



## Hello!

During 2017, my activity resembled very much that of the previous year. Only now, my edible houseplants book is a year *nearer* to completion. By 75 different clients—26 on more than one day—I was employed: hands-on work, consulting, or custom tours and lectures. Varied potential new clients were referred to less busy workers. In April, July, and September I welcomed all visitors to my garden. Also, I led 14 public tours between March and November.

It is likely that my 2018 will be much like 2017, unless unexpected external drama intervenes. By that is meant such unpleasant possibilities as a financial meltdown (likely), health collapse, or miscellaneous catastrophe. As a result of my predictability, this newsletter therefore has so little to report that is “new” literally compared to a year ago, that it *could* be reduced to a mere postcard. To fill 4 pages, however, I do share in more detail various matters, both serious and whimsical. A time-sensitive event to cite immediately is: February 7–11<sup>th</sup> I shall assist at the **Flora & Fauna Books** booth at the NW Flower & Garden Show in Seattle, at the convention center. As is now habitual, David Hutchinson staffs the booth every day until 4:00 or so, then I do the late-afternoon and evening shift. Both new and used books about gardening and natural history are offered.

**Some tidbits of my 2017.** Seattle’s fall leaf color was exceptionally brilliant and beautiful. The dusting of a gentle white blanket of snow made a delightful White Christmas. My 2017 newsletter enumerated 32 stores I buy food from. Two additional new-to-me Seattle food stores that I have tried and like are: ASIAN FOOD CENTER (13200 Aurora), and H MART in the U District. Two new places to eat in Seattle that I enjoyed, are Xi’an Noodles in the U District; and Regent (14<sup>th</sup> & Pine) for its dim sum (served at lunch Thursday thru Sunday). I did not travel from Seattle last year, which is rare for me—this year I will, at least a bit. My medical expenses as a self-employed businessman, including health insurance, totalled over \$8,000 (before factoring in the ACA discount), so this year I’ve switched from a silver ObamaCare plan to a bronze one, to reduce the cost. When a teen, like most boys, I bought comic books. Unlike most middle-aged men, I had kept those. Well, I sold all 158 comic books of my youth, for \$215, to Lone Star Comics. If you have old comics, you can do better than have them sit in a box unread. Over the year I

acquired 100s of musical CDs, but having not listened to all yet, cannot proclaim a favorite. I saw six movies: *Atomic Blonde*, *Florida Project*, *Loving Vincent*, *Spider Man: Homecoming*, *Thor Ragnarok*, *Wonder Woman*. I liked all, and enjoyed also the company of the friends with whom I attended the movies. *Tip*: if one goes to a movie on Monday at Seattle’s Dine-In theatre in the U District, and shows an ORCA, a hefty discount is given.

Update on **Edible Houseplants** book. After 8 years, my draft book contains 225 families, arranged A to Z by 1,242 genera, of which over 78% have species reported edible. That is one reason the book is large and will require more time to finish. I expect it may ultimately resemble in heft the 1986 *Mushrooms Demystified* (976 pages) and 2015 *The Wine Bible* (1,008 pages). Possibly a year from now it will be done finally—or at least pre-orders will be accepted.

Here’s some trivia. **Reported edibility** differs widely from genus to genus. *Peperomia* has 1,600 species, about 30 reported edible. *Dendrobium*, an orchid, has 1,500+ species, yet only slightly over a dozen reported edible. *Anthurium*, an arum genus, has 1,500 species, only 16 reported edible. *Begonia* has 1,400 species, about 95 reported edible. Of smaller genera, *Solanum* has 1,250 species, 200+ reported edible. *Dioscorea* has 600+ species, fully 160 reported edible. So far, the most interesting thing I learned is that there is no simple division of edible or toxic. Instead, there is a *continuum* from the most benign, nutritious foods to the most virulent poisons, and *many* factors affect whether a species is edible or not. Because of this, the utmost care and precision is needed in my reporting. Just like the toxic / edible matter, there is also an intergradation of plants regarding their growing in temperate, subtropical and tropical regions. And between shrublets, shrubs, small trees and large trees. Nature has far more intermediates and “gray areas” than absolute black and white divisions.

100% of the Aralia Family (Araliaceae) and Spurge family (Euphorbiaceae) genera in my book have species reported edible. 97% of the Palm family genera, 93% of Rue family genera, 92% of Grass family genera, 91% of Arum family genera, 90% of Ginger family genera. Only 34% of the Gesneriad family genera are reported edible, but none are toxic—it’s just that Gesneriads tend to be small, bitter and often rare. We grow and love them because their flowers are irresistible. African Violets are Gesneriads. They taste foul but will not hurt you.

