

# IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN



## The December 2011 Monthly Journal Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association

[www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)

"It is a golden maxim to cultivate your garden for the nose, and the eyes will take care of themselves." -Robert Louis Stevenson

### THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Amy Scheuer



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THE HOLIDAY SEASON IS HERE ALREADY!!! And this is my last month as your President. I must say that it has been an honor and a privilege. I know that Pat Kovach, my successor, is well equipped to guide this wonderful organization through 2012.

Recently, we have added Lylburn Downing Middle School's Community Garden to our educational projects with Nancy Trump at the helm. Our Master Gardeners' "touch" through our education and participation in our communities is seen and felt throughout Rockbridge County, and we should be proud of that. We now need to add more MGs to our organization, so I am urging you all to speak to family and friends to sign up for our Class beginning on 1/10/12.

Thank you for a wonderful, memorable year!!

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!

## David Beebe: CSA's and Organic Gardening

Our November speaker was David Beebe of Cherry Ridge Organic Farm, a community supported agriculture program which is located at 2715 Walkers Creek Road off of Maury River Road, (Rt 39) 6 miles north of Rockbridge Baths. He gives tours and would love to have you visit. Call him at 540-348-5107 to arrange a time. Please visit his website:

[cherryridgeorganicfarm.vpweb.com](http://cherryridgeorganicfarm.vpweb.com) for more information. The full text of David's notes for his talk is available on the MG website... [David Beebe Presentation](#)

**This is a summary of the parts of his talk dealing with tools and pest management.**

### Tools:

**Hula hoe**- great tool for removing weeds without planting more, while keeping walkways hard and accessible during wet weather. Great weeder around larger plants. Care must be taken not to nick tender stems of crops with sharp edges of tool.

**Pitchfork**-essential tool for handling bark mulch, compost, weed piles. Take care to not leave with tines turned up where they can puncture ankles and pets running about the garden.

**Potato hoe**-perfect for hilling rows, moving rocks, piling weeds, light cultivation around plants, pulling vines and spreading mulch.

**Bow Rake**-used to flatten rows for planting, piling weeds for pick up with pitchfork.

### Organic Insecticides

Many erroneously believe that Organic method means we do not use any sprays. We try to avoid use of pesticides and allow natural controls to work, believing there has to be a few bugs to feed the natural predators like spiders, lacewings, praying mantis, assassin bugs,

trichogramma and braconid wasps, blue mud wasps and others, but on some occasions there has to be remedial control in order to save a crop from serious damage, or keep fruits acceptable in appearance to finicky customers. Crops susceptible to flea beetle damage are the only ones that we use insecticides in a prophylactic way, as we know they will do great harm. We practice Integrated Pest management but find it requires careful evaluation, knowledge of the pest, and consideration of potential damage to the crop.

### Pesticides of the organic Gardener

**Diatomaceous earth**-a white powder made of microscopic sea organisms called Diatoms, which is very effective in killing soft-bodied insects, parasites and larval stage of larger insects. **Problem:** Leaves residue once dry of white powder that is not easy to wash off fruits and vegetables ready for sale- also looks bad to those that suspect we are not organic.

**Bacillus Thuringiensis**-a naturally occurring bacteria that when mixed with water can be sprayed on leaves of all Cole plants and completely controls caterpillars of the cabbage looper moths. A near life time cure for tent caterpillar infestations on wild cherry trees. Some subspecies are effective on bean beetles larvae. It is effective on caterpillars but doesn't harm birds, humans or pets. **Problem:** BT should be used only on target crops to prevent damage to butterflies and other moth species. Might spread diseases of cucumbers and melons.

**Castile soap**-all natural, vegetable oil based, organic soap (not detergent) that, mixed with water gives mild control of some soft bodied insects like aphids where crop is near harvest as it can be easily washed from fruits and leaves. Helps dissolve and suspend repellent oils and make other insecticides more effective by sticking to insects. **Problem:** care is needed to avoid foaming in sprayer; add water, then soap, stir gently. Back spray will irritate eyes.

