

# IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

## The February 2010 Monthly Journal Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)



"Kiss of the Sun for pardon. Song of the birds for mirth.  
You're closer to God's heart in a garden than any place  
else on earth." Dorothy Frances Gurney

### PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHTS By Nancy Smith

It's February - one month closer to Spring. Now isn't that a cheery thought? It conjures thoughts of sunny warmth, tweeting birds (the real tweeting, not the latest computer communication trick) and seedlings. Ah....

Just to keep that dream alive, Liz Maurer's program on February 25 about Limahuli, the National Botanical Garden in Hawaii, will fit the bill nicely. Liz and Caren Nash are our co-coordinators for programs this year. They have also enlisted the help of Jim Davis. From the preview of programs I have seen, I can guarantee we are all in for some

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wonderful presentations. My thanks to them for all the work they have already accomplished in this year's planning, and for their continuing efforts to provide interesting and educational presentations to all of us.

As you know, we are well into this year's Master Gardener class. We have 19 students, all of whom are enthusiastic and eager to learn as much as the instructors can offer them. We are truly grateful to the instructors for sharing their knowledge and expertise so willingly. I know from sitting in on most of the classes, I am gathering little tidbits and helpful hints each time.

In conjunction with that, I'd like to encourage you to consider coming to class on occasion and helping out as needed. That usually means coming in a bit early to help get the coffee and tea started, setting up tables and chairs and being available to the students for questions and encouragement. Serving as a model MG is a good thing. If you would like to sign up to help for some of the classes, please contact Anne Riffey-Buckner, Class Facilitator, at buckrock@rockbridge.net. Remember, this is a great way to earn volunteer hours.

Want to spice up your Valentine Day? Look what I found:

**Basil** - when used, basil helps to promote peace and harmony for a couple. In the olden days, placing a pot of basil on the windowsill indicated a woman within was ready to be wooed.

**Bay** - it was believed that by placing a few bay leaves in a small red muslin or cotton bag and putting it on the pillow at bedtime on

Valentine night, the sleeper would see her future husband in her dreams.

**Calendula** - the original 'he-loves-me, he-loves-me-not' flower used to determine the probability of the right husband. As a flower meaning constancy and lasting love, calendula was often included in bridal bouquets.

**Lovage** - the folk name was 'love ache' and as such was used in potions and in a variety of love spells.

**Mint** - Hades, the Greek god of the Underworld, fell in love with the nymph, Menthe. Unfortunately his wife, Persephone, discovered her husband's indiscretion, and chased after Menthe and trod her into the ground. Hades transformed Menthe into the mint plant and to alleviate Hades' grief, the mint plant was infused with its fresh, soothing fragrance that can be experienced whenever it is touched or walked upon.

So for Valentine's Day, how about starting an indoor Herb Garden of Love?



**LIMAHULI  
OUR NATIONAL TROPICAL  
BOTANICAL GARDEN**

**By Liz Maurer**

**Piovano Room      February 25, 2010  
7:00-8:00pm**

Many years ago, my children and I took a vacation to Kauai. As we were driving along the narrow, two-lane road of the north shore, approaching the Na Pali Cliffs, a sign for a public garden caught

my eye. Unfortunately the garden wasn't open that day. But avid gardeners never forget a potential find! Years later an advertisement for an organization which teams people up to work on public land projects in National Parks and Monuments came across my desk. What a joy to find the Hawaiian garden listed as a project! I couldn't sign up fast enough. Five years later I have returned every September to join and co-lead trips to live in the garden's hale and work for a week with the staff.

What I found there was not a tropical creation of color and texture, but a garden unlike any I had ever visited. Because the Hawaiian people pass along their history via oral traditions, much of the pre-Western Hawaiian culture has not been recorded or taught. This ethnobotanical garden of 1,000 acres is a living history book, offering a window into ancient Hawaii. In 1997 the American Horticultural Society honored Limahuli as the nation's best natural botanical garden. In addition to learning about the plants and ongoing research in the garden, all of us on the team were deeply moved by learning from and living among the native Hawaiians.

