

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The February 2009 Monthly Journal
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association
Volume 13, Number 2



"Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom." Marcel Proust



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

February Presentation	1
The President's Column.....	2
10 th Annual Biological Farming	3
Vegetable Growing Tips.....	3
Choosing Appropriate Ice Melt.....	4
My Favorite Gardening Books	5
Invasive Species Guidebook Info....	6
Calendar.....	6
Educational Opportunities	7

**February 26 – 7:00pm – Piovano Room –
Growing Roses (and other things)
Responsibly**

Our February speaker will be a noted local expert, Debbie Lugar, past RAMGA president, speaking on "Growing Roses (and other things) Responsibly." Her main themes are (1) lessening dependence on chemicals, with recommendations for organic substitutes; and (2) presenting good techniques that apply equally to general gardening. Throughout her

presentation she will address techniques and plant material that do well in our area.

Debbie grows gorgeous roses and has long experience in the subject. She will have great handouts, and a PowerPoint presentation that includes an impressive array of slides from her own technical slide collection. She will demonstrate that a gardener doesn't need to be intimidated by the aura of difficulty that has shrouded the subject of rose growing in the past. This will be a highly informative, well researched presentation and an event that shouldn't be missed by anyone interested in gardening.

NOTE: Volunteers are desperately needed to bring refreshments for this February meeting and the September meeting. One volunteer could bring a beverage and one could bring munchies. Please contact Anne at 464-8616 or buckrock@rockbridge.net

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OUR MONTHLY PRESENTATIONS: The RAMGA Board has decided to hold brief business meetings 15 minutes before the start of our regular monthly meetings. These sessions will begin at 6:45pm and last no more than 15 minutes. They are open to all MGs and interns. Hopefully, these meetings will keep everyone informed of any major news on board actions.



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN
By Barbara Thomas

Are you wearing all your warm sweaters on these wintry days? Enjoying the cold snap that has killed many nasty bugs like ticks? How many garden catalogs are filling your mailbox and which ones are your favorites? Remember to bring the catalog extras plus old gardening magazines to the extension office where we have a basket in the meeting room. I have found great hand-me-downs there!

Many of you may have heard by now, but just in case you have not, we didn't have enough class members signed up and paid for by the deadline, so we were unable to hold a Master Gardener class of 09'. It's happened in the past, and will happen again, because we are not a major metropolitan community. The good news is that we ARE planning on holding several advanced classes on Tuesday and Thursday mornings in February, which will qualify for educational credit. You will receive more information as those plans are finalized (remember to check our website – ramga.org). Many, many hearty thanks to those who worked on the class committee.

By now all of you with e-mail have received the potential new bylaws via that mode of communication and others have received them via "snail mail." We have highlighted the changes to make it easier to compare the differences. Please take the time to look them over so you'll be ready to vote on February 26. And February 26 is also the night that we restart our evening education meetings with our "own" delightful Debbie Lugar!

Also starting that night, in an effort to keep an open line of information between the board and general membership, the President of RAMGA (currently me) will hold short business meetings before the evening educational meetings. Nothing too choreographed, coerced or contrarian, just communication about what's going on with RAMGA. I'll plan on starting at 6:45 and we'll take it from there. If any of you have something to share with the general membership, please see me beforehand and we'll work the announcement in.

And don't forget that the best way to ship vegetables this winter is to use Parsley Post!



10th ANNUAL VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION FOR BIOLOGICAL FARMING

By Katherine Smith

The 10th Annual Virginia Association for Biological Farming will be held in Richmond, February 27-28, at the Sheraton Richmond West. The theme this year, Community Based Farming Systems, features Will Allen, CEO, Growing Power, Inc.

Based in Milwaukee, the non-profit has developed and put in place in urban environments, the essentials for producing fresh foods for low-income populations. These include many of our favorite methods: raised beds, vermiculture, and waste-heated greenhouses.

Dr. McBug (Richard McDonald) will return to bring us the latest from the beneficial insect world. This year we will also have a presentation on good nematodes.

The Pre-Conference at 10:00am on the 27th includes two presentations from growers many of us know. Gary Scott sells at the Lexington Farmers Market and Michael Clark's "Planet Earth Diversified" is well known to many shoppers in the Charlottesville area for herbs and tomatoes all year long. Both will speak on season extender methods.

