

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

September 2024



The Seed Library at Rockbridge Regional Library

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Gardening Events, p. 2
- Fall Garden Tips, p. 2-3
- Become a Rockbridge Master Gardener, p. 4
- Garlic Planting, p. 5
- The American Groundnut, p. 6
- Invasive Plant Help, p. 7
- Asters, p. 7-8

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 FARMERS MARKETS

- **Lexington Farmers Market**, behind the Southern Inn, Weds., 8am – 12:30pm
- **Rockbridge Baths Farmers Market**, Rockbridge Baths Fire Station, Sat., 9am – 11am
- **Glasgow Farmers Market**, corner of 10th St. and Kanawha, Fri, 10am – 2pm and Sat., 9am – noon
- **Kerrs Creek Community Market**, 27766 West Midland Trail, Sat., 9am – noon
- **Fairfield Farmers Market**, 5613 North Lee Highway, Sat., 9am – noon
- **Seasons' Yield Farm Market**, 165 Oakland Circle, Raphine, 2nd and 4th Saturdays, 10am – 2pm

GARDENING EVENTS AND EDUCATION

The American Horticultural Society has just published their catalog for their new Lifelong Learning program featuring many celebrated horticulturists and plant professionals. The classes look like they are on Wednesday evenings for the most part. \$15 for non-members and \$10 for members. I am definitely signing up for several of these. Check it out. And they all count towards RAMGA Continuing Ed. hours. <https://ahsgardening.org/lifelong-learning/>

As a note – joining AHS is well worth it. Their bi-monthly magazine is excellent and as a bonus, you will be a member of their AHS Reciprocal Admissions Programs (RAP) which gets you in free to more than 345 public garden and arboreta across the county. Boxerwood is a RAP member, so your Boxerwood membership card also gets you free admission to all those gardens.

Friday, September 13, Waynesboro Tree Workshop, Best Western Inn and Conference Center, 109 Apple Tree Lane, Waynesboro. www.treesvirginia.org for more information.

Saturday, September 14, 9:00am – 2:00pm. Open House and Plant Sale at the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, 1293 Tufton Farm, Charlottesville.

Saturday, September 14, 9:00am – 1:00pm. Fall Plant Sale, Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association, Verona United Methodist Church Parking Lot, 406 Lee Highway, Verona. www.csvmga.org . Cash or check only.

Saturday, September 14, 10:30am, Piovano Room, Rockbridge Regional Library, “Growing Blueberries”, with Steve Donald of Blueberry Hill on Stillhouse Rd., Lexington. Sponsored by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners. RARA Community Building, 350 Spotswood Dr., Lexington.

Saturday, September 21, 9:00am – noon, Hopkins Green. Route 11 Native Plant Sale.

September 20-22. Annual Meeting of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Massanutta Springs Conference Center, Massanutta, VA. Registration opens after September 7th and includes one day options.

<https://vnps.org/events/2024-annual-meeting-and-program/>

FALL GARDEN TASKS

- Purchase garlic bulbs to plant in October. Don't use grocery store garlic bulbs as they have often been treated with preservatives.
- Harvest vegetables as soon as they are ripe to encourage further production.

- Plant cover crops on the bare soil in your vegetable garden.
- Plant cool weather vegetables such as greens for a late fall, early winter harvest.
- If not planting a cover crop, mulch beds so no bare soil is exposed.
- Remove spent annuals and compost them.
- Save seeds from desirable plants. Remember, if the plant is a hybrid, it may not come true.
- Divide peonies and iris.
- Is your bulb order in? When ordering bulbs, remember that daffodils and alliums are pest-free, unlike tulips which deer adore. If you have some older bulbs on hand, the way to tell if they are still viable is to place them in a bucket of water. If they float, they are not good. Discard them.
- Certain annuals can be sown now for early bloom in May or June next year. These include larkspur, nigella, calendula, annual poppies. Sow in the open so they will become established by the time the weather gets colder.
- Tip prune shrub roses to promote new growth.
- Fall is usually a good time to plant trees and shrubs.
- Reseed and patch lawn.
- Apply pre-emergence weed killers to the lawn in the second half of the month to discourage winter weeds. Don't seed during the pre-emergent's active period, usually about four weeks.
- Compost your dead leaves instead of bagging them. Run over them first with your lawn mower so when added to your compost pile, they will break down faster. Or better yet, leave the shredded leaves on your lawn to harbor beneficial insects.
- Prune late summer and fall flowering shrubs after they go dormant or in the spring.
- Watch for plant sales. Nurseries usually want to sell down their inventory before winter.
- Start bringing houseplants inside.



