

March 2022

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Submissions due the 20<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month.

# Into the Garden

## Leadership Team Letter

*Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle, David Caldwell*

Signs of spring abound and I'm sure all RAMGA members are looking forward to the new growing season! Even though the pandemic continues, EMGs are actively working to educate our community about sustainable gardening, managing alien invasive species, and composting, among other topics. The Plant Clinic and Help Desk have adapted to provide virtual education to all during the time when in-person gatherings weren't possible. A huge THANK YOU to all RAMGA EMGs!!!

Virginia Cooperative Extension suspended requirements for earning annual hours for a period of time early in the pandemic. We're now expected to earn CEUs, provide volunteer service hours, and record our time in Better Impact just as we've always done. For those who are challenged by BI, help is available. Bob Kovach has mastered the system and does a wonderful job of explaining how to use BI. If you are a seasoned MG who just can't become comfortable with the computer, you can record your hours by hand and submit them to the IT

team for entry in BI. Why do we log hours? Because your time matters, and volunteer hour reports are collected and analyzed to determine funding



projects at Federal, State, and local levels.

RAMGA's volunteers make a difference in Rockbridge and the surrounding areas, and the time you spend volunteering positively changes lives. Find your comfort zone, share your knowledge, educate yourself and others. Projects are evolving and 3 new ones have been approved in response to the needs of RAMGA members and the community. All our project leaders have fascinating elements to the programs they lead. How many have you visited? Reach out to a program in need. Find your niche(s), fit volunteering into your schedule in a way that works for you, then report your time.

The following is paraphrased from The Virginia Master

Gardener Handbook and refreshes our collective memory about how we share knowledge and empower communities:

The challenge of educating the public about sustainable landscape management is tremendous but accomplishable with your help, qualified instructors, and the EMG team spirit. Twenty Eight (28) hours of volunteer time total are required annually to meet program requirements. Of these a minimum of eight (8) hours of continuing education training is needed. This training obligation can be met through continuing education programs offered through the Virginia Master Gardener Association (VMGA); lecture-style presentations at project meetings; local programs and projects (RAMGA); advanced training credits earned through participation in the annual VCE-MG College in June at Virginia Tech; completion of advanced-level VCE MG training programs, such as Master Gardener Tree Steward; and similar educational opportunities, or college credits.

With your support, knowledge, and continued involvement the partnership between VCE and the VCE Master Gardeners continues to grow and bloom through increased participation and program expansion. Again, thank you for your service to VCE, your community, and planet earth!

*Jen, Anita and David*

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## RAMGA FYI...

**If you haven't already done so, it is time for volunteers to re-enroll in the EMG program for 2022.** This can be done through Better Impact:

1. Log into Better Impact at [myimpactpage.com](http://myimpactpage.com)
2. Go to the "MY PROFILE" tab at the top right corner of the screen
3. Click the Qualifications subtab
4. Read and agree to the four statements provided (contact information update, voluntary disclosure, EMG Standards of Conduct, EMG Volunteer Agreement)
5. Set the expiry date for the end of the calendar year (12/31/2022)

**Three new RAMGA projects have been approved and are looking for volunteers.** Volunteer hours on these projects will count towards the required 28 hours per year needed to maintain Master Gardener certification. All three programs provide educational outreach to RAMGA members and the community at large. Further information can be found on your shared google drive under "Projects".

1. **SEED SAVERS:** RAMGA volunteers will provide relevant, scientific-based instruction to the community regarding the methods and processes needed to preserve new seed varieties, including native seeds from our region. An inventory of suitable seeds for Rockbridge County is in the process of being developed. Future goals include expanding the seed swap to include other gardening groups and the community at large and to develop a "lending" seed library. **If you are interested in volunteering, contact Karen Lyons, [klyons0221@gmail.com](mailto:klyons0221@gmail.com) or Ginger Reed, [farcountrygrl@gmail.com](mailto:farcountrygrl@gmail.com)**

