

# IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The August 2009 Monthly Journal  
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association  
Volume 13, Number 8



"You can bury a lot of troubles digging in the dirt." Anonymous



## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN By Barbara Thomas

The Rockbridge County Fair has come and gone and RAMGA members were certainly in evidence at the Anderson Coliseum. The Virginia Horse Center was the organizing group for the first time, rather than the previous Rockbridge Regional Fair Board. Yes, there were some speed bumps and obstacles that come with a new group organizing an event of that magnitude. Overall, success was ours.

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I am so proud of and thankful for our RAMGA members who effectively organized the Produce Show and the Horticulture Show (Katherine Smith and Maureen Becker, respectively) in spite of miscommunications. I am thankful for our members who volunteered their time to categorize and stage all those flowers brought in! It is enjoyable to work alongside friends from our organization and catch up on activities. There were over 300 entries this year in spite of the Fair booklet not listing the categories. In a prideful aside, three of the four top winners were RAMGA members: Maureen Becker, Aline McKenna and Bee Zwart!

The Produce Show and Homemaking shows were staged in the coliseum for the first time and it was nice not to have to worry about dirt floors making the veggies look all dusty, as well as being cooler there, which increased their longevity a bit. It is always marvelous to see other people's produce so large (and mine not so big). How do other fairs keep their produce looking plump and good? Large refrigerator units? Massive ice chests? An array of cooling coils?

Speaking of produce and refrigerators, how many of us remember why they may go bad - like in my parent's fridge? After picking fruits and vegetables, they continue to give off carbon dioxide, heat and take in oxygen (respiration). Cooling slows down that respiration which makes sense but to complicate things, produce

respires at different rates. Now to add more ingredients to the mixture, there's this thing called transpiration - plants giving off moisture (at different rates of course). So that's why there are crisper drawers and special bags, to slow that process!

Here's our next ingredient - some fruits and veggies get physiological damage from chilling and never recover. Once you refrigerate a tomato, you will break down the chemical compounds that give it its' fragrance and flavor. Potatoes take on a sweet taste since their starch converts to sugar. Basil turns black when chilled several hours! Of course, once produce is cut, it's safer to chill it rather than let it spoil on a counter.

So what is a master gardener to do when sorting out which produce to cool or not to cool? How can we weed out TMI (Too Much Information)? Here is a list for you to tape on the refrigerator from the book "How to Pick a Peach."

#### **NEVER REFRIGERATE**

- Bananas and Plantains
- Potatoes and Sweet potatoes
- Storage onions and Garlic
- Tomatoes

#### **REFRIGERATE ONLY BRIEFLY**

- Cucumbers
- Eggplants
- Melons (only after fully ripened)
- Peppers

## REFRIGERATE ONLY AFTER FULLY RIPENED

Avocados  
Peaches, Plums and Nectarines  
Pears

## REFRIGERATE ALL OTHERS



## HORT SHOW FLORABONDANZA!

By Maureen Becker

At 2 AM the morning of the Hort Show, I decided to call it quits with the bottles and the cuttings and, as English diarist Samuel Pepys used to say, "And so to bed." Worries over having enough entries to make a good display in this year of transition for the Fair made sleep largely elusive.

What a glorious surprise it was the next day to see the parade of healthy and distinctive plant material arriving to be entered in the show. In the eight years that I have been in charge of the event, this year surpassed all others with number of entries: a hefty 380 exhibits were recorded, entered, staged and placed. It was a remarkable 125 more than the highest total in the past and all of us hustled to get everything ready in time for judging. Best of all, there were more entries than usual from our local, non RAMGA, gardeners of all ages. There was a three generation family entry, another from a Natural Bridge

Elementary Botany Club member and student from our 4<sup>th</sup> grade NBES teaching program and multiple entries from a local man who called me to ask if he could use plastic water bottles for his exhibits because his wife cleaned out the garage and carted to recycling his carefully assembled collection of glass exhibit bottles. (He was able to retrieve them all from recycling!) We can thank our own "Rose Queen" Debbie Lugar and an elderly, almost blind local gardener for all the entries in the roses section.

Personal heartfelt thanks to the wonderful fellow MGs who stepped up to volunteer to make this the most successful year ever for our community event:

Ted Jenks and Dave Buckner for table set up help and Ted again for tear down and clean up. Ted, after six straight years of help, you are my hero!

Helen Smith who comes from "far, far away" and Ann Jones who just had major surgery on her foot for being such gracious greeters and recorders of entries.

