

Photo Contest – Jerry Cleland

For the 2017 year, the theme for our photo contest is “Water” so we encourage members to take plant and garden-related photos that include water features. Our themes for the past two years were “Trees” in 2015 and “Bees, Bugs and Butterflies” in 2016. As in the past, none of the photos entered into our annual contests are required to have thematic items included but our members have enjoyed seeing how others have photographed the thematic items in the past.

The 2017 contest will be our 10th consecutive year for a photo contest. For many of our newer members, the club has always sponsored a photo contest but of course it had to begin somewhere. The 10th anniversary seems like a good time to tell that story.

In the early 2000s the club voted to discontinue the large annual Flower and Garden Show that we had sponsored each fall, for several decades. The show was very expensive in terms of members’ time and club funds but we had continued because of its central importance for the club’s identity. But, when we discovered that only a few of our members were supporting most of the show by bringing in very large numbers of entries, we decided that the large show was no longer appropriate. However, after we had stopped that club activity, it seemed like we needed a replacement activity that many members would find enjoyable.

In 2005 and 2006, I had entered the national photo competition on my own and wondered if there might be other club members interested in learning more about plant and garden photography. After discussing this possibility at our general meetings once or twice and receiving a positive response, Andy Plaszc and I approached a photo club that met at Volo Bog; the Shutter Bugs of Volo Bog Nature Photography Club. One very cold and snowy evening we drove to one of their meetings, watched what they did, and asked if they would be willing to talk to our club about what they did in their club. They graciously agreed and three of their members came to at least a couple of our meetings. As our invited speakers, we provided them with photos taken by our members which they projected onto a screen and talked about numerous positive and negative issues with each of the photos. They did a wonderful job and our members enjoyed those meetings.

In 2006 the club voted to have its first photo contest, with the possibility of entering our best photos into the national contest. Because I had previously entered the national contest, I was aware that entries for the national were due in early February, so our first contest was held in January 2007. However, there had never been a group or club entry in the national competition so there were numerous conversations with those administering the national competition about whether the national would allow our club to enter individual photos from a large number of people as a single entry. In the end the national agreed, but our club was not eligible for the annual “most points” award and perhaps some other awards. Since we were not entering the competition for those reasons and agreed that we would not be eligible for certain awards, we were allowed to enter our individual photos as a single club entry and, to this day, remain the only club in the country that does this.



After deciding to have a club photo contest, for the first couple of years and probably longer, we made sure to invite outside nature photographers to show their photos during at least one of our monthly meetings each year. We wanted to keep learning how to take better flower and nature photos by viewing photos from external experts with a broad range of skills. Joan and Jim Sayre were one of those early presentations and have now become a regular yearly presentation, for the past several years during the January meeting. I think most of the club members will agree that our photos continue to get better and better.

Over the past ten years we have developed a relatively consistent set of steps through which our members' photos are processed. The annual process begins near the end of each calendar year when club members send their photos for our upcoming contest. Our members send me an email by December 15 with their attached entry of up to 5 photos. Those photos are printed in a standard format and displayed during the January meeting, where members anonymously vote for the best photos. The 20 photos receiving the most votes at the January club contest are then entered into the Gardeners of America contest; we call that the "national contest." The photos sent to the national are judged twice. The first time they are judged at the national convention where a group of 3 judges rates each photo on a 1-15 scale: 11-15 is blue, 6-10 is red and 1-5 is yellow. In addition to total points, the judges at the national competition give Best of Section and Judges' Choice awards. More details are available on the national site by clicking Photo Competition - <http://www.tgoa-mgca.org/>

Once the judging is complete at the national convention, all of the submitted photos are then re-entered into a separate competition for the national calendar, published each year by the Gardeners of America. From that contest, thirteen photos are chosen to be printed in a large 8" x 11" format in the Gardeners of America calendar; one cover photo and then one photo for each month of the year. In addition, a smaller 1 ½" x 2 ½" photo is also chosen for inclusion for each month in the national calendar. Our members have had many photos selected and included in that calendar over the years. We have also had photos selected by the judges for special honors - <http://www.tgoa-mgca.org/PhotoComp.htm>

Photos from past