2. **INVASIVE SPECIES EDUCATION – IDENTIFICATION & MANAGEMENT:** This project focuses on invasive plant identification and management. Invasive plant species are smothering native flora. Volunteers in this project would help develop and present educational programs that work to increase awareness and knowledge of responsible landscape management and natural resource conservation. Working with volunteers at Brushy Hill removing invasives, for example, would count as volunteer hours for this project. **If you are interested in volunteering with this project, contact Jan Smith, [janhuntersmith@gmail.com](mailto:janhuntersmith@gmail.com).**
  
3. **FRUIT TREES – BERRIES & VINES:** Volunteers in this project, in collaboration with community members, will provide educational outreach through field trips and programs on the best management practices in growing fruit trees, berries, and productive vines. **Contact Project Leader, Dave Bryer, [dmbryer@gmail.com](mailto:dmbryer@gmail.com), if you would like to volunteer.**

**Hummingbird Hill Native Plant Nursery in Charlottesville (4190 Free Union Rd.) has a consistently excellent free newsletter.** This month's issue is on developing wildlife corridors on your property. Subscribe here: [www.hummingbirdhillnatives.com](http://www.hummingbirdhillnatives.com)

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## WELCOME, RAMGA CLASS OF 2022!

### Meeting and Greeting the Class of 2022

*By Tamara Teaff*

#### Melanie Griffis

Melanie has been a resident of Rockbridge County twice. The first time, 1983 to 2007, she came as the Director of Alumnae Affairs at Southern Seminary (now Southern Virginia University). Later, she worked as Events Director for the Virginia Military Institute Sesquicentennial Campaign. She married a Washington and Lee administrator. Together, they have two daughters. After the second daughter was born, Melanie began working as a non-profit consultant. Eventually, she became the director of the Rockbridge Concert Theatre Series and attended Mary Baldwin University to complete requirements for a teaching certificate. That led to ten years as the Executive Director of Yellow Brick Road Early Learning Center. In 2007, she was offered the opportunity to be the first Director of the College of Fine Arts at her Alma Mater, Marshall University, in Huntington, West Virginia.

Melanie feels that her greatest professional accomplishment was leading a 7MM campaign to redevelop a vacant downtown building as a state-of-the-art Visual Arts Center.

While working in West Virginia, Melanie and her husband decided to buy property in Rockbridge for their retirement. It took some time, but they finally found the perfect site, "Camp Gigi". After retiring from a nearly 40-year career in fundraising and non-profit management, Melanie and her husband moved back full-time to Lexington in 2019. Currently her husband is undergoing treatments for pancreatic cancer at

the University of Virginia Medical Center. Together they had big plans for developing gardens and a fruit orchard. With the help of friends and a crew of local, plant loving landscapers this past year, the vision continues.

Since 1983, Melanie has participated in the various iterations of the Rockbridge Chorus/Choral Society. She founded the Rockbridge Youth Chorale in the 1990's and served as its Artistic Director for its first five years. Melanie has served on the Choral Society board (sometimes commuting from West Virginia) and as the first Executive Director of the Rockbridge Choral Society. She left that position during Michael's illness to be his caregiver.

Presently, Melanie is the full-time owner/manager of "Camp Gigi". She greatest joy is being Gigi to four granddaughters and Gigi, by choice, to a couple more kiddos. Her gardens and 173 houseplants are her second greatest joy. Her proudest accomplishment is raising two accomplished young women. Each has a fulfilling career, a loving husband, and two nearly perfect children. They both garden – with very different approaches – but with loving enjoyment of having their hands in the dirt and teaching their children.

### **Becky Herndon**

She was named Becky Ann Moncure. She is not a Rebecca because she was named after her Aunt Becky whose real name was Grace! Confusing, huh? Her father gave her aunt the nickname Becky. She became Becky Herndon when she married a fellow Hokie, Larry Herndon. They were married almost 41 years when Larry passed away. Becky still lives in the same log home that she and her husband built in 1989.