**New plants.** My three favorite new plants of 2017 are not recorded as edible, or have been scarcely so, but since they all have near relatives that are reported edible, and they are not reported toxic, I tried them, because it's my job to, and "Fortune favors the brave." These 3 tropical plants are all beautiful ornamentals suitable as houseplants.

***Odontonema cuspidatum*** is from Mexico, Honduras and the West Indies, has dark glossy green leaves, and waxy red, skinny flowers that attract

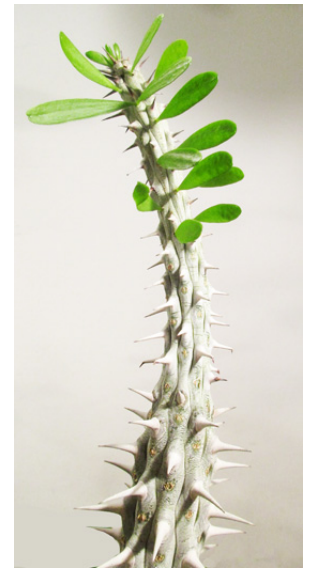
butterflies and hummingbirds. It is called Firespike, Fiery Spike, Firestick, Scarlet Flame, or Cardinal Guard. Its leaves taste mild, are slimy-textured, and agreeable both in salads or (better) cooked.



My second good find is ***Brighamia insignis***, from Hawai'i, on high sea cliffs of Kaua'i. It is called Cabbage-on-a-Stick. Its plump succulent trunk is topped with a head of light green, shiny tongue-shaped leaves. Its flowers are trumpet-shaped, cream to yellow, fragrant, and moth-pollinated. Raw, its white sap is slightly acrid, but boiling the leaves 2 minutes renders it a wholesome vegetable.



***Alluaudia procera***, from S Madagascar in dry forests and thickets, is a cactus-like succulent, deciduous, spiny tree. It has been sold as Madagascar Ocotillo, and Silver Desert Serpent. Spines as plentiful, stout and sharp as those on any rose bushes, so dense and fierce as to afford visual enhancement to the plant, besides guarding it from herbivory. Lemurs consume its leaves and little green flowers carefully. I find the leaves sour, succulent, and mucilaginous; utterly delectable to eat raw.



### What stands out ?

The eye sees, mouth tastes, nose smells or ear hears, especially whatever is *extraordinary*. The ordinary is taken for granted, but the *extraordinary* excites or alarms. It can be in a person's appearance; a piece of music; in writing; in a stroll; in a glass of wine. Such things can be prized as pearls or scorned as defects to be minimized.

The more experience someone acquires the more able he or she becomes to *note* such aberrant details. My strongest perceptive ability is in the realm of plant life. Other areas include: language, graphic design; bicycle riding; and in the sliver of food and drink that I favor. This acquired ability to notice, to discriminate, often if not usually goes along with an increasing vocabulary to describe what is perceived. We all have our unique niches. My laser focus on plants, learning about them and writing profusely, keeps me out of trouble, is my livelihood, and my contribution to civilization.

### Reading, writing & graphic design.

My favorite new book of 2017 was *Mabberley's Plant Book*. It is more useful to my work, than lovable. But while some lovable books I can do without, I cannot do without *Mabberley's Plant Book*. At over 1,100 pages of tiny type (like *this* 8-point type!), it is packed densely with plant geek data.

When certain magazine subscriptions are about to expire, there is a generous offer made by their publishers to *give* a free subscription or two if you renew. Therefore, I had the recent pleasure of giving some subscriptions to clients and friends. To me, *Smithsonian* magazine is well done, broad in topics, and worth reading. It contains as much or more photography as writing, which is a pity to some readers, but a solace to others. The exact same freebie also is offered by *Consumer Reports*.

