

In 1983, Pamela Copeland began planning for her 230-acre estate to become a public display garden. She and her husband, the late Lamot du Pont Copeland, have developed the estate since the 1930s, and although it is still her private home, some policies which will guide the garden once it is public have been implemented now, including a plant collections policy.

A prerequisite to developing a plant collections policy is having a clear purpose. Mt. Cuba Center has two primary objectives: first, to display and study native American Piedmont plants for their ornamental potential and to educate the public about this flora; and second, to preserve the Copeland's estate as an example of a 20th century country estate. The focus on Piedmont plants for garden use reflects Pamela Copeland's life-long interest in native plants, yet it sets limits suitable to the space and resources of the garden. Recognized by early botanists and explorers for its rich flora, the Piedmont is the most appropriate region for concentrated study since the estate is situated amid rolling Piedmont hills and natural woodland. In striving toward these goals, Mt. Cuba Center will be assured a unique niche in the already rich horticultural community of the Delaware Valley. It will not attempt to duplicate the broad horticultural displays of Longwood Gardens nor compete as an historic-house museum and garden with Winterthur Museum and Gardens, Hagley Museum and Library, and Nemours.

Once these objectives were set, we realized that different portions of the estate should have separate collections criteria based on function. Four distinct areas were identified: the wild garden, the natural Piedmont woodland, the residential gardens and the support area. To anyone touring the garden these distinctions don't exist—the residential gardens at the heart of the estate blend into the wildflower garden which in turn blends into the natural woodland. But for the collections policy, artificial borders were drawn based on existing roads, paths and bed edges. Part of the collections policy is

M T C U B A

## IMPLEMENTING

# A POLICY

by Claire Sawyers



*A view of the large pond in the wild garden where plantings are restricted to native Piedmont plants.*

a map which with its strict definition provides the clarity needed to carry out each area's collections policy. If a future board of trustees decides that more area should be devoted to displaying Piedmont natives, the borders of the wildflower garden can be expanded into natural woodland, residential or support areas.

The wild garden, which has been the focus of Pamela Copeland's development efforts since the 1960s, is a naturalistic area with ponds, woodland plantings and an open meadow area. For this area the

collections policy states: "new plantings are restricted to native Piedmont plants (including cultivars of Piedmont species, selections of Piedmont species originating from within or outside the Piedmont, and hybrids of species which are known to cross in the wild)." It was necessary to define the terms "native" and "Piedmont," which could be subject to individual interpretation, in the policy. "Native" here means any plant which exists or is judged to have existed within the Piedmont without human intervention during recorded history. For definition of the "Piedmont," we used Nevin M. Fenneman's 1930s work for the U.S. Geological Survey. He outlined the Piedmont as the physiographic province between the Appalachian Mountains and coastal plain stretching from the southern tip of New York to Alabama. Based on Fenneman's work, we compiled a list of Piedmont counties. (If half or more of a county was Piedmont, it joined the list.) Plants reported for those counties in floras and herbarium records are then, by our working definition, native Piedmont plants.

Besides stating what plants can be used in the wild garden, the collections policy provides guidelines for its design and maintenance. "The form of these gardens is intended to carry a sense of the wild, while the plants used may be found in numbers and combinations different from those in nature. Cultivars selected for extreme qualities are to be avoided. . . ." This policy is to preserve naturalistic effects created by Pamela Copeland. The meaning of "extreme" is illustrated by examples in the policy. Plants considered unacceptable are giant forms of *Helianthus annuus*, completely sterile forms of *Hydrangea arborescens* and stiffly weeping forms of *Pinus strobus*.

The collections policy for the natural Piedmont woodland, which makes up about half of the estate, is simple: "This area is not to be planted." If preserved as an example of woodland Piedmont flora, this area will provide a different type of landscape experience and will add con-

trasting educational and study opportunities. Only minimal clearing of well-defined paths and the removal of exotic weeds which threaten the landscape are anticipated.

The residential gardens surround the Georgian-style residence and were developed largely during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. This area includes expanses of lawn, formal plantings, and several specialty gardens. The collections policy for this area states that plantings are "intended to ornament the house and may consist of exotic or native ornamentals. They are to be maintained to carry out the landscape effect existing in the 1980s. In all cases of replacement, the landscape effect will be the deciding factor in choice of plants, but where Piedmont plants . . . create the desired effect, they will be preferred. New species and cultivars may be used, but the visual effect, color, texture, form and pattern, should remain the same. No plantings will be made without prior reference to whatever inventories, plans, and photographs document the area under consideration. . . . This policy is to preserve the effects the Copelands created."

The support and work area of the estate includes the nursery, coldframes, tenant houses, estate office and buffer pastureland. Here, although landscape

plantings are restricted to plants native to the Piedmont, cultivars and hybrids of Piedmont plants will be emphasized. While it may not be visited frequently by the public, this area provides space for extreme forms which may be desirable for educational or plant evaluation purposes.

We took several steps to help us follow the collections policy. Using floras and checklists of the nine Piedmont states, we compiled a list of all Piedmont plants with ornamental potential. This list of about 1,700 species is used as a reference during planning. It also acts as a nomenclatural reference since all the names agree with *A Synonymized Checklist of the Vascular Flora of the United States, Canada, and Greenland* (Kartesz and Kartesz, 1980).

Another step which helps us follow policy is noting in the computerized plant records whether the plant meets the "native Piedmont" definition. This makes it easy, for instance, to generate a list of non-Piedmont plants in the nursery which can be considered for planting only in the residential gardens. This also makes it easy to check how successfully we are following policy by reviewing the planting locations of non-Piedmont plants. Of the 377 plant accessions made in 1984, all but 35 (about nine percent) were native Piedmont plants. About three percent

were non-Piedmont plants which were planted in areas where they shouldn't have been. Of the 509 accessions made in 1985, about 12 percent were non-Piedmont plants; about one percent were non-Piedmont plants which slipped into the wild garden.

One problem in adopting this collections policy is dealing with the existing exotic plants. Staff members wondered if chain saws would be taken to the handsome specimens of *Metasequoia*, *Acer griseum* and *Stewartia pseudocamellia* in the wildflower gardens. The collections policy addresses this dilemma: "Existing exotic plants of merit may be allowed to live out their useful ornamental life, but will be replaced by Piedmont plants upon removal." It may take years before the gardens truly reflect the collections policy.

An issue of collections development which is yet to be addressed is that of plant source. Because Mt. Cuba Center primarily deals with natives, plants should be acquired in a manner which won't contribute to the destruction of natural populations. One of our goals is to help reduce collecting in the wild. Working with administrators of other wildflower gardens, we are currently outlining acceptable means of acquiring native plants for display purposes. Eventually this will be included as part of the collections policy.

Mt. Cuba Center's plant collections policy is inextricably linked with the garden's purpose. The collections policy helps guide the activities of the staff; it helps set goals which are realistic for the resources of the garden; and it helps identify a unique role for Mt. Cuba Center in its immediate horticultural community as well as the larger field of public horticulture. The collections policies for the different areas create a gradient of landscapes from wild areas with little human interference to naturalistic gardens to formal areas which are entirely man-made.

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A part of the support area of the estate is this pasture. Here, landscape plantings are also restricted to native Piedmont plants; however, cultivars and hybrids of Piedmont plants will be emphasized.