

December 2021  
January 2022

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# Into the Garden

## President's Letter

*Faith Vosburgh*

So, we've almost (I am writing this in December) finished another year of uncertainty. For RAMGA, 2021 has been a year in stasis. We've been just waiting and seeing with the rest of the world. With the vaccines, our lives had been creeping back to normal, but then the Delta variant hit and now Omicron is on the prowl.

RAMGA does, however, continue to persevere. Although we did not field a new class this year, our stalwart Class Steering Committee headed by Peggy Agnor and Tamara Teaff, has been busy organizing and recruiting next year's class, a record number of sixteen with a couple on the waiting list. The Plant Sale team, Peggy Bateson, Margaret Howard, and Sandra Martis fielded yet another very successful plant sale and brought us in to this century with an amazing online e-commerce plant catalogue with help from Bob Kovach. Karen Lyons' Seed Swap (see article on p.3) continues to expand. RAMGA

participated in both the Rockbridge Community Festival and Buena Vista's Mountain Days thanks to Jill Alvarado. The



Plant Clinic's popular Zoom plant clinics continue to educate both MGs and the general public thanks to Vera Winkler's team of experts. The Rockbridge County Fair and Expo moved the Fair from the Horse Center to Glasgow this year and the Horticulture Show followed. A number of RAMGA projects remained active with the exception of any project relating to schools. Hopefully, in 2022 the school projects will be able to reactivate. Thank you!

The new year means new leadership and new leadership means new ideas and focus. Thank you, David Caldwell, Jen Coluzzi, and Anita Tuttle, for taking up the challenge.

*Faith*

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS, EVERYONE!**

## FYI...

**From Bob Kovach, RAMGA Records Chair:** Don't forget to update your volunteer hours and continuing education hours for 2021. You can log on to Better Impact by accessing the RAMGA website ([www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org)), clicking on the "Members Section" and click on "Volunteer Management System". If you do not remember your sign on to Better Impact, or the password for the "Members Section", contact Bob Kovach, [bobkovach1@gmail.com](mailto:bobkovach1@gmail.com)

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## RAMGA VOLUNTEER OF THE MONTH

### JAN SMITH

*By Anne Riffey-Buckner*

In Master Gardener, Master Naturalist, and Virginia Native Plant Society circles, the name Jan Smith tends to get elided into one word, used as a synonym for “dynamo”. Many of you already know Jan but may not know all that she does. For you who are new to our group, you will soon be meeting her.

Jan was a geology major but spent much of her career as a budget analyst at the US Interior Department, living with her husband Bob in Arlington, Va. Upon retirement they moved here full time. She took the Master Gardener course in 2014.

Upon graduating, she immediately undertook, with the Plant Sale leadership, the tedious but necessary task of going over the inventory list and identifying the invasive plants on it. She has also worked to identify useful native plants to put in the sale, offering our patrons a rare chance to buy good quality native plants at good prices.

Jan also runs the all-important Dig and Divides, generating inventory for our one major fund raiser, the annual Plant Sale. She and her team of MG volunteers generate the majority of the 2,000+ plant sale inventory. She plant-sits hundreds of plants in her home garden.

She also is the eyes and ears, via email, that keeps many of us informed about upcoming events of interest to MGs.

She is a member of the Deadly Damsels, a group of six MGs who go to each other's properties and destroy invasive species of plants, up to and including mature Ailanthus 'Tree of Heaven'. Jan also helms site visits to the properties of members of the public who request MG help.

She serves in a treasurer capacity in some aspects of our increasingly sprawling finances, in support of Karen Lyons. She is involved at Boxerwood.

Jan joined Bob in becoming a Master Naturalist, and volunteers at the Natural Bridge State Park. She serves on the leadership team of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Upper James Branch (that means our area).

She is a recent past Treasurer of the Community Table. She tutors students in the Rockbridge County school system. She and Bob bicycle all over Virginia.