Join us for the Master Gardener Volunteer Training Program for 2025

What Is Involved

- Read 19 chapters in the Master Gardener Handbook
- View on-line modules that illustrate and supplement the Handbook
- Take 16 open book on-line quizzes
- Participate in 10 hands-on labs
- Complete 50 volunteer hours with other Master Gardener volunteers in educating the public

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in any Rockbridge Master Gardener events, contact the Rockbridge Extension Office at (540)463-4734/TDD* during business hours of 8:30am and 5pm to discuss accommodations. *TDD number is (800)828-1120

Our Mission

Master Gardener Volunteers are trained to support VA Cooperative Extension by educating the public about all aspects of gardening.

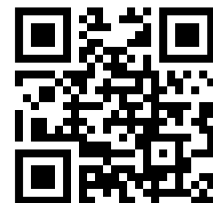
What We Do

- Provide information to the public on best garden practices, including the Help Desk, Plant Clinic, and other public information tabling events
- Engage and encourage children through classroom instruction and hands-on gardening
- Work as a part of a team to plan and implement public demonstration gardens
- Partners with the Rockbridge Regional Library to support a Seed Library

Information and registration at

www.ramga.org/join-us

Registration opens on-line at noon on Sunday, October 27, 2024



Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association
P.O. Box 1383
Lexington, VA 24450

 **Virginia Cooperative Extension**
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Time to Plant Garlic

Fall is the proper time to plant garlic, at least three weeks before the ground freezes so the roots have a chance to develop. Garlic, as with most plants in the allium family (onions, shallots, leeks and chives), requires at least two years between successive plantings to allow the soil to recover. Loamy soil and full sun are best.

It is not a good idea to grow garlic from bulbs you have bought at the grocery store. Most of those have been treated with chemicals to make them more shelf stable. Look for garlic at one of our local farmers markets or find a reputable dealer online (I usually use Southern Exposure Seeds, www.southernexposure.com located outside of Charlottesville). Also, I grow garlic every year and usually save some of the plumpest bulbs from my July harvest for planting.

Break the bulb apart into cloves and weed out the tiniest ones. Large cloves will equal large bulbs. Plant them root side down with 4-8" between plants, planting at least two inches below the surface. I find it easiest to dig a trench. Mulch with shredded leaves or straw.



Round about June, garlic will send up a curly firm scape (flower stalk) that looks a bit like a swan's neck. Cut these off. They are edible and taste a bit like a very spicy scallion. Cutting off the scapes allows more energy to go into the bulb rather than into a flower. In midsummer, usually around the 4th of July, my garlic is ready to pull when the bottom leaves are yellow and 3-5 lower leaves turn brown. I use a spade fork to unearth the bulbs. Brush off the soil. Garlic bulbs need to cure for about two weeks in a warm shady place with good air circulation. Hang in bundles or spread in a single layer on screens or drying racks. Don't store garlic in the refrigerator as it will likely sprout.

There are two types of garlic: hardneck and softneck. Softneck tends to last a little longer (9-12 months) and can be braided for storage. It likes a warmer climate. Hardneck is the one that develops a scape and is often a bit more flavorful than softnecks. They peel easier and have larger cloves. Their shelf life is about 4 – 6 months.

***Amios americana*: the American Groundnut**

By Louise Brennan

As a member of the Rockbridge Master Gardener Class of 2024, I quickly learned that labs are full of interesting and surprising information but surely one of the most unexpected of these moments came during our Water Lab at the Jackson House Garden last May. Shawn Jadrnicek, Associate Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources for Roanoke County and the cities of Roanoke and Salem was in the midst of telling us about irrigation systems when he happened to mention a plant of which most of us had never heard: the American Groundnut. He was full of enthusiasm for this tuber and told us about his attempts to hunt down a source for it to propagate.

