



The April 2009 Monthly Journal
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association
Volume 13, Number 4



"The garden is a mirror of the heart." Anonymous

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RAMGA EVENT – APRIL 23

On Thursday, April 23, RAMGA will host a Thursday night session on "Every House a Garden and Organic Gardening" given by Peggy Dyson-Cobb. It will start at 7:00pm and be held in the Leyburn Library at W&L. Volunteers are still needed for refreshments. Please give Anne Riffey-Buckner a call at 464-8616 if you would be willing to help.



THANKS FOR THE REFRESHMENTS!!

Thanks to Heather Marion, Lilli Bradin, Mollie Smith, Penny Wilson and Barbara Thomas for bringing refreshments to the February meeting. It really facilitates socializing when there is a nice table of food and drink for people to congregate around. All who bring refreshments may claim expenses by filling in a simple form, which can be found in the Program Committee folder in the extension office and mailed to RAMGA, Attention "Treasurer."

We still have need of refreshments for the April and May meetings and would appreciate volunteers. Thank you from the Program Committee.



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Barbara Thomas

This month is filled with so much joy for the gardener within me. Bulbs are bursting out, trees are greening up and the asparagus comes in! The days are warming up, but it's not too hot to work in the afternoon sun. One of my favorite spring sights is the redbud trees blossoming all over the county while the smells of freshly dug soil and sweet blooms bring satisfaction to the soul.

What aspects of gardening bring you joy? Is it having a favorite springtime bulb survive both the winter and the critters? Having a vigorous session of weeding or garden tasks? Planting greens and new varieties of seeds? Hiking and taking in the native wildflowers? Whatever "rocks your boat," take time this month to savor that joy.

I know something that brought joy to the team of Master Gardeners volunteering at Natural Bridge Elementary School and here it is: the fourth grade students recently had their first foray out of the classroom and into the garden. It was one of those very warm days, somewhat unusual for March but so energizing. The NBES team had the students help out with necessary garden cleanup by each bringing five weeds that they had to dig from garden beds and paths to put into the compost pile. It was so much fun watching the kids busy as beavers, having the best time digging, counting and identifying plants. And the garden looked so much better after the students' efforts.

Now on to business: the new By Laws passed at the last educational meeting (the vote was 34 to 0) and the board wrote a slightly expanded Policy statement for the beginning of the document at the last Board meeting. Yes, slowly but surely, we are making progress on the new

membership directory and a written copy will be available this spring.

Also, don't forget to join in the fun at the Dig and Divides this month (see the other article in this newsletter for specific places, dates and times). It is quite enjoyable to meet other MGs, learn about plants, get dirty and know that the fruits (and plants) of our labor go to the Plant Sale on May 9 at Waddell Elementary in Lexington. What a great way to have a great day!



DIG AND DIVIDE SCHEDULE

Spring will be here before you know it and once again time for our dig and divide season to stock up for the Annual Master Gardener Plant Sale. Some of us dug plants in the fall and we have over wintered alot of plants - BUT we still need a few more so we have scheduled the following digs. Please send an e-mail to maryroseadkins@gmail.com to sign up for the dig that you will be attending.

April 1, Wednesday - 9:00 a.m. - Stephanie Louquet, Fairfield

April 7, Tuesday - 9:00 a.m. - Stephanie Louquet, Fairfield

April 8, Wednesday - 11:30 a.m. - Libby Moore, Lexington

April 15, Wednesday - 9:00 a.m. - Mary Adkins, Lexington - This dig is already full; sign up is closed.

As always - Thanks for all your help, we couldn't do it without you!



**WORDS CELEBRATING ARBOR DAY,
APRIL 24th
By Jim Davis**

The poet Wordsworth was probably right. The way we look at nature changes as we grow up. Our early innocence is full of wonder, but a later mature understanding of nature becomes ample recompense when the splendor along with childhood passes. Although my view of nature seems to have been single-mindedly focused on trees, the poet's idea fits my experience fairly well.

Every child, I suppose, has had a tree to play in. My wife tells of "Burnt Log," a downed, charred, and misshapen trunk that was submarine, fort, or ranch house, as needed. My tree was a huge sycamore that took me up. My imagination didn't work out any particular plots; it just reveled in the adventure of height, the awe of terrifying risks as I tried for limbs I hadn't reached before.

