

# IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The December 2009 Monthly Journal  
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association  
Volume 13, Number 12  
[www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)



"Nothing is more a child of art than a garden." Sir Walter Scott

## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN By Barbara Thomas

As I look back over a year and a half of columns and my "Ideas To Do" list, there are both items to check off as "completed" and a few things left in the "Do" list. On my computer I kept notes of possible column topics and the words "Inspire, remind, inform and thanks" to keep me on track as I labored over writing each month. As to inspiration within my columns, one can only hope. Reminders and information have certainly



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been steady throughout the months. And there are definitely a lot of "Thanks" to be given to members of the RAMGA Board, both outgoing and incoming. And to all MG's, another hearty "Thank you" for all the known volunteering and also the unheralded activities members do on behalf of RAMGA. I am truly proud to have been RAMGA President (and look forward to being "just" Team Leader of the educational 4-H program at Natural Bridge Elementary School and the Norrington's Nook Garden).

On the completions side, we updated our By Laws (which hadn't been updated for eight years), had more members attend the annual VMGA conference held at Blacksburg in June and had a record number of entries in the Horticulture Show at the Rockbridge County Fair. Another one of my hopes was to have more of us plant an extra row of vegetables for donation to our local food banks (see Jim Kvach for advice on this one). Who will volunteer to plant an extra row of veggies next spring? MGs did begin to volunteer with the Every House A Garden project this year. That effort will continue and expand this next growing season so that is a great step toward getting quality fresh food into the stomachs of those who need it the most. I figure that "my" families tried/ate five new types of vegetables and grew about \$250 worth of fresh produce!

As our membership grows, the task of having a fair, flexible yet systematic organization will continue be addressed. To the next President, Nancy Smith, I bequeath the task of figuring out how best to have members shift between projects and how to assist project/team leaders find replacements. When we were a smaller organization, project leaders found their own replacements so that process wasn't just placed on the President or Vice-President. If members have ideas on how to solve these challenges, please share them with Nancy or Amy Scheuer (our new vice-president), not me!

Remember that our new class will start on January 12 so save several Tuesday and Thursdays from 9:00 to 12:00 to attend. Although the sessions do not count for your educational hours, it is nice to meet new people, help out the class committee and re-learn material from favorite speakers.

So In ending my tenure, I wish you "Happy Holiday" once more! And to all, a good growing New Year!



## It's Dues Time Again



January is the beginning of RAMGA's new fiscal year and time once again to collect

dues. *At the November meeting, the board approved an increase in our annual dues to \$15.00. For non-Master Gardeners who would like to continue to receive our newsletter, a subscription is now \$10.00.*

All dues must be paid by check to facilitate record keeping. **Mail your dues no later than January 30<sup>th</sup>.** **Thank-you!** Please make your check out to RAMGA and mail it to:

**RAMGA**  
**PO Drawer 897**  
**Lexington, VA 24450**

**A NOTE FROM THE RECORDS  
 COORDINATOR  
 Carol Schoner**

**A Note from the Records Coordinator**  
 This is just a note to keep you informed on our membership. We now have **93 master gardeners** listed on the RAMGA active list. We have completed and reported well over **3100 volunteer and continuing education hours** since January 1 2009. That is great work in and about our community. And all being accomplished while learning, having fun, and interacting with some great gardeners.

Three gardeners have now been added to our Active Master Gardener list. Two more of the master gardener interns

from the **Class of 2008** have completed and reported their 50 hours: **Chris and Marie Shiraki**. Congratulations! And **Faith Vosburgh**, who many of you know as the owner of **The Potting Shed**, has asked to be on our active list. Faith originally was an active Master Gardener in the Fairfax area. She did not transfer her membership when she moved her, but has now asked to be included in our membership. Welcome, Faith.