**Thyme oil**-a powerful insect deterrent mixed with water and soap for repelling flea beetles, aphids, corn borers, Japanese beetles, cabbage loopers and many others. **Problem:** can be an allergen to some sensitive individuals, irritant to most when concentrated, can kill plants if applied too strong and may repel necessary pollinators.

**Sluggo**-all natural, completely safe iron phosphate in a pelleted wheat form that is excellent for effective control of slugs and snails. **Problem:** pellets may damage leaves and make lettuce unsightly. Care must be taken to avoid pellets falling onto leaves.

**Pyrethrum-Pyganic™**-(not to be confused with inorganic synthetic cube resin pyrethrin) excellent fast acting, all natural extract of daisy flower that is very effective in killing most all insects except squash bugs. Used as a water-diluted spray is useful in many crops even at harvest. **Problem:** must be sprayed on the insect directly. It is expensive and has no residual effect.

**Spinocide™**-very effective natural pesticide derived from the byproduct of a specific bacteria that only grows in the leftovers from making rum !! This water soluble spray is very effective on a wide variety of insects except adult squash bugs. It is useful to alternate with Pyganic™ thus preventing resistance to the pesticides.

**Row cover**-crops that do not need access from pollinators like eggplants and Swiss Chard, but are susceptible to damage from pests may be covered by a prophylactic barrier. This thin cloth-like sheeting is designed to transmit most of the solar energy, yet not overheat in summer sun, and allow water to penetrate. **Problem:** expensive, blows in the wind and needs to be firmly pinned down which interferes with harvesting.

**Mole chaser®**-the best method of moving moles and voles we have found yet. This simple battery powered tool, penetrates in to the ground in mole infested areas and quickly moves them away from crop plants by making a rattling sound. **Problem:** expensive at \$70 each they only cover an area of 40 feet X 40 feet. Rattling sounds very much like a threatened rattlesnake !

**Night Predator™**-solar powered night predator scaring device. It blinks a red LED light only during dark hours startling deer, bears, raccoons, possums and other night marauding garden thieves (including humans). **Problem:** expensive at \$50 each, they need to be moved routinely to prevent predators becoming accustomed and they need to be set at 40 foot intervals.

**Electric fence**- Solar powered is cost effective and excellent in keeping out many 4-legged pests. Repels pets and livestock by quickly teaching them to avoid the garden. Easy to set up and maintain, and effective at repelling raccoons, ground hogs, deer, bears, cats and dogs. **Problem:** complicates access to garden, causes interference on AM radio, may offend neighbors with pets or small children, can cause fire if not kept free of weeds and paper trash.

**Bone meal:** excellent deterrent to Colorado Potato beetle when dusted on seed pieces. **Problem:** may attract dogs to dig for the bone.



## Getting Your Garden Ready for Winter

Preparing your garden, lawn, and tool shed for winter is an essential fall activity that lasts through December.

1. One of the most important things you can do to prepare your lawn and flower beds for winter is to give them a deep and thorough watering before the ground freezes to provide plants with the water they need to survive the winter.
2. Fertilize your beds in the fall with a slow-release organic fertilizer or compost. Organic fertilizers are preferable because they distribute nutrients evenly over time, preventing plants from growing too early in the winter or spring. Inorganic fertilizers tend to work quickly, jump starting growth too early.
3. When nightly temperatures begin to go below 55°F, it is important to move any tender bulb perennials and tropical plants indoors. Tender bulbs include dahlias, cannas, gladiolus, calla lilies, and Caladium. Store bulbs in a cardboard box filled with peat moss and keep in a frost-free place.
4. Spraying your trees and shrubs with a highly refined horticultural oil spray will kill many overwintering insects. For most effective control, it is good to make two applications- once in late fall (after leaves are raked up) and again in February. Be sure to coat all surfaces of the tree branches and trunk.
5. When your plants have finished blooming for the year, you can cut them back and compost them. Bag up and throw away any plant foliage that looks diseased, has powdery mildew, or insect damage. It is especially important to cut back and throw out peony foliage as peonies are prone to fungal diseases. Leaves under native dogwoods should be raked up as they may harbor anthracnose spores. Black spot can overwinter in leaves and plant debris left under rose bushes. Leaves and dropped fruit under fruit trees, crabapples and grapes should be removed to prevent fungi. It is safest to dispose of leaves and debris from these plants in the trash.
6. Leave the stems of taller Sedums, ornamental grasses, and the seed pods of Yucca, poppies, and Siberian Iris because they to add winter interest.
7. Do not cut back ornamental grasses, Buddleia, Crape Myrtle, Callicarpa, or Caryopteris until spring after the danger of frost. In spring after the threat of cold weather, cut the shrubs back until you reach a green stem or to 12"-18".
8. Fall is a great time for weeding too. By doing your weeding in the fall, you get a great head start on spring weeds and hopefully prevent current weeds from seeding.
9. Mulching is highly recommended to keep plants from heaving and to protect the crowns of more tender plants. Mulch is great for keeping down weeds and keeping the soil evenly moist throughout winter.
10. Protect your evergreen shrubs from drying in the Rockbridge County winds of winter. Spray the foliage of broad-leaved evergreen shrubs in exposed positions with an anti-desiccant spray. Boxwood and junipers are particularly prone to wind burn.
11. Clean dirt off tools to prevent them from rusting. Sharpen any tools that need it. Tools with wooden handles should be rubbed down with a mixture of two parts boiled linseed oil to one part paint thinner or turpentine to keep them from cracking.
12. Wait for the new garden catalogs to arrive in your mailbox!

