



IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The February 2012 Monthly Journal

www.ramga.org

**"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant."
- Anne Bradstreet**

DON'T FORGET THESE DATES:

*February 25th Saturday 9:30-12:30
Winter Plant Identification and Nature
Enjoyment Walk at Katherine Smith's
Persimmon Tree Farm*

*February 28th Tuesday, 7:30 -8:30 pm.
Rockbridge Master Naturalist Continuing Ed
program: Phillip Hysell, Warning Coordination
Meteorologist at the Old Courthouse
Meeting Room, Lexington.*

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

By Pat Kovach



Now is a time to get a different perspective on gardens. During the summer, I admire the bright colors of the crape myrtles, but now the beauty of crape myrtle trunks and branches are what catch my eye. And on a drive through some unexpected snow, I spotted what I thought was a winterberry bush (*Ilex verticillata* to botany students) in a national forest nearby. It was a bright sunny day, and those bright red berries almost glowed. Unfortunately, the foresters don't put labels on the trees and shrubs, so I'm just guessing. But it's time to get out the catalogs and start planning - not just for the coming summer, but also for the winters to come. And if you don't get enough catalogs at home, remember that there is a basketful of extra plant catalogs and gardening magazines in the extension conference room just for the taking.

Our Master Gardener Class 2012 is well under way. We now have eleven students in the class, and they had a healthy dose of botany in the first class. We have a very interesting class with a lot of prior gardening experience. Please consider coming out to the class and helping out by coming a little early to help set up tables and chairs, get coffee ready to go, and getting acquainted with the MG students. If you would like to sign up to help for

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some of the classes, please contact Dave Buckner, Class Facilitator, at buckrock@rockbridge.net. It's a great opportunity to cultivate potential project team members.

But no matter how colorful the plant catalogs and gardening magazines are, nothing beats a trip to a botanical garden for getting the creative juices flowing. And I'm so looking forward to the annual RAMGA bus trip. This year we're going to the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond on Monday, April 30th, and then to a private garden. Please put the trip on your calendar and join us if you can. For \$50, you get a relaxing trip, admission to Ginter Garden, and afternoon refreshments. Contact Doris Stark, 30 St. Andrews Dr., Lexington 24450 to reserve a seat.



MASTER GARDENER CLASS 2012 PROGRESSES By Jim Davis

Enrolment in Master Gardener Class 2012 climbed to eleven, even twelve if you count Autumn Alvarado, a home schooler who attends with her mother. (Autumn is young but obviously capable.) It's a jolly yet intense group, with all the experience and interesting backgrounds we like to attract. As always, MGs are enthusiastically invited to come for all or part of any sessions, to meet these new folks and to show support.

The first session, on January 10, was a fast-paced one on basic botany, conducted again this year by Anne Alerding, a VMI professor. Scheduling complexities caused postponing orientation till the second session on the twelfth. That day, coordinator Dave Buckner introduced the Extension office staff, including our new 4-H agent, Beth Hawse. Dave Close, state-wide MG coordinator, spoke via computer from Virginia Tech. He explained the function and importance of the Master Gardener program and stood ready to answer questions—which arose, but only after Dave signed off. Then Barbara Thomas came on stage to conduct several activities designed to help the trainees get to know each other. There was laughter and warmth.

The following week, K.B. Bailey came to talk on The Healthy Plant. K.B. is usually inspiring and this year was especially so, tracing her career from childhood to the present and showing how certain precepts taught her about life and nature. Session four featured David Beebe on soils and natural fertilizers. David has long experience in building soil and in organic farming. His convincing facts and physical evidence (a table covered with soil, roots and experiments) provided more inspiration. In fact, trainees ignored coffee at break time as they gathered round him with questions. Jim Davis followed the break with comments on chemical fertilizers and Power Point slides showing

his granddaughter and the steps necessary for successful composting.

In and Out of the Garden goes to press before Eric Day's session on basic entomology, but we all know Eric from an earlier visit here for an MG meeting. Beyond Eric are most of our regular instructors, but with some new and exciting ones as well.

