

# IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The December 2010 Monthly Journal  
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association

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



"If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." Cicero

## THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Nancy Smith

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As hard as it is to believe, my tenure as President of this fine organization is coming to an end. I am delighted to note, however, that I am handing over my responsibilities to the very capable Amy Scheuer. She has been an invaluable cohort as Vice-President, often thinking of ways to make RAMGA more efficient and accessible to the membership.

I am also pleased to say the remaining and new Board members all have the best interest of the MGs in mind and will continue their extraordinary work.

This has been a year of some accomplishments. Thanks to all who put together the MG class. We had a sterling group of instructors and avid students; all dedicated to making Rockbridge County more productive and beautiful. We also had another very successful Plant Sale, due in great part, to the MG Dig and Divide efforts and gardens, again making Rockbridge County more productive and beautiful.

The very best spot at the County Fair was the little garden area created by botanical entries provided by the MGs. What a serene little space that was. The RAMGA booth tenders at the County Fair offered inspiration and education to its many visitors and signed up some more interested pre-MGs.

With the assistance of her many elves, Barbara Thomas put on a remarkable conference for the Commonwealth's Virginia Master Gardener Association. Sprinkled throughout the year, were the informative, enlightening and a-great-excuse-to-get-together member-friendly monthly meetings, and don't forget the great bus trip.

The Board formulated and enacted a new policy for non-RAMGA sponsored, though credit-worthy projects. We welcomed Waddell's Roots and Shoots and Habitat for Humanity landscaping projects. All the other projects, school gardens, etc. just keep rolling along because of the quiet, caring work carried out by our members.

And we are kept informed about all things MG through the Newsletter and the website. Jane Birzenieks and her team continue to do a great job with the scrapbook.

Hurrah to you all!

I want to leave you some thoughts for gardening in the years to come. Our own Master Gardener, Rita Poranski gave me this piece.



## HOW TO PLANT YOUR GARDEN

Submitted By Rita Poranski

*First, come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses....For the Garden of Your Daily Living,*

*Plant three rows of Peas*

1. *Peace of mind*
2. *Peace of heart*
3. *Peace of soul*

*Plant Four Rows of Squash*

1. *Squash gossip*
2. *Squash indifference*
3. *Squash grumbling*
4. *Squash selfishness*

*Plant Four Rows of Lettuce*

1. *Lettuce be faithful*
2. *Lettuce be kind*
3. *Lettuce be patient*
4. *Lettuce really love one another*

*No Garden is without Turnips*

1. *Turnip for meetings*
2. *Turnip for service*
3. *Turnip to help one another*

*To conclude our garden, we must have thyme:*

1. *Thyme for each other*
2. *Thyme for family*
3. *Thyme for friends*

*Water freely with patience and cultivate with love. There is much fruit in your garden because you reap what you sow.*



### **THE HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PRACTICAL LANDSCAPING PROJECT by Jim Davis**

Our RAMGA board, at the November meeting, approved a new Master Gardener project. It's an activity that's been going on now for some time, providing basic landscaping for houses built in the Habitat for Humanity Program, along with gardening instructions for the owners. The project was proposed by Heather Marion, MG Class of 2005 and three-term secretary to the RAMGA board. Heather has worked on various assignments with Habitat and is now a member of their board. In February of 2008, Dan Walz, Habitat's local executive director, asked her as MG to develop a simple landscaping plan for use with Habitat houses. Heather, never reluctant to initiate action, agreed. Originally, she enlisted Master Gardeners Kathy Kvach, Sherry Smith, Nancy Vallance and Marnie Wheeler to help out. After awhile though Heather continued on her own with Marnie Wheeler helping to draw landscaping plans.

Using landscaping software, Marnie drew plans for four houses, all in Buena Vista. It was a teaching situation from the start, as Heather asked owners about the kinds of

plants they liked and made suggestions. Owners worked with Heather who explained the importance of preparing soil, digging proper holes and caring for plants. During spring break, college students often came from other areas to build Habitat houses, and Heather diverted groups of those volunteers to landscaping. Thus, she was able to teach young people the same gardening principles.

Heather enjoys meeting, getting to know the new householders, and developing friendly relationships with them. No one expects everybody who owns property to know or enjoy gardening, but Heather has been pleased with the number who have developed an interest in planting and caring. Surely these folks are responding to the personal attention they receive. At any rate, Heather says they are clearly proud, not only of their new houses, but also of the greenery surrounding them. It helps make the buildings part of the community.