Becky is a retired teacher. She taught for 23 years in Rockbridge County with her last five years in Loudoun County. While a fourth-grade teacher at Natural Bridge Elementary, she worked closely with the Master Gardeners and, at that time, made a pledge to herself to take the course once she retired. Becky continues to teach, working as a substitute teacher for Rockbridge County Schools. Prior to her teaching career, she worked, for nearly a decade, in corporate public affairs and advertising for a large telephone company near Dulles Airport. It was a wonderful experience but not conducive to raising small children as it required a great deal of travel. Becky has two children, Will and Courtney.

Most of her volunteer experience has been working with students in the educational field. It continues to be a passion. She loves reading a variety of genres, dance exercising, walking, and traveling. She also enjoys planning outings with her high school pals, usually with a fun theme. In addition, she adores playing with her five grandchildren. Becky feels blessed to have three great siblings. Master Gardener, Nancy Stikes, being one of them. With her siblings, summers are spent on the Potomac doing such activities as crabbing pots, floating in inner tubes, looking for shark's teeth, and fishing with bamboo poles. These events usually include 20+ family members, as another generation of "river rats" is being raised.

Becky has a favorite fun fact to share. She saw the Monkees in concert as a preteen with Jimi Hendrix as the opening act. No one puts those two acts together! In conclusion, Becky is looking forward to learning and growing as a gardener as well as meeting new friends and volunteering in the community.

## Ben Huger

Ben is a native of Virginia Beach. He met his wife, Laurie, at James Madison University. They have been living in Raleigh, North Carolina for the last 30 years where Ben worked as a Raleigh Police Officer. He recently retired. Laurie is a retired third-grade teacher. Their son, Ben, is a Virginia Military Institute graduate and resides in Virginia Beach. Their daughter, Lane, is an Elon grad and lives in New York City. Ben's dad grew up in Lexington, and Ben has cousins who live in Rockbridge County. Both he and his wife always dreamed of moving to the Valley and have decided that this is a good time to flee Raleigh, before it becomes more like Atlanta. They are building a house south of Lexington and hope to be moved in by June 1st.

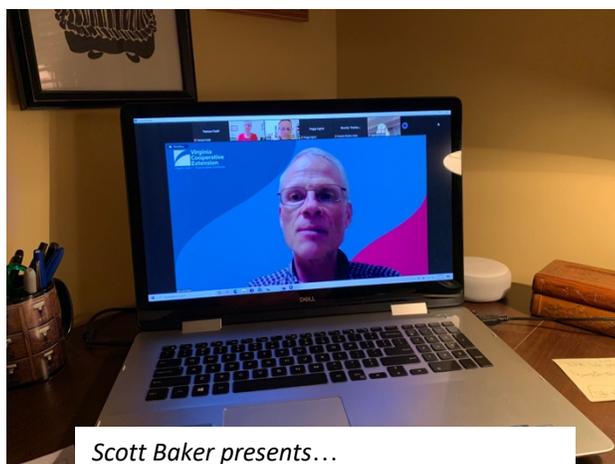
Ben and his wife love to grow vegetables in their backyard for personal use and to share with friends. Together, they volunteered with organizations in the Raleigh area that grow vegetables for food banks. Ben admits that he knows little about flowers. However, he began beekeeping several years ago and is excited to expand his horizons beyond vegetables to other aspects of gardening. Ben expresses a specific interest in learning more about pollinator gardens.

## CLASS OF 2022

### LAB 1, IPM MODULE

*By Tamara Teaff*

The first lab of the 2022 Master Gardener Training Course took place on Thursday, February 24, on Zoom (6:30- 8:00 p.m.). This lab involved learning about safe use of pesticides and an alternative solution through the implementation of IPM (Integrated Pest Management). Before participating in the lab, each trainee completed the pesticides/IPM computer-based module and related quiz. Also, to prepare for the Zoom meeting, the trainees were assigned prelab activities related to best practices on pest management. These activities provided the foundation for a lively discussion later, during the lab, by the trainees.



Scott Baker, Bedford Area Extension Agent, and Betsy Brown, a Bedford Master Gardener, were the instructors. Scott Baker started the lab by stating the goal was to train the trainees how to think critically when presented with a plant problem.

