



**GARDENCOMM**  
Garden Communicators International

# A Tropical Welcome!



National Federation of Press Women  
2020 1st Place National Award for  
On the QT • May-June

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University of Puerto Rico's Botanic Garden, located in the north part of the island, will be one of the many international garden scenes featured during GardenComm's Virtual Garden Tours. Region 7 member Perla Sofia Curbelo will show us some of the areas visitors enjoy the most, like The Guanacaste's (*Enterolobium cyclocarpum*) Garden, Palmetum Garden, The Laguna Grande Reservoir, and the experimental food-production garden.

## Summer 2021 Conference Takes Shape

- All speakers are confirmed and info is available on the registration page.
- So far we have confirmed 10 editors for Pitch Sessions (see page 4 for details).
- We're having a Story Slam.
- Plan for an after-party event.
- There are 12 education sessions planned.
- We'll tour at least five gardens from throughout the world.

**Don't miss a minute!**

**... ATTENTION ...  
NEW WEBSITE LOGIN**

With GardenComm's new association management software Rhythm on the website, members need to establish new logins/accounts. Please see page 9 for instructions.



GARDENCOMM  
**VIRTUAL**  
conference  
SUMMER 2021 • AUGUST 11-14  
*Garden Communications in Changing Times*

Go to [GardenComm.org](https://GardenComm.org) and click on [EVENTS](#) for all the details



# McDowell's Visit to Dickinson's Home, Garden Creates Visionary Flash



Photo courtesy of Shelley Cramm

Gardening, writing, and exploring history come together gloriously in the career of **Marta McDowell**. These passions have led her to extraordinary biography projects that speak to the

inner gardener's curiosity, the twinkling "I-knew-it!" that our great historical and literary icons must have had a garden in their midst. Treasured names—Beatrix Potter, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Emily Dickinson, and coming soon, Frances Hodges Burnett, author of *The Secret Garden*—have unknowingly invited Marta into their lives by the backdrop of garden scenery in their sagas.

"I am intrigued by writers who garden and gardeners who write. The pen and the trowel are not interchangeable, but seem to be linked," wrote Marta in her preface to *Beatrix Potter's Gardening Life*. This visionary flash first came to Marta while touring Emily Dickinson's garden in Amherst, Massachusetts.

"I visited the Emily Dickinson Museum when I was on a business trip," said Marta in recounting from her prologue career as a vice president for Prudential Insurance Company, based in New Jersey. "And I tripped into garden writing by accident."

She had always been a fervent gardener, influenced by her rural heritage in Illinois, which led her to enroll in adult education classes at the New York Botanical Garden on nights and weekends. However, pausing among the poet's posies, "I had a 'road to Damascus' moment, in a way, where I saw this connection between a writer and a garden. And I thought, 'Well! That would be very interesting to write about—and to research.'"

And in a moment, her heart made a meaningful turn toward a captivating new calling.

Interestingly, it was full-circle. Marta graduated college with an American Studies degree from a program she loved but which required a full load of reading and writing about any and all things American. To be inspired later, on the grounds of one of America's most famous poets, and leave a prominent position in the "pursuit of happiness" of her own American dream, is an American story all its own.



Marta S. McDowell says she tripped into garden writing by accident.

She "left leading for weeding," her husband quips.

## GARDENCOMM: A NATURAL STEP

Filled with affection for gardening, a passion to write, and the opportunity to make a career change, now Marta needed to confront her literary-agent niece's advice: "You're nobody!" Accepting this forthrightness in her humble manner, Marta began researching how to get published. Her niece advised her to start with articles, publishing in any kind of periodical to establish credibility for the bigger hope of a book contract.

In researching mode, Marta came across the Garden Writers of America Association, the original name of GardenComm, in *Writer's Market: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published*—this was pre-Internet—a big book available in a library's reference section. "I'll join

that!" she thought at once.

