

Gardeners reap benefits of seed swap

■ Montgomery College event draws green thumbs-up

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Some people came for the gardening lectures. Some came to swap seeds with fellow enthusiasts. Others were mostly interested in a photography contest.

But over the course of four hours Saturday afternoon, about 50 participants of all ages descended upon the Montgomery College's Takoma Park/Silver Spring campus for the second annual Washington Seed Exchange.

"I wanted something to get readers together, and we're booked every spring and summer at garden events," said Silver Spring resident Kathy Jentz, editor of Washington Gardener magazine and organizer of the event.

Though most attendees were already readers, Jentz gave out 10 new subscriptions. But expanding readership was not the main purpose of the day, she said; it was to network with local gardeners and share tips and knowledge.

"Much of our continued existence is due to sharing seeds and promoting the variety available to the public," said Barbara Melera, who gave a 25-minute talk on heirloom vegetable seed collecting. She and her husband own D. Landreth Seed Co. in New Freedom, Pa.

"As gardeners, we don't get a lot of access to this knowledge on

a regular basis," she said.

Other speakers included Jenny Guillaume, garden coordinator at the Washington Youth Garden at the National Arboretum in Washington, D.C., and Sylvan Kaufman, conservation curator at Adkins Arboretum in Ridgely. They gave 25-minute talks on seed saving with children and propagating native seeds, respectively.

But some people did not come for the lectures or networking.

"I'm here because I entered photos in the flower contest," said Mark Ratner of Silver Spring. "I don't know anything about seeds."

The photo contest was divided into two categories, Garden Views for buildings and landscapes, and Small Wonders for close-ups of flowers and garden animals, the category for which Ratner submitted nine photos.

The winners will be featured in an art show at the World Building in downtown Silver Spring scheduled to run until May, Jentz said.

But even if an attendee did not walk away with a prize, either from the photo contest or a raffle drawing, he or she could still get by with a gift bag and a variety of new seeds to plant in a personal garden.

"I've never heard of a seed swap before," said Gail McDermott of Silver Spring. "I just came to see how it works for next year."

Though bringing seeds to swap was encouraged, Jentz allowed everyone to take a look at the spread on a table in the back

of the room and take home as many packets as possible. Seeds ranged from herbs to edibles, annuals and perennials for shade, partial shade and sunlight.

Participants toured the Montgomery College greenhouse where they could buy plants that were cultivated last semester.



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