So come and journey to Hawaii on a cold February evening and hear the story of this remarkable place and a culture that learned to treat the land with great care and familial love, using a sustainable watershed model we would all do well to

emulate. Learn about the amazing diversity of the tropics- a national resource that needs to be protected before it is lost. Hear about research that is going on and why it is important- a Virginia Tech alum is in charge of their Breadfruit Institute! See how native plants are given a helping hand to out compete the invasives. Discover Limahuli - our National tropical botanical garden chartered by congress to advance conservation, research and education.



### HELP NEEDED PLEASE

The new Master Gardener class is off to a good start with 19 students enrolled. They are an interesting bunch, and we invite you to help with class facilitating on Tuesdays and Thursdays through April 6.

"Facilitating" means a few light duties that would be fully explained to you (putting out the name tags, collecting evaluation forms, that sort of thing) and, of course, meeting the new class. Please contact Anne Riffey-Buckner at buckrock@rockbridge.net if you are interested. Thank you.



### AN INVITATION

If any Master Gardener wants to attend any of the classes for our new training course, a current course syllabus can be found at our website, RAMGA.org. Feel free to drop in on any class you care to. E-mail Anne Riffey-Buckner if you have questions.

## MASTER GARDENER CLASS 2010 BEGINS

By Jim Davis

Dave Buckner's optimism about offering MG class 2010 was well placed. Long before the planned first session, seventeen trainees had signed up. On the *night* before, a married couple called and asked to be included. And so, nineteen assembled January 12 for orientation.

Many familiar routines took place that day. Anne Riffey-Buckner, class facilitator, made introductions, which included RAMGA's President, Nancy Smith, and the entire Extension Office staff. Ellen Ivy and Barbara Thomas handled the ice breaking, making sure that every trainee met every other trainee. The projects were described and the tests explained. Several MGs were on hand to show support and welcome the new folks.

A major addition this year was an address by Dave Close, our State Coordinator. He spoke from Virginia Tech on screen via video teleconference. Dave's theme was what it means to be a Master Gardener and our importance to the Virginia Cooperative Extension and the state. Our mission and reason for pride were made clear, and received emphasis by words direct from the head man. Ted Jenks, who engineered the teleconference, preceded Dave with a flow chart showing our relationship to VCE, Tech and our state level organization, VMGA.

All agreed that the new class is an affable, energetic, interesting and intelligent group. But isn't that always the case?



## SCRAPBOOK ON RAMGA HISTORY

By Jane Birzenieks (I finally got it together!)

A scrapbook covering the first fifteen years of RAMGA history is on a shelf of the bookcase behind our desk at the Extension Office. You can be very proud to be a part of this group that has contributed so much to the Rockbridge area. Educating and informing the public through the hot-line, clinics, exciting speakers, garden tours, Roots and Shoots, plant sales, demonstration garden areas, recruiting and training new Master Gardeners --- we have been a very active and beneficial organization and the scrapbook proves it!

I thank Jack Pearson and others who carefully saved memorabilia and for the following who organized it on pages for the book: Becky England, '94; Jim Davis, '97; Doris Stark, '00; Barbara Thomas, '02; Anne Riffey-Buckner, '02; Heather Marion, '05; Diana Losche, '05; Rita Poranski, '05; Carol Schoner, '07; and Ann Gruner, '08. On the top shelf of the bookcase, behind the office desk, is a green box for collecting pictures, newspaper articles, and anything else that you think should be saved to continue to describe our organization. Please fully identify your contributions and place them in the correct slot. Thanks for your help!