Marta has kept current in the organization over the years by reading the bulletins, *Clippings*, and *Quill and Trowel* magazine, and now *On the QT*, a natural magnet for her pursuit of the writer-garden connection. She has attended several annual conferences over the years; her husband traveled with her to the Chicago conference and they enjoyed the garden tours together.

## FROM WRITING TO SPEAKING

As Marta pursued her writing topics, she developed concurrent lectures and talks, debuting in the program from which she received a certificate at NYBG. Her years teaching and training at her corporate job made it a natural move to present her work to garden audiences.

—Continues on page 7



"Whatever you have done before," she tells her NYBG students to this day, "it will count. You just have to figure out what your skills are and how they apply to this new world."

Marta's attentiveness to in-person engagements over time led to her feature in the recent PBS American Masters series, *Laura Ingalls Wilder: Prairie to Page*, as well as a full schedule of Zoom presentations to garden clubs and botanical gardens in the COVID era.

Next up from Marta's pen is *Unearthing the Secret Garden: The Plants and Places That Inspired Frances Hodges Burnett*, available September 2021. In Marta's books, she writes on a first-name basis with her historical authors. Her extensive research and travel to the gardens they walked and tended grows an affinity and friendship with them across the centuries.

Likewise, I have referred to Marta as an

endearing friend, grateful that GardenComm brought us together. Find out more about Marta McDowell's books and lectures at [www.martamcdowell.com](http://www.martamcdowell.com) 🌱

**Shelley S. Cramm** is the author of devotions for *God's Word for Gardeners Bible*, writes the Devotions Blog at [www.gardeninDelight.com](http://www.gardeninDelight.com), and speaks on plants of the Bible to garden clubs and faith groups. She is co-chair of the Membership Committee for GardenComm and a Region 5 Regional Director..

GARDEN 365



**GARDENCOMM**  
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On the QT is partnering with the **National Garden Bureau** to promote all of the "days of" that relate to gardening or nature. [Garden365](http://Garden365) gives us a heads-up on celebrations,

special events and community activities that we can share with our audiences. The National Garden Bureau present ideas for articles, promotions, Instagram and other outlets.

## NATIONAL DAYS FOR JULY, AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER

### July

- Smart Irrigation Month (#WaterSmart)
- National Blueberry Month
- 2nd week in July:  
International Plants at Work Week
- 1 – National U.S. Postage Stamp Day
- 3 – National Eat Your Beans Day



Public domain

- 4 – Independence Day
- 5 – National Apple Turnover Day
- 11 – National Mojito Day  
(Harvest your mint!)
- 15 – Give Something Away Day  
(Share perennials? Or your harvest?)
- 22 – National Hammock Day
- 24 – National Tequila Day
- 28 – National Dance Day  
(Dance in your garden!)
- 29 – National Lasagna Day
- 30 – National Father-in-Law Day

### August

- 3rd Saturday in August:  
World Honey Bee Day
- 1 – National Girlfriends Day and  
National Night Out
- 3 – National Watermelon Day
- 6 – National Wiggle Your Toes Day
- 8 – Porch Day
- 10 – National Lazy Day
- 12 – National Garage Sale Day
- 13 – Left-Hander's Day
- 14 – National Relaxation Day
- 17 – National Non-profit Day

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- 18 – National Fajita Day  
Mail Order Catalog Day
- 21 – National Senior Citizens Day
- 24 – National Peach Pie Day
- 31 – National Diatomaceous Earth Day

### September

- 3rd week in September:  
National Indoor Plant Week
- 1 – National Food Bank Day
- 2 – National College Colors Day
- 4 – National Wildlife Day



- 7 – National Acorn Squash Day
- 9 – National Swap Ideas Day
- 26 – National Johnny Appleseed Day
- 28 – National Good Neighbor Day
- 30 – National Family Health & Fitness Day

For more information:

- [Garden 365](#)
- [International Plants at Work Week](#)
- [American Grown Flowers Week](#)
- [National Indoor Plant Week](#)