Special thanks to Helen for the emergency run to WalMart for supplies and to Ann for getting the gift certificates signed by donors. Recognition goes to Wonder Woman Barbara Thomas who managed to produce

additional blue ribbons when we thought we would run out

Becky England and Debbie Lugar, our stalwart "classification experts," who helped exhibitors identify and label their exhibits correctly.

Phyllis Fevrier and Penny Karla who helped entrants with multiple exhibits fill out entry cards.

The Very Precise and Reliable Margaret Fletcher and Mary Adkins who tallied all exhibits by Section and Class (awesome as always!)

Runners Bea Zwart, Gerri Wenz and Penny Karla who placed all exhibits after all paperwork was completed.

Clerks Kate Jenks, Jane Comstock, Tracy Smith-Oliver and Penny Karla who stayed until very late afternoon to record and tally the ribbons awarded and ensure they were placed correctly.

Thanks to Gerri Wenz who filled in everywhere when needed and took pictures all the while.

I am so grateful to you all for your splendid efforts in making this such a positive event.

Our own RAMGA members scored impressive results with the judges who were a bit stingy with the blue ribbons

this year. Three of the four top awards went to our members:

Award of Horticultural Excellence (Best in Show) Gift Certificate from The Potting Shed

Bea Zwart for an amazing Oakleaf Hydrangea that wowed one and all (she bought it ...where else???? from Faith at the Potting Shed).

Award of Merit (Best Perennial or Biennial) Gift Certificate from Jefferson Florist

Aline McKenna for a stunning pink phlox with a crimson center (with not even a whisper of mildew..kudos!).

Sweepstakes (most blue ribbons) Gift Certificate from Fancy Hill Nursery.

Yours truly, the mad midnight "bottler"  
29 blue.

Many thanks to all of you who answered my persistent (annoying??) e-mails begging for entries:

<b>Mary Adkins</b>	6 blue, 2 red, 1 yellow, 2 white
<b>Jane Comstock</b>	6 blue, 2 red, 1 white
<b>Claudia Ellis</b>	4 blue, 1 yellow
<b>Becky England</b>	7 blue
<b>Phyllis Fevrier</b>	4 blue, 4 red, 1 yellow

<b>Debbie Lugar</b>	15 blue
<b>Sunny McDonald</b>	1 blue, 1 red
<b>Aline McKenna</b>	7 blue, 3 red
<b>Mary Beth Schuder</b>	9 blue, 10 red, 2 white
<b>Katherine Smith</b>	3 blue, 1 yellow
<b>Barbara Thomas</b>	14 blue, 7 red, 2 yellow, 2 white
<b>Bea Zwart</b>	5 blue, one white

The collective efforts of so many RAMGA volunteers resulted in this benchmark year for the Horticulture Show. You are THE BEST! See you next year at the Fair.



### **SILVER LINING** By Aline McKenna

Sometimes gray clouds do have a silver lining. I have been bemoaning the fact that the medians on I-81 would no longer be mowed and planted with wildflowers. Recently, I was a passenger riding in a car from Lexington to Staunton. I am usually the one driving so this was a much more pleasant drive, one that allowed me to really look at the roadsides

I could not believe all the wildflowers that have been allowed to grow and bloom as never before. It was an amazing sight. The biggest surprise was the amount of white, light pink and dark pink Sweet Peas that I was able to see. There were so many of them blooming their silly heads away. I started keeping a list of

the the wildflowers I observed; there were so many. I saw many of the roadside Orange DayLily's, White Yarrow, Queen Anne Lace, Black Eyed Suzy, Blue Chickory, the lavender flowers of Nettle, Daisy's, and Crown Vetch. There were the blue flowers of the Common Vipers Bugloss and even pink clover which is usually mowed before it gets high enough to bloom.

One of my favorite roadside plants, the Common Mullien, stands tall and has its little yellow flowers along its tall stalk. This plant was also common along the roadsides in New Jersey where I gave it the nickname of Roadside Cactus. There were some other yellow flowers about a foot high that I could not get close enough to identify.

One of the plants that I was most happy to see was Milkweed with its ball of rose pink flowers. The butterflies are going to be so happy this year. Hopefully we will have many more of these pretty flutterers. Even the grasses that grew right along side the macadam were waving their silky seed heads at all the cars going by. I am sure there were many others that I neglected to see and identify but there were enough to keep me busy as we drove along.

