

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The May 2009 Monthly Journal
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association
Volume 13, Number 5



"As the gardens grows, so does the gardener."
Anonymous

**MAY 28 – NOTE DIFFERENT DATE
“BETTER GARDENING WITHOUT
CHEMICALS” BY KEVIN FROM
COUNTRYSIDE NATURAL PRODUCTS
PIONVANO ROOM – 7:00PM**

Kevin will be talking about various products that are carried at Countryside Natural Products as alternatives to common commercial chemical fertilizers, insecticides, and herbicides. He will also touch on a few ideas that can be used at home from things that you may already have around the house.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The President's Column.....	2
Demo on Removal of Invasive	
Aliens	2
Figs Anyone?.....	3
Tarragon.....	4
On Dahlias, Part 1	4
Calendar	5
Educational Opportunities.....	7-8



THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Barbara Thomas

Amazing amounts of information are available about gardening and plant growth on the Internet. The myriad number of sites is mind boggling, as are the various qualities of those sites. Whether one is using a computer at the Rockbridge Regional Library, a high-speed connection or dealing with dial up service, the breadth and depth of information can be a real eye-opener.

One can find commercial sites galore and mundane information such as “plants in stress are the ones attacked by insects and disease” in the Plant Problem Solver section of <http://gardening.yardener.com>. Or how about a site that looks educational until you read in the fine print that it is sponsored by a publishing/web hosting company, as is gardenguides.com? Now, sites like these may have good information but are they the most informative for Master Gardeners?

Then there are the scientific sites such as plosbiology.org, which has information about a new study published in the open-access journal PLoS Biology that concluded slower-growing plants stay fresh longer. Or to be precise: “Production of a plant hormone called jasmonic acid is influenced when microRNAs inhibit certain regulators known as TCP transcription factors. As the number of microRNAs increases, there are fewer active transcription factors and the plant produces a smaller amount of jasmonic acid. Jasmonic acid is an important part of the plant aging process, and the plant grows more slowly if there is less of it. Researchers can use genetic methods to control the quantity of microRNAs in plants and thus can control the amount of jasmonic acid. In the future, agriculturalists may be able to cultivate longer-living and faster-growing plants.”

Whew, I couldn't have said it more succinctly myself. Anyway, the point of this column is to challenge our RAMGA members to share their favorite and most useful Internet sites with Geri Wenz at our own website www.ramga.org. Or feel free to email them to me (and use your new 2009 directory to boot).

And in the spirit of plant growth, let's not forget to grow and support our RAMGA Plant Sale on May 9th at Waddell Elementary School. Most of us have specific tasks that day and hopefully all members are digging up their own perennials and repotting them for that day as well. See you bright and early for the event that supports all our projects!



DEMO ON REMOVAL OF INVASIVE ALIENS – MAY 2

By Katherine Smith

Members of the Upper James River Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, the Rockbridge Area Forest & Wildlife Association and the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association will demonstrate a method for removing the invasive species *Ailanthus* on Saturday, May 2. The demonstrations, which will take place in locations around the county, are part of Weed'em Out, the first ever state wide Invasive Plant Removal Day.

Targeted species in Rockbridge County include *Ailanthus* (tree of Heaven), Japanese honeysuckle, autumn olive and multiflora rose.

Invasive species are non-native species that can cause ecological or economic harm to trees, wildlife, livestock and water quality.

Tree of Heaven – botanical name *Ailanthus altissima* – can grow up to 80 feet tall. Its roots spread rapidly, creating thickets if it is cut or mowed. It thrives in both shade and sun and it

tolerates flooding. The seeds, spread by wind and water, can sprout for as long as 3 years. It is know to kill seeds of competing plants.

Brochures containing information on recommended techniques for eradicating Ailanthus can be found at the Rockbridge County Virginia Cooperative Extension office, Boxerwood Nature Center and Woodland Gardens, and the U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For information on Ailanthus and the location of Weed'em Out demonstrations, call Katherine Smith at 540-261-2562. Information on projects elsewhere in Virginia can be found online at www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/invasives/index.html.