Need more information? Get in touch with MGs Linda Davis or Katherine Smith.



VEGETABLE GROWING TIPS

By Aline McKenna

Mix fine sand with lettuce seeds, broadcast and cover with little dirt.

Sow Lettuce seeds in mid summer under shade

of other vegetables.

Throw a few matches in the hole when you plant peppers .

Pinch plants if it only has 1-2 flowers per stem.

Cut vegetable fruits rather than pulling or twisting

Cut leaves and stems near ground on tomato plants and discard in garbage to prevent spread of fungus.

For juicy tomatoes add powdered milk to water. While it nourishes them it also helps prevent blossom end rot.

Do not feed tomatoes too early. Too much nitrogen results in too many leaves and watery bland fruit. Wait until fruit starts then side dress with low nitrogen fertilizer

Peppers and tomatoes need radiant heat for large full flavored fruit and to ripen faster. There are two ways to accomplish this: You can put aluminum foil strips on soil or red plastic under the plants.



HEADS UP!! MARCH PRESENTATION CO-SPONSORED BY THE MASTER GARDENERS AND THE HERB GUILD

What: Garden Symposium

Date: Saturday, March 28, 2009

Time: 9:00am – 12:00 Noon

Registration and Coffee to begin at 8:30am

Place: Turman Room, VMI Library

Speakers: "Landscaping with Herbs" James Blythe, Golden Owl Herb Farm, Culpeper, VA
"Permaculture"

Vicky Peterson and Pierre Constans, Blue Ridge Permaculture Network



CHOOSING APPROPRIATE ICE MELT PRODUCTS - ADVICE FROM VA TECH

Significant threats of snow and ice will remain across much of Virginia from January through March. For safety reasons in our region (both vehicular and pedestrian), there is plenty of justification to use chemicals commonly referred to as “ice melt” or “salt” on roads, sidewalks, and hardscapes.

Standard ice melt compounds are usually some form (or combination of) chloride-based salts (calcium chloride, magnesium chloride, potassium chloride, or sodium chloride are typically the most readily available and cheapest ice melt compounds) and it is one of these compounds that is typically applied by VDOT during inclement weather.

Many towns and cities have their own local statutes regarding mandatory snow and ice removal from sidewalks within a given time period following snow or ice events for both business and residential situations alike. It is hard to argue against the importance of treating streets and sidewalks for public safety in such hazardous conditions. At the same time it is important to ensure that appropriate “ice melt” chemicals are selected so as to minimize possible environmental effects.

The chloride-based salts are generally considered to be some of the most environmentally friendly products available for this use. However, anyone that has lived in the north understands how corrosive even these materials can be to your vehicles and/or roadside vegetation. Did you recognize the names of some of these salts? One of them is likely on your kitchen cabinet right now, sodium chloride (or table salt).

Potassium chloride is likely in your garden shed as it is known by most as muriate of potash, the

0-0-60 lawn and garden fertilizer so common at garden centers. Are you a fan of home-made ice cream? If so, then it is likely you have added rock salt (might be any one of these compounds) to your ice cream freezer to accelerate the hardening of the mix. Using salt to increase the speed of making ice cream applies the same chemistry principles that result in salt applications to streets and sidewalks melting ice.

Salts lower the freezing/melting point of water from 32° F. In general, most commercially available salts work quite well at preventing ice formation to temperatures as low as 15° F. Beyond this temperature there are only a very few specialized salt formulations that result in ice melt to temperatures as low as 5° F.

The point of this article is not to provide a chemistry lesson, but strangely enough given the time of year, the reason is protect water quality.

Mother Nature effectively deals with most recommended salt applications by way of an appreciable diluting effect of these salts due to rainfall etc. Environmental impact from recommended salt sources is typically minimal.

However, there are some forms of ice melt that get marketed during icy conditions that can and do have serious environmental implications: traditional lawn and garden fertilizers containing nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P).

A few years ago, I received word that one of our state’s big box retailers was selling urea (46-0-0) and 10-10-10 as “ice melt.” I doubt the sales staff had any idea of the concerns with these materials.

However, there is no quicker way to contaminate water resources than to apply N and P-based fertilizers to hardscapes where water is intentionally channeled to storm drains

for removal. From an environmental standpoint, direct applications of N and P-containing fertilizers to streets and sidewalks make no more sense now than they do in the middle of summer, especially since there are more environmentally friendly options for ice melt available.