## PRINCIPLES OF LANDSCAPING

By Jim Davis

(Who flunked the course)

Landscaping is a skill I've never mastered. I've tried; in addition to the session in my Master Gardener Class, I attended one at Master Gardener College held by Robert McDuffie, a well known professor at Virginia Tech. But I still can't say I'm ready to take on a major design. Even so, three concepts I've picked up seem to make pretty good sense, and when asked by a couple of friends for advice, I've passed them along.

First and most important is developing a sense of place, that is, arranging trees, shrubs and beds to create an area of interest that becomes a destination. I suppose this principle accounts in part for the allées in the formal gardens of Europe, long lanes formed by trees with a statues at the end. Around here we want something considerably less formal, of course. We've been taught to plant perennials in threes (or fives) for the best effect. Following this idea, we might, then, plant three small trees in a triangle and put a bench or a table with chairs in the middle of them. If the yard is large, one could use walkways and beds to guide toward an outbuilding or a bed where the gardener's speciality is shown off. You know I'm not competent to get into much more detail, but looking through gardening magazines with the sense-of-place concept in mind would offer some good ideas.

In McDuffie's class, our teacher asked us to design a landscape for a small yard. One member of the class put a garden object in her solution, a sculpture on a short column. McDuffie pounced. No. Never. No objects of so-called art in the garden. I didn't comment, but I thought of the stone capital in my garden. I bought it from Governor's Antiques, north of Richmond, and I think of it as poetic, something Ozymandias left behind. It came from a

demolished church, and I confess my desire for a stone cherub, also available, big as a Volkswagen. But McDuffie was right. We see gardens with stuff that adds no beauty.

Wishing wells are common. (Though not found often *in* gardens, they stand solitary near them, assertively denying the Sacred Principle of Sense of Place.) And I shudder to think what McDuffie would say about homemade objects designed to be clever. There is, however, a garden on Massie Street in Lexington, a kind of folk garden, with more objects than plants. It's one of my favorites, and for me, it works. But if asked, I'd say, "Be conservative."

Finally, a battle long lost and no sense fighting—that of foundation plants. I speculate the practice of planting next to the foundation arose when houses had exposed crawl space. Nowadays, a house might have a cinderblock foundation under brick or wood, and the householder might want to hide it. But otherwise, why line up plants? In eighteenth-century England, Capability Brown, the famous landscape architect, left foundations bare on all the great estates whose grounds he designed. One critic called the modern practice "decorating the house," like stringing lights at Christmas. Anyway, the results usually aren't very pretty. An informed or talented gardener might plant an attractive row, but what we usually see is a mess allowed to overwhelm the house in size, or a mess languishing without care into puny, struggling stalks, or—not quite a mess—plants that simply make no statement.