At the early sessions, a few MGs have come as visitors, to show support and interest in our new trainees. Dave Buckner has asked, however, for more. You could come any time, maybe at 9:00, to stay for break, mingling and meeting. It's been said that it takes too long for new MGs and old to meet. Here's a way to shorten the time—and boost enthusiasm as well. Check 'em out—they're a great group.

A list of trainees: Jill Alvarado (with her daughter, Autumn), Peggy Bateson, Malcolm Brownlee, Dale Buckner, Jackie Buckner, Pat Cleaveland, Joan DiNardo, Joan Dubis, Dustin McClung, Rebecca Moore, Richard Wendt.

BOXERWOOD NEWS - FEBRUARY

- ❖ Thursday, February 2, 1pm, Training session for Boxerwood garden volunteers.
- ❖ Saturday, February 18, 10am, Pruning Workshop at Boxerwood. Meet at the lodge.

This is the quiet time of year at Boxerwood when the staff regroup, plans, and enjoys the stillness. The elementary education programs don't begin until April and many of the pre-school programs are held off campus. The gardens, too, are quiet (and wet this year), except for the rustling of the birds and small mammals and the occasional deer running through the woods. One can admire the "bones" of the garden - the quiet majesty of the dawn

redwoods and bald cypress, the beautiful bark of the sycamores and kousa dogwoods, the vibrant cinnamon color of the stewartia and the paperback maple. Winter interest is something you should keep in mind when planting your garden. Conifers play a major role in the landscape in the winter, and Dr. Munger planted many of them, especially dwarf conifers (which is a bit of a misnomer, since a dwarf conifer might be 30' tall while its parent might be 100' in height). Berried plants are also a major feature in the winter garden. Not only do they look beautiful (think of a stand of Winterberry), but they also provide sustenance for the birds. Just the other day, I noticed a small grouping of cardinals perched in one of the heavily loaded holly trees, looking like big fat berries themselves. Come visit and see for yourselves.

Thanks to all of the Master Gardeners who showed up in January to join the volunteer corps of gardeners here at Boxerwood. We can always use more volunteers. If you are interested (and I hope you are), I am having a volunteer training session at Boxerwood, 1pm, Thursday, February 2nd. I am planning on having some sort of outdoor walk/workshop on the third Saturday of every month - so stay tuned!

Faith Vosburgh

faith@boxerwood.org

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GOT A PROBLEM? CALL THE HELP DESK!

By Pat Tichenor

Bet you don't know what our first MG project was. A good guess might be Chuck and Caroline Norrington's at Natural Bridge School; Chuck, a transfer from Tidewater, was RAMGA's first president and was active early on. But no; it was the Help Desk, our telephone service reaching all corners of the county. Katherine Smith, another transfer and our founder, began taking calls as early as 1994. Soon, Becky England, from the class of '94 joined her, as did Chuck. The next class graduated in 1997, when Alice Strecker and I joined the team. Soon after, I agreed to be team leader.

The project may not get as good a press as others; it's hard to take interesting photos of what we do, after all. But it's an important project. We have the widest audience of any other and we accommodate all gardeners, beginners as well as experts. We are also easily available, and people feel comfortable discussing things over the phone. It isn't surprising, then, that we handle as many as 500 calls a season, dealing with a wide variety of questions. To fulfill this service, a Master Gardener sits in the Extension office Monday through Friday mornings and Wednesday afternoons, from the first of April till the end of October. After October, someone calling the office is referred to a duty MG at home, with this function rotating among some of the team members. Members now are Nancy Cook, Becky England, Lynn Jones, Debbie Lugar, Katherine Smith, Jim Davis (substitute) and me.

Questions can be fairly simple or relatively complex, but the team is rarely stumped—at least not in the long run. Often we must do some research in our richly-stocked office library and call back with a solution. At the MG desk we also have a computer and a microscope, both very useful (and fun). However, sometimes, we must consult the great resources of Virginia Tech; if any horticultural problem defeats us, we get assistance by mail or e-mail.

Subjects range from what you'd expect—such as insects and diseases, plant identification, fruit growing and lawns—to the more uncommon. In that category are calls about landscaping to enhance the value of a house, what to do with hummingbird feeders in winter and whether the caller's sheets contain bed bugs. Some folks bring dead leaves and live insects (in jars) into the office, but so far no sheets. No matter, the team finds the diversity interesting and is never embarrassed to admit ignorance (which is most often only temporary).