The take-home message is simple: do a little research before choosing and applying ice melt materials and make sure the product is not an N and P-based fertilizer. Regardless of the season, it is always important to protect our water resources.



MY FAVORITE GARDENING BOOKS

By Jim Davis

Selecting books for another person may be like buying perfume or a tie for somebody you don't know very well. But I'm inclined to think it's more like buying tools for someone, and so I dare to offer a short list of essential tools for gardeners.

First must be our *Master Gardener Handbook: A Guide to Gardening in Virginia*. Yes, some of the matter is fairly technical, but there's plenty for reference.

Next comes *The American Horticultural Society A-Z Encyclopedia of Gardening*. This useful book lists virtually every garden plant, including trees and shrubs. Each article contains photos, a description, the plant's needs, its diseases and cultivars. There are also brief sections on subjects such as botany and pruning. You can buy this \$80.00 book for \$55.00 at edwardrhamilton.com.

Michael A. Dirr offers two books. 1. *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants: Their Identification, Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses*. The title tells all, and so do the contents. The lists of cultivars seem endless, but I'm grateful for the book's

completeness. You'll find this Dirr available for use at any good nursery, so save your money. 2. Instead, buy *Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, a handsome book intended for the home gardener. Descriptions and lists are brief, color photos helpful.

Companions to Dirr's books are two by Allan M. Armitage. 1. Corresponding to Dirr's *Manual* is *Herbaceous Perennial Plants: A Treatise on their Identification, Culture and Garden Attributes*. Although not as complete, it has much in common with Dirr. 2. For most needs, the other may suffice. *Armitage's Garden Perennials: A Color Encyclopedia* is much like *Dirr's Hardy Trees and Shrubs*, also with photos.

Another category includes books less general in nature, and these authors offer practical advice based on experience. Pamela J. Harper deals with a selection of perennials and woody plants in *Time-Tested Plants: Thirty Years in a Four-Season Garden*. The fully-illustrated book contains excellent advice on choice and maintenance. Tracy DiSabato-Aust's *Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting & Pruning Techniques* is no substitute for Harper's comfortable chat. It's nevertheless an easy read and more nearly complete in its advice on the basics. DiSabato-Aust discusses more plants (but no woodies), with fuller and more concise coverage. The two books prove the dictum that a single book on a given subject is not enough.

For diseases and pests, start with the best quick guide, *The Ortho Problem Solver*, available for use in some nurseries and garden supply stores and at the Extension office. The shorter version, *Ortho's Home Gardener's Problem Solver* is less expensive if you choose to buy. Keep in mind that Ortho recommends chemicals, some of which we should neither use nor suggest to others without consulting our MG handbook.

Less common and more desirable plants listed in books and magazines aren't readily available, at least not locally. A solution is Barbara J. Barton's *Gardening by Mail: A Source Book*. Barton lists not only nurseries but also garden suppliers and services, societies, magazines, libraries and books. A 1997 fifth edition is, however, the latest one I can find. Some of the entries could be out of date. But there's always the web as a source.

Speaking of the web, before resorting to amazon.com for books, be sure to check our local book stores. Special orders come quickly, and there's no charge for shipping. The Hamilton website I mentioned above deals in remainders, books for which sales have fallen off. One must question why they didn't sell, but many are worthy; prices and shipping are reasonable.

Did a grade-school teacher tell you, as did all of mine, that "Books are your friends?" I'm afraid I never got over this indoctrination. I'm compelled to hope, then, that you'll find a buddy or two here that you didn't know before.



INVASIVE SPECIES GUIDEBOOK

This is Susan Reines, Invasive Species Program Manager for the Wildlife Habitat Council. I believe many of you were in contact with my colleague, Adam Gundlach, while he was working to develop an invasive species guidebook last year. Adam has since moved back to Wisconsin and I am now in his position. He gave me his former contact list so I could let you know when the guidebook was finalized. It is now available for free download from our website! You can link to it through the News Flash on our homepage (www.wildlifehc.org).

Originally devised as a tool for land managers at Department of Defense installations, the guidebook is applicable to management of any natural area. The book's first section focuses on identification and management of specific invasive plants that occur in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Later chapters contain information about invasive species removal and habitat restoration techniques, including discussion of how to minimize impacts on native wildlife while controlling invasive species, how to prevent recurring invasions, how to restore native habitat, and how to use partnerships to achieve goals. I hope you will find it useful. If you know anyone else who might like it, please pass it along!