And now something about time reporting!! Of the 93 MGs listed as "Active", only 30 (that less than a third) have completed and reported the 20/8 hours needed to stay active. Based on the work being done in our area, I am thinking that you just have not gotten your time sheets submitted to me yet. Am I right? I hope so! You have one month left to get those hours completed for 2009 and two months to report those hours to me (I ask that you submit your 2009 hours to me by 1/31/2010). Send your time sheets to Carol Schoner, [cschoner@comcast.net](mailto:cschoner@comcast.net) or leave them at the Help Desk in the Extension Office. **Keep those time sheets coming!!!**



**BAPTISIA AUSTRALIS**

**By Stephen Banks**

**Annotated by Margaret Fletcher**

Baptisia australis is a stately yet tough herbaceous perennial. I had planned to write a borderline formal article about

this native legume. (Master Gardener: Legume? Who knew?!) My good intentions were stymied by too much information (for me) about the plant, some of it differing; e.g., botanical family name changes and some disagreements about species and subspecies. So, I decided to write more about my personal experiences with this wonderful plant. I have included some references below for those who want more details.

I bought my three plants from Bluestone Perennials. Although small, each plant had several eyes. (MG: Legumes have eyes?) Fooled by their size and not reading enclosed instructions, I planted them close together (MG: Sure sounds familiar!) in a narrow cutting bed. Well, they grew large. Each plant is a good three feet tall. They would have been easily as wide except for being so crowded. The plants form deep taproots, not unlike herbaceous peonies. So, consider carefully where you plant them as they are tough to move. (MG: Ask Mary or Tracey - we dug some for the plant sale and it was NOT easy. If our customers only knew how we abuse innocent plants!)

Stems emerge from underground eyes in April. When the plants were young, the stems were few (two or three) and thin (like a thin pencil). On the mature plants, roughly five or six years, 15 to 25 stems emerge, each gaining in diameter (like a fat pencil). The stems have alternating

trifoliate leaves. The three rounded leaflets are blue-gray, blue-green, blue-gray-green, gray-green depending on whether you ask men or women and if they are gardeners or artists. Anyway, the foliage is striking with a definite bluish cast. In May, stunning indigo blue flowers one to two feet long spike above the foliage. (MG: Andre Viette has several magnificent specimens; worth the visit in spring!)

I have never had a second flowering during the growing season but have read that this can occur. The lack of second flowering is made up for by the black seedpods on long stems and the foliage, both good for flower arrangements. When I have cut the stems back to ground level, new stems do not appear. However, when the stems are cut several nodes above the ground, new fresh foliage grows from the stem. So far, pests, mammal or insect, have not noticeably bothered the plants. I have read the foliage is mildly toxic to most mammals and so it grows in pastures in its native habitat—E, SE US. (Master Gardener: I agree. Although its neighbors are munched to the ground, my baptisia stands tall.)

When I clean up the plant after the frost, I break the remaining pods, scattering the seed. In the spring, some seedlings emerge at the same time the mother plant awakens. (Note: if grown in seed flats, the seeds need special

treatment. I have found it easier to let the winter cold and wet do the work.) I have transplanted the volunteer seedlings, finding that even after a month or so of growth, they start to form a taproot so it is best not to wait too long. By the end of the first year, with luck, it will have one stem about 6 inches tall. By the end of the second season there might be two or three stems a foot tall. The plant still has a fragile appearance. Each year it gets stronger. Under good conditions, the seedling will take five to six years to grow into a mature plant, although they flower before that. (Master Gardener: I have 3 - all from Steve. The oldest blooms beautifully and needs its neighbors thinned so it can spread. The 2 newer will probably bloom this spring. Hope I've given them enough room.)

Other Baptisias. I planted Baptisia 'Carolina Moonlight' several years ago. This hybrid is a nice enough plant with soft yellow flowers that appear earlier than *B. australis*. But Carolina Moonlight's foliage is a washed-out version of *B. australis*. I have seen other species and hybrids in catalogs (such as Wayside Gardens, White Flower Farm and Gossler Farms Nursery. However, from the pictures, none seem as dramatic as the *B. australis* I got from Bluestone Perennials. (MG: I covet Baptisia Twilite Prairie Blues. Check Google Images.)

Seeds from my *B. australis* are available from Margaret Fletcher. I have noticed some minor variation in the color of some of the seed-grown plants. To assure getting the identical plant one has selected, one must carefully dig and divide the roots keeping one or more eyes. (MG: Good luck! See comments above about our dig/divide.)

MG: I agree with Steve: It's a wonderful plant. Because of size, it can anchor a border or, if your borders are like mine, at least a section. And I still covet that Baptisia Twilite Prairie blues. And remember: We will have some for sale next spring.