Tradition is strong; many still insist on foundation plants. To my friends, I've recommended extending the planting away from the house, even creating a border or bed. Avoid, I've suggested, the usual boring sheared evergreens and emphasize variety of shape, color and size. And use plants consistent with the style of the house. (Recently, in another county, I saw a simple, one-story house adorned in front with topiary.) A greeting at the front

door would be nice, maybe a small flowering tree and some container plants. Corners of the house can be softened with columnar evergreens, but one should always keep in mind, as with any plants, the ultimate size and spread. Indeed, plants as well as mulch, should be kept away from the house to prevent fire. Mulch, I emphasize, has been known to combust spontaneously or in other ways.

Having a limited knowledge might make it easier for a person to be dogmatic and prolix. But you asked me. You didn't? Well, somebody did.



## Thank You Master Gardeners

I want to thank everyone who came and listened to our speakers this year

### A BIG THANK YOU to our PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Jim Davis, John Dinkel, Sunny MacDonald, Liz Maurer,  
Cindy Miller, Sally Nunnely Chris & Marie Shiraki  
and Faith Vosburgh

Without you it would not have been a success!

The program committee contacted speakers and introduced them  
Submitted posters to the library for their bulletin board  
Submitted information to the newspapers for the calendar  
Distributed bookmarkers to local bookstores and Library  
Provided snacks & Setup meeting room

If you would like to help with the committee next year  
Please contact a Board Member  
Thank you, Caren Nash

## Bringing Back Your Poinsettia

Poinsettias are members of the Euphorbia family. Like all Euphorbias, it has a sticky, somewhat noxious white sap that can be irritating to the skin or eyes. Toxicity of this species has been very exaggerated, however, and at worst it can cause some oral irritation or stomach ache if eaten.

### Keeping your Poinsettia

After the holiday season, you will notice it starting to lose the pretty bracts, no matter how well you take care of it. This is normal. Some recommend a period of 'rest' at this time- like putting these plants in a cool cellar or dark place until spring time. Temperatures for this rest period should be at or under 60F, but not over. Keep watering it regularly, but try to keep it on the drier side now (not bone dry, ever, though!). Bring them back of out 'resting' in spring.

By spring time these plants benefit from a pruning- cut them back to about 6"-8". Water as before, but now you can start adding in some water-soluble well-balanced plant fertilizer every 2-4 weeks. You should notice some healthy new leaves and stem growth within a month. If warm enough outdoors (no risk of frost) it is best to take these plants outdoors for the rest

of the spring and summer. If you want your plants to remain bushy and compact, you will need to prune repeatedly every few months. But do not prune near the end of summer and not again after that until the following spring.

### To 're-bloom' indoor plants:

Starting October 1, these plants should be moved into a **totally dark** area (room or box) overnight at least 12 hours at a time, with temps in the 60s-70s. If kept in a dark room be sure no one goes into it accidentally overnight and turns on a light, or it could adversely affect their flowering schedule. In the day they need at least 6-8 hours of bright filtered or direct sunlight. Temperature ranges and lighting times are critical for blooming over the holiday season. Variations from these parameters could make these plants bloom too late, drop bracts too early, or not flower at all. Water and fertilize as before, but stop the fertilization schedule as soon as signs of bract or flower formation begin. If everything goes well, you will have plants that look like they did the season before, but perhaps even better.

### Poinsettia pests:

Though many insects/mites can infest these plants, by far the most common pest encountered is the white fly. This insect is particularly hard to eradicate, but fortunately they rarely do much damage to this species of plant unless they are present in massive numbers. White flies can be physically hosed off, and insecticidal soaps help prevent their return. Remember they live on the undersides, so hosing should be from below, ideally.

Spider mites and fungus gnats can be controlled with insecticidal soap.

Mealy bugs are a relatively dangerous pest, but easy to see and fairly easy to control. Alcohol swabbing and/or insecticidal soap takes care of these nuisances.

## Volunteer Alerts

1. RAMGA is in need of a new Program Coordinator and committee for next year starting January. Duties include contacting prospective speakers for RAMGA meetings which are held on the 4th Thursday - Feb, March, April, May, October and November. Reserving the meeting place and setting up the room for the meeting. Writing an article for RAMGA newsletter and publicity. If you are interested please contact Caren Nash at [nashva@comcast.net](mailto:nashva@comcast.net) or see her at a board meeting.

