

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The August 2010 Monthly Newsletter Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association

www.ramga.org



"Friends are flowers in life's garden." Unknown

PRESIDENTIAL THOUGHTS

By Nancy Smith

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I have to say I was truly shocked at the news of Jon Repair's retirement. As I am sure you do, I congratulate him on his new lease on life. But we sure will miss him. Jon has been a good and faithful friend to RAMGA since the last century. I venture to say we would not exist had it not been for the tenacity of Katherine Smith and the getting-all-the-problems-out-of-the-way efforts of Jon Repair. We are grateful for all Jon's work on our behalf, and wish him great and fulfilling adventures in the future.

As we bid goodbye to Jon, we welcome Tom Stanley to the Lexington Extension office. We hope he will enjoy his work here; we will do all we can to make that happen.

Did everyone have a good time at the Fair? We all owe a debt of thanks to the MGs who put in all the time and effort to make the Horticultural show such a great success. It was really impressive to see all the flowers and produce on display; such a show of loving care and expertise coming from our local home gardens. Congratulations to all participants. And to the ribbon-winners, good job!!!!

I have been recently reminded just how lucky we are to live in Virginia. My husband and I took a road trip through the Blue Ridge Mountains just for the fun. An assemblage of Rhododendrons and Mountain Laurels ushered us along the highway. Age-old, bare-trunked trees stood as sentinels guarding the sun-dappled forest behind them. Bullying Kudzu, in its show-off way, insinuated itself in and over conifers and deciduous trees without the least apology. We discovered open woodland pockets polka-dotted with black-eyed Susans and Queen Anne's Lace mixed with feathery grasses here, and more expansive, rambunctious wild flower meadows there.

One day, we found ourselves in the midst of small rain showers and great squalls of thunderstorms. When I say in the midst of, I mean just that. As the elevation grew, we realized we were not just caught up in your everyday fog bank. We were in the clouds, clouds hanging like curtains. Sometimes the curtain was as light and airy as gauze, sometimes it was as heavy as brocade. At one point, we broke through the brocade and found ourselves in bright sunshine and clear air. I looked back to see the seemingly impenetrable floor to ceiling cloud drape

pulled tightly closed, creating an illusion of a secret passage.

Such wonders exist in the space of just a few miles!

All this is to say, we are fortunate to be surrounded by such natural beauty. We can't allow ourselves to be so busy with our everyday lives that we lose track of that glory set before us. It is all here for us. Let's appreciate it by enjoying it. It is a gift we can give ourselves.



JON REPAIR RETIRES AFTER GREAT YEARS OF MG SUPPORT

By Jim Davis

By now everybody knows of Jon Repair's retirement, leaving his desk and busy travel schedule for a full life of farming. Looking back, all would agree that Jon has been an enthusiastically supportive overseer of our MG unit. It's appropriate, therefore, that we send him off with our thanks and good wishes, sentiments in which everyone surely joins.

Jon himself readily admits that he was skeptical of the MG program when Katherine Smith, a transfer MG from Richmond, urged him to establish it in the early nineties. Nevertheless, he taught most sessions of the first MG Class, and then gave us office space and staff assistance, essential to our being. Since then, he has often confessed his mistaken notion in words, but most often has expressed his positive attitude by his actions. He has freely granted requests, taught more of our classes, saved our skins,

and with minimum intervention trusted us to run our projects. Let us not forget, though, that Jon has also come to many of us in his capacity as agricultural expert, ably advising management of cattle and pasture. We tend to overlook the need in all these things for wisdom and special knowledge. What gets our attention is the calm and agreeable manner, and pleasant personality with which he manages all situations. We consider him a friend.

So Jon, we'll miss you, but we know that running your own cattle will give you more peace than keeping track of so many farms in the five-county area.

And now we welcome Tom Stanley as our new extension agent. Pursuing the special area of business management, Tom has spent the last 15 years as an extension agent in our five-county planning district, often on duty here. He is a resident of Rockbridge County, and he and Jon have enjoyed a friendly as well as a professional relationship over the years. Since Tom is also well grounded in agriculture, all factors indicate a smooth transition and capable hands guiding farmers in the district.

Good wishes to Tom also. We look forward to working with him in the years ahead.



MASTER GARDENER HONOREES

At the Master Gardeners (MG) College held at Virginia Tech in June, several of our Master Gardeners were honored for their accomplishments during the 2009 calendar year. Certificates and pins were awarded.

Congratulations are due to those MGs who completed milestone levels of volunteer work for RAMGA during 2009.

