By Connor Yearsley

o commemorate the life and legacy of renowned botanist, author, and photographer Steven Foster (1957–2022), the *HerbalGram* staff has chosen a sample of his photography to showcase here. Foster died in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, on January 15, 2022, at age 64. Over his nearly 50-year career in the herbal field, Foster captured the beauty, diversity, morphology, and vibrancy of hundreds of medicinal and other useful plants in more than 150,000 photographs, and photography took him to six continents.

Choosing the images for this photo feature was challenging because of both the quantity and the quality of Foster's work. "I have been the art director of the American Botanical Council (ABC) for more than 60 issues of HerbalGram and worked closely with Steven for all of those issues over the past 15 years," wrote Matthew Magruder. "When we decided to pull together a collection of Steven's plant photography for this pictorial feature, I wasn't sure what that would entail. I quickly realized the huge diversity of Steven's photography that we have used throughout HerbalGram and other ABC publications. Steven provided more than 8,000 photography files for us during my tenure thus far at ABC. Looking back at these images, many are nostalgic surprises that I'd forgotten we featured and loved revisiting. Many are hidden gems that were never able to be featured. Many are mainstays that are quintessential and easily identifiable with Steven's signature style. All of these images are beautiful. I will always be grateful for the contributions Steven made to ABC and HerbalGram. They are immeasurable."

From those 8,000-plus image files, Magruder narrowed it down to about 150 images, from which the rest of the *HerbalGram* staff voted to arrive at the selection featured here. Some of these have appeared in previous issues of *HerbalGram* and may be familiar to some readers.

A native of Maine, Foster was born on February 27, 1957. In 1974, at age 17, his herbal career began at Sabbathday Lake Shaker Community in New Gloucester, Maine. Established in 1783, Sabbathday Lake is the only active Shaker (a Protestant Christian group) community in the world, according to its website, and has an herb business that started in 1799. During his four years there, Foster managed three acres of herb gardens and produced more than 50 herbal products. "Everything I do now — writing, lectures, consulting and photography — began during that time from age 17-21," Foster wrote on his website. "Part of my job was to shadow visiting photographers working on assignment for various publications. I learned photography by watching great photographers at work."

His first published photos appeared in Thomas Moser's *How to Build Shaker Furniture* (Crescent Publishing, 1977).

His photography later appeared in many publications and filled nearly every issue of *HerbalGram* since issue 24 in 1991. Foster also authored more than 20 books about herbs and more than 800 articles for different scientific publications (including many *HerbalGram* articles), served as a consultant and on the boards of several organizations (including ABC's Board of Trustees for 22 years), and much more.

"I love plants and sharing information and imagery about the human experience with medicinal and aromatic plants," Foster wrote on his website.

He explained his artistic mission: "As a photographer specializing in medicinal and aromatic plants, my artistic goal is simply to capture the spirit and beauty of plants using natural ambient light. As a medicinal plant specialist and photographer, my work takes me around the world. Photo equipment is ever present. In my botanical photography, color, form and design offer themselves to the observant eye at the right time of day, in shade, in rain, or with clouds hiding harsh sunlight. These are the situations I strive to work in, which give me the best color saturation, the richest light, and the greatest challenge in exposure length, depthof-field, and waiting for that still moment when a breath of air does not move the subject and offers up the detail values that I seek. I strive to know the plants that I photograph: their names, botany, history, and human connection (use) and feel their beauty."2

More information about Steven Foster's life and legacy is available in *HerbalGram* issue 133, which includes a 10-page tribute to him by *HerbalGram* Associate Editor Hannah Bauman.³ HG