I was truly surprised in a good way, to see the Silver Lining caused by the States decision not to plant wildflowers or to cut the median and roadsides but

twice a year. Unless the wild growth is in an area that may prove dangerous to drivers, I am all for leaving the roadsides and medians alone. Next time you drive on I-81 be sure to look at all of the flowers in our Virginia Flower Gardens.

Being from outside NYC, I was used to traffic that makes I-81 seem mellow. Yes, all the trucks can be intimidating, but really folks, if you have ever driven on the New Jersey Turnpike, 1-95, you can understand where I am coming from. There were no flowers along this road. The author John Sandford was asked what was great about America. He said that one of the great things about this country are its roads. He has traveled on almost every interstate highway in the country. One of the ones he especially loves is riding through the Shenandoah Valley on I-81. I also love this portion of the interstate, especially heading south entering Rockbridge County, where you see mountains on either side of the road and mountains straight ahead. On a clear day it is quite a site as you all know, and now with all the wildflowers it is spectacular.



## PLANT CLINICS DRAW CROWDS

By Jim Davis

On Wednesday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, the plant clinic team set up to answer questions at the Lexington Farmers Market. MG's participating were Ann Gruner, Laura

Mattingly and Jim Davis. Responding to Stephanie West's publicity, many stopped by to present gardening problems and to have soil samples tested. Among the questions asked were these: How can I get rid of copperheads in my garage? (Eliminate mice, their principle food of choice.) What are the insects massing in my driveway (Box Elder bugs.) Why are the tops of my tomato plants curling like fern fiddleheads? (Probably yellow leaf curl virus.) The team held another clinic on Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup> at the Horse Center, during the Rockbridge County Fair. Laura and Jim helped some twenty questioners asking about soil testing and amendments, attacks by deer and masses of spider mites, unproductive tomato plants and harlequin bugs.



<u>Aug</u>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
5 - 9	Gardening in the Shade*
8	Gardening for Butterflies*
8	Orchid Grower's Day*
12, 15 or 16	Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardening*
15	Soil Basics*
21- 23	In the Garden*
29	Down & Dirty Gardening Symposium*
* See Educational Events Calendar this issue	

## LOTS OF BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

By Diana Losche

Fish emulsion is an effective plant fertilizer (think Indians burying fish heads in their corn mounds). Research scientists at Canada's McGill University now believe that the popular fertilizer may have important fungicidal properties as well. Their study, published recently in the journal *Phytopathology*, showed that some organic acids in the emulsion are toxic to *Verticillium*, a common soil fungus that causes wilt and *Pythium*, which causes damping off in seedlings. They applied the emulsion to infested soil and observed that up to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the fungal spores were killed after one day and nearly all were killed after six days. They compared cucumber seedlings grown in humus-rich muck soil with those grown in a peat based mix. After application damping off in the former was suppressed. In the latter the effect was seen only when the seedlings were planted after the application.



## COPING WITH SPIDER MITES

By Jim Davis

We're all familiar with spider mites, those eight-legged cousins of ticks and spiders. They're tiny, but especially on house plants we see their webbing, laid down to protect eggs. There are many species, but, looking closely, we mostly

see pale critters with two dark spots, the pale turning reddish toward winter. These pests nibble plant cells, turning the leaves speckled, then brown, finally scorched-colored before dropping. The plant could die. Washing it with horticultural soap, *not* detergent solution, or plain water will often get rid of them if only temporarily.

They come from outdoors, maybe riding a plant put on the deck to enjoy a rain. The species we are likely to see winter under garden debris or in the crevices of plant structure. When the weather warms, they move, if necessary, to healthy plants to mate and lay many, many eggs. The young grow fast and are soon busy producing their own offspring. Like mice, a population of spider mites can soon grow to incredible numbers.

Recently, I become aware of massive infestations. The gardeners may have worsened the situation by using pesticides. Few if any act very well on the mites; they don't kill eggs, and in addition they do kill predators—other mites and insects. Products containing the commonly advertised imidacloprid, a systemic chemical, are no better than others claimed to be specifically effective. The ability to reproduce quickly and abundantly allows much mutation, and a new generation arises with many immune to the poison. These in turn produce young who are also immune, and now we have a problem. It

could be that the infestations occurred from overlooking webs, eggs and adults until too late; at any rate, it can be, indeed, too late. The two gardeners I spoke with couldn't bathe their collections of house plants often enough to free them of pests.