Many of us immediately wanted to know more, including me.

The American Groundnut, as Shawn informed us, was a staple crop of many Native American tribes. One website reports that it was cultivated by the Shawnee tribe with corn and squash in a method known as Three Sisters. It would provide nitrogen for the heavy-feeding squash. It is also mentioned in accounts of the Cree, Lenape, Iroquois, and Sioux. A traveling Swedish botanist named Peter Kalm referred to it in 1749 as “hopniss.” He noted that the roots resemble potatoes and were eaten by the Native Americans instead of bread. Another reference cites evidence that the Pilgrims ate it in 1621 as part of the first Thanksgiving; they were taught to prepare it by the Wampanoag people.

Indigenous peoples prepared the tubers in many ways, such as frying them in animal fat or drying them into flour. The tubers and seeds can both be cooked and eaten, though Shawn reports that he found it necessary to first boil the tubers and then fry them. When we asked him what they tasted like, he said, “The most delicious potato you’ve ever eaten.”



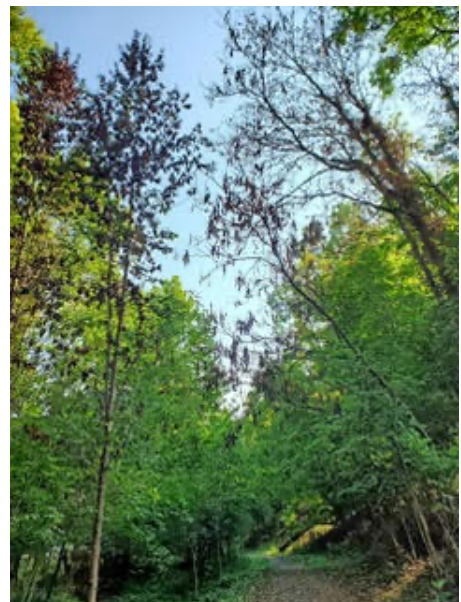
Although the American Groundnut is little known here in the States these days, with only a few research projects (one at Louisiana State University and another at Iowa State) to study its possible propagation and use, it is popular in Japan where it has been cultivated for over 100 years. One theory of its history in Japan is that it was a stowaway among apple seedlings; another is that it was deliberately brought to Japan as an ornamental flower. Whatever its origin, it has become a culinary specialty in the Aomori Prefecture region of Japan.

These tubers, according to Shawn, remain difficult to acquire, but he thinks his efforts to raise it are well worth the trouble. Nutritious and delicious to eat, and a beautiful plant to look at, *Amios americana* has a fascinating history. One source reports that [Brushwood Nursery](#) sells the ground nut but their website currently reports that they are sold out. Perhaps someday it will be commercially available—and we won't have to go to Japan to get it! Thanks, Shawn, for introducing it to us!

Do you have invasive plants on your property?

RAMGA has been helping the Friends of Woods Creek eliminate invasive plants along the Woods Creek Trail. Note the dying trees in the photo. The trees are Callery or Bradford pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) on the left and Tree of Heaven or Paradise Tree (*Ailanthus altissima*) on the right. These invasives have been intentionally killed using a “hack and squirt” method of herbicide.

If you would like information about invasive plants, how to identify and manage, go to <https://www.ramga.org/invasives>. We also do homesite visits to help get you started. Email us at ramgainvasives@gmail.com