References

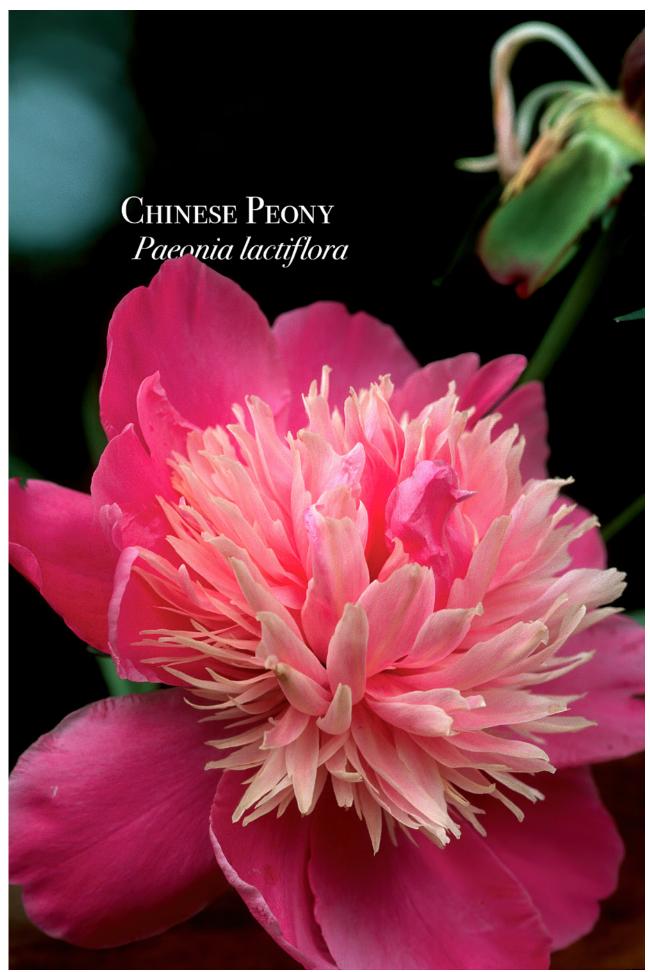
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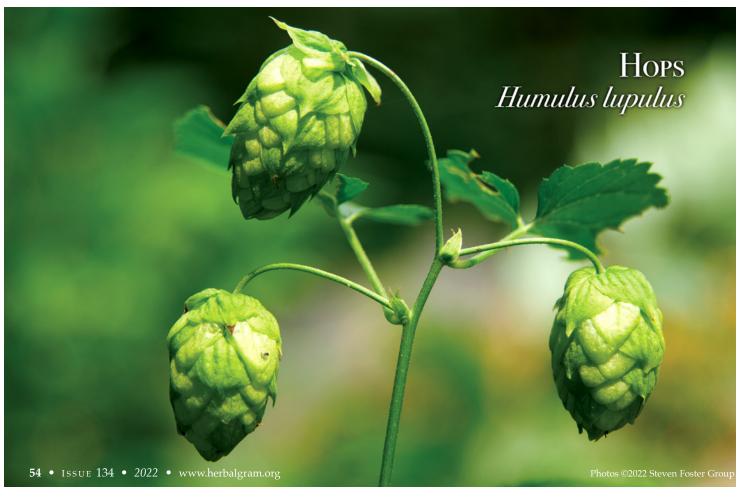


