

February 2023

Inside this Issue

- 1 Leadership Team Letter
- 2 Class of 2023 Orientation
- 3 Buena Vista Visitors Center
- 4 Seed Swap Success
- 5 RAMGA Program: Vines and Wines
- 6 Continuing Ed.
- 7 Book Review: **Braiding Sweetgrass**
- 8 Faith's Garden Notes
- 9 Faith's Garden Notes cont.

Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle

RAMGA is off to a fast start in 2023! The board had the first meeting of the year via Zoom on January 5. By the time you read this, we'll be celebrating a successful Seed Swap - the first one open to the public. Many thanks to Karen Lyons, Ginger Reed, and all the other seed harvesters and cleaners who supported this event!

RAMGA has a full slate of programs coming up beginning with another Mushroom program in March. Since the library is undergoing repairs/renovations following a burst pipe in December, be sure to pay attention to future announcements regarding event locations.

Mark your calendars for Master Gardener College: June 8-11 in Blacksburg. The picnic celebrating graduation for the Class of 2023 MG trainees will be held at the Rockbridge Baths Fire Station on June 17. Check out the RAMGA calendar or FaceBook events page to see what else is happening in our area - thanks to new MG Mary Katherine Stein for keeping this up-to-date for us!

www.facebook.com/RockbridgeMasterGardeners/events



Notably absent from the RAMGA calendar this year is the Plant Sale in May. We are enormously grateful to Peggy Bateson, Margaret Howard, and Sandra Martis for producing this major community event and RAMGA fundraiser for 12 years! The amount of organization, time, and effort put forth by these MG Superheroes is simply mind-boggling. In the absence of sufficient volunteers to take on some of the duties to which the Plant Sale Team can no longer commit, they advised the board against holding a 2023 sale.

The Board voted by email, and the majority opted to take a Plant Sale break for 2023. We will explore the feasibility of returning to the Plant Sale in 2024, as well as exploring other options for fundraising. All ideas are welcome and encouraged; however, please prepare a plan of execution to go along with your idea.

Following some bone-chilling temperatures near the end of December, January has given us better weather for outdoor pursuits (except skiing, perhaps). Snowdrops are blooming, crocus are showing buds, and daffodils are displaying green tips. Spring will be here before we know it!

Happy Gardening,

Jen & Anita

RAMGA CLASS OF 2023

And So, It Begins! Class of 2023 Orientation

By Tamara Teaff

The Class Training Team had the privilege of meeting the trainees face-to-face for the first time at the orientation sessions. The training sessions were offered at two different times to accommodate schedules. Both were held in the VCE Extension Office Conference Room. Options were Thursday, January 12 from 5-7 p.m. or Thursday, January 19 from 1-4 p.m. The purposes of the sessions were to acquaint the trainers with how to access the instructional modules as well as be introduced to the RAMGA community. Co-presidents, Anita Tuttle and Jen Coluzzi, were present to welcome the trainees. Tom Stanley, Extension Agent, offered his congratulations to the trainees on beginning their EMG journey.



Trainees checking out their online training modules

Bob Kovach presented an easy-to-follow guide on how to locate the 17 on-line training modules along with the *Master Gardener Handbook*. He also covered the steps needed to take the open book quizzes for each unit of study. Bob prepared jump drives (containing the *Handbook*, class schedule, and other important information) for each trainee. These are valuable for those who have limited Internet access at home. Peggy Agnor explained the stages of training from trainee to intern to fully certified master gardener volunteer. The Class Training Team's goal was for each trainee to leave with a feeling of confidence as they tackle their first assignment- to read the botany chapter of the *Handbook*, view the botany module, and take the related quiz.

Bob also applied his photography talents by photographing each trainee. This will be used to compile a class composite which has proven to be a valuable tool for creating a community of learners. At the completion of their training in June, these trainees will be equipped to share horticultural knowledge with the Rockbridge Area community.

The next scheduled meeting for the trainees will be training in the use of Better Impact on February 9 and February 11. Included in this meeting will be a project overview to acquaint the trainees with the volunteer activities from which to explore while acquiring their 50 volunteer hours.

RAMGA Members in the Community

Buena Vista Visitors Center

By Katherine Smith, Barbara Ekin, and Mary Hodapp

The Buena Vista Visitor Center (BVVC) garden project has an interesting history. The first master gardener class was in 1999. Katherine Smith was in this class as were Becky England and Marty Rocket. The first master gardener (MG) project was the Help Desk. The second was the Rockbridge Regional Library Headquarters' garden (no longer a project). The third project was the gardens at BVVC.