Betsy Brown, who worked in the field of pest management for 40 years before retirement, provided an overview of pesticides as well as ways to prevent their use through preventive measures, such as the importance of healthy soil, the selection of pest resistant plant varieties, and knowledge of the correct plant for the correct climate location. She advocated an idea of taking a *Chardonnay*

*Walk* through the garden to assess what is happening among the plants growing there. This daily habit was

introduced to her by a Master Gardener friend as a way to explore and evaluate the health and well-being of her personal garden.

Stating that pesticides are indeed a poison, she cautioned that the application needs to be done with extreme care. Later in the lab, Scott Baker led the trainees in a thorough reading and analysis of the labels of a selected pesticide. He reminded the class that the label is a legal document. It is a binding agreement between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the product manufacturer, and the user.

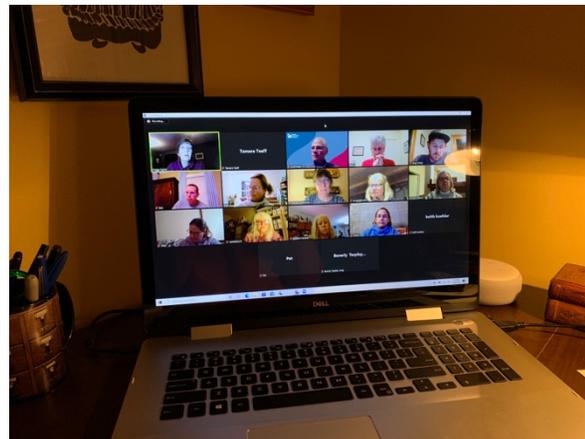
Next, Mr. Baker continued the discussion of IPM as an alternative to pesticides. **INTEGRATED:** Consider all types of control strategies, combined, to solve a pest problem

**PEST:** Unwanted organism that causes a problem to humans, plants, animals, and property

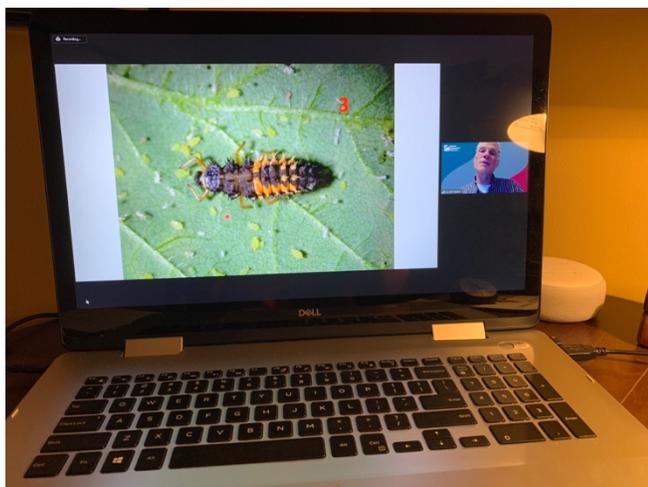
**MANAGEMENT:** Making decisions

Key to the implementation of IPM is the identification of the plant issue and the determination if a problem exists or not. For example, is the plant suffering from over-watering or something altogether different?

Mr. Baker challenged the trainees to apply their deductive reasoning skills to determine the cause of plant problems. Photos of various stressed plants were displayed, and the interns discussed the cause of the plant difficulty.



*Zoom lab in action*



*Problem or not a problem? That is the question.*

The class was introduced to the *Virginia Tech Pest Management Guide, Home\_Grounds and Animals, 2022* which is available online

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/456-018.html>

This helpful manual, from VA Tech, covers identification of pest problems, pest control, and the proper use of pest control methods.

In conclusion, the interns were encouraged to make educated choices when managing insect damage, plant pathogens, and weed control in their gardens, with the emphasis being on **control**, not **eradication**.

**IPM is taking preventative measures by selecting appropriate actions. It is based on removing causes rather than treating the symptoms.**

**Scott Baker IPM Lab 2022**

## Seed Swap 2022

We had a great turnout for our 2022 seed swap event on January 27th. Many RAMGA members, both longstanding and new trainees, were able to meet and socialize before returning home with a bag full of seeds. We have seen enough interest in this activity to expand it into a formal project of Seed Sharing.