"Every House a Garden" volunteer hours count toward your MG hour tally. And if you have surplus serviceable garden tools you may donate them to this program. Contact Peggy Dyson-Cobb at 464-3511 or cobbking@rockbridge.net. Financial donations, if you are so inclined, go to Rockbridge Grown, PO Box 87, Lexington VA 24450.



FIGS ANYONE? **By Katherine Smith**

I'm frequently asked if it is possible to grow figs in Rockbridge County. I always answer yes, because I have a fig growing happily outside all year here and know others who have them as well. The real question is - can you keep the fig happy enough here to have figs!

And this is where the discussion of climate, weather and a basic understanding of microclimates/microweather gets down to local—really local—issues. Climate, of course

is what's all over all of the time. Weather changes almost by the minute.

First of all, the big picture, that USDA climate zone map, will show all of us being in zone 6, and not all of us are. Mountains make this a microclimate issue.

Next, we take into account the predominate wind pattern—west to east, which is also ruffled up by mountains.



Then consider where we place our houses and other structures. Or where these are placed by others on our behalf. Figs are happier in Zone 7 - particularly if it's close to 8. Maybe you already have that...asphalt, concrete, stone and brick can alter a southern exposure considerably. These would be hard to plan in advance, just for a fig.

This is where the other microclimate comes into play. We can grow a fig, and even have figs from it almost every year, if we can create a microclimate for it. Sun, with no shade would be this first requirement. Next would be wind protection all year around. Then, the necessity for water, water and more water. Finally, fig food. All of this gardener-created weather will make it possible if we add one other ingredient: grow the variety, Hardy Chicago—a proven winner here.

Eventually, global warming will ease some of us into Zone 7. I'm getting ready by working on the microclimate now. Until then—figs at the back of the Rockbridge Regional Library anyone?



TARRAGON

By Diana Losche

Do you love tarragon...on fish, chicken, and shrimp salad? Have you noticed that the dried version loses its flavor quickly? Well here are a couple of tips for you.

True culinary tarragon is French, *Artemisia dranuncululus* 'Sativus.' Growing it in the garden is easy but it goes dormant in winter. Farmers who grow it in greenhouses have learned how to overcome this. They put the tarragon plants outdoors for 4-6 weeks in the fall when temperatures go to 40 degrees at night. They then bring them back indoors and give them artificial lighting for 16 hours. This sounds like a lot of trouble to me and there is an alternative.

A substitute for tarragon is a sweet marigold, *Tagetes lucida*, the leaves of which have the same anise flavor. This plant can be grown in low light conditions all winter.

Great in lobster salad too!



ON DAHLIAS, PART I

By Jim Davis

Dahlias exist in twenty-seven species, with 800 varieties, among them 15,000 named flowers. This great genus offers enough diversity to delight any gardener and to satisfy all needs. "But," you argue, "They're hugely tall and besides that, high maintenance plants." Even the illustrious Allan Armitage asserts it's a plant "not worth the problems trying to raise them well."

One could argue that achieving anything of value is fraught with trouble and problems. But Dahlias need not be. First, though, let's look at

the selling points, and then we'll deal with the alleged difficulty. Among the varieties are the giants we know so well, plants up to eight or ten feet tall producing blossoms ten inches or more in diameter. Less well known are the dwarves, bushes only twelve inches to two or three feet high with blossoms as small as an inch. There are singles, doubles, pompons and more—in a great range of shapes and colors (but no blue), some you wouldn't easily recognize as Dahlias.

Thus you can grow Dahlias for cut flowers or group small plants to fill spaces in the border. Yes, tall plants need support, even my five footers. No adequate prop is likely to be pretty, so I grow them out of sight in my cutting garden. The blossoms are four or five inches in diameter and while not gaudy are often impressive. I use small varieties, needing no support, in borders. My favorite is 'Bishop of Llandaff,' an eighteen-inch plant bearing purple leaves with either red or golden flowers (singles, about two and a half inches in diameter). I don't have room to mass them, but there are many varieties one might use that way for a sensational effect.



Catalogs offer enormous selections. Since Dahlias grow from tubers, shipping is safe, and you can probably still order this season. I use the lavishly illustrated Swan Island catalog; get it from the web at www.dahlias.com or call 800-410-6540.