Federal grant money was provided to Buena Vista (BV) to build a floodwall and improve the watershed for flood control. Chalk Run, which runs behind the BVVC, was part of that project. Funds were provided to landscape the project once it was completed. MGs worked with the City's public works unit to select plants and advise on their care. Anne Spivey and Katherine Smith worked on this aspect of the project. The building itself first housed BV's Chamber of Commerce. So, the land and the building are, and always have been, owned by the City of Buena Vista. At that time, RAMGA did not exist.

Originally, there were, and still are, two levels in this project. The current agreement with the reconstituted Public Works Department is: RAMGA, as part of its educational outreach, provides landscaping for the 11 garden beds around the building. Buena Vista provides mowing, heavy lifting, and leaves from their fall leaf removal. RAMGA's budget supports the plantings.

We continue to experiment with plants that can tolerate the compacted fill soil, which results from the fill dirt (construction waste) and the compaction caused by heavy vehicle parking. Katherine Smith remembers when the MGs saw the first earthworm...it was a day to celebrate! Over the years, structural improvements such as water barrels, deer fencing, and invasive plant removals have been added. All 11 garden beds have signage we created and produced. We have kept a notebook (a descriptive binder) of plants, and it has a necrology section. So...it's not all weeding! We prune and propagate, collect seeds to try and grow at home, divide perennials, amend soil, plant new material, try different methods for weed control, and re-design as needed. The camaraderie amongst the gardeners is the strength of this team too.

Katherine Smith presents....





We maintain these demonstration gardens with the theme of eastern North American natives and their Asian cousins. On-site gardening is held at the Visitor's Center from early April once the Center is open until it closes in November. We always welcome new volunteers. If interested, please email Barbara(baeromi46@gmail.com) or Mary (selbyfarm@aol.com).

Rain Barrel artists (left to right): Jeanne DeSantis, Barbara Ekin, and Sue Braford

2023 Seed Swap Success

By Tamara Teaff

Upon approaching the entrance to the RARA building, I met a couple just leaving the Seed Swap. Their arms were loaded with packets of seeds and accompanying literature. I commented that they looked like they found some necessary seeds. Their reply: "Those people in there (nodding toward the RARA entrance) really know what they are talking about. And it is all free!"

"Those people in there" are the members of the Seed Savers team, led by Karen Lyons and Ginger Reed. Offered were 90 varieties of seeds which were harvested, cleaned, packaged, and labeled thanks to the efforts of the Seed Saver team. Annuals, perennials, vegetables, and herb seeds were available at no charge. Note that no invasive seeds were included.



Ginger Reed demonstrates how to access the seed library.

Along with processing the seeds, team members were responsible for updating the seed library (available on the RAMGA website) to include this year's featured species. QR codes, which link to the website, were

accessible to the participants. In the seed library are detailed plant descriptions, pictures, and instructions for planting.

The Plant Clinic team was onsite to offer advice on how to start and propagate from seed. Educational display boards were present that explained the importance of plants to the Rockbridge ecosystem as well as answering questions such as “What Is a Native Plant?”, “What Is a Host Plant?”, and “What Is a Deer Resistant Plant?”.

Karen Lyons had the vision of a Seed Swap five years ago. At the first Seed Swap, RAMGA members exchanged seeds. Karen admits that the first attempt was a bit haphazard. The second Seed Swap was more organized but limited in scope. COVID challenged the team to resort to a virtual event and the development of the online seed library. Last year, the team returned to an in-person event for RAMGA members only. And, this year, the team decided to share the Seed Swap idea with the Rockbridge area as a free community experience. The event was held on January 21 from 10:00-1:00 at the Piovano (RAMGA) Building.

RAMGA Programs

Vines and Wines

By Anne Riffey-Buckner

“Vines and Wines”, Gonzalo Ortiz presenting, was the topic of the most recent RAMGA in-person program, on 12 November at 10:30am in the Regional Library’s Piovano Room.

Gonzalo is a third-generation vigneron (that’s “vine grower” to most of us), who came with his family to this country as a child from Chile. He is a consultant and a colleague of Anita Tuttle’s at the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. Recently, he purchased a 160 acre farm in Virginia’s Lancaster County, on the Northern Neck, and planted 15 acres in vines. His American Dream, as a first generation American, is to grow his own vines and produce grapes for wine.



