

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

June 2022



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**Thank you, everyone, for helping to make
our 2022 RAMGA Plant Sale a huge success!
See you in 2023.**

Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners community newsletter. Each month we will be bringing you relevant seasonal horticultural information for Rockbridge County. If you enjoy this newsletter, please pass it on. Subscription information is on the last page of this newsletter.

LOCAL HAPPENINGS

Saturday, June 18, 11am. RAMGA Virtual Plant Clinic. “Plant ID? There's an App for that!” The Master Gardeners are having a free, open to the public Zoom session discussing their experiences with some of the numerous apps available for plant identification, with helpful hints for getting the most out of them. Register at www.ramga.org

And don't forget the Brownsburg Garden Tour, Saturday, July 2, 9:00am – 3:00pm
For tickets and more information, www.brownsburgva.com

AREA HAPPENINGS...

Wednesday, June 8, 1:00 – 3:00pm. Glasgow Garden Club will be giving tours of Centennial Park in Glasgow. There will be free plants and refreshments.

Wednesday, June 8, 1:00pm – 2:00pm. Webinar, “Ask the Experts About Phlox”. The National Garden Bureau via Bedford Extension Master Gardeners. <https://ngb.org/great-garden-webinars/>

Saturday, June 18, 2:00pm – 4:00pm. “Garden Basics: Maintaining the Perennial Garden”. Free. Sponsored by the Piedmont Master Gardeners. Trinity Episcopal Church, 1118 Preston Ave., Charlottesville.

Thursday, June 23, 9:00 – 4:30pm. Pollinator Power Symposium. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden in Richmond. In-person ticket: \$52, Virtual ticket: \$30. <https://www.lewisginter.org/event/pollinator-power-symposium/>

The New Perennialist website has several interesting free webinars by well-known landscape designers. <https://thenewperennialist.com/new-perennialist-talks/>

JUNE GARDEN CHORES

General

- Continually pull weeds from beds
- Work organic material such as chopped leaves or compost into garden beds
- Continue to mulch garden beds 2 to 3 inches deep with an organic material. This will keep moisture in the soil and will also help keep the weeds down
- Newly planted perennials, trees and shrubs will generally need 1 inch of water each week – either from rain or irrigation
- Don't bag your grass cuttings. Instead let them fall back onto the lawn where they will add organic matter and nitrogen to the soil

Insects:

- Keep an eye out for Japanese Beetles. We usually see them the end of June here in Rockbridge County. If you are going to use traps, be sure and place them far away from the plants you want to protect
- Watch for squash bugs on your squash. Monitor for eggs on the undersides of leaves and scrape them off

- Bagworms hatch in late May to early June, especially on arborvitae. Insecticides work from mid to late June and handpick after that

Fruits and Vegetables:

An excellent and useful VCE publication organized by climate zone (Rockbridge, for the most part is zone 6B heading towards 7) is “Virginia’s Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-331/426-331.html>

Stop cutting asparagus by mid to late June. Don’t cut the foliage until the fall as the fronds feed the asparagus roots during the summer.

The following vegetables can still be planted as a first crop or a second crop until the following dates. I’ll include the dates for planting fall crops in the July/August newsletter.

- pole beans until June 20
- lima beans until July 15.
- - cucumbers until June 20
 - eggplant until July 10
 - peppers until July 1
 - pumpkins until July 1
 - winter squash until July 1
 - summer squash until June 20 (a second crop of summer squash often evades squash bugs)
 - sweet corn until July 1
 - sweet potatoes until July 1
 - watermelon until July 1



Don’t pull your fall-planted garlic yet. In Rockbridge, it is usually ready to be pulled in the first week of July. But do cut the scapes and use/saute them as you would use a spicy scallion.