<u>Feb</u>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
9	RAMGA Board Meeting - 2pm
3 - 5	Everything Old is New Again*
4	Landscape Mgmt Seminar*
6, 13 20,27	Basic Home Landscape Design*
11, 18 25	Trees & Shrubs for Home Landscape*
12	Prof & Advanced Gardeners*
13	Spring Pruning for Trees*
13	Ecosystem Agriculture*
16	Organic Gardening*
18	Starting Seeds for Your Garden*
19 - 22	Maymont Flower & Garden Show*
19 - 20	11 <sup>th</sup> Annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference*
20	Planning & Designing Cutting Garden*
27	Practical Urban Garden*
* See Educational Events Calendar in this issue	



## POOLING OUR RESOURCES

By Jim Davis

With help from Katherine Smith

If you like bananas, you owe thanks to the gene pool. Many years ago, plant breeders eliminated annoying seeds from bananas and improved their flavor and texture. While there are other varieties in existence, the hybrid created is now the popular supermarket fruit we enjoy. The specks we see imbedded in the flesh are only vestiges of seeds and are not viable. For new plants, growers must harvest rhizomes from old ones. But shipping rhizomes from country to country provides an easy carrier for disease to travel the world. Eventually, a virus attacked and spread. Had someone not saved non-hybrid parents with desirable qualities, the tasty yellow fruit in its marketable form, America's favorite fruit, the principal food source in Uganda and a treat the Germans import more of than any other nation, would have vanished.

A *gene pool* is what we call the practice of saving old strains of plants, often in seed banks, such as those to which the Virginia Native Plant Society contributes. More precisely, a gene pool is all the genetic information in a population of sexually reproducing organisms. All members of a species possess certain characteristics, but individuals will have some that differ from all other members. One plant may be resistant to a disease, display a color or bear cold weather while its cousins have none of these attributes. Crossing an ordinary member of the species with a gifted one can produce a plant with the old desirable traits in addition to the new beneficial ones.

The bad news is that the plant gene pool is being destroyed. Everyone has read of one ruinous example, the devastation of the Brazilian rain forest. Now we learn that Ethiopia has burned its forests for cooking. In the entire tropical world, an average of five species is lost for good each day. If 67% of the tropical forest were destroyed, which could happen by the end of the next century, half of all plant species would disappear. The number of *known* plant species is 1.75 million. This catastrophe could *actually* destroy about thirteen or fourteen million plant species.

Crop diversity is the basis for food production, and it is in sharp decline. Modern farming and marketing, changes in diets and increasing population density are doing the damage. About three-quarters of the genetic diversity found in agricultural crops have been lost over the last century, and this erosion continues.

The problem is that without artificial protection our major foods won't grow in every climate or survive attack by insects and diseases. We rely on poisonous sprays or genetic engineering to grow these plants. Eventually, enemy organisms mutate and produce offspring immune to chemicals. Introducing genes that fend off attackers is perhaps more effective but is limited, expensive and perhaps risky.

For instance, Monsanto, the giant chemical and seed producer, has expensively developed a potato with a gene borrowed from the BT bacterium (*Bacillus thuringiensis*). It's possible that insects for which this organism is deadly will become immune to nature's own insecticide.

*Consider* the potato, an important food and one rich in practically everything the body needs. The Incas, in what is now Peru, grew blue potatoes, as well as red, pink, yellow and orange ones. Maybe they liked the diversity. But as it happens, different varieties did well in various locations. And resistance to enemies differed from kind to kind. Not having to rely on a single kind, they weren't threatened with total loss should a pernicious bug or disease attack the crop. In the process, the different plants cross bred, producing prettier, tastier or stronger hybrids. In short, the Incas maintained a substantial gene pool, protecting and improving their major source of food. If we lose our gene pool, we would seriously weaken our source of important foods. We could also lose **much** of the variety and aesthetic quality of our lives. The loss could come at a crucial time, when so much of our lives has been mechanized and commercialized.

There is hope. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has fostered a treaty to which 115 nations have agreed. They will make their genetic diversity and related information about crops stored in their gene banks available to others who comply. Shakeel Bhatti, Secretary of the Governing Body of the Treaty, said in 2007, "World agriculture is under enormous pressure to produce more food in a sustainable way. Agricultural production needs to be improved by developing crops that can adapt to threats such as climate change, desertification, pests and diseases and at the same time meet the demand of a population that will grow from six billion people today to nine billion in 2050."