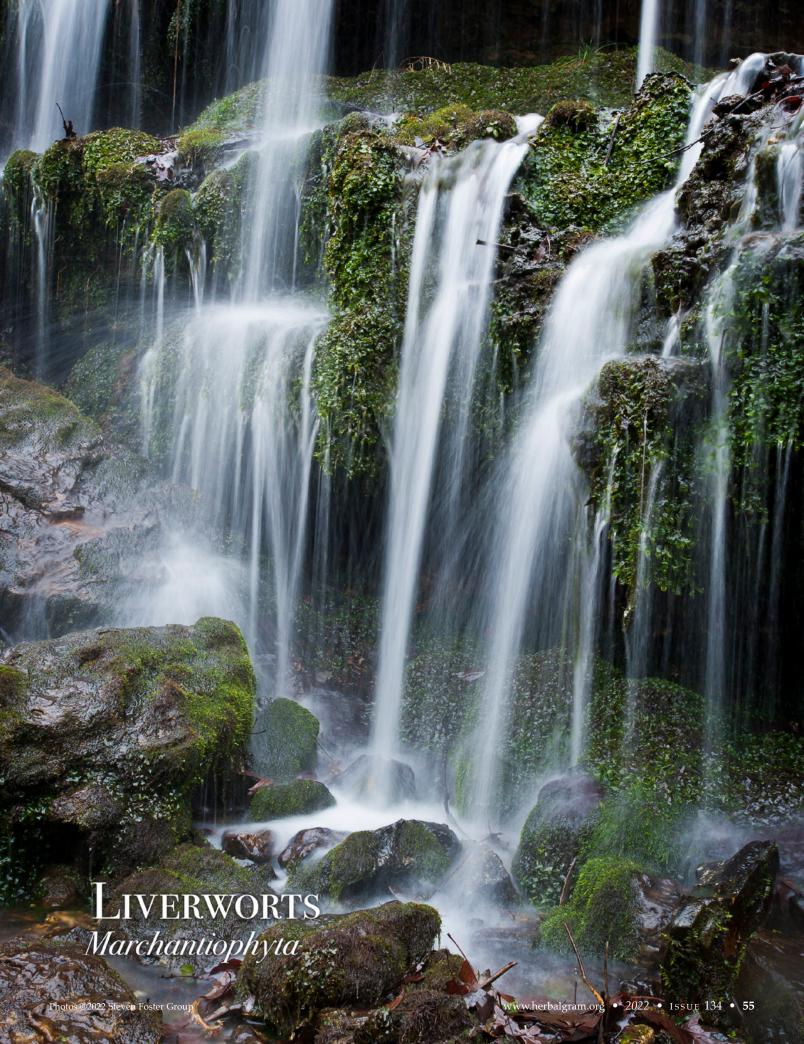


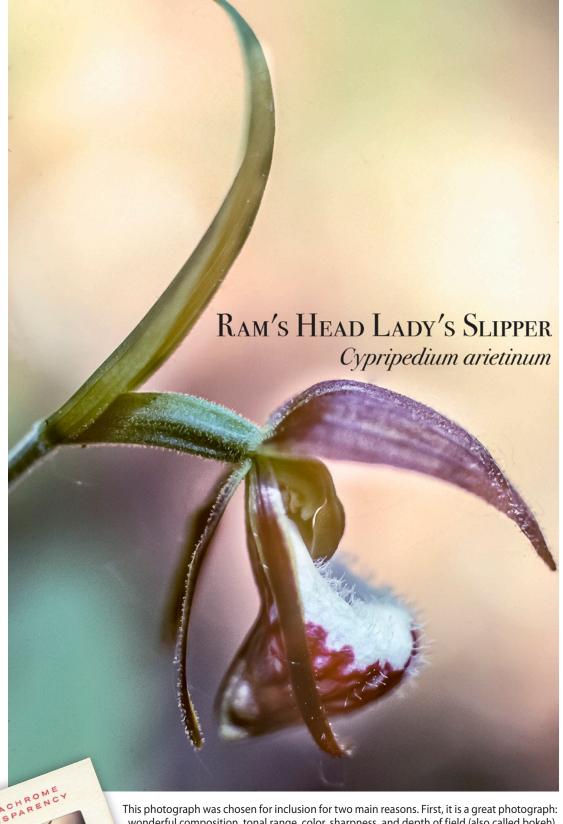












wonderful composition, tonal range, color, sharpness, and depth of field (also called bokeh).

Secondly, it is interesting and unique from a photographic history perspective. This image is a digital scan of a 35mm Kodachrome slide that Steven created for his extensive feature on lady's slipper orchids in HerbalGram issue 131. Kodachrome was a very popular photographic film created by Kodak in the mid-1930s and remained quite popular throughout its 70+ year availability. It was also incredibly unique in its rendering of color and tone, as this photograph demonstrates. The film had a proprietary process for chemical development that was provided by only a handful of small photographic labs during its production. This photograph also encapsulates the huge breadth of Steven's tenure as a photographer, moving from a collection of 35mm color slides into the digital photography world.

- Matthew Magruder, ABC Art Director

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