

# SOCIETY PAGES //

Celebrating Plant  
Communities,  
Past + Future

**From begonias to bonsai, dahlias to daylilies, plant societies have been a foundation of American horticulture.**

Formed by passionate amateurs and experts alike, these organizations have nurtured the study, preservation, and celebration of specific plants for generations. They've generated publications, organized flower shows and swaps, and offered the kind of specialized advice you can't Google—building community through shared botanical passion.

At the American Horticultural Society, we believe these groups still matter, perhaps now more than ever. In a changing world, they offer continuity and connection. They hold archives of knowledge, encourage hybridization and dispersal of new cultivars, and serve as stewards of biodiversity, preserving cultivars, species, and traditions that might otherwise disappear.

Some are thriving by reimagining their missions through digital education and conservation work and by building social networks that support communities of people and plants. Others are facing declining membership at a time when public interest in native plants and ecological gardening is surging, highlighting a gap between traditional organizational structures and emerging cultural momentum.

That's where the **SOCIETY PAGES** come in. In each issue, we will highlight key challenges and opportunities facing plant societies and aim to connect our readers with communities you may not be aware of. //

## Why Plant Societies Matter (and Why We're Stronger Together)

### ONE-ON-ONE WITH HARRY RISSETTO

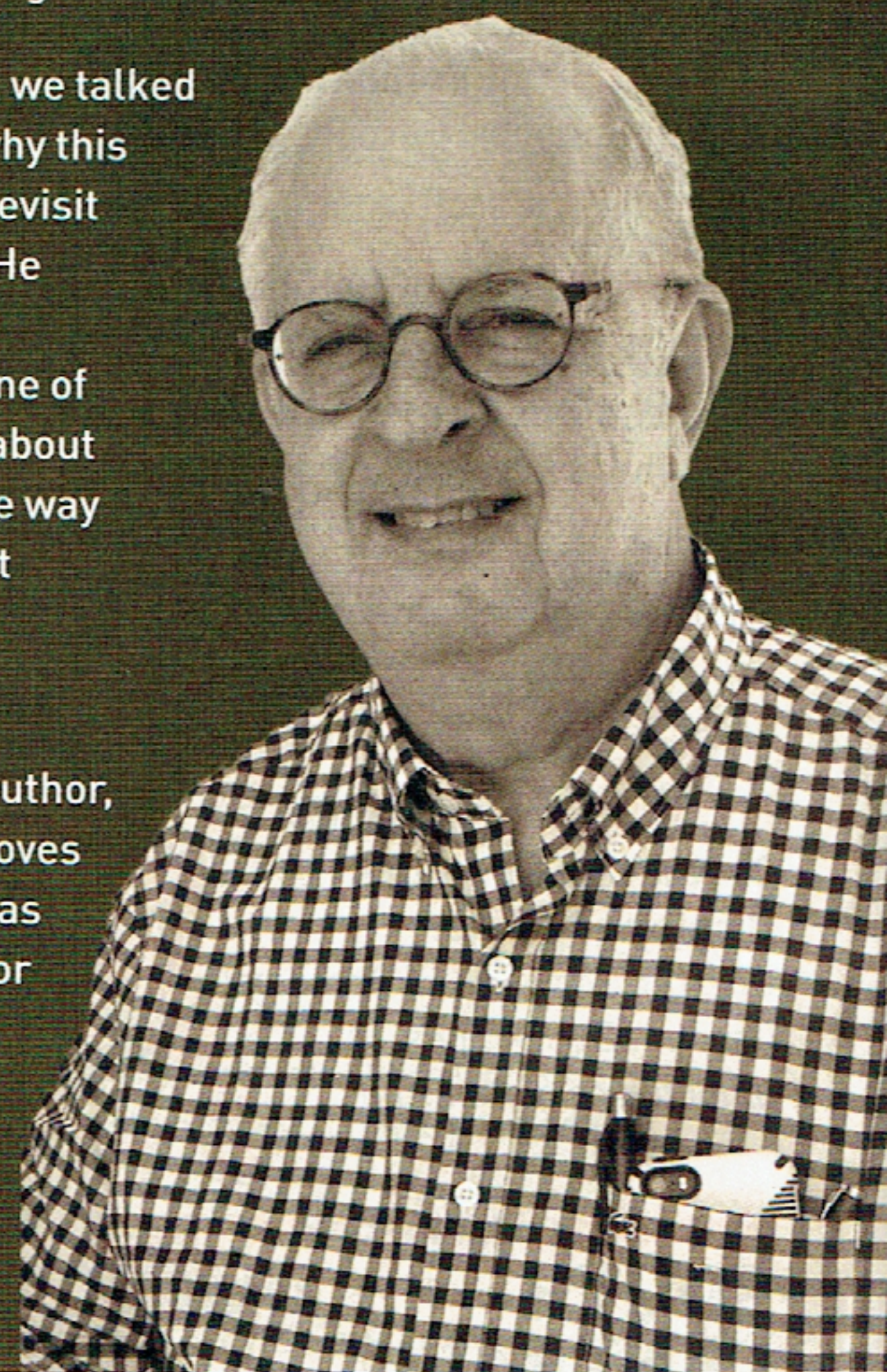
Harry Risetto doesn't claim to have all the answers. But he's exactly the kind of person who asks the right questions, shows up, and helps build the connections that keep horticultural communities relevant. A longtime member of the American Horticultural Society and a retired board member, Harry has spent years working to support and strengthen plant societies across the country.

In 2017, he helped launch CAPS—the Coalition of American Plant Societies—to foster collaboration, amplify shared values, and help groups support one another. AHS has been involved since the start, and Harry sees this partnership as essential. "The AHS can be a kind of octopus," he says, "reaching out, linking groups, offering structure—but also listening and responding."

In our conversation with Harry, we talked about CAPS, community, and why this might be the right moment to revisit what plant societies can offer. He referenced *Bowling Alone*, the landmark book about the decline of social capital in America. "It's about how people don't join things the way they used to," he said. "But that doesn't mean they don't want connection."

Robert D. Putnam, the book's author, notes that civic engagement moves in long waves. The pendulum has swung away from community for decades, but it can swing back. Plant societies offer one way to help it do just that.

Harry Risetto



### LET'S GROW TOGETHER

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