MGs have little to do with such grand happenings, but we can at least enjoy a little optimism and explain, if called upon, why they are important.



### **WILL POINSETTIAS REFLOWER?**

**Submitted by Heather Marion**

If you are up for a challenge this year, wait for your poinsettia to finish blooming, then start feeding it with a water soluble fertilizer according to package directions and follow this schedule:

1. In March after the leaves fall, trim the poinsettia to 6-8 inches in height. Continue to provide the plant with water, fertilizer and a sunny location.
2. In May, after nighttime temperatures reach 60 degrees, repot your poinsettia in a slightly larger container and take it outdoors. Place it in a sunny spot, but protect it from the harsh afternoon sun. Gardeners in frost-free zones can plant their poinsettias permanently in the ground.
3. In mid-July, prune the poinsettia back about halfway, leaving at least two or three large leaves on each stem. Water and fertilize regularly.
4. In early Fall, before the temperature drops below 60 degrees, bring the plant back inside and put it near a sunny window. Inspect the plant carefully for pests.
5. From October 1 through December 15, place your poinsettia in total darkness from 5:00pm to 8:00am, in temperatures about 65 degrees, to stimulate flowering and force blooms. A box or closet works well.

6. Any exposure to light during these hours, even for a moment, will ruin the entire process. Put the poinsettia in a sunny spot during the day.
7. In mid-December, continue to give the poinsettia six to eight hours of sunlight per day until the bracts are fully colored. Then, stop fertilizing and put the plant in its holiday location.

I don't know about you, but I was willing to give this a shot until I got to step #5 and then #6. I simply don't have the time, nor the motivation to get this involved even though I think poinsettias are beautiful. I'll just buy one!!



### **A NEW HORTICULTURAL NEWSLETTER**

**Submitted by Diana Losche**

There is a new horticultural newsletter, or as they identify themselves, a "unique horticultural news service." It's called The Avant Gardener and it's published monthly. Here are some titles from the latest issue:

Dogwood Show Winners  
 Appreciating Ants  
 Misbehaving Beauty  
 Clovers to Cherish  
 Fireside Reading  
 Plants in the News  
 Grass-Based Borders

The article quoted below is entitled "Best Indoor Air Cleaners." We all know about the fantastic job trees do to keep our air fresh and pollution-free so what about house plants? Do they do the same? Is one kind better than another?

"The healthiest, best-functioning environments contain a diversity of plants. It seems this is as true indoors as it is outdoors.

ivy, waxplant, asparagus fern, wandering jew, mosaic plant and the last, the tree we all love to hate, the fig tree.



An extensive cooperative study by the University of Georgia and Konkuk University (Seoul, Korea) has shown that house plants differ in their ability to remove indoor pollutants. The research tested 28 plants commonly used for interior plantscaping for their efficiency in removing five volatile pollutants - benzene, toluene, octane, trichloroethylene and terpene.

*Hemigraphis alternata*, *Hedera helix*, *Hoya carnosa* and *Asparagus densiflorus* had the highest removal efficiencies for all pollutants. Four pollutants were effectively removed by *Tradescantia pallida*. Benzene, toluene, and trichloroethylene were specialties of *Fittonia argyroneura*, and octane and terpene were neutralized by *Ficus benjamina*.

The researchers concluded that the variation in removal efficiency among species indicates that for maximum improvement of indoor air quality, multiple species are needed. The number and type of plants should be tailored to the type of pollutants present and their rates of emanation at each specific indoor location."