2. Did you know that you can earn continuing education hours by researching and submitting an article for the newsletter? If you have an idea or questions, please contact Molly Delappe at [mkbluce@yahoo.com](mailto:mkbluce@yahoo.com).



## Early 2012 Educational Programs

January 11, 2012. Wednesday. 12:00-1:00pm. "So You Want to be a Beekeeper...". Hahn Horticulture Garden, Va Tech, Blacksburg. Veteran beekeeper Mark Chorba will give an overview of backyard beekeeping and details about the Beginner's Beekeeping Course sponsored by the New River Valley Beekeepers Association (two day course - Jan 28 and March 31). Call Stephanie at 540-231-5970 to register by phone or email [vtgarden@vt.edu](mailto:vtgarden@vt.edu) **\*\*1 credit hour\*\*\*** <http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html>

Jan. 13-16, Jan. 27-29, Feb. 18-20, and March 3-4, 2012. 2012 Permaculture Design Course: Sustainability Strategies for the Blue Ridge. A 72-hour course held near Charlottesville. Early registration (by Nov 15) from \$895 to \$1200. Limited scholarships may be available. Contact Terry Lilley at [tygerlilley@gmail.com](mailto:tygerlilley@gmail.com) or 434-296-3963. Website -

<http://www.blueridgepermaculture.net/courses.html>

January 25, 2012. Wednesday. 12:00-1:00 p.m. Diagnosing Plant Problems in Your Garden or Landscape. Hahn Horticulture Garden, Va Tech, Blacksburg. Elizabeth Bush will share with us the procedures they go through to diagnose plant problems at the Plant Disease Clinic at Virginia Tech. □ Call Stephanie at 540-231-5970 to register by phone or email [vtgarden@vt.edu](mailto:vtgarden@vt.edu) **\*\*\*1 credit hours\*\*\***

<http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html>

February 2, 2012. Thursday. "What's Buggin' You? Insects in our Gardens" The Virginia Horticultural Foundation Home Gardener Day at the Marriott at City Center, Newport News. 8:30am-3pm. Speakers, book signings, Garden Book Store on site, hot lunch, silent auction. Registration \$75 before 1/13: \$90 between 1/14-31: \$100 at door. Info at [www.mahsc.org](http://www.mahsc.org) **\*\*\*4 credit hours\*\*\***

Feb. 10-11, 2012. Friday, Saturday. Virginia Association for Biological Farming (VABF) Conference. Koger Center, Richmond, VA.

More information when posted on website.

<http://www.vabf.org/j/cal>

February 11, 2012. Saturday. 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Woody Plant Propagation Workshop, Hahn Horticulture Garden, Va Tech, Blacksburg. Call Stephanie at 540-231-5970 to register by phone or email [vtgarden@vt.edu](mailto:vtgarden@vt.edu) **\*\*\*2 credit hours\*\*\***

<http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html>

February 16, 2012. Thursday. Piedmont Landscape Assn 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar.

Paramount Theater, Charlottesville, VA. More info at [www.piedmontlandscape.org](http://www.piedmontlandscape.org)

February 25, 2012. Saturday. 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual MG Day at VSU - "Focus on Food- from Field to Table". Ettrick, VA. Registration open 1/2/12. Limited to 200. More info: [www.VMGA.net](http://www.VMGA.net)

May 1-4, 2012, Tuesday- Friday. Southern Region Master Gardener Conference at Natchez, Mississippi. Details and info at <http://msucares.com/srmg> and registration at <http://www.regonline.com/srmg> .



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**IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN**

Editors-in-chief Molly Delappe and Cecile West-Settle

*In and Out of the Garden* is published monthly by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association. Items to be published in the newsletter must be submitted not later than the twentieth of the month prior to publication. Articles, Letters to the Editor, and inquiries about subscriptions may be addressed to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association, c/o Molly Delappe 1705 Raphine Rd Raphine Virginia 24472 or e-mail [mkbluce@yahoo.com](mailto:mkbluce@yahoo.com).

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

Subscription rates: \$10.00 per year.