But help may be on the way. Just as we can buy boxes of ladybugs (as if we needed any more), so we can buy predator mites to dine on our two-spotted enemy. *Metaseiulus occidentalis* (sometimes called *Galendromus occidentalis*) are available from [arbico-organics.com](http://arbico-organics.com) (phone 800-827-2847). They charge \$76.50 for 1,000 mites, and if you call they will give you advice on application. You may also want to know about a thirty-two page online booklet listing suppliers of beneficial organisms in the United States, Canada and Mexico. It goes far beyond spider mites and has a convenient search mechanism allowing you target the pest or disease you're fighting. Go to [cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgmt/ipminov/bensupp.pdf](http://cdpr.ca.gov/docs/pestmgmt/ipminov/bensupp.pdf).

If you want to avoid this doomsday experience with your house plants, or those in your garden for that matter, practice good hygiene, maybe using a pound of prevention. If the worst happens, you might have to turn the predators loose.



## Zone 6 - August To Do List

- Sow seeds of fall veggies and annuals
- Plan perennial beds for fall and winter color with ornamental grasses, fall-blooming bulbs and hardy heaths and heathers
- Divide and transplant bearded iris
- Harvest vegetables continuously to stretch their season
- Sprinkle compost starter to speed up composting for fall soil building
- Prune summer-blooming shrubs (hydrangea, clethra, caryopteris) after [flowers](#) finish
- Plant garlic now for spring harvests
- Look forward to something different next spring: try alliums in your bulb garden
- Sow seeds of cool-weather herbs (chives, parsley)
- Enjoy a case of the late summer "blues" with a palette of hardy ageratum, caryopteris, fall asters and reblooming iris in your planting schemes



## Calendar of Educational Events - August 2009

Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
<b>August 5, 8, or 9</b> 1:30 pm Cost: Free	<b>August – A Great Time for Gardening in the Shade</b> <i>Credits: 1 hr</i>	Create a beautiful shade garden by following a few easy steps for color and low maintenance. Your shady spots come alive with Hosta and other shade loving annuals, perennials, and shrubs.	Viette's Nursery Fishersville, VA (800) 575-5538 <a href="http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9">http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9</a>
<b>August 8</b> 10:00–11:00 am Cost: \$20	<b>Irresistible Attraction: Gardening for Butterflies</b> <i>Credits: 1 hr</i>	How to plan a garden to nurture every stage of a butterfly's life cycle	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>August 8</b> 9:30am–4:30 pm Cost: \$25	<b>Orchid Grower's Day</b> <i>Credits: 8 hrs</i>	Learn from expert growers how to grow different types of orchids in the home and greenhouse.	JC Raulston Arboretum Raleigh, NC (919) 469-9149 orthobob90@aol.com <a href="http://www.triangleorchidsociety.org">www.triangleorchidsociety.org</a>
<b>August 12, 15, or 16</b> 1:30 pm Cost: Free	<b>Butterfly and Hummingbird Gardening</b> <i>Credits: 1 hr</i>	There are plants which act as "hosts" for the butterfly larvae and plants that supply nectar for adult butterflies and hummingbirds. Discover perennials, annuals, & shrubs that attract these creatures!	Viette's Nursery Fishersville, VA (800) 575-5538 <a href="http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9">http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9</a>
<b>August 15</b> 9:00 am– 2 Noon Cost: \$40	<b>Soil Basics</b> <i>Credits: 3 hrs</i>	Everything starts with soil! Learn the characteristics of basic soil types, amendment techniques, and drainage.	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA <a href="http://www.lewisginter.org">http://www.lewisginter.org</a>
<b>August 21 – 23</b> Friday evening Registration until Sunday at 11:00 am Cost: \$499+	<b>In The Garden</b> A garden weekend at the Homestead <i>Credits: ***</i>	Presenters: Andrew Viette, Stephen L. Gable, Donald R. Buma, C. Colston Burrell, Forrest Lee speaking on Perennials, Conifers, Shade Gardens and more	The Homestead Hot Springs, VA 800-838-1766 <a href="http://www.thehomestead.com">www.thehomestead.com</a>
<b>August 29</b> Cost: ?	<b>The Down 'n Dirty Gardening Symposium</b> <i>Credits: ***</i>	Get down 'n dirty for an entire day filled with great gardening advice, hot new plants, design ideas, and more!	Hahn Horticultural Garden, Virginia Tech <a href="http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html">http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html</a>
Credits *** Contact Kip Brooks for credit questions: <a href="mailto:kipb@rockbridge.net">kipb@rockbridge.net</a> or 462-6160			

**2008-2009**

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**IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN**

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The newsletter may also be viewed at [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)

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**ROCKBRIDGE AREA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION**  
**P.O. Drawer 897**  
**Lexington, Virginia 24450**