If you're curious beyond what I've been saying here, stop by the Extension office and read a few pages of our log. We record a brief but detailed account of every contact, with the date and, if available, name of the caller. While you're there, look over the library. The books cover just about every aspect of horticulture, and while they can't be removed from the office, you can comfortably look things up right there.

Our team members are probably just eager to learn. At any rate, I'm sure they feel the same satisfaction of all MGs as they serve the public. It might even be greater.

Note: This is the tenth in a series of articles reporting the activities of our unit's projects. The series was mandated by the RAMGA Board and is overseen by Vice President Pat Kovach. The purpose is to keep all MGs aware of how busy we are and what good work we do.



NEWS FROM THR RAMGA BOARD

It was suggested at the last board meeting that the whole membership should know what is discussed and decided at the monthly board meetings so a summary of the minutes from the meetings will now be a regular feature.

On January 10, 2012

1. Our treasurer, Bob Kovach, reported that we stayed within our budget in 2011 and he expects 2012 will be within budget also. We have a healthy surplus for any unexpected expenses.

2. Carol Schoner, Records Coordinator, reported that increasing numbers of members are using the web-based system to report hours, making her job easier and drawing more people to the MG website. However, there are still some members who show zero hours and are encouraged to take care of this

3. There was discussion of reducing the number of newsletters from twelve to ten each year by possibly combining July-August and November-December, with a calendar-only notice to go out in the missing months.

4. In earlier meetings a "Past Presidents Council" has been proposed for the purpose of nominating members for offices or project leaders within RAMGA. Pat Kovach reported that she has received positive responses from several past presidents and a draft of the job description for the council was discussed.

5. Pat Kovach asked for suggestions for attracting and retaining RAMGA members. Some of the suggestions were:

- an annual social event (potluck) so that members would have an opportunity to socialize with members outside their projects
- encouraging class reunions
- drawing parents into roots and shoots programs
- presence at additional public events
- a prominent "beautify Lexington" project, perhaps reviving the library garden

-reviving social aspect of CE meetings by staying after for refreshments

-better inform the membership about board activity through the newsletter

As always, the board welcomes input from all members.

Volunteer Alerts

1. We are still in need of a new Program Coordinator and committee for next year, starting in now. Duties include contacting prospective speakers for RAMGA meetings, which are held on the 4th Thursday in February, 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, or have an idea for an upcoming program please contact Pat Kovach at 540 463-7713 or patkovach@embarqmail.com

Reminder: RAMGA dues for 2012 are payable in January. If you have not done so already, please send your check for \$15.00 to:

RAMGA
P.O. Drawer 897
Lexington, VA 24450

February 2012 Educational Programs

February 4, Saturday. Garden in the Valley Symposium, Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association. Shenandoah University. Winchester. 8am-3:30pm. Speakers on trees and shrubs, pests, green roofs, Proven Winners for your garden, tools and techniques for home orchards, and pests. \$35 registration.
<http://nsvmga.org/> ***5 ½ credit hours***

February 8, 9. Wednesday, Thursday. 8am-4pm. "Treading Lightly on the Land". Winter Symposium and CVNLA Short Course. Massey Conference Center, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden. \$40/day. www.lewisginter.org ***5 credit hours per day***

February 9-12. Thursday-Sunday. Maymont Flower and Garden Show, Richmond Convention Center. Richmond. \$10. Speakers to be announced.
<http://macevents.com/show.cfm/eventID/139>

Feb. 10-11. Friday, Saturday. Virginia Association for Biological Farming (VABF) Conference. Koger Center, Richmond, VA. Fee: \$100. More information on website.
<http://www.vabf.org> ***multiple credit hours***

February 11. 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 ***2 credit hours***
<http://www.hort.vt.edu/hhg/events.html>

February 15, Wednesday. Fern Terrarium Workshop. Frances Plecker Education Center, JMU Arboretum, Harrisonburg. 12pm- 1:30pm. Free. More info at (540) 568-3194 and
<http://www.jmu.edu/arboretum/events.shtml#terrarium-workshop>