Those who completed 250 Hours During 2009

Phyllis Fevrier	Sharon Jones
Greg Lemmer	Lorraine Lemmer
Laura Mattingly	Angelike Matiuk
Karen Orrison	Rita Poranski
Tracey Smith-Oliver	

Those who completed 500 Hours During 2009

Jane Birzenieks	Aline McKenna
Nancy Mills	David Mims
Donna Noyes	Carol Schoner
Nancy Smith	

The certificates and pins are available now in the Extension office and can be collected by the recipients. I will also bring them to our annual picnic in September.

Carol Schoner
RAMGA Records Coordinator



MASTER GARDENER SHIRTS FOR SALE

If you missed the opportunity to purchase a Master Gardener shirt, you are in luck. We have 3 L/XL shirts for sale for \$14.25 each. Contact Becky England at 463-1728 to arrange a pick-up.



HELLEBORES, YOU GOTTA LOVE'EM

By Diana Losche

Until four years ago I had no idea what a hellebore was. We had just finished our first meeting of the year at Campbell House and had gone out to the shade garden to check on what needed to be done. I think it was late March of 2005 and very, very cold. Amazingly there were some pink blooms in one of the flower beds. I believe it was Ann Spivey who clued me in about hellebores and I've been a fan of this plant ever since. Not only is it one of the very first plants to bloom, it is also evergreen (mostly), deer proof (it's poisonous), shade happy, pest and disease free, has lovely foliage and is low maintenance (relatively speaking). The flower colors span a wide swath from inky black, through all the pinks, to yellow and white.

Well, here's the lowdown on the downside. Hellebores take a long time to mature to the point of producing flowers, three years on average. You've got to be patient. They don't particularly like to be moved around so decide where you want them and stick to it. The varieties that you can purchase locally have flower heads that face downwards (at 13 degrees F, who wouldn't?) The more mature the potted nursery plant is, the more expensive it is.

New hellebore hybrids are being produced all the time. And there is now one where the flowers turn up. The blooms start out green, turn ivory and then pink. Foliage is blue-green with reddish stems. It's called 'Ivory Prince'. None of the big box stores or local nurseries market it. I think there is a reluctance amongst many gardeners to buy

plants from internet sources but this is where you find the most interesting ones. People worry that what is ordered is not what gets delivered; that, being fragile, plants will arrive in terrible shape; that shipping will be prohibitively expensive. All of this is true of a few nurseries. But, in my experience, most are very careful about packaging and many guarantee the plant for a period of time. If you total up your expenses for gas and lunch, a trip to Milmont will most likely equal or surpass shipping charges. You can learn about the "good" internet suppliers by trial & error. You can ask your friends. You can go to Dave's Garden and read reviews. You can ask me.

There was a piece in the May issue of Smithsonian magazine on hellebores: how does it stand the cold? Scientists from the Spanish National Research Council found that there is a strain of yeast living in the flowers' nectar that warms the flowers by metabolizing sugars. "This is a novel mechanism whereby the flowers can raise their temperatures." That answers that question.

Cole Burrell, Judith and Richard Tyler and Daniel J. Hinkley have written a hardcover book entitled *Hellebores: A Comprehensive Guide* which sells for \$25.00. Used copies are \$10.00. This book was awarded the AHS best book of the year in 2003. The Tylersown and operate Pine Knott Farms in Clarksville, VA. They grow only hellebores and sell only via the internet.



GIMMICK, GADGET OR USEFUL DEVICE?

Part I

By Jim Davis

If you get as many gardening catalogs as I do, you're aware of myriad and manifold miracle products. These are guaranteed to make your gardening chores quicker or easier, protect your plants against all enemies or bring forth a superabundant yield. If you haven't tried any of them, you at least must have wondered whether any really work or are truly useful. If you *have* tried some, here's a chance to let others know of their success or failure. Let me hear about your experiences so that in the next issue of *In and Out of the Garden* I can let everyone know what to buy and what to avoid. I'll not use your name—unless you are particularly proud of your triumph and want all to know.

Some of these things are simple and are clearly good sense. For instance, I wish I'd seen the metal corners that form raised beds—just add wooden sides. Some of my raised beds are necessarily odd-shaped, and I had to hire Archimedes to cut board ends that would angle together. (He wasn't successful.) Gardener's Supply Company now sells corners and connectors that pivot easily to any angle.

But who has tried some of those listed with more spectacular claims? What about any of the six models of composters this catalog offers? We all know that compost happens eventually, even if the heap is never turned. Still, we wonder whether the company's claims to fast compost and good quality bins are valid.