As a major means of enhancing interest and encouraging care, all families receive notebooks containing photographs of the houses taken during construction, planting and dedication ceremonies. The books include information about the plants, watering and other care, and telephone numbers to call if any questions arise. Planting for five houses has been completed, and work on four additional ones is in progress, three in Buena Vista and one in Collierstown.

Trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses, selected for hardiness and low maintenance, have been largely provided by Habitat, but plants and even hoses will be bought with cash donations

from garden clubs. Master Gardeners have also given plants, and continue to do so.

Some readers may not be familiar with Habitat for Humanity. It's a nationwide program in Rockbridge County begun in 1989. The mission is to provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for deserving families and individuals. Volunteers do the building, many of whom are members of Habitat's partner families, those who are already living in Habitat houses. These folks are obliged to contribute a total of 350 hours constructing their own houses or those of others. Owners receive interest-free loans. Habitat makes no profit from its activities. The Rockbridge program has completed forty-seven houses to date, and is currently building the forty-eighth. Master Gardener Jim Kvach currently serves as president of Rockbridge Habitat.

While no funding has been requested from RAMGA, MG volunteers may now list time spent on Habitat landscaping as volunteer hours. Heather would like, of course, to have many MGs volunteer. She says the word *landscaping* in this case is used loosely. No sophisticated plan is attempted, but rather the creation of a pleasing space. Any of us could do an admirable job of that and help make these brand-new houses appear cozy and welcoming, as only a gardener's hand can do.



## THE FORGOTTEN SEASON

By Stephanie Knipper, State-by-State Gardening E-Newsletter



Winter is often a neglected season in the garden. In our zones, most plants are dormant, we're not outside as much, and, let's face it, it's cold!

There are so many reasons to stay inside and curl up with your favorite gardening books (or magazine!) and dream of next year's garden. However, we don't have to write off winter as lost time. We just need to reshape how we think about gardening in winter.

Structure and texture play more of a role in the winter garden than in any other season. In spring, summer and fall, everything is in bloom. There's always something to see, touch or smell. In contrast, winter's starkness and simplicity can seem overwhelming. I think that's why so many of us give up and wait for spring, making winter the forgotten season. It doesn't have to be this way. The key to gardening in winter is to look beyond flowers to some of the forgotten garden design elements.

There are four things to think about when selecting plants to add interest to your garden in winter. If you incorporate some of these elements, rather than waiting for spring, you'll be waiting for your garden's next surprise!

## Form

Form is probably one of the most important aspects of winter gardening. What is the basic shape of the plant when the leaves and flowers are gone? Is it upright or weeping? Do its limbs stretch to the side or do they twist and curl? Is it conical or rounded? You get the idea?

One of the most interesting shrubs for the winter landscape is *Corvulus avellana* "Contorta" or Harry Lauder's Walking Stick. This shrub is definitely at its best when its branches are stripped bare. That's when its unbelievably twisted branches are on display. Plant this shrub in your garden and I guarantee people will stop and ask you what it is.

Ornamental grasses and other perennials should also be included when talking about plant form. Leave the dried flowers on your hydrangeas and the cone heads on rudbeckias. Don't cut your ornamental grass back. Instead, let the plumes stand tall against the winter sky.

## Foliage

Not every plant loses its leaves when the weather turns cold. Evergreens provide much needed color when the landscape is at its bleakest. Often overlooked when the garden is overwhelmed with color in other seasons, evergreens take center stage in the winter garden.

Although we often think only of trees and shrubs when we talk about evergreens, those are not our only options. Some wonderful perennials and ground covers are evergreen

or semi-evergreen. *Phlox subulata* (creeping phlox) and *Ajuga* (bugleweed) are wonderful evergreen ground covers. *Hedera helix* (English ivy) and *Jasminum nudiflorum* (winter jasmine) are generally evergreen (although winter jasmine may lose its leaves, it retains its green stems) and can be used as vines or as groundcover.

## Bark

Obviously without leaves on our trees and shrubs, the bark is exposed. Too often we see bark as only utilitarian. It protects the tree or shrub and that's it. We forget that bark can be beautiful, providing months of interest in our gardens. Exfoliating bark can be especially interesting. As it peels away revealing other layers, trees and shrubs with exfoliating bark display a tapestry of colors.

*Lagerst roemia indica* (Crape myrtle) is one of my favorite plants for adding interest to the garden year round. We are most familiar with its showy summer flowers, but in winter Crape myrtles display a beautiful exfoliating bark. In addition, these plants can be pruned into an upright shape, adding a sculptural element to the landscape.

Another shrub with beautiful bark is *Cornus sericea* (Redtwig dogwood). An upright shrub, when this bush loses its green foliage it reveals bright red bark, a perfect accent for the winter garden.