Susan Reines – 240-247-0912

<u>Feb</u>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
4,5,6	Gardening in an ErA of Climate Change*
7	Practical Gardening: Spring Pruning for Trees*
11	RAMGA Board Meeting – 2:00pm
12	Great Woody Plants*
21 & 28	Basic Home Landscape Design*
23	Techs for Keeping our Planet Healthy*
24	Intro to Organic Gardening*
26	Growing Roses (and other things) Responsibly*
26	The Forgotten Annuals*
* See Educational Events Calendar this issue	



Calendar of Educational Events – January 2009



Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
February 4, 5, 6 \$40/day	25th Anniversary Symposium: Gardening in an Era of Climate Change <i>Credits***</i>	Are we living in an era of extreme changes in climate? Focus is on design and operational practices for sustainability and environmental stewardship.	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA 1800 Lakeside Avenue Richmond, VA 23228 (804) 262-9887 http://www.lewisginter.org
February 7 9 am - 12 pm Cost: \$35 non-member	Practical Gardening: Spring Pruning for Trees <i>Credits: 3hrs</i>	The basics of pruning, appropriate pruning times for various trees, and techniques demonstrated.	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA 1800 Lakeside Avenue Richmond, VA 23228 (804) 262-9887 http://www.lewisginter.org
February 12 6:00-7:30 pm Cost: \$20 General Public	Great Woody Plants for Blue Ridge Gardens: New Favorites and Old Friends <i>Credits: 1.5hrs</i>	New plant introductions, whether as novel species or new forms of old favorites, continue to fuel the excitement of gardening in the twenty-first century.	Fralin Auditorium, Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech 301 Saunders Hall Blacksburg, VA 24061 540-231-5970 or vtgarden@vt.edu
February 21 (8:30 - 12:30) February 28 (8:30 – 2:30), March 7 (8:30 – 2:30), and March 14 (8:30 – 12:30)	Practical Gardening: Basic Home Landscape Design <i>Credits: 20 hrs total</i> Cost: \$210	Develop the knowledge and skills needed to construct a customized home landscape. Participants conduct a site analysis and create a base map, site plan, conceptual plan, and planting plan.	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA 1800 Lakeside Avenue Richmond, VA 23228 (804) 262-9887 http://www.lewisginter.org
February 23 8:30am-4:00pm Cost: \$45. Registration is required.	4th Annual EcoSavvy Gardening Symposium: Techniques for Keeping Our Planet Healthy <i>Credits: 8 hrs</i>	EcoSavvy Gardening Symposium brings together experts to share practical information on environmental issues focusing on the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.	Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria, VA 703.642.5173 to register. More details at www.greenspring.org
Feb. 24 OR Mar. 10 4 - 6 pm Cost: \$30 nonmember	Sustainable Basics: Introduction to Organic Gardening with Amy Hicks <i>Credits: 2 hrs</i>	Learn the basics of gardening the earth-friendly way!	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA 1800 Lakeside Avenue Richmond, VA 23228 (804) 262-9887 http://www.lewisginter.org

February 26 7:00pm Free of Charge	Growing Roses (& other things) Responsibly Credit: 1 hour	Debbie Lugar speaking on “Growing Roses (and other things) Responsibly.” Themes are (1) lessening dependence on chemicals, with recommendations for organic substitutes; and (2) presenting good techniques that apply equally to general gardening.	Piovano Room, Rockbridge Library
February 26 6:00 to 7:30 pm Location: Fralin Auditorium \$15 Friends of the Garden/\$20 general public	The Forgotten Annuals... What Happened to Growing Plants from Seed? Janet Draper, Hort., Smithsonian Institute <i>Credits: 1.5hrs</i>	Janet will remind us that annuals are wonderful and easy plants to include in our garden and encourage us to rethink how we can incorporate these amazing beauties in our landscapes.	Fralin Auditorium, Va Tech Hahn Horticulture Garden at Virginia Tech 301 Saunders Hall Blacksburg, VA 24061 (540) 231-5970 or e-mail vtgarden@vt.edu
Credit *** Contact Kip Brooks for credit questions: kipb@rockbridge.net or 462-6160			

2008-2009

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IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

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