great change for our industry. The pandemic has shown us just how vital the green industry is in providing safe spaces for work and play – spaces that improve people's mental health and well-being while healing the natural world. As we face a period of generational, economic, and philosophical changes. I encourage you to come to meetings, bring friends, and help form connections. The benefits of the green industry are more important now than ever before. Like many of you, I worry about climate change, economics, and how it will affect the legacy of our work. But just like a forest of trees- we can help support each other in finding solutions.

Metro Hort Group has something for everyone regardless of where you are in your career. Let's practice some self-care by treating ourselves to new skills and fun experiences in the New Year.

I hope to see you in person at this year's Plant-O-Rama.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Lucas

Stephanie Lucas
Incoming President