Helpful sources of information include the following:

1. Wikipedia: *Baptisia australis*.
2. Baptisia—Revenge of the Redneck Lupines by Tony Avent (Horticulture Magazine, June 2002, available on-line at [www.plantdelights.com/Tony/baptisia.html](http://www.plantdelights.com/Tony/baptisia.html)).
3. The Southern Living Garden Book
4. Encyclopedia of Garden Plants by the American Horticultural Society
5. Perennials (Volume I Early Perennials) by Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix
6. Easy Wildflowers ([www.easywildflowers.com](http://www.easywildflowers.com))



## GARDENING TOPICS YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT???

This year's Program Committee is forming up, to include Caron Nash and Liz Maurer, and is planning next year's programs.

Please pass along your thoughts and ideas to them. The more give and take there is between the committee and the membership, the better our programs can be tailored to fit your interests. Contact Caron at 464-6271; nashva@comcast.net or Liz at (540) 377-9095; esm306@yahoo.com.



## MG CLASS 2010: WE'RE HOPEFUL

Instructors have been lined up and the schedule of sessions completed. The Steering Committee is ready for further work. All we need is enough folks signing up, and we'll have a Master Gardener Class 2010.

<u>Dec</u>	CALENDAR
4	5 <sup>th</sup> Annual Continuing Education Seminar*
* See Educational Events Calendar this issue	

At this writing, we have nine checks in hand. But Dave Buckner, Class Coordinator, knows that every year interested people wait till after the announced deadline (this year, November 19<sup>th</sup>) to make their move. And Dave is more than optimistic. He has said, in fact, that there will be a class. Just to make sure, he has asked RAMGA board members to call persons who have expressed interest but who have not returned applications. They will call anyone they know, first checking with Dave. That way, no prospective trainee will get calls from more than one board member.

We all know the rewards, both social and educational, to be derived from Master Gardening. For the good of our program and for all involved, let's hope the class is formed. Next month: a report.



## MONTHLY MG MEETING A WINNER By Jim Davis

The November MG meeting featured Marek Smith from the Allegheny Highlands office of the Nature Conservancy. The audience had the pleasure of a knowledgeable, articulate and personable speaker who discussed the Conservancy's 9,000 acre holding on Warm Springs Mountain. MGs might have known some of the subjects he covered,

for instance, the use of fire to preserve the forest in a natural state and fighting invasive species, such as garlic mustard. But his accounts of plant communities, descriptions of the area's highlights (such as caves and the pristine Cowpasture River) and explanation of work with surrounding public forests were enlightening. Attesting to the success of the talk were the many questions that followed. Attendance at the meeting was not as large as usual. It was encouraging, however, to see several guests in the audience. The Nature Conservancy is a national, non-profit organization that buys acreage to preserve ecologically important lands and waters.

After the talk, Anne Riffey-Buckner presented outgoing president Barbara Thomas with a token reward for her hard work and leadership during the previous year. The gift was a copy of *Remarkable Trees of Virginia*, inscribed to her by one of the authors.

## Calendar of Educational Events – December 2009



Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
<b>December 4</b> 9:00am – 4:30pm Cost: \$20	<b>5<sup>th</sup> Annual Continuing Education Seminar</b> <u>Credits: 7 hrs</u>	Benefits of Composting; Exotic Invasive Insects; Design & Plants for Shade Gardens; and more!	Charlottesville, VA Register at the Albemarle Extension Office: 434-872-4580
<b>LOOKING AHEAD:</b>			
<b>Jan 15-18, Feb 12-15, March 13-14, and April 10-11</b> Cost: By 11/15, sliding scale: \$895-\$1200. After 11/15: \$995-\$1200.	<b>Blue Ridge Permaculture Design Course</b> <u>Credits: ***</u>	Permaculture Design Course: working with natural systems to design sustainable environments that produce food, shelter, and energy. This 72-hour certificate course is presented by the Blue Ridge Permaculture Network.	Harrisonburg, VA <a href="http://www.blueridgepermaculture.net/courses.html">http://www.blueridgepermaculture.net/courses.html</a>

**2008-2009**

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Sherry Smith and Jeanne Eichelberger, Newsletter

**IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN**

Editor-in-chief     Sherry Smith  
Managing Editor    Jeanne Eichelberger

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

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