I read daily the *Wall Street Journal* in much of November. Until then, I had ignored it, believing it was just a bunch of business news of no value to me. Well, to my pleasant surprise I discovered that it is *far* more than business news only. It is a superbly done, impressive publication, that makes Seattle newspapers look pathetic in comparison. It has humor, lengthy, insightful reviews of books, movies, and the like. It is edited intelligently, and its graphic design mature. Numerous publications, to appeal to young people or grown ups with ADHD, obsess with photos, gloss, playful typefaces, and gimmicks such as colored ink. These afford fleeting excitement to the eye, but are often annoying, can become exhausting, and sometimes the type is unnecessarily tiny. In contrast, a gentle, orderly pace and style of writing such as the *Wall Street Journal* (and this newsletter) exemplify, is a simple joy that does not disturb. Certain previously esteemed publications, such as *Parade* magazine, are now mere ridiculous shadows of what they were in their glory years. Maybe the *Wall Street Journal* was even once better than it is now? New subscribers can get home delivery 6 days a week for about \$4.40. The *Seattle Times* is some \$3 weekly, for 7 days, and offers far less overall, but does supply a vital local focus. If you cherish sports and comics, the *Seattle Times* is necessary; if you prefer international and U.S.A. news, the *Wall Street Journal* is best.

Some people get writer's block. Not me. Ever with me, I **keep paper and pen**, so when I think of or learn something clever, noteworthy, or crucial to recall, it can be written. This can occur as I walk, work, nap, or eat. I simply write what is needed. Easy. A newsletter is usually prosaic, matter-of-fact, like a schoolkid describing what was done on summer vacation. At the other writing extreme is a passionate love letter, inspired by only he or she for whom the letter is written, love professed, tenderness expressed, joyfully and poetically. SINCE, dear reader, I am not in love with you\* but am a better writer than is the average schoolkid, my newsletter is somewhere in the middle. It's my hope, plan and intent that my edible houseplant book will also combine factual accuracy with a sprinkling of artful sentences, like a plain pasta dish elevated by a zesty sauce, on an impassive face enlivened by a warm smile. An experienced cook, in a few minutes, can create a delicious meal. Some writers are also able, in similar fashion, to pour forth consecutive paragraphs and chapters with languid ease, as if in a bewitched trance, blessed by the writing muses. Alas!, this sort of easy composition doesn't exist for most non-fiction writers. Facts that *must* be stated keep getting in the way of fun, juicy adjectives, and interrupting, like someone knocking at the door when you're making love.

(\* Some women on my mailing list of over 800 names *have* received love letters from me. If there is ever a court case challenging my ability to write as much, I will call on them as expert witnesses.)

### **Light, sun & warmth.**

It is the dead of a Seattle winter as I write this; most of the U.S.A. is even colder. Seasonal and weather effects on plant and animal life are paramount. Human beings owe where we are now due in good part to our mastery of *fire*. Its control enabled cooking food, scaring carnivorous beasts that would fain consume us, warming ourselves, brewing beer, and has given us great advantages over other animals. Our ancestors spent long dark evenings sitting around their fires, talking and staring at the starry universe above. Us modern, rich descendents, now stare at our computer screens, at televisions, at movies in theatres, and at all the miscellaneous bright lights in our big cities. The primordial attraction to, and requirement for, light and warmth is as strong as ever. After decades of sleep, the fictional Brunnhilde awoke after Siegfried kissed her. She sat up, yawned, stretched, shook her hair, and sang—accompanied by glorious orchestral music:

*Hail, O sun!*  
*Hail, O light!*  
*Hail, O radiant day!*

Then Brunnhilde & Siegfried fell in love, which was very good and sweet while it lasted. Sunshine is celebrated in chirpy modern love songs, such as Stevie Wonder's "you are the sunshine of my life, baby," and John Denver's "sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy." Skin cancer aside, all but vampires love sun.

So . . . spoiled as I am in the cozy lap of luxury, here sit I in my office in 70-degree warmth and sunny due to man-made lights. Yet outside the window, it is dark, rainy and cold. I keep the office warm and "sunny" during the day, for the sake of the tropical plants being evaluated. At night, the office is dark and 10 to 15 degrees cooler. The humidity ranges from 40 to 60%; in winter it is drier. Certain plants such as peppers and tomatoes are more concerned about temperature than light level; others such as cacti, Geraniums and ice plants care more about light level, and for some such as Maidenhair Ferns, insufficient humidity is a dealbreaker.