February 16. Thursday. Piedmont Landscape Assn 29th Annual Seminar. Paramount Theater,

Charlottesville, VA. 8am-4:30pm. \$60-\$75. Speakers' topics: deer management, meadowscaping instead of lawns, stone in garden design. ***5 credit hours*** More info at
www.piedmontlandscape.org

February 25. Saturday. VMGA program: 3rd Annual MG Day at VSU - "Focus on Food- from Field to Table". Ettrick, VA. Registration open 1/2/12. Limited to 200. \$15-\$20. More info:
www.VMGA.net ***5 credit hours***

February 25. Saturday. Four-County Master Gardener program "Sparking Creativity in Your Garden". 9am-4pm. Germanna Community College, Culpeper. Speakers include Dr. Holly Scoggins and Karen Rexrode. \$35. Seating limited to 300. More info at
www.fourcountymastergardener.org ***4 credit hours***

February 25th. Saturday. Winter Plant Identification and Nature Enjoyment Walk. 9:30-12:30 at Persimmon Tree Farm. Co-sponsored by the Upper James River Chapter of the Native Plant Society and RAMGA. Everyone is welcome. For more information call Katherine Smith at 261-2562 Directions:
http://www.ramga.org/directions_to_katherine_smith.html
 3 credit hours

February 25, 26. Saturday, Sunday. Orchid Society Show & Sale. Strange's Garden Center, Richmond.
 Info: <http://www.vaorchidsociety.com/2012VOSShow.html>

February 28, Tuesday. Rockbridge Master Naturalists invite interested Master Gardeners to attend a presentation by Phillip Hysell, Warning Coordination Meteorologist, National Weather Service Forecast Office, Blacksburg Office. Old Courthouse Meeting Room. Lexington. 7:30-8:30pm. Check out this interview with him at
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3M8Zpiqv8c>

*****1 credit hour***

Save the Dates:

March 1, Thursday. Frances Litten Botanical Lecture: "Bringing Nature Home", 7pm, JMU Festival Conference Center, Harrisonburg. Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* and professor of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, will speak on the many ways insects interact with landscape plants and how their interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. Free. www.jmu.edu/arboretum

March 7, Wednesday. "The Nature of Trees", Trees Virginia Workshop, Western Virginia Community College, Roanoke, VA. 8:30am to 3:30pm. \$55 for MGs before March 1st. Speakers include Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Dr. Bob Lyons, Jim Flott and Dr. Neil Hendrickson. Registration available at www.treesvirginia.org.

March 24, 25. Saturday, Sunday. Loudoun County Master Gardener Symposium. Leesburg. One day \$37.50; Two days \$65. 12 speakers, various subjects. ***Multiple credit hours***
<http://www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org>

March 28, Wednesday. Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium "A Gardener's Palette", VNLA and City of Waynesboro Dept of Parks and Rec. Best Western Inn, Waynesboro. 8am- 4pm. Speakers include Tony Avent, Steve Aitken, Brent Heath, Richard Bir and Clara Curtis. Topics: Tony Avent's 100 Favorite Perennials, Captivating Combinations, Tropical Paradise Garden, and Designing with Annuals-What's Hot for 2012. Registration: \$95 before March 16. ***6 ½ credit hours***
<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07e5gj3r0125f8cc49&llr=bcko7ziab>

March 31, Saturday. Northern Neck Master Gardener Symposium " Watershed to Water's Edge". 8:45am - 3pm. White Stone. \$25.
<http://www.nnmg.org/> ***multiple credit hours***

May 1-4. Tuesday- Friday. Southern Region Master Gardener Conference at Natchez, Mississippi. Register by 1/14/12 \$105. 1/15/12- \$155. Details and info at <http://msucares.com/srmg> and registration at <http://www.regonline.com/srmg>

September 7-14, 2013. International Master Gardener's Conference, Alaskan Cruise- Holland America Line; sailing and returning to Seattle. Booking open starting May 7, 2012. Details developing at <http://www.uaex.edu/imgc2013> Jacoby. Contact: Liz Maurer at esm306@yahoo.com or 540-377-9095***1 credit hour***



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IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

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

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The newsletter may also be viewed at www.ramga.org

Subscription rates: \$10.00 per year.