Common names for these plants (in order of appearance) are: red ivy, English



## Calendar of Educational Events – February 2010

Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
<b>February 3 - 5</b> 8:00am–4:00pm Cost: \$40/day	<b>Everything Old is New Again</b> <i>Credits: ***</i>	Innovations in horticulture and design rooted in the past, creatively adapted for the present and emphasizing future sustainability	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 4</b> 8:30am–5:00pm Cost: \$60	<b>27<sup>th</sup> Annual Central Virginia Landscape Management Seminar</b> <i>Credits: 8 hrs</i>	Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden; Design Ideas and Plant Combinations for Winter Gardens, and more!	Charlottesville, VA <a href="http://www.vsls.org/Members/news/SEMINAR4PAGE2009FINAL.pdf">http://www.vsls.org/Members/news/SEMINAR4PAGE2009FINAL.pdf</a>
<b>February 6, 13, 20, 27,</b> 8:30am–12:30pm Cost: \$235	<b>Basic Home Landscape Design</b> <i>Credits: 16</i>	Develop the knowledge and skills needed to construct a customized home landscape.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 11, 18, 25, and March 4</b> 6:00–8:00:00pm Cost: \$130	<b>Trees and Shrubs for the Home Landscape</b> <i>Credits: 8</i>	Using the Garden's collections, learn how to choose and care for woody plants in your home landscape.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 12</b> 8:30am–4:00pm Cost: \$130	<b>Professionals &amp; Advanced Gardeners</b> <i>Credits: 6</i>	Speakers discuss practical care issues for trees and research on future tree care, selections, and planning.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 13</b> 8:30am – 12:30pm Cost: \$50	<b>Spring Pruning for Trees</b> <i>Credits: 4</i>	Pruning in the early spring helps shape ornamental trees; learn the basics of pruning and appropriate pruning times.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 13</b> 7:30– 9:00pm Cost: Free	<b>Ecosystem Agriculture and Forest Gardens</b> <i>Credits: 1.5</i>	Permaculture Community Presentation and Potluck Pre-registration is encouraged by e-mailing Terry Lilley at <a href="mailto:tygerlilley@gmail.com">tygerlilley@gmail.com</a> , but not required	Harrisonburg, VA Eastern Mennonite University <a href="http://www.blueridgepermaculture.net/courses.html">http://www.blueridgepermaculture.net/courses.html</a>

<b>February 16</b> 5:00– 7:00pm Cost: \$30	<b>Organic Gardening</b> <i>Credits: 2</i>	Amy Hicks discusses how to “go green” with your garden, including soil amendments, plant maintenance, and pest control.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 18</b> 5:00– 7:00pm Cost: \$30	<b>Starting Seeds for Your Spring and Summer Garden</b> <i>Credits: 2</i>	Learn seed pre-treatments, media selections, sowing techniques, planning for germination dates and tips on hardening off your sprouts.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 19 – 22</b>	<b>Maymont Flower and Garden Show</b>		Richmond, VA Richmond Conv Center
<b>February 20</b> 9:00– 11:00am Cost: \$30	<b>Planning and Designing a Cutting Garden</b> <i>Credits: 2</i>	Whether you want the freshest possible flowers or simply trying to save money, cutting gardens can fill your needs.	Richmond, VA, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>February 19-20</b> Cost:\$60	<b>11<sup>th</sup> Annual Virginia Biological Farming Conference</b> <i>Credits: ***</i>	Farmer, author and photographer <b>Michael Ableman</b> will give the keynote address, entitled “Beyond Organic”. Check the website for more information.	Daleville, VA Mariyn Buerkens Phone: (540) 291-4333 <a href="http://www.vabf.org">www.vabf.org</a>
<b>February 27</b> 8:30am – 4:00pm Cost: \$45	<b>EcoSavy Gardening Symposium: The Practical Urban Garden; Understanding Your Garden’s Life Cycle</b> <i>Credits: 7.5hrs</i>	Linking sustainability, diversity and ecosystem services in Residential Gardens; Seasonal Strategies for the Virginia Gardener; The Impact of Climate Change on Pollination Biology; Project Budburst	Alexandria, VA <a href="http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/2010ecosavvy.pdf">http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gsgp/2010ecosavvy.pdf</a>
Credits *** Contact Kip Brooks for credit questions: <a href="mailto:kipb@rockbridge.net">kipb@rockbridge.net</a> or 462-6160			

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**IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN**

Editor-in-Chief Sherry Smith  
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The newsletter may also be viewed at [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)

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