This was in Savannah where the tall oaks of Forsythe Park shaded my vigorous play. Soon, I was able to appreciate the beauty of trees; and even now the most striking image of Savannah I retain is those oaks, with their dark canopy, their huge writhing roots creatively destroying concrete walkways. Later, in Mobile, the beauty of other, spreading live oaks amazed me. On one broad thoroughfare, they overhung traffic; there was one in our churchyard with low limbs longer than the tree was tall—they had to be propped. When I was a young man, the army for some reason sent me to Labrador. This tour left me with another vivid picture—the maples and ash trees there, so brilliant in autumn that Virginia's fall was almost an anticlimax.

But before the army, shades of practicality had already begun to close about me. I worked several summers for a paper company in northern Florida and learned the commercial value of trees. Although a reluctant wader of swamps, I was receptive to this new knowledge of trees, learned how to cruise timber, to spot with paint the pines to be cut (leaving the best for seed trees), and to de-bark, by hand, a pit prop. I learned incidentally about the turpentine industry, what a cat face is, and the difference between resin and rosin.

As I've grown older, this harsh maturity has been tempered by a recognition of symbolism in trees. In Lexington there was a large, shapely maple in my yard that blew over while I was in Mobile at my mother's funeral. Did it fall out of sympathy? Ultimately, it assumed a meaning having more to do with life. Before my return, my good friend cut it up, hauled it away, and planted a seedling. It was the offspring of a tree in his yard, a real giant that Lee and Jackson no doubt passed many times.

When we moved into the County in 1992, I wanted to help its beauty, maybe even change the world, by turning our pasture back into forest. Of course this was long before advice from the Fevriers was available, and my old friend reminded me how much even a small tree costs. I settled on three, a maple, a copper beech and a willow (down by the stream). Later, I added four river birches. I'm not sure these efforts exhibit Wordsworth's standard for mature understanding, but the trees offer this mature person pleasure and contemplation every day.



GARDENING NEWS

THE BEST INFO ON GROWING YOUR OWN FOOD

By Fine Gardening Magazine

Thanks to rising food prices, the recession, organic health concerns, and increasingly frequent supermarket produce scares, it's no surprise that vegetable gardening is experiencing a surge in popularity. And homegrown veggies taste better than anything you can get in a supermarket.

That's why we're excited to introduce VegetableGardener.com, a new site from the editors of *Fine Gardening*.

Whether you're a seasoned gardener or just getting started, our new site brings you excellent advice on:

- [Planning and design](#)
- [Selecting the best](#) heirloom and hybrid vegetables to plant
- [Harvesting, preserving](#), and [cooking](#) what you grow

We also offer garden projects, info on organic gardening, fun photo contests and galleries, and how-to videos on all aspects of vegetable gardening.

[Become a member](#) (it's free!) so you can start sharing photos, tips, and gardening experiences. If you're already a member of FineGardening.com, you can [log in](#) using the same email address and password and get started creating your profile. And for the latest in timely growing how-tos, sign up for the twice-monthly [eLetter](#). Hope to see you at our new site!

P.S. - At VegetableGardener.com you'll find lots of archived articles from Taunton's *Kitchen Gardener* magazine. We know you missed it.



<u>Apr</u>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
2	Storm Water Management*
4	Spring Green Lawn Clinic*
7	A-Z Organic Gardening*
8	RAMGA Board Meeting – 2:00pm
15	Compost Training *
18 or 19	Pond Construction & Stocking with Plants*
21	Keeping Virginia Green*
25	Spring Garden Festival*
* See Educational Events Calendar this issue	

Growing and Caring for Hydrangeas

By Kathy Anderson

Hydrangeas are a very popular landscape plant, prized for their abundant blooms and easy care. How you care for the hydrangeas in your landscape will depend on what type of hydrangea you have.