So what's the problem? Armitage's is probably hot Georgia where he lives, and where heat fosters insects and diseases. Virus, fungus and bacteria are possible threats; spider mites are indeed a menace anywhere. Here in the mountains, however, I've never had any problems except Japanese beetles and ground hogs, both now thwarted with milky spore and

chicken wire. I confess, though, that Dahlias do require some special treatment.

The real work comes in the fall. Tubers must be dug as soon as frost blackens the leaves and before a hard freeze. The main stems are cut close to the tubers, which must be hosed free of soil and dried in the sun, with stem ends pointed downward to drain. Books then recommend coating them with a liquid or powered fungicide, but I've had good luck without any treatment. Finally, they must be stored for the winter. Some growers put them in vermiculite, peat moss or sawdust, and these might help to keep the individual tubers from breaking off. But netted orange or onion bags work fine. Tubers will overwinter successfully in a relatively dry place where the temperature is always above freezing but below forty-five degrees F. Fortunately, I have a friend with an ideal basement.

Is all that too much trouble? Well, since Dahlias mature and bloom in a single season, you can always grow them as annuals. Let the tubers die when the soil freezes and buy new ones in the spring. In this case, obviously, inexpensive varieties are the way to go—try Lowe's—and many of the spectacular ones won't be available. Whatever you decide, look for planting instructions on the package or in the catalog. Just don't water the tubers until they sprout, and I'll offer some suggestions on nurture next month.

Take a dose of common sense also.



MAGI MARION IN HEATHER'S GARDEN

By Heather Marion



<u>May</u>	<i>CALENDAR</i>
2	Bedford Gardening Day*
2	9th Annual Festival of Gardening*
5	Green Thumb Gardening Series*
13	RAMGA Monthly Board Mtg – 2:00pm
14-21-28	Annuals & Perennials for Richmond Gardens *
22	Plants, Plants & More Plants*
23	Spring Pruning of Trees & Shrubs*
26	What's Bugging You*
28	Better Gardening Without Chemicals*
31	Put Some Zing in Your Spring*.
* See Educational Events Calendar this issue	



The following excerpt is from an article written by KB that appeared in the Boxerwood newsletter.

“It seems strange. Having never heard the question before, I’ve recently had three or four seemingly unrelated people ask, ‘If I have the money for only one plant, what would you recommend?’ I’m a little surprised to hear my father’s words roll forward: ‘Fruit, nuts, berries.’

“One of the consequences of growing up a preacher’s kid was that we were required to move at least once every 4 to 5 years—frequently more often. Every place we lived my dad planted small whips of apples, pecan, peaches and figs.

“I remember thinking how dumb he was for planting such small trees. The fruit from a 3 or 4 year old tree was pretty disappointing and we were most likely to move away sooner than a real apple would arrive. And pecans? You can forget that. I’ve learned it could be 15-20 years before a notable pecan crop.

“There’s no lack of testimony that I was opinionated—if not a downright difficult child. For example, as the know-it-all teenager I was

bound to have been, I came home from school to find my father dirty and digging holes for some tiny fruit or nut trees. I chided him. ‘Just tell me why you plant all these little trees where we go. We never get any fruit.’

“He studied me for a long, quiet moment. ‘Get in the car.’ He drove directly to the house we lived in 10 years earlier. Nothing was as I remembered it—especially the apple trees. That day they were huge and full of blossoms. Kids were climbing in, over and through them. We watched for a while. ‘This is why we plant trees. We may never eat from the trees, but someone will.’

“Today, I take great pride in my father. He has practiced what he preached his whole life through. This land he has stewarded for the past 20 years is replete with giving trees and plants of all sorts. I wonder what the world would be like if just a few of us left the land we steward as my father has.

“So I now pass along the best advice I have...plant edible landscaping. Fruit and nut trees could replace lawn.”

If you would like to read the entire article, you can do so in the Boxerwood newsletter. And, I might add, it’s well worth reading.