Virginia, from a vigneron viewpoint, is a large state with five separate wine producing areas.

The Shenandoah Valley accounts for 14% of the vines planted. The most common grape varieties produced are cabernet franc, chardonnay, petit verdot, and merlot. It’s becoming an increasingly important part of the state’s agricultural scene. The state has 4,386 acres planted, producing almost nine tons, with additional immature rootstock that is not yet producing. Site selection is extremely important. Different rootstocks prefer different growing conditions,

some sandy, some rocky. There is a very narrow range of many factors in selecting a growing area. Rain, soil, type of grape, humidity, length of growing season, sun exposure, temperature fluctuation, dates of first and last frost, water drainage and soil depth are all factors to be considered. One has to know what one is doing.

Gonzalo's 15 acres of rootstock were laid out after carefully calculating the width of each row and the space between rows. Even this cannot be left to chance. He used a GPS guided tractor to install the rootstock in the precise rows he wanted. So far, he has been pleased with the plants' growth.

He calculates that it will be three years before his rootstock begins to produce grapes. He calculates that his break-even point will be in ten years.

Climate change is a constant factor. Lantern flies can be devastating to grape crops, smoke from forest fires is having a marked effect in California's wine trade, and new species of invasive insects are constantly emerging. Pesticide use is a necessity, effectively and carefully applied. So far, though, Gonzalo's labor of love seems to be on track, in this increasingly important sector of the economy.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

****Tuesday, February 7, 6:30pm, Piovano Building (RARA), 300 Spotswood, Lexington. Valley of Virginia Herb Guild presents speaker Kat Maier on her new book, *Energetic Herbalism: A Guide to Sacred Plant Traditions through Integration of Elements of Vitalism, Ayurveda, and Chinese Medicine*. Free and open to the public.**

Tuesday, February 21, noon – 1:00pm. Blue Ridge Prism presents another Brown Bag Webinar on "Volunteer Training: Survey for Spotted Lanternfly Egg Masses", given by Lori Chamberlin and Katlin DeWitt of the VA Department of Forestry. Free. Register here:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/brown-bag-webinar-spotted-lanternfly-egg-mass-survey-training-tickets-492006603997>

The annual Waynesboro Shenandoah Plant Symposium is scheduled for Friday, March 24 at a new location, the Wayne Theatre in downtown Waynesboro. The roster of speakers includes Kelly Norris (one of my favorite garden speakers), Heather Holm on Native Bees, Felder Rushing of NPR's Gestalt Gardener, and Yolima Carr of the Elizabeth River Project at Paradise Creek Nature. For more information and to register:

<https://www.waynesboro.va.us/971/Shenandoah-Valley-Plant-Symposium>

And here are a few more **webinars**, thanks to Jan Smith, to help you with your Continuing Education hours while it is too cold to work outside:

[Virginia Native Plant Society recorded webinars](#)

From all the chapters' programs.

[Maryland Native Plant Society recorded webinars](#)

note the webinar of sedges

[VA Master Naturalist High Five for Nature](#)

short webinars featuring 5 species plants, animals and insects.

[OH State - long but very good series on bees](#)

[Plant Virginia Natives 2 part series of webinars](#)

BOOK REVIEW

By Tamara Teaff

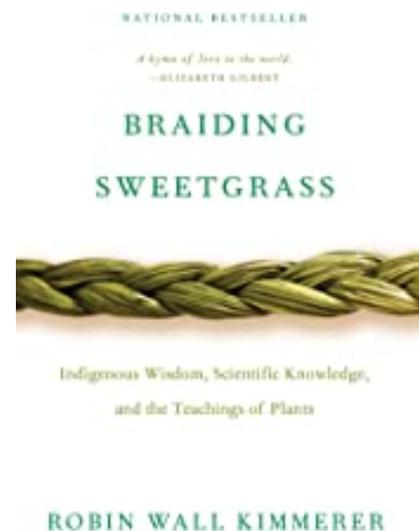
***Braiding Sweetgrass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. 2013. Penguin Books.**

A storyteller friend recommended this book to me for the wealth of Native American folktales in the book. This person did not know my connection to Master Gardeners or even that I garden. When I bought the book, I was thrilled to discover that it not only contained folktales but also was a collection of essays that focus on living with respect and reverence for the earth.