There are four categories of hydrangeas. These are *Hydrangea macrophylla*, commonly called Big Leaf, Mophead or Lacecap hydrangeas; *Hydrangea arborescence*, which includes “Annabelle” and its relatives, also known as Smooth hydrangeas; *Hydrangea quercifolia*, also known as Oakleaf hydrangeas; and finally, *Hydrangea paniculata*, which are commonly called PeeGee hydrangeas.

Big Leaf hydrangeas are some of the most popular hydrangeas in landscapes. Most of these bloom in July to August in either blue or pink,

although a few varieties are white. Except for the white varieties, any of these can be grown as either blue or pink, depending on the acidity of the soil they're grown in. We'll talk more about changing the bloom color in another article.

If your Big Leaf hydrangea needs to be pruned, this should be done in early summer, before the flower buds are formed for the next season. These hydrangeas bloom on old wood, which is wood that was formed during the previous growing season. The flower buds are formed in August through October, so do any necessary pruning in the summer, prior to August. Prune out any dead wood each year, and after the plant has reached five years old about a third of the stems can be pruned back to the ground each summer to help revitalize the plant.

Annabelle hydrangeas have large white blooms which often reach up to ten inches in diameter. A native plant of the eastern U.S., Annabelle prefers to grow where it can have morning sun and afternoon shade, or dappled shade all day. Hot afternoon sun will make Annabelle's heavy blooms fade more quickly. Annabelle hydrangeas bloom from early summer through August or September.

Annabelle is a popular landscape shrub because it will bloom reliably even after heavy pruning or a severe winter. In the far north, the plant will die back to the ground each year, send up new growth in the spring and still bloom profusely. The blooms tend to be quite heavy, sometimes bending the stems to the ground. The stems may be staked to prevent this, or pruned to about 24 inches to help the stems become stronger and better able to support the heavy blooms. Annabelle hydrangeas bloom on new wood, and should not be pruned in the spring while they are preparing to bloom. They can be pruned any other time of year, but it isn't necessary to prune Annabelle each year except for removing dead wood or branches that don't contribute to a nicely shaped plant.

Oak leaf hydrangeas are also native to the U.S., and as their name suggests, they have large, deeply lobed leaves. The white blooms of oak leaf hydrangeas are beautiful in early to mid summer, tending to turn pink as they age. Oak leaf hydrangeas also add color to the landscape in the fall as the large leaves turn brilliant red, burgundy, orange or yellow, especially if they receive some sun. These hydrangeas are more tolerant of sun and dry conditions than other types, but they will not tolerate wet feet. Oak leaf hydrangeas should be pruned at the same time and in the same manner as the Big Leaf hydrangeas.

PeeGee hydrangeas are very popular because they will grow in a variety of climates and are hardy up to zone 3. Like the oak leaf hydrangeas, PeeGee's white blooms tend to turn pink as they age. PeeGees often grow very large, up to 8-10 feet tall and just as wide, and should be planted where they'll have ample room. They do like some shade in very hot climates, and are tolerant of sun if they receive enough moisture. PeeGee may be pruned at any time except in midsummer when they are preparing to bloom, and they can also be pruned to a tree shape.

All hydrangeas will grow well and bloom with morning sun and afternoon shade. But they will not do well in heavy shade and wouldn't be happy if planted beneath a shade tree. If you live in a cool northern state, your hydrangeas may grow well in more than a half day of sun, but if your landscape is hot and mostly sunny, you may want to stick to the PeeGee varieties. It may be difficult to grow hydrangeas in far southern areas that rarely see frost.

Hydrangeas don't require much special care. You may want to give them a balanced, slow-release fertilizer once a year in late spring to keep them happy.

Kathy recommends <http://www.freeplants.com> as a great place to learn more about gardening. Article provided by <http://gardening-articles.com> If you use this article the above links must be active.



GROWING BETTER FOOD

By Diana Losche

Organically grown vegetables and fruits are as flavorful, or more flavorful, than conventionally grown produce and often store better. Now “nutrient density,” the amount of nutrients in a given amount of food, is being shown to be “modestly or moderately higher” in organic produce.

Numerous studies reveal that as yields of crop plants rise, nutrient content falls. Increased applications of chemical fertilizers boosted yields, but resulted in declines of 5-40% in some minerals in vegetables. A famous study published in 1981 showed that as phosphorus fertilization was increased on raspberries, the content of phosphorus in the plants increased but other nutrients dropped by 20-55%. More recent work shows that in 43 garden crops, protein content has declined 6% and content of three vitamins has decreased by 15-38% since 1950.