Calendar of Educational Events – March 2009



Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
May 2 9:00am-1:00PM Cost: Free	Bedford Gardening Day <u>Credits: ***</u>	9:30 Growing Blueberries 10:00 Dahlias 10:30 Successful containers 11:00 Herbs 11:30 Composting	Bedford, VA Central Virginia Community College 1633 Venture Blvd.
May 2 8:30 am - 1:00 pm	9th Annual Festival of Gardening <u>Credits ***</u>	9:30 Four Seasons Vegetable Gardening 10:30 Deer Proofing Strategies 11:30 Drought Tolerant Gardens	420 Grove Street, Lynchburg, Virginia http://www.vmganet.org/calendar/calendar.htm
May 5 7:00 – 9:00 pm <i>Repeats weekly on Tuesday, until June 2, 2009.</i> Cost: \$40	Green Thumb Gardening Series A partnership with MGs of Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth & Virginia Beach. <u>Credits: 2 hrs per class</u>	May 5– Growing Vegetables May 12 – Lawn Care May 19– Herbs in Landscape May 26– Proper Pruning Techniques June 2- Plants that Attract Butterflies	Norfolk Botanical Garden Norfolk, VA http://www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org/programs-events/calendar/
May 14, 21, 28, June 4, 4:00 – 6:00 pm Cost: \$120 (\$80 members)	Annuals & Perennials for Richmond Gardens <u>Credits: 8 hrs for all 4 sessions</u>	Discussion includes site conditions, care and combinations to create your own garden paradise. In-class and hands-on instruction in the Garden.	Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, VA http://www.lewisginter.org
May 22 9:30 - 11:30 am Cost: \$34	Plants, plants and more plants! <u>Credits: 2 hrs</u>	Behind-the-scenes tour of the Greenhouse. Learn to divide & multiply plants, saving you money. Take home cuttings.	Norfolk Botanical Garden Norfolk, VA
May 23 1:30 - 3:30pm Pre-registration and fee of \$15.00, two for \$25.00	Spring Pruning of Trees and Shrubs <u>Credits: 2 hrs</u>	Bart McDowell from Bartlett Tree Experts gives workshop on pruning trees and shrubs. Learn proper timing & techniques including fruit and nut trees. Diseases & pests of trees and shrubs discussed.	Viette's Nursery 994 Long Meadow Rd Fishersville, VA (800) 575-5538 http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9
May 26 9:30 - 11:00 am Cost: \$16	What's Bugging You <u>Credits: 1.5 hours</u>	Be a plant detective and discover many insects living in your yard. Learn safe, environmentally friendly remedies.	Norfolk Botanical Garden Norfolk, VA http://www.norfolkbotanicalgarden.org/programs-events/calendar/

<p>May 28 7:00 – 8:00pm Cost: Free</p>	<p>Better Gardening Without Chemicals <i>Credits: 1 hr</i></p>	<p>Kevin from Countryside Natural Products discusses various natural products to use instead of chemicals</p>	<p>Rockbridge Library Piovano Room</p>
<p>May 31 1:30 pm</p>	<p>Put Some Zing in Your Spring! All About Peonies and Iris <i>Credits: ***</i></p>	<p>Learn how to select, plant, and maintain these plants plus other early bloomers for a stunning spring display. A tour of perennial beds and the poppy, peony, and iris display gardens will follow.</p>	<p>Viette's Nursery 994 Long Meadow Rd Fishersville, VA http://www.inthegardenradio.com/v.php?pg=9</p>

2008-2009
Officers
Barbara Thomas, President
Nancy Smith, Vice President
Tracy Smith-Oliver, Treasurer
Secretary
David Mims, Representative, Virginia Master Gardeners Association

Standing Committees
Kip Brooks and Carol Schoner, Volunteer Coordinators
Anne Riffey-Buckner, Helen Smith, and Laura Mattingly, Programs
Stephanie West, Publicity
Ted Jenks – Plant Sale
Sherry Smith and Jeanne Eichelberger, Newsletter

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

Editor-in-chief Sherry Smith
Managing Editor Jeanne Eichelberger

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 Sherry Smith, 225 Dalewood Drive, Lexington, Virginia 24450 or e-mail resmith575@aol.com.

Subscription rates: \$8.00 per year.

ROCKBRIDGE AREA MASTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION
P.O. Drawer 897
Lexington, Virginia 24450