I suspect that I've just scratched the surface, but Jan is a pleasure to know and if you ever need to know something about native plants, or provide some useful and enjoyable volunteer hours, start with her. Thank you, Jan.

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## Seed Swap 2022

*By Karen Lyons*

It is that time of year when our gardening outside is winding down and we begin to plan for next year. Just in time, we plan to have our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual RAMGA seed swap.

This year's format will feature an online seed library on the RAMGA website (similar to the plant library) where you can browse the seed selections prepared by our MG volunteers and formulate your wish list. Then, on the evening of January 27<sup>th</sup>, you are invited to attend an in-person event to be held at the Piovanno building in Lexington. There we will feature our specially prepared seed packets in addition to a venue for swapping your own personal seed stash, a table just for "old seed" of questionable viability, and possibly a white elephant section featuring seed catalogs, used pots, and other gardening items.



Everything is **free**, first come, first served, though **donations** to RAMGA will be accepted via cash or check. (Remember we are a 501 (c) 3 organization now so your donation is tax-deductible.)

RAMGA prepared seeds have been harvested from member gardens and specially stored and packaged for 2022 by our seed swap team. Descriptions of the plants, pictures, recommendations for planting and useful links will be listed on the website seed library.

We recommend that privately donated seeds come in the original packaging having the descriptive information, or in envelopes clearly marked with the seed ID and year of purchase. On-site donations will not be featured in the library.

So, mark your calendar and stay tuned for more information via the weekly email blast or the RAMGA website.

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## Abbreviated RAMGA Board Minutes, November 18, 2021

**Treasurer** (Karen Lyons): The 2022 RAMGA budget was submitted. ***Motion: the proposed budget was approved by the Board with the stipulation that projects can exceed their budget by 5% without Board approval.***

**Records** (Bob Kovach): Bob proposed Becky England for Emeritus status. She has over 1300 volunteer hours and 5 years as a Master Gardener. ***Motion: The Board voted to approve Emeritus status for Becky England.***

**Class Steering** (Tamara Teaff and Peggy Agnor): CSC is scheduling the 2022 members for small group orientation sessions. The Bedford training module will be used at a cost of \$25 per year.

**Website** (Bob Kovach): Bob is training Vicki Hall on website editing. Bob and Mackenzie Brooks will be handling major updates.

**Plant Clinic** (Vera Winkler): The team is preparing the November Zoom clinic on finding and removing Invasive plants.

**School & Demonstration Gardens** (Dave Bryer): Dave reported that gardens are being winterized and most projects are winding down for the winter. Boxerwood will be open all winter. Faith and Petra Visscher met with the new culinary instructor at the Rockbridge Regional Center of the Mountain Gateway Community College (formerly Dabney Lancaster), Michael Calhoun re: the greenhouse project at the Center which will start up again in March.

**Activities** (Karen Lyons): The Seed Swap group is planning their seed swap for January 27<sup>th</sup> in the Piovano building.

**Waste Reduction Roundtable** (Phyllis Fevrier): Phyllis emphasized the use of single use plastics. Lauren McCamden of the Glowbowl Café has organized a program where people can drop off food scraps at their house. These will be transferred to Paradox Farm where they will be used as compost.

**VMGA Report** (David Caldwell): David urges everyone to join VMGA for \$12 per year. He suggested using our VMGA budget to pay for RAMGA Board members to join VMGA for a year.

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## Continuing Education Opportunities:

(Local opportunities in **Bold**)

Stuck inside this winter? There are so many webinars online just waiting for you to read on all aspects of gardening. One of my new favorites is through the online *Garden Design* newsletter, [www.gardendesign.com](http://www.gardendesign.com). (Fair warning: I am not quite sure who sponsors this newsletter/website, but I

am pretty sure it is the brand Proven Winners). David Culp seems to be their resident expert and he is one of my favorite designers. Take a look at his book, *The Layered Garden, Design Lessons for Year-Round Beauty from Brandywine Cottage*, published in 2012, for inspiration. There are periodic webinars by Culp offered by Garden Design on their site, usually for \$20.

