

IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

The June 2011 Monthly Journal
Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners' Association
www.ramga.org



"Spring shows what God can do with a drab and dirty world."
Virgil a. Kraft

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN By Amy Scheuer

Okay! Enough with the rain already!! I'm sure Mother Nature is going to make me wish I didn't say that when it comes around to July and August. I hope not.

This month Pat Foreman is going to talk to us about chickens on June 23 at the Rockbridge Regional Library. I understand she is pretty passionate about them. I certainly look forward to learning more about their care. Yes, we have those little critters too. We just love the fresh eggs!

Our Horticultural Show at the County Fair is coming up in July. Maureen Becker is again hard at work putting together this program. I'm sure she could always use some additional

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help. You can contact her at (540) 462-6119 or email at mbecker@wlu.edu.

Our Plant Sale was a huge success! Thanks to all who participated.

Hope you are all enjoying this extended Spring weather!



CHICKENS AS MASTER GARDENERS
Thursday, June 23rd - 7:00 pm
Rockbridge Regional Library - Piovano
Room

Pat Forman co-host of the Chicken Whisperer Backyard Poultry and Sustainable Lifestyles Talk Show and author of *Chicken Tractor*, *City Chicks*, *Day Range Poultry* and *Backyard Market Gardening* will be discussing how chickens have talents and skill sets that can be gainfully employed in creating productive and beautiful gardens and yards. This bold, insightful, leading-edge seminar gives you practical and effective ways to integrate chickens with small-scale food production. This is truly a "think outside the coop" workshop. You will leave with a new appreciation of what a family flock can truly do, and how to enable your chickens to "be all they can be" naturally.



TRAPPING OF CRITTERS IN THE
GARDEN
By Bob Kovach

Since becoming a Master Gardener, I have been helping in the Stonewall Jackson House vegetable garden. Recently the garden has

sustained damage from critters. We suspected a groundhog. So I volunteered to set two traps in the garden in the hope of catching the dastardly critter.

In mid April I received a call from one of the docents at the house. He related, "Bob, I have good news and bad news for you. The good news is that there is a critter in one of the traps. The bad news is that we think it is a skunk." So I dashed over to the Stonewall Jackson House and discovered that it indeed was a skunk that was caught. And it clearly was very unhappy about being in the trap.

First I tried moving the trap by picking it up with a long pole. The skunk became very agitated, turned its rear toward me and started to raise its tail. I quickly set down the trap and backed away. At this point I was baffled at how to resolve this situation.

One of the Jackson House docents suggested calling Animal Control and have them deal with the skunk. Good idea! I called Animal Control and they laughed at me. As it was not their trap, they refused to get involved and stated that it was my problem. However, they did provide a bit of useful information; cover the trap and the skunk will quiet down.

So I went home, grabbed an old bed sheet and then carefully covered the trap. Sure enough in a few minutes there was no rustling in the trap. Now what to do? I clearly had to move the trap and release the skunk. Not thinking too clearly at this point I carefully picked up the covered trap and placed it in the back of my truck. The skunk was silent!

My next move was not as swift. I drove to my house, removed the covered trap from the truck and carried it to the back yard. No movement from the skunk! My confidence was increasing. Now to release the skunk. The problem is that in order to open the trap I had to get very up close and personal with the critter. I removed the cover from the trap. The skunk suddenly became active! Now I had no way to release the critter without the potential of getting sprayed.

At this point I figured my only alternative was to shoot the skunk in the trap. So I retrieved my .22 rifle and prepared to dispatch the creature. I was aware that as a skunk dies its anal muscles may relax and the spray will be released. So I made sure its rear end was pointed away from me and I fired the rifle. The skunk died and released the spray. What I didn't count on was even though the spray was directed away from me; there was a large aerosol cloud. And a portion of that cloud settled upon me and my clothes! It took several long showers and two washings of the clothes to remove the perfume.