Going forward, we plan to reach out to other gardeners and community members to encourage seed preservation through education and future sharing events. If you are interested in participating in this project in the future, please email one of us.

**Karen Lyons (klyons0221@gmail.com)**

**Ginger Reed (farcountryglr@gmail.com)**



*A successful 2022 seed swap!*



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## Continuing Education Opportunities:

(Local opportunities in **Bold and a larger font**)

**Piedmont Master Gardeners Announce Spring Lecture Series** – March 3, 10, 24 and 31, Zoom – The Piedmont Master Gardeners have lined up a slate of leading experts on sustainable landscaping, indigenous gardening wisdom, and small fruit production for their 2022 Spring Lecture Series, to be presented online

from 7 to 8:15 p.m. on four Thursdays in March. Admission for each lecture is \$10. Registration to receive links to the Zoom sessions will be available beginning mid-February at

<https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/events/>

The schedule includes:

- March 3 – C. Colston Burrell, “Beauty, Integrity and Resilience: Can a Garden Have Everything?”
- March 10 – Renée Gokey and Christine Price-Abelow, “The Three Sisters: Indigenous Origins and Best Growing Practices.”
- March 24 – Jayesh Samtani, “Home Garden Berries: Selection, Cultivation and Growing Alongside Ornamental Plants.”
- March 31 – Designing with Native Plants (Details TBA)

**March 5, Saturday, 9:15 – 11:35 and Saturday, March 12, 9:15 – 11:35. Bedford Master Gardeners annual symposium, “Grow the Good Life” via Zoom.** \$18 for each weekend, \$36 for the entire presentation.

March 5 presentations: “Gardening in a Chaotic Climate”, “Plants You Can Eat and Drink” and March 12 presentations: “Gardening Simplified: Plants and Design Solutions for Time-Pressed and Maturing Gardeners” and “Good Weeds: Bad Weeds: What You Should Know About the Plant You Didn’t Plant”.

Register here: <https://www.bedfordareamastergardeners.org/event/grow-the-good-life/>

**March 8, Tuesday, 6:30pm. Part 1 of “Below the Surface: How Plants & Geology Interact” with Bert Harris and 8:00pm “Virginia’s Geology: A Journey from Deep Time to the Future” with Chuck Bailey**

via Zoom. 2022 VNPS (Virginia Native Plant Society) Annual Workshop. Tuesday, March 15, Part 2, 6:30pm, “Geology & Soil Parent Materials as Determinants of Natural Communities in Virginia & the Carolinas”, 8:00pm, “Beyond Substrates: Universal Geologic Principles for Interpreting Plant-Landscape Relationships” with Tony Fleming. Free. Register here:

<https://vnps.app.neoncrm.com/np/clients/vnps/eventRegistration.jsp?event=1308&>

**March 10, Thursday, 7:00pm – 8:00pm. Online event. “Growing Bird Food: New Research on Wildlife Usage of Native Hydrangea”** with Sam Hoadley of Mt. Cuba Center. Sponsored by the Audubon Society of North America. Register here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/growing-bird-food-new-research-on-wildlife-usage-of-native-hydrangea-tickets-256290410517?aff=ahs>

**March 12, Saturday, Gardening in the Valley Symposium, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm, Hester Auditorium, Hester Hall, Shenandoah University, Winchester, VA.** “Attracting Beneficial Pollinators”, Carrie Whitacre of Blandly Farm, State Arboretum of VA; Berenice Thieblot, “Reclamation of a Quarry”, “Growing Minds – School Gardens”, teachers Jennifer Horn and Christina Pezzimenti; “Role of Natural Remedies in Pet Health Care”, Dr. Wendell Combest; “Educational Public Gardens”, Perry Matthews, Deputy Director, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley. \$65. Includes lunch and breaks. To register or for more information, contact [www.nsvmg.org/events/symposium/](http://www.nsvmg.org/events/symposium/)

**March 16, Wednesday, 8:00 – 4:00 pm, Roanoke Tree Health Care Workshop, sponsored by Trees Virginia. Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke.** [www.treesvirginia.org](http://www.treesvirginia.org)

**March 18, Friday, Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium 2022, 8:00 am – 4:15 pm, Best Western Inn and Conference Center, Waynesboro, VA.** Speakers include Carol Reese on native plants, Paul Westervelt on

new perennial introductions, Scott Beuerlein on survivor trees, and Marie Butler on designing for wildlife. \$95 registration includes lunch. Contact <https://www.waynesboro.va.us/971/Shenandoah-Valley-Plant-Symposium> for registration and/or more information.