Flowers:

- Deadhead perennials and annuals to keep them blooming.
- The first couple weeks in June are a good time to prune your fall perennials. Cut them back by a third. They will become bushier, and this will also avoid the lower stretch of dead looking stem you might see in the fall. Asters and goldenrod are notorious for this.
- Don’t remove spent daffodil foliage until it is completely withered. That foliage is feeding the bulbs. Remove it too soon and you may not get any flowers next year.
- Do succession plantings of zinnias or other annuals quick to germinate so you will have some extended blooms in the fall.

Trees and Shrubs:

If you are planting new trees and shrubs, remember to consider hardiness, light requirements, soil drainage, wind tolerance, mature size, insect or disease problems, maintenance levels, etc. when choosing your plant. Remember the “plant right place” rule. Here is another good Tech publication, “How to Plant a Tree”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/SPES-226/SPES-226.html>

- Prune roses to an outward facing bud

Pruning:

- Prune spring flowering shrubs after flowering is completed.

VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH - EGGPLANT

Eggplant and its Enemy, the Flea Beetle

I know eggplants are not everyone’s favorite vegetable, although they are related to probably the number one favorite, tomatoes. I happen to love them and grow them every year with some success. Like tomatoes, eggplants are a warm season vegetable and like tomatoes, they can suffer many of the same diseases. The best way to stave off disease is with good cultivation practices. Make clean cuts with sterilized shears or pruners when pruning. Be careful when watering and make sure the lower leaves are not wet. Splash up to those leaves from the soil when watering invites disease. Plant the transplants 18” apart and keep 3’ between the rows. Rotate your planting every couple of years.

In my experience, flea beetles are eggplants worst enemies. Are your eggplant leaves covered with little shot holes? These are the result of flea beetles. Those myriad little holes reduce the photosynthetic capability of the plant resulting in stunted growth and may even kill the eggplant. The eggplant flea beetle (*Epix fuscus* ‘Crotch’) are tiny black beetles, oval-shaped with tiny indents all over their shells. They have an enlarged back leg which characterizes their flea-like jump. Rub your hand over invested leaves and you’ll see flea beetles jumping off in all directions. Flea beetles overwinter in field edges, not in the



soil, and lay eggs in the spring at the base of solanaceous plants such as eggplants and tomatoes. The adults emerge the end of May and early June. There is no effective biological control for these pests, but there is one solution that has worked for me – row covers. Until I started using row covers for my eggplant, I had dismal results. Inevitably, the flea beetles would decimate my crop. I put the covers on when I put in the transplants and then take them off when the plants begin to flower. The Piedmont Master Gardeners have a great article on row covers here, <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/row-covers-a-gardening-season-extender-with-benefits/>.

Most of my eggplant goes into one of my favorite summer dishes – eggplant caponata.

Eggplant Caponata

1 globe eggplant, approximately, 1 ½ lbs., peeled and cut into 1" cubes
3 Tablespoons olive oil plus 2 Tablespoon for the saucepan
2 stalks celery, diced
1 onion, chopped
1 red pepper, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
2 Tablespoons tomato paste
1 can (14 oz) petite diced tomatoes
2 Tablespoons capers
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
¼ cup ketchup
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon oregano
A few shakes of crushed red pepper
Salt and pepper to taste
¼ cup raisins
¼ cup chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Combine eggplant cubes and 3 tablespoons oil in a large bowl. Cover a large, rimmed half sheet pan with parchment paper and spread the oiled cubes in the pan. Roast in the oven until tender and golden about 30 – 40 minutes.

In the meantime, heat the remaining 2 T. oil in a large saucepan. Sauté the onions over medium high heat for about 5 minutes. Stir in the peppers and celery for another five minutes or so. Add the garlic and stir for another minute or so.

Add the tomato paste to the pan and stir until darkened. Add the can of tomatoes, capers, raisins, vinegar, ketchup, sugar, oregano, red pepper, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil and then let the mixture simmer until tomatoes are soft and the liquid reduces somewhat, about 20 minutes.

Adjust salt, if necessary, stir in parsley and serve room temperature or cold.