The VT Extension website has a plethora of webinars available to you, <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/webinar-archive/>

Did you know you can get 3 hours of Continuing Ed. just by reading a book on this list? [https://docs.google.com/document/d/11GcvQr\\_wm\\_oH2BaNCLZuXzY6POD2f0FXD0TgY5DIBs8/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/11GcvQr_wm_oH2BaNCLZuXzY6POD2f0FXD0TgY5DIBs8/edit?usp=sharing)

New Directions in the American Landscape (NDAL) and the American Horticultural Society are going to be teaming up to offer a series of home gardener virtual programs this coming January through March. I will let you know when the registration opens.

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## Virginia Master Gardener Association (VMGA)

By David Caldwell

Did you ever wonder what's VMGA all about? I have served as RAMGA's representative to this organization for two Presidents now, I'd like to share what I've learned both pre and post pandemic. I hope to squash some misconceptions if you have any. Let's make something good happen within RAMGA by engaging, but first, let's look at what VMGA promotes. The purpose of VMGA is simple. The mission is to **foster communication, education, and fellowship** among Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteers. Sounds good.

These are admirable goals and aspirations. Fellowship with other EMG's is important. Seems simple enough. Is there any way to make that fun? I say Yes! So, I go to board meetings. But believe me...it's not the meeting that I enjoy with all the standing committee reports. Honestly that's not fun. I mean, it is a board meeting and most of those are BORING! Right. Nonetheless there are those of us who attend these meeting and try to find ways to make things *better for you* and all volunteers who are willing to contribute to a cause bigger than themselves. That means getting out and engaging with other EMGs, it provides opportunities for fellowship, lessons learned, what works for you? Let's share what didn't work for us. Is the plant sale the only way your unit raises money? Can bringing in qualified speakers earn revenue? Can and should we sell other things to make money for road trips? Can we partner with you? These are all good questions and something that keeps me re-examining my restricted involvement.

Another noteworthy fact is that VMGA has an endowment sustained by making responsible investments. The monies earned fund a full-time horticulture position at Virginia Tech. and serves as an affiliate to our local VCE liaison. This partnership helps provide legitimacy to RAMGA concerning the educational approach for the next class. A good relationship helps. Collectively, we bestow the latest approved curriculum for students, interns, and master gardeners for every unit in the State. It helps to consolidate, integrate, and

disperse information. Unfortunately, the past couple years can best be summed up as the years of uncertainty. We did not have a 2021 class. How did others pull it off?

I hope the worst of the pandemic is over because I'm vaccinated and ready to see and do things in a participative environment. I hope you can join me. Take time to think (or rethink) the potential value VMGA could bring. We know one person can't do it alone. Let's not let RAMGA become an insular organization. I have been able to attend one, repeat ONE in-person VMGA meeting in Hanover Va., and it turned out far better than I thought. That was 2019. Beyond the meeting, again BORING, there were things to do garden tours, theater events, good local food establishments and eateries, great conversation, and a host of fun things to do in the local area. Let's go together. Lastly, it's not just RAMGA visiting and learning from other MG units. Trust me – they want to visit us too for the same reasons mentioned above. To learn more about VMGA visit the website and links to other units!

[Virginia Master Gardener Association \(vmga.net\)](http://vmga.net)

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## BOOK REVIEWS....

By Tamara Teaff

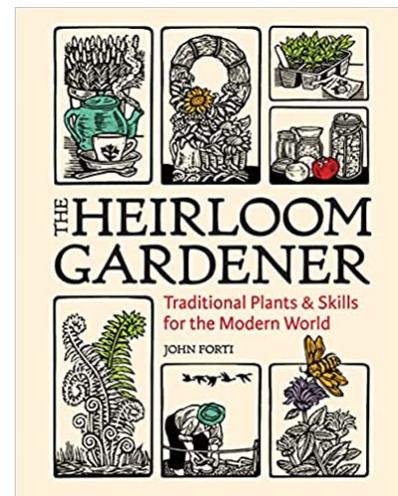
***The Heirloom Gardener, Traditional Plants and Skills for the Modern World*** written by John Forti and illustrated by Mary Azarian. Timber Press, Inc. 2021