Except for some particularly gaudy garden ornaments, in general this catalog offers pretty sensible-sounding stuff. One item, however, surely has caused you to wonder and maybe even bite. I speak of the upside-down tomato grower. Judging from catalogs as well as my visits to nurseries, this method is now widely popular. From Gardener's Supply, you can buy planters and a sturdy four-plant hanger. Various accoutrements are also available. Improvements for Your Home, Inside and Out will sell you a combination support and planter (not clear how many plants it will hold). Well, do they work? Do they eliminate "in-ground insects or tomatoes rotting on the ground," with "no weeding and less chance of soil-borne diseases"? (Do they produce tomatoes?)

There are many other somewhat less exotic products in various catalogs: self-watering window boxes; instant mulch (just add water to expand it); the Garden Groom Pro Trimmer, the subject also of an interminable TV commercial (makes nice, flat hedges, while collecting the cuttings); a lawn sweeper; mosquito traps; seats and kneelers to make weeding easy; and Rot-Stop to prevent blossom-end rot on tomatoes. And should we all immediately order all three deer repellents: pouches, clips and "the station"? Maybe include some squirrel and rodent repellent?

Perhaps you've shopped on line and bought the Easy Bloom Plant Sensor Plus. After sticking it in the soil for a while, plug it into your computer's USB port to "adjust raw sensor data with your local growing zones, climate, and hourly weather." Looking for other gimmicks on line, I found mostly gardening tips, all for free. Let's include

those. Vinegar, citrus peel and baking soda are touted as good in various ways for plants; did *you* have any luck?

Just let me know what you've tried and how well your purchases or suggestions worked. Send me an e-mail at jimlex@hughes.net.



WHAT'S BUGGING US? By Jeanne Eichelberger

There's a Scottish gardening rule of thumb that if you find a bug that moves slowly enough to catch and kill it, go ahead and kill it because it's probably a bad guy. If it moves really fast, assume it's in a hurry to help you. Well, that may be a good start, but of course there's more to it than that.

A friend just forwarded me an excellent article from the Dave's Garden web site, "The Dirty Half Dozen: Six Insects That Are Harmful To Vegetable Gardens" by Melody Rose (<http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/1391>). The six bad guys under discussion are the spotted cucumber beetle, aphids, the striped blister beetle, the tomato hornworm, grasshoppers, and leaf-footed bugs. Herewith some highlights:

-The spotted cucumber beetle doesn't care whether you're growing cucumbers; it will invade your garden anyway, bringing with it a nasty virus, Bacterial Wilt, which damages and kills many types of vining vegetables. The beetle looks like a greenish ladybug, so people tend not to pay much attention to it. Between devouring plants and spreading the

virus, it can be one of the most destructive insects in the garden.

-The striped blister beetle is not idly named; it actually does raise nasty blisters on the skin if you crush it. Also called "army beetles", they travel in large groups and can lay waste a garden in short order. The author's grandmother used to control them by sprinkling flour on the adult beetles, gumming up their legs and wings so they fell to the ground and died. (Wonder if that works on beetles in general...?)

-Tomato hornworms feed on just about any member of the nightshade family and can strip an entire plant of its leaves in a day. Suddenly bare branches on the tomato plants are an almost sure sign that tomato hornworms have moved in. The author recommends hand-picking the caterpillars or using the organic pesticide *Bacillus thuringiensis*. **However**, if you notice small white things hanging off a caterpillar, just move the caterpillar off the plant, but don't kill it. The white things are parasitic wasps which have already doomed the host and will mature to produce more hornworm-eating babies if you let them.

There's much more to this very well-written article, including excellent pictures of the bad guys. Prompted by links in the article, I also found an earlier article by Melody Rose entitled "Nature's Ninjas", an excellent overview of beneficial insects in the garden (<http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/056/>). The Dave's Garden website also offers an Insect Identification Forum which helps gardeners identify unknown insects in their gardens.



ARE BOTANICAL GARDENS TURNING AWAY FROM FLOWERS AND GOING WITH SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPES?

Submitted by Sally Nunnely

Monday's New York Times had an interesting article about the changes taking place at the nation's botanical gardens. The central theme is that they are moving away from flowers due to diminishing interest and are instead emphasizing sustainable landscapes and local foods. I thought RAMGA members might be interested in this phenomenon since here in Rockbridge County we are also encouraging reliance on local foods and a sustainable landscape.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/us/27/botanical.html?src=sch&pagewanted=all>



DID YOU KNOW.....

There is a Lady Banks rose that was planted in Tombstone, AZ in 1885 by a Scottish immigrant homesick for the gardens of her native lands. Today, that rose has a trunk 12 feet in circumference, its branches covering 8,000 sq ft! Impossible??!! Well apparently not. It's still there, at the Rose Tree Inn and Museum, blooming away in the spring and giving shade in the summer. Stop by and see it!