THE ORNAMENTAL GARDEN

ASTERS: The Perennial Stars of the Fall Garden

By Faith Vosburgh

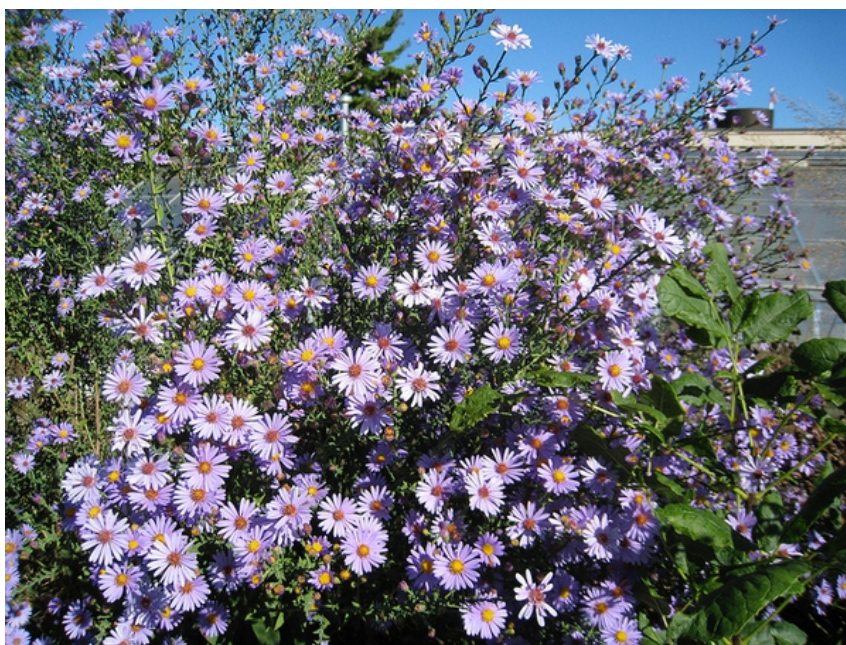
Asters are definitely the stars in the fall garden. I cannot imagine a late garden without them. Asters come in all shapes and sizes, from a few inches tall to a height of 5' or more. There are an estimated 250-300 different species of asters worldwide. This prolific plant (in this case, *Aster novi-belgii* and *Aster novi-angliae**) seems to pop up all over my garden, but often looks stringy by fall with lots of dead foliage running along the bottom of the plant, even though, as

per the advice of Tracy Sabato-Aust, author of *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting and Pruning Techniques*, (a book I highly recommend to any perennial grower), I cut the plants back drastically in early June. What to do?

Mt Cuba Center (www.mtcubacenter.org) in Hockessin, Delaware is a non-profit botanical garden that specializes in native plants of the Piedmont. If you are ever in the Philadelphia area, be sure to visit. They are also a well-known research center on native plants and do yearly trials on various families of plants. Asters were trialed in 2006. 56 different aster species were planted and studied. You can check out the aster trial report here: https://issuu.com/mtcuba/docs/mt_cuba_report-asters_for_mid-atlantic?fr=sYig2YTl0NjAxNDg

My plan is to slowly replace all my asters with some of the higher ranked ones from the trial.

Last year I put in Smooth Aster 'Bluebird' (*Aster laevis*) and it is doing beautifully with very little dead at its bottom. This was one of Mt. Cuba's highest-ranking asters. It has the usual violet-blue flowers with leaves that are lance-shaped. In its second season, it is 3' tall and almost as wide. I also put in Aromatic aster 'October Skies' (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*), another winner. This too, has very little dieback at the bottom of the stem. 'October Skies' has the same purple color but is shorter (2') and shrubbier. I already grow two other nice



asters, also with high ratings: Smooth aster 'Lady in Black' (*Laevis lateriflorus*), close to 4' with dark foliage and white flowers, and the smaller New England Aster 'Purple Dome' (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) an old standby that grows to about 18" in my garden, hiding the unsightly foliage at its base.

I'll keep some of my older asters for now as I gradually replace them with better varieties. I will, however, be planting some shorter fall flowers such as the newish 'Little Goldstar' Black-eyed Susan, in front of them to hide their unsightly legs.

*To make things even more confusing, botanists have reclassified asters. The word Aster is no longer in the botanical name. *Aster novae-angliae* (New England Aster) and *Aster novae-belgii* (New York Aster) are now *Symphotrichum novae-angliae* and *Symphotrichum novae-belgii*. Nomenclature keeps botanists in business.

Source: Frett, Janet and Victor Piatt, "Asters for the Mid-Atlantic Region: Mt. Cuba Center Research Report 2006", Hokessin, DE, Mt Cuba Center.

Photo: North Carolina Extension Toolbox <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/symphyotrichum-laeve/>

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