**March 19, Saturday, 11am – noon. RAMGA Zoom Plant Clinic, “The Healthy Gardener”.**  
**Register at [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)**

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## Faith’s Garden Notes...

### Loads of Witch hazels

The end of February and the first couple weeks of March are usually peak for another of my favorite plants, witch hazels, in this case, *Hamamelis x intermedia*, a cross between two species’ parents, *Hamamelis mollis* (Chinese witch hazel) and *Hamamelis japonica* (Japanese witch hazel). You might be more familiar with our native witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*), another nice plant that blooms in fall, the same time as its handsome yellow foliage. Another spring blooming witch hazel is the Vernal witch hazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*). All have their virtues.



However, I do have a special fondness for the intermedias. They are considered a large deciduous shrub or small tree, somewhat coarse, and grow 15 – 20’ tall. Their sterling characteristic is their flowers. Depending on the cultivar, you will find intermedias blooming from January to mid-March, just when you have about given up on spring. The petals are long and spidery, anywhere from 1-3” long and come in shades of yellow, red, and orange. There are often fragrant. Flowering is best in full sun. Autumn foliage is usually yellow, but the red-flowered varieties may have redder fall foliage. There is a

beautiful ‘Diane’ directly in front of the lodge at Boxerwood with reddish-orange petals and an orange petalled ‘Jelena’ behind the handicapped parking that I’ve long admired. There are many, many cultivars of the intermedias, but they are often hard to find in the nurseries, probably because when they are in peak bloom the nurseries don’t have much foot traffic if at all.

The Common or Eastern witch hazel is our native witch hazel, blooming from October to December. The Blue Ridge mountains are full of this low maintenance plant. They can grow to 15-20' tall but look more shrublike with competition in the forests. A notable feature of all the witch hazels is their zig-zag twiggy structure. Cluster of bright yellow flowers, each with four crinkly threadlike petals appear along the branches after the leaves drop. Fruit forms over a long period of time through the winter forming a greenish seed capsule that ripens to brown. The seed capsules split open in the following year, spitting their seeds up to 30'. The leaves look rippled and are a dark green turning to yellow in the fall.



The Vernal or Ozark witch hazel is the other native. It, too, does best in full sun, but can take partial shade. Flowering from January to early March in colors ranging from yellow to reddish-purple, this fragrant shrub is a great addition to the winter garden. The four threadlike wavy petals are small, about ½" long with a slight waviness. As with the other witch hazels, the petals curl up in frigid temperature and unfurl with warmer weather. A minor liability is the leaves tend to linger through the winter often obscuring the early flowers. The shrub can top out at about 15' or so but is more often

around 8'. This witch hazel will sucker.

All the witch hazels are tough low maintenance shrubs with an open habit. Many are fragrant. They'll grow in almost any soil, including the stubborn clay soil here in Rockbridge. Occasional oak galls may be the only problem they experience.

If you are ever in the Washington DC area, check out Green Spring Garden Park, 4603 Green Spring Rd., in Alexandria, a public park run by the Fairfax County Parks Authority. Green Spring's has an official Plant Collections Network collection of Hamamelis, part of the American Public Gardens Association. There are 215 witch hazel plants in the collection and 100 different types.

Resources: *Dirr, Michael. Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Stipes Publishing, 2009*  
[www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/](http://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/plantfinder/)  
[https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/which\\_witch\\_hazel\\_should\\_be\\_your\\_yard](https://www.chicagobotanic.org/plantinfo/which_witch_hazel_should_be_your_yard)  
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/hamamelis-virginiana/>

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