How To Prevent an Achy, Breaky Back and Other Body Parts in Gardening

By Karen Carlton

I was reading an article in the New York Times that was addressing good body mechanics when you are doing your gardening chores. The basic take-away message is this in gardening; it is a series of repetitive motions. You shouldn't feel pain doing something you enjoy, also it helps to already have a regular fitness habit for good health.

Madeline Hooper is a retired public-relations executive and avid gardener in the Hudson Valley area of New York. She was having discomfort with her gardening tasks. A friend of hers suggested she talk to a personal trainer, Jeff Hughes. He could help her try to reduce her pain while still doing her gardening that she loves. Those sessions started a public television series called "GardenFit". The GardenFit crew goes to different farms and gardens to help the gardeners of the various properties develop good body mechanics to do their gardening work.

The Home Base Position: The Armchair

While filming GardenFit Mr. Hughes emphasized each gardener in the program needs to be aware that the hips play a key role in any garden activities. To the rescue: The Armchair! Everyday tasks such as weeding, picking up tools and digging with a trowel can be done from this position without straining your lower back. And it's the place to stop off on your way to crouching or kneeling, or when you're coming back up.

"Stopping off at the armchair is kind of a home base for everything else", Mr. Hughes said. Here is how it works: Spread your feet to just slightly past hip width. Then start by squatting, keeping your knees from jutting forward beyond your toes. Rest your forearms on your legs, which relieves the lower back from the supporting role. As you begin to work, remember to keep one elbow on one thigh.

He also recommends using the armchair for lifting heavy objects such as the big pot or a bag of potting soil. He said, "Don't hold it out in front of you, make it part of your body." In other words, it is best to keep the object close to your body when you are picking up.

Putting a Spin on Things

To get the rest of the way to the ground from the armchair, or back up without stressing your knees or lower back, add a spin to the move. Start from the armchair, and if you need to spin

to the left, drop your right knee. As you do that, you'll be turning, not dropping straight down. To come back up off the ground, turn and spin back to the armchair enroute.

If It's a Heavy Lift...

Another stressor is holding a tool - a hedge clipper, for instance - out in front of you and trying to do all the work with your arms. Mr. Hughes said, "we also need to get our back muscles into the game, specifically the ones that pull the shoulder blades downward." Imagine sliding your arms down into your back trouser pockets. It is a balancing act between your arms and back that Mr. Hughes calls the seesaw.

The other recommendations were not overdoing it. You need to think of your to-do list of garden tasks, like being at a carnival. When most people go to a carnival, they don't usually ride one ride the whole time they are there. So, think of your tasks in 30-minute increments. That way no one muscle group is getting overtaxed with whatever gardening chore you are doing at the time.

Remember, you don't want your muscles to be the sacrifice because you love gardening.

Resource:

Roach, Margaret. "Gardening Shouldn't be Painful". *The New York Times*, Sunday, May 15, 2022

Nigella

Have you ever grown Love-in-a-Mist? This pretty little cool season annual is in its element right now. The genus name *Nigella* comes from the Latin word *niger* which mean black, the color of nigella seeds. You may have used nigella as a spice, but the spice is another nigella, *nigella sativa* as opposed to love-in-a-mist, *nigella damascene*, which is purely decorative. All the nigella are in the buttercup family.

Broadcast the seed where you want it as soon as the ground can be worked or even in the fall. Full sun is best. The plant gets to be 1 ½ - 2' tall and as wide with very fine leaves. The flowers are usually blue but can also be white or pink. But be forewarned, your mixed colors next year will probably turn out to be totally blue if you have let them self-sow which they do readily. Each puffy flower sits on a bed of lacy leaves. That flower forms strange little egg-shaped, horned seed capsules (to 1" diameter) that are covered with bristles. You often see these unusual seed heads in dried flower



arrangements. The plant dies out when the weather gets hot. To me, this is one of its benefits. It is a nice filler plant while the summer annuals and perennials are coming along – and, once it is dead, I pull it and scatter the seeds where I want them to come up next year.

The Garden Gate, a monthly newsletter by the
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