I follow this author on Facebook and was excited to discover that he had just published a book. He is the director of historic Plimoth Plantation Museum Garden and Soil Program for the Preservation of Pilgrim and Wampanoag Crops. Since that combines my passion for history and my love of gardening, I started following him. His posts deal with topics such as saving seeds to preserving traditional gardening techniques. He is a horticulturalist and an ethnobotanist.

First, I will share what this book is not. From the title, I thought that it would be a how-to book on heirloom gardening. I was sure that I would learn where to buy heirloom plants, tips on growing, and seed saving guidance. However, it is not an essential book on heirloom gardening, even though the title hints on that topic. There are no step-by-step tutorials.

Instead, the book is a series of essays about a range of garden wisdom, arranged in alphabetical order from angelica to zucchini. It is a celebration of gardening as a craft with an old *Farmer's Almanac* vibe.

One essay explains why he has changed his terminology from **native plants** to **indigenous plants**, along with his advice about how to preserve them. *“Seeding jack-in-the-pulpit into our backyard, cultivating a line of native plants for your local farmer’s market or garden club plant sale, designing wildflower meadows, carefully transplanting and saving the clumps of lady’s slipper otherwise doomed by the developer’s*



*bulldozer, or changing legislation that replants wildflowers instead of mowing our endless highways.” (page 117).*

In his strawberry essay, I learned that in the Algonquian language, they are called *wuttahimneash* or “heart berry”. Not only does that name perfectly describe their heart-like shape but also, bring full of vitamin C, the berries are good for heart health. What is not to love about that tidbit of knowledge?

*The Heirloom Gardener* is packed with delightful two-color nostalgic woodcut illustrations, which add to the enjoyment of the book. This is not a reference book or the kind of book a person would want to read from the first page to the last. It is the type of book that asks to be put on the bedside table, to be picked-up for a moment of environmental insight and inspiration.

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## Faith’s Garden Notes...

So, what to get your favorite gardener – or maybe yourself – for the holidays?

I love my short-handled Japanese weeder, especially since there is now a left-handed one available for lefties like me. I also wouldn’t be without Fiskars micro-tip easy action scissors, available locally at most of the big box stores. They are great for dead-heading and snipping herbs. The cobrahead weeder, now also available in a smaller size ([www.cobrahead.com](http://www.cobrahead.com)) is one of my favorites. A couple years ago the company came out with a mini version (8.75” as opposed to the original 13”). This one is definitely on my Christmas list. A splurge would be a pair of Felco pruners. With those red-handled beauties sticking out of your pruner holster, you’ll be the envy of the dig and divide team. Felcos also come in a left-handed version. Hori hori weeding and digging knives also make a nice gift. This is a tool that will last a lifetime.



Books are always a good bet. Every serious gardener should have a copy of Michael Dirr’s *Encyclopedia of Woody Landscape Plants*. Look back through your issues of this newsletter for book recommendation by our own Tamara Teaff. Any of Doug Tallamy’s books would be a good choice. I find his *The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity* especially useful. The annual American Horticultural Society Book Awards are always good bets. This year there were only two: *The Complete Book of Ferns* by Mobe Weinsten and Jessica Walliser’s *Plant Partners: Science-Based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden*.

Always welcome is a gift certificate to a favorite nursery. Soon the plant and seed catalogues will be arriving in our mailboxes and plenty of them offer gift certificates as well.

Magazines give all year round. I especially like Taunton Press’s *Fine Gardening*. Membership in the American Horticultural Society ([www.ahsgardening.com](http://www.ahsgardening.com)) includes their excellent magazine, *The American Gardener*, and offers free entrance fees to many public gardens, such as Richmond’s Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, through their reciprocal program.



Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and e /affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