## Berries

Winter is the time that berries shine! There's nothing like a splash of red against white snow or gray skies to lift your mood. Berries provide another benefit as well - they not only brighten your landscape, but

also provide needed food for birds and other animals.

If you want a tree that is covered with bright red berries throughout the winter months, consider adding *Crataegus viridis* "Winter King" (Green Hawthorn) to your landscape. Red berries coat the branches of this tree beginning in late September or early October and continuing through the winter months. An added benefit is the white flowers that bloom in spring.

As you can see, there are several ways to bring interest to your garden in the winter. It just takes looking at things in a different way, and the rewards are great. Planning a garden for the fourth season will make counting the time until spring that much easier!



### **BOOKS TO INSPIRE ENDEAVORS IN LANDSCAPE DESIGN, GARDENING**

**By Joel M. Lerner, the Washington Post**

How about some green books for wintertime reading - and for your holiday shopping list? Here are some texts addressing the latest landscape design trends and information on plants' needs:

**"Edible Landscaping"** by Rosalind Creasy (Sierra Club Books, 2010) has offered new ideas to enhance melding landscape design with edible plants. This 384 page soft-cover book is illustrated with more than 300 color photographs taken by Creasy and contains several color garden plans and 20 black and white illustrations. Cost: \$39.95

**"Honeybee Democracy"** by Thomas D. Seeley (Princeton University Press, 2010) will teach you everything you ever wanted to know about one of the world's most beneficial insects. This 280 page clothbound, hardcover includes 30 color images, 30 halftones, 26 line drawings and one table. Cost \$29.95

**"Best Garden Design: Practical Inspiration from the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show"** by Chris Young (Firefly Book, 2010) is a must study if you are searching for landscape design ideas. It is a library of the obscure. It is a 224 page hardcover idea book. Cost \$35

**"The World of Trees"** by Hugh Johnson (University of California Press, 2010) is the ultimate tree-hugger book. It covers tree classifications, weather and hardiness zones of trees in North America and Europe. It's the equivalent of a course in arboriculture for the amateur gardener and landscape professional, including the history and culture of trees, suggesting the climates where you might find them growing. Cost: \$34.95

**"Mini-Farming: Self-Sufficiency on ¼ Acre"** by Brett L. Markham (Skyhorse Publishing, 2010) presents the concept of home food production - a very popular topic in these economic times. Markham covers irrigation, pest control, seed saving and starting, as well as many more aspects involved in self-sufficient gardening for food and money. Cost: \$16.95

## Calendar of Educational Events -December 2010



Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
<b>Dec. 2</b> 6:00-7:30 p.m. Friends of the Garden \$15, general public \$20.  Credit: 1.5 hrs.	<b>"Year-Round Landscape Appeal Using Woody Plants"</b>	Alex Niemiera will present woody plant species that have notable form, fruit, flowers, and foliage that will entice you to stroll through your landscape every day of the year.	Hahn Horticultural Garden VA Tech, Place TBD <a href="http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html">www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html</a> (540) 231-5970
<b>Dec. 4</b> 9:30-11:00 am \$18 / class (\$12 /class for NBG Members) Pre-registration is required.  Credit: 1.5 hrs.	<b>Curator's Corner on "Camellia Care"</b>	Camellias provide year-long interest with their evergreen glossy foliage and showy winter blossoms. NBG's world renowned Hofheimer Camellia Garden is home to more than 1700 camellia plants with over 680 varieties. Learn all about their care from one of our experts!  Presented by Marcus Jones, Curator of Woody Plants and Certified Arborist	Norfolk Botanical Garden <a href="http://www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org">www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org</a> (757) 441-5830
<b>SAVE THE DATE</b> <b>February 26</b> Registration opens 1/1/2011	<b>MASTER GARDENER DAY AT VSU -- Expanding Horizons in Horticulture</b>	This second "mini-college" style program at VSU offers 2 main learning tracks - "protected culture" and "gardening therapy."	Virginia State University Ettrick, VA <a href="mailto:vmgaedu@rcn.com">vmgaedu@rcn.com</a>
Online courses available for credit	<b>Department of Plant Pathology, Ohio State University</b>	Various online courses available	<a href="http://plantpath.osu.edu/extension/outreach/online/index_html">http://plantpath.osu.edu/extension/outreach/online/index_html</a>
Credit *** Contact Liz Gordon for credit questions: <a href="mailto:saddleup4travel@comcast.net">saddleup4travel@comcast.net</a> , 464-4901			

**2009-2010**

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**IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN**

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