Not having learned a lesson, I continued setting the traps in the hope of catching the elusive groundhog. Several weeks later it was discovered that the traps had caught two critters the same evening. However, no groundhogs were in the traps, but two skunks this time!

Having learned the hard way from previous experience, plus some online research on skunk trapping, I decided on a different approach. Both traps were carefully covered and placed in the back of my truck. This

time I was not going to dispatch the creatures, but instead try to release them. So I drove far away from civilization and area farms. The covered traps were placed on the ground and only enough of the covers were removed to expose the trap doors. Then I carefully blocked the doors open with pieces of wood and quickly backed away. In short order both skunks came out of the traps and ran into the woods. What a relief!

The bottom line from this story is that RAMGA has a problem with truth in advertising. During the interview process and the training, no one mentioned that Master Gardeners may have to deal with skunks!



**THE CAMPBELL/SLOAN
DEMONSTRATION GARDENS
By John and Jeanette Matchette**

During 1844-5, when Alexander T. Sloan built the Campbell House and the neighboring Sloan House, having previously bought The Castle, his wife, Eleanor, described the grounds as "rough and unsightly." For the next eighty years the Sloan House and Castle were rented or vacant, all three structures existing with no known gardens. In 1924, they were sold to Hale Houston who developed a garden behind the main house and The Castle. The area was terraced, using field stones removed from the grounds, and a greenhouse was added to the lowest terrace, two features we can recognize today. Many considered Houston's gardens as among the most beautiful in Lexington, and he became an honorary member of a ladies garden club.

By 1949, the property had passed to Houston's brother-in-law, Dr. Leslie L. Campbell, but had been neglected for years. The Castle's limestone walls were crumbling and covered with vines. In 1964, the three historic buildings were donated to The Rockbridge Historical Society when Campbell died leaving no heirs. The Campbell house now serves as the organization's Headquarters and museum.

The grounds have received care from various local garden clubs, volunteers and RHS members. In 1997, however, a team of MGs led by Ann Spivey looked over the situation. They found it "rough and unsightly." Vines had taken over several mature boxwoods and weeds abounded in the beds. They recommended renovations of the gardens and developed a maintenance plan. The hope was to fix things and leave maintenance to RHS; but the Society was so pleased with the team's work they asked to have the grounds made a Master Gardener project, and our board agreed.

Today MGs continue to plan and maintain all beds and shrubs. The gardens incorporate beautiful old iron fences, as well as stone and brick, enhancing the charm of peaceful respite in the heart of a busy downtown.

The Upper Shade Garden is perhaps the most inviting, and a perfect place for a picnic. The team decided to ask, "Is the right plant in the right place?" While the soil of this garden is alkaline from mortar in house and



walls, its most important aspect is the deep shade in summer created by two dogwood trees, a Chinese Fir and a Deodar Cedar, as well as the shadows of surrounding old buildings. White impatiens and other plants with white or pastel blooms illuminate the shade.

The team also wanted flowers or foliage to create interest in all seasons. With their large, white flowers, evergreen azaleas, cultivar 'Susuki Gumpo,' provide interest in both spring and winter. In early spring, white and yellow low-growing Narcissus and yellow and red tulips show off, along with a white Bleeding Heart (*Dicentra*), cultivar 'Alba,' whose foliage remains attractive throughout the summer. Coral bells were already doing well, so we added some yellow-green Heucheras, cultivar 'Lime Rickey,' for more color in summer. We put a row of dwarf Nandina, an evergreen, against the sunny wall of the building, covering the front of the bed with Candy Tuft 'Little Gem'; its large long-lasting white blossoms gleam all summer and into the fall. Artemisia was added to complement the early spring bloomers and provide summer and autumn interest. The final trim was Lady's Mantle and white Astilbe.



The Old Greenhouse Garden presented the challenge of integrating the concrete foundation of the greenhouse with its surroundings. The solution was to create two raised beds, a border and a semi-circular bed. Two Hollies, along with Sedum 'Autumn Joy,' Monkshood and spring

flowering Hyacinths soften a rock retaining wall.