The author is a Native American and professor at the school of Environmental and Forest Biology at the State University of New York. Because of her background, the book is a combination of botany and indigenous folklore with a tad of personal memoirs braided into the mix. Perhaps that combination explains the title of the book. Each chapter is a stand-alone essay written in colorful poetic language and does not need to be read in any specific order.

The first chapter relates the Potawatomi tale of the creation of the earth. Sky Woman falls from the sky and is sheltered on the back of Turtle. Each chapter contains a folktale. There is almost a formula to the author's writing- myth, personal narrative, science connection. She combines her heritage with her environmental passion plus emphasizes the importance of continuing traditions and saving stories.

If I needed to select one word to describe this book, it would be "reciprocity". We restore the land, and the land restores us. The earth gives to us, and we give back to the earth. When I discovered this quote, I knew that this book needed to be shared with the RAMGA community. *"Isn't it the purpose of education to learn*



the nature of your own gifts and how to use them for the good of the world?" That quote is the cornerstone for which all Master Gardener volunteers strive.

The book could be shorter (200 pages). At times, the author gets a bit repetitive. However, if you enjoy being outside and believe you could contribute more to respect the natural world, this book is for you. Likewise, if you value the indigenous teachings of gratitude for all the earth provides for us, you will connect with this book.

NOTE: After reading the book, I discovered that it may be obtained in audio format, being read by the author. In November 2022, the young adult edition of this book was published.

You can find the author on YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4nUobjEEWQ> The title of her 17 minute talk is "Questions for a Resilient Future".

Faith's Garden Notes...

Looking for large trees to screen your property? Instead of purchasing a Leyland Cypress, why not consider, say, a Cryptomeria? Leylands have been massively overplanted, probably due to the fact that they are an evergreen that can grow about 3' per year. But the ultimate height for a Leyland is about 100' and too many times I have noticed plantings in smaller residences where the trees are planted only a few feet apart. Leylands need to be 12-15' apart for good air circulation and to allow space for the plant to mature.

Leylands are very susceptible to several fungi. Probably most common is a fungus called Seridium canker dieback (*Seridium unicolorne*) which will ultimately kill the tree. If you notice lots of dead branches on your tree, look for dark, oval or elongated lesions on stems and branches oozing resin. These are the cankers. Drought seems to make the trees more susceptible to the disease. Young Leylands can also suffer from Phytophthora Root Rot, another fungus and a problem that is often due to poor drainage. This fungus lives in the soil and enters the plant through the succulent part of small roots. And there is Bot canker (*Botryosphaeria dothidea*). The first symptom of this disease presents itself with yellowing branches. Dead stems will reveal v-shaped cankers, often girdling a stem. There is little to no oozing with this canker. It also differentiates itself from the other cankers in that the needles don't fall off the affected stem or branch. One more fungus is Passiflora Needle Blight caused by the fungus *Passalora sequoia*. Needles will brown and drop from the inside of the tree outwards. This starts on the lower branches and eventually moves its way to the top, leaving a tree with green needles only at the tips of the branches.

All this Leyland talk leads me to my favorite tree for screening, the Cryptomeria, common name, Japanese Cedar (although it is not a true cedar). Cryptomeria are native to Japan (it is their national tree) and are highly prized both as an ornamental and as a wood. They are evergreen with awl-shaped needles spirally arranged with a bark that is a beautiful reddish color. In the winter, the evergreens may take on a bronzy tinge. There are pretty rosebud-like spherical 1" cones

There are lots of cultivars out, both large and small. I have not had much luck with the smaller varieties (3-5') as our hot sticky summers often cause them to brown out from the inside. The foliage on the small *Cryptomerias* tends to be very dense. The larger ones work better here. 'Yoshino' is the most popular, reliable, and readily available cultivar to use for screening. This plant gets to be about 30'-40' with a 15-20' spread. It has bright blue-green foliage and the characteristic reddish bark. It's easy to grow, has a medium growth rate, and transplants easily.



Cryptomerias in winter

Sources: "Leyland Cypress Diseases, insects, and related pests. Clemson Cooperative Extension Home and Garden Information Center.

Dirr, Michael. **Manual of Woody Landscape Plants**. 6th edition. Stipes Publishing, 2009.

Editor: Faith Vosburgh, fvosburgh@gmail.com
Proofreader: Penny Wilson

Submissions are due the 20th of the month
before publication

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and 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, military status, or any other basis protected by law.