How plants vary reminds me of people. Some people get seasonal affective disorder (SAD) in Seattle, but those of us born and raised here tend to not. Some people shiver often, and relish heat; I'm the opposite. In summer, some lie out like lizards in the blazing sun to warm themselves. In winter, most of us love to share someone in bed to warm ourselves. Also in winter, I host fireside face-to-face social gatherings—instead of Facebook's "virtual" version. My guests and I sit around eating, drinking and conversing, with or without background music. It is an excellent way to get better acquainted, both with other people and their contributed food and drink. Because burning wood pollutes, it is good to not light the fire unless I share its warmth, light and cheer with neighbors and friends. Sharing my plant love is my livelihood, and is a privilege. I *appreciate* your reading what I write. ☺

**Walking tours** let people benefit personally from my learning. Dress for the weather; be prepared to walk. Usually at the tour's end, I invite attendees to join me to sit somewhere nearby for rest, chatting, a bite to eat and a drink. Tours proceed even if it rains, or with a low turnout. Registrants are called if an emergency occurs. Tours are limited to 15 participants. (*Custom* tours can be arranged for your group.) The cost per participant is **\$10** (*i.e.*, \$9.01 plus \$.99 sales tax). Payment by cash or checks only. For additional information, or to register, e-mail or call Arthur Lee Jacobson at (206) 328-8733

[ALJ@consultant.com](mailto:ALJ@consultant.com). Committing months ahead to events is distasteful. But my newsletters come out rarely. To help you, below are two Seattle tree & plant walking tours, and my two-day spring Open Garden. To learn more about these or of *later* events, please either contact me, or visit my website [ArthurLeeJ.com](http://www.ArthurLeeJ.com). You will not be bombarded with e-mails.

### **Spring Flowering Trees tour**

Sunday, March 18, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

A great many trees blossom in spring, and can be breathtaking. See Cherry trees, Magnolias, Pear and Plum trees, Pussy Willows. Even shade trees such as Elms, Hornbeams & Maples. *Meet* in front of Madison Park Hardware; 42<sup>nd</sup> Ave E & E Madison St). When done, we can warm up at the Attic Alehouse.

### **Wild Edible Plants of Spring** (Limit of 10 people)

Sunday, April 8, 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Anyone who spends much time walking outside should learn common wild edible plants, and learn to avoid poisonous ones. Hikers, walkers, and chefs can increase their culinary options by attending this tour. The emphasis in spring is salad greens such as Candyflower, Cleavers, Cress, Daisies, Red Dead-nettle, Dock, Maple flowers, Oregon Grape new leaves, Sweet Cicely, Vetch, Wall Lettuce, Wild Garlic, *etc.*

About this **newsletter**. I've issued newsletters for over 24 years. Readers choose paper mail or e-mail. *This* is the web version. I'd do newsletters more often, but am busy and these take time. If this newsletter does nothing else, it affords me an opportunity to express *thanks* to my family, friends, neighbors, fans, clients, and associates. I have been, are, and expect to remain, *very* fortunate. ☺

**To order my books**, mail me a check or please see

<http://www.ArthurLeeJ.com/more-books.html>

Free shipping ; autographed as you like.

**Trees of Seattle** @ \$25

**Wild Plants of Greater Seattle** @ \$20

**Trees of Green Lake** @ \$9.95

About my **availability for hire**, please call me or see <http://www.ArthurLeeJ.com/services-rates.html>

Consultations @ \$80/hour

Custom tours @ \$60/hour

Hands-on work @ \$44/hour (plus sales tax)

### **Vashon & Maury Island Trees**

A new book features decades of learning about trees of Vashon and Maury Islands. I helped with it. To see it, click this link: <http://vashonaudubon.org/media/VashonLandmarkTrees2018.pdf>

**NW Flower & Garden Show** Feb. 7-11 at downtown Seattle's WA State Convention Center; ([GardenShow.com](http://GardenShow.com)). In evenings I staff **Flora & Fauna Books** booth. Owner David Hutchinson staffs daily from 9:00 til 4:00; then I til closing time. Books are new, out-of-print and rare ones on natural history, gardening, & plant exploring. At post-show dinners, I dine downtown with anywhere from one other person to about seven. You need not already know me, either. Just be good company, and hungry.

### **Seattle Hands-On Skills Fair**

Saturday Feb. 10<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 - 5:00 at Meadowbrook Community Center, 10517 35<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Seattle. Short workshops share varied practical skills such as crocheting, basic carpentry and soil building. The homemade soup luncheon speaker is me, on *Seattle plant foraging*. Join me after lunch for a walking tour outside to learn more about plants to forage. For details, see: <http://sustainableseattle.ning.com>

### **—Jacobson April Open Garden— \* ♥ 🎵**

Saturday & Sunday, April 21-22<sup>nd</sup>, noon - 6:00 Free. Rain or shine, all are welcome to visit my garden in Seattle's Montlake neighborhood: 2215 E Howe/2216 E Blaine St. I provide food & drink. Unless too rainy, books are for sale; likely a baby goat to cuddle. Mainly, it is a springtime social. *Additional* details, & tours, will be on my website.



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