The plants in The Washington Street and Herb Gardens may vary, but all fulfill specific criteria. They must tolerate moderately alkaline soil with morning sun and partial afternoon shade. With one exception the gardens are designed as a cottage style, mimicking the rustic and charming look of English peasant gardens, though the layout of beds and choice of plant material is rigorously thought out.

Our mission, of course, is education, not maintenance. By creating demonstration gardens we hope to present examples of good gardening. We have labeled all plants and made available brochures describing all plants and their locations. All plantings demonstrate the concept of beautiful home gardens by careful plant selection, requiring relatively low maintenance.

To support the MG mission, we are also recruiting non-Master Gardener volunteers to help us. If any of these has landscaping issues and wants to manage them, chances are that similar issues exist at the RHS properties, where information and hands-on tutelage are available.

Our team meets as a group once monthly at the gardens on Wednesday mornings. In addition, some members meet as necessary to keep their respective areas properly planted and attractive. Want to join us? Have a friend who wants to learn? You can reach team leaders Jeanette or John Matchette at 540-377-9003 or johnmatchette@gmail.com. Team members are Claudia Ellis, Ted Jenks, Diana Losche,

Alberta McGrogan, Alma DeGrasse, Jeanette and John Matchette and Doris Stark. Also on the team are volunteer gardeners of the Rockbridge Historical Society Ed and Sue Bauer, Fred Massey and Sue Whitsitt.

We thank all of our team members for their dedication and hard work at the gardens and their contributions to this article.

Note: This is the fourth 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.



OUR OWN RAMGA 2010 MILESTONE AWARD RECIPIENTS By Carol Schoner

Each year Virginia Master Gardeners who have accumulated and completed milestone levels of volunteer hours in increments of 250, 500, 1000, and each successive level of 1000 hours are recognized and awarded for their efforts. The recognition and awards will be given at the Virginia Tech 24th Annual MG College during the week of June 21-26, 2011.

These awards are important for two reasons: 1) It gives Dave Close a chance to recognize and reward those volunteers contributing to VCE and 2) It serves as the basis for discounts to apply toward their MG College registration fee.

Here are the 2010 Milestone Award recipients for Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association:

3000 Hour Milestone

Katherine Smith
Barbara Thomas

1000 Hour Milestone

Heather Marion

500 Hour Milestone

David Buckner
Phyllis Fevrier

250 Hour Milestone

Caren Nash
Pat Patterson
Amy Scheuer

Our efforts are appreciated by VCE and our communities. Keep up the good work. Give these members a word of appreciation the next time you see them.



PLANT SALE NEWS - DIG AND DIVIDES
By Tracey Smith-Oliver



Now that another successful plant sale is behind us (and people really seemed to like

the compost), the fall dig and divides for next year's plant sale are not far away, and we need to start planning.

We'd like to try a team approach to the dig and divides in preparation for the 2012 plant sale. Typically, 6-10 dig and divides are conducted to achieve the



desired number of plants (1600-1800) for the sale. The team approach consists of identifying 3 Master Gardeners who will split up the dig and divides between them. This way, one person is not going to all the digs, but rather one person would go to approximately 3 digs. Each member of this team is responsible for bringing the supplies (soil, pots, labels etc) to his/her digs, as well as identifying plant sitters, and labelers for those 3 digs. We'd also like to identify a 4th person who will schedule all of the dig and divides. This 4th person will send out a sign-up sheet to all Master Gardeners informing them of the dates and times and requesting assistance at the dig and divides.

We think this team approach will greatly reduce the work burden and at the same time keep it fun! If you'd like to join the team, please contact Tracey Smith-Oliver at 348-6734 or her new email address at tsmitholiver@centurylink.net.