Food nutrient density, however, is enhanced when plants are grown organically. A “State of the Science Review” just issued by the Organic Center of Enterprise, OR reviews that in 97 published studies, average contents of 11 nutrients were 25% higher in organically grown food plants vs. those chemically grown.

So how does this work? Breeders have programmed crops to grow very close together to produce higher yields. Chemical fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation push the plants to grow fast and large. These plants have less time to extract nutrients from the soil that move up

stalks and become the food we eat. They devote less energy to sinking deep roots and health promoting phytochemicals, including some vitamins and antioxidants. If you are interested in learning more about this study, go to: <http://organic.insight.net/reportfiles/Yield..Nutrient..Density..Final.pdf>.



Bruges – Gardens Along the Waterway

OK Everyone – We’re going to start a new feature in the newsletter all about gardening photos.

Please send me your garden photos – when you’re on vacation (like mine above), your animals in your garden, whatever. I’ll publish them in each month’s newsletter. The downside to this will be if you don’t send me any pictures, I’ll have to keep running my pictures.

So send me your photographs!!



Calendar of Educational Events – April 2009



Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
April 2 6:00-9:00pm Cost: Free	Storm Water Management in Your Backyard Rain Garden <i>Credits: 3 hrs</i>	Master Gardeners & Master Naturalist Stormwater Management in Your Backyard Rain Garden Education Program	Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, 901 Amherst St., Winchester, Va 22601 To register: call 540-665-5699 (Co-op Ext Office Fredrick County, attn: Lynn Hoffmann)
April 4 10:00am – 2:00pm Cost: Free	Spring Green Lawn Clinic - Brookmeade Sod Farm <i>Credits: 4 hrs</i>	Mike Goatley, Richard Nunally, will be speaking as "experts" on different grass care related topics	14340 Medley Grove Lane, Doswell, VA www.brookmeadesod.com
April 7 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Cost: \$20 General Public	A-Z Organic Gardening for the Homeowner” with Dennis Dove and Tenley Weaver <i>Credits: 2 hrs</i>	Expertise on organic vegetable gardening: starting seeds to harvest, easy to grow crops, pest- and disease-resistant cultivars, organic practices.	Virginia Tech Peggy Lee Hahn Garden Pavilion [Seats are limited. - Pre-registration is required!]
April 15 9:00am – 3:30pm Cost:	Compost Training for MGs <i>Credits: ***</i>	9 - Noon Overview of Compost Products Available 1 - 3:30 Tour the Composting Facility at the New Market Waste Water Treatment Plant and Organic Recycling	Quality Inn, New Market Contact VCE Shenandoah Unit at 540-459-6240 or email raclark@vt.edu by April 8.
April 18 or 19 1:00 – 2:30pm Cost: Free	Pond Construction and Stocking with Plants <i>Credits: 1.5 hrs</i>	Information for creating a pond and water garden.	Springdale Water Gardens, Greeneville, VA info@springdalewatergarde ns.com 540-337-450
April 21 Cost: Early Bird by March 1: \$40; after March 1, \$45	3rd Biennial Horticulture Horizons Symposium: Conserving the Commonwealth, Keeping Virginia Green <i>Credits 5 hrs</i>	Advanced MG programs: Protecting and promoting pollinators in your backyard, Landscape plants for conservation and habitat	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA http://www.lewisginter.org More information: Susan Edwards, Chesterfield County MG Coordinator 804-751-4401
April 25 9:30am – 3:30pm Cost: \$10 + materials costs	Spring Garden Festival 2009 <i>Credits ***</i>	A gardening festival featuring classes, workshops, demonstrations and plant sales.	Goochland, VA 804-556- 5841 www.gpmga.org/SpringFest .htm
Credit *** Contact Kip Brooks for credit questions: kipb@rockbridge.net or 462-6160			

2008-2009**Officers**

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IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

Editor-in-chief Sherry Smith
 Managing Editor Jeanne Eichelberger

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