In olden times, a good farmer or plantsman would sow his seeds while naked. Here is the excellent reasoning - if one could sit on the ground with a bare bottom, and be comfortable, it was warm enough to plant seeds. Unfortunately the images conjured up are hard to erase from the mind's eye.

<i>August</i>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
10	RAMGA Board Meeting - 2pm
July to Aug 31	Illustrating the Flora of Virginia*
2	CSI for Plants*
4,7	Step into the Shade*
7, 11, 18	Butterfly Walk*
7	Tomato Tasting*
11, 14	Hummingbird & Butterfly Gardening*
12	You Want to Garden Where?*
14	Summer Fruit Tasting*
20-22	In the Garden*
24	Building a Cold Frame*
25	Gardens of Central & So. America*
* See Educational Events Calendar in this issue	



Calendar of Educational Events – August 2010

Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
July -Aug 31 Cost: Free	The Art of our Plants: Illustrating the <i>Flora of Virginia</i> Credits: 1 hr.	Native plants take center stage in a new exhibition of illustrations from the upcoming <i>Flora of Virginia</i>	UVA's Blandy Experimental Farm in Boyce www.virginia.edu/blandy/ 540-837-1758
Aug 2 7:00-9:00pm \$16 (\$10 for NBG Members)	CSI FOR PLANTS Credits: 2 hrs.	Be a plant detective and diagnose plant problems with Lynette Swanson, retired VA Coop. Ext. Agent of Norfolk.	Norfolk Botanical Garden www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org/programs-events/calendar
Aug 4, 7 1:30pm Cost: Free	Step into the Shade: Gardening with Hosta & Other Shade Perennials Credits: 1 Hr.	Learn all about creating a beautiful shade garden and selecting the proper plants.	Andre Viette's Fishersville, VA www.inthegardenradio.com 800/575-5538
Aug 7, 11, 18 Noon-1:00pm Cost: Free	Butterfly Walk Credits: 1 hr	Entomologist Tom McAvoy	Hahn Garden hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html 540/837-1758, or email fosaevents@virginia.edu
Aug 7 9:30-11:30am Cost: \$10	Tomato Tasting Credits: 2 hrs	This workshop will examine and rate a sample of varieties now available to gardeners. Participants may bring their own favorite varieties.	Monticello Garden Center, Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center www.monticello.org
Aug 11, 14 1:30pm	Hummingbird and Butterfly Gardening	Did you know there are plants that act as hosts	Andre Viette's Fishersville, VA

Cost: Free	Credits: 1 hr	for butterfly larvae and the plants that supply nectar for adult butterflies and hummingbirds?	inthegardenradio.com 800/575-5538
Aug 12 10:00-11:30am Cost: \$10 \$8 FOSA members	You want to garden where? Credits: 1.5 hrs	Fasten your seatbelts as you explore unusual ways and places to garden with Steve Carroll.	State Arboretum of VA www.virginia.edu/blandy 540-837-1758 or email fosaevents@virginia.edu
Aug 14 9:30am Reservations required Cost: \$10 Aug 20-22 Weekend Cost: check for prices	Summer Fruit Tasting Credits: 2 hrs. In the Garden Homestead & AHS Credit: 3 hrs	Short talks on the history of fruit growing in Virginia plus a fruit feast. Jefferson's Fruiterie Weekend full of gardening tips. Numerous activities to choose from. Several seminars and a tour of Homestead Gardens	Meet at the Garden Center, Thomas Jefferson Visitor Center, www.monticello.org 434/984-9822 Homestead 866/354-4653 www.thehomestead.com/upcoming_holidays
Aug 24 1:00-3:00pm Cost: \$15 \$12 FOSA members	Building a Cold Frame Credits: 2 hrs	They will build a demonstration cold frame, and you will leave with a set of plans for building your own.	Blandy Experimental Farm 540-837-1758 or email fosaevents@virginia.edu
Aug 25 1:00-3:00pm Cost: \$16, \$10 NBG members	Gardens of Central and South America Credits: 2 hrs	Angela Weber takes you on a virtual tour of lush tropical gardens with exotic plants.	Norfolk Botanical Gardens www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org/programs-events/calendar
On-line courses available for credit	Department of Plant Pathology, Ohio State University	Various online courses available	http://plantpath.osu.edu/extension/outreach/online/index_html
Credit *** Contact Liz Gordon for credit questions: saddleup4travel@comcast.net , 464-4901			

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IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

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The newsletter may also be viewed at www.ramga.org

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