**CONSIDERATIONS FOR PUTTING IN A
SCHOOL GARDEN**

By Barbara Thomas

**Saturday - June 25 - Master Gardener
College - Virginia Tech**

Our very own Barbara Thomas will be teaching a class on putting in a school garden. Should be a very interesting class!

Have you been itching to teach the future generation about growing vegetables? Ever consider starting a school garden? Come hear about an elementary school garden that's been around for 10 years and still going strong. Start-up strategies and curriculum ideas will be presented as well as hands on experiments for participants.



Calendar of Educational Events –June 2011

Date	Event/Credits	Content	Location/Contact
<p>June 4 9:30-11:30am \$15</p> <p>Reservations required.</p>	<p>Rose Culture & Propagation Workshop Charlottesville, VA Tufton Farm</p> <p>Credits: 2 hrs</p>	<p>Dennis Whetzel will demonstrate his successful techniques for propagating and cultivating the center's exclusive collection of historic roses. Bring gardening gloves and hand pruners and leave with your own cutting.</p>	<p>http://www.monticello.org/site/visit/events/rose-culture-and-propagation-workshop</p>
<p>June 18 & 19 1:00-2:30pm</p> <p>No Charge</p>	<p>Pond Construction and Stocking with Plants and Fish Springdale Water Gardens, Greenville</p> <p>Credit: 1 hr</p>	<p>Demonstration on how to install a water garden. Topics include pond shape and size, how to choose and install the correct pond liner size, skimmers, filtration options, placement of stones and planting areas along the edges of your water garden and how to stock plants, fish and scavengers to establish an ecological balance. Break for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.</p>	<p>More info at http://www.springdalewatergardens.com</p>
<p>June 22-26</p>	<p>Master Gardener College - VA Tech College, Blacksburg, VA</p> <p>Credit: Multiple Credit hours depending on classes attended</p>	<p>This is an amazing opportunity to join other MGs from around the state to attend a wide range of classes taught by experts in their field. There are excellent opportunities for multiple continuing education hours. Topics range from food preservation to plant breeding, conifers to ornamental grasses, weed ecology to abiotic stressors/nutrient deficiencies, hardscaping to hydroponics, visits to the VT</p>	<p>Go to http://www.cpe.vt.edu/reg/mastergardener/ for more info and registration details. Online registration ends June 5. To register by phone, call (540) 231-5182</p>

		Soils, Insect ID, Nematode, Plant Diagnostics Labs and more. Our own Barbara Thomas is presenting a talk on "Considerations for Putting in a School Garden". It is possible to attend for only a day or two instead of the full 4 days. One day registration is \$50 and two day is \$100.	
June 23 7:00 - 8:00pm No Charge	Chickens as Master Gardeners Credit: 1 hr	Rockbridge Regional Library - Piovano Room - chickens have talents and skill sets that can be gainfully employed in creating productive and beautiful gardens and yards.	
SAVE THE DATES			
Aug 29-21	13th Annual "In The Garden With The Experts". Homestead, Hot Springs Credit: 4.5 hrs	Andre Viette will show you which plants make the wonderful gardens in the United States and Canada great. Michael Goatley will discuss keeping lawns green & water clean & Bart McDowell shows you how to prune like a pro. Mike Western talks about three season vegetable gardening.	More info at http://www.thehomestead.com/events
Aug 27	Down and Dirty Garden Symposium II: The Wicked Garden. Credit: Hrs TBD	All-day symposium featuring Amy Stewart, author of "Wicked Plants" and coming in 2011, "Wicked Bugs".	VA Tech, Blacksburg
Online courses available	Department of Plant Pathology, Ohio State University	Various Online Courses Available	http://plantpath.osu.edu/extension/outreach/online/index.html
Credit *** For credit hour questions, contact 540-377-9095		Liz Maurer esm306@yahoo.com	757-428-4777 (c) or

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IN AND OUT OF THE GARDEN

Editor-in-chief Sherry Smith
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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.

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

Subscription rates: \$10.00 per year.

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