

March 2021

Into the Garden

President's Letter

Faith Vosburgh

As more and more of us are getting our vaccines, I am feeling hopeful for the fall. Activities will still be curtailed in the spring, but at least we will start to see green growing things, always a boost to the spirit.

We intend to start some workdays for the various projects. Volunteer shifts following COVID guidelines will be set up through our new Better Impact volunteer system which you should have in hand by the time this newsletter reaches you. Goodbye VMS, welcome Better Impact. Bob Kovach will help us transition smoothly. Keep your fingers crossed.

In the RAMGA Visioning session that was held a couple weeks ago, one thing became readily apparent. Each Board position, each committee, each Project Leader needs to have a second-in-command. Several Board positions need to expand to committees. Our most successful Board positions – Plant Sale (including Dig and Divide), Class Steering, the Plant Clinic and the new Seed Swap – are all run by committees with committee head(s).

Do you have some website or IT expertise? Bob Kovach who runs our website and our Records

(new Better Impact system) could use your help. He should not have to go it alone.



Especially with our new volunteer recording system we will need RAMGA members who can lend a hand and help with the transition. Contact Bob if you can help in any way (bobkovach1@gmail.com). This is a great way to get volunteer hours if you are still working and are unable to help with any of the projects that meet during the week.

The Continuing Education committee's task is to develop educational programs/workshops for RAMGA and the general public. Have some great ideas for a program? Have you heard a good speaker? I did programs for years and thoroughly enjoyed it. Ideally, RAMGA would like to develop a yearly symposium or maybe an annual garden tour or field trip. If any of these interests you, contact me or Jane Stange (pastange@embarqmail.com).

Our Communications Committee run by yours truly, always needs more help. We produce the

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Editor: Faith Vosburgh
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Submissions due the 20th of
the month

Press Releases, handle social media, advertise within our own unit via the Tuesday e-blasts and the internal newsletter. The new Garden Gate newsletter is part of the Communications Committee. Contact me if you would like to help. We can always use good writers.

The Project Working Group has been in touch with the Project

Leaders to codify Project Leader descriptions through updated and/or brand-new Memorandums of Understanding. This endeavor has been sorely needed and, in the future, the MOUs will be reviewed yearly.

As you can see, your Master Gardener unit stays busy despite the pandemic. However, won't it

be wonderful to meet face to face!

Faith

RAMGA News:

COVID-19 Guidelines from VCE Regarding Community Gardens (includes demonstration gardens)

- The local Extension office must have documented permission to be on property where the garden exists
- The wearing of masks is required and not optional.
- Communal tools and sharing of personal tools should be avoided at this time. Please refer to the original "Virginia Cooperative Extension Recommended Guidelines for Community Gardening during COVID-19" document released on April 10, 2020 for additional details on tool usage. You should also develop a plan for appropriate handwashing stations on site.
- Please think through and consider how physical distancing guidelines will be met in the garden space. Take into consideration the following questions as you plan and implement your work: What are the physical dimensions of the garden where you will be working? How will those working be dispersed in the garden space? Based on the square footage of the garden, you may have to limit the number of volunteers in order to satisfy physical distancing requirements.
- Current restrictions limit gatherings to 25 or fewer individuals.

RAMGA will not be participating in teaching at any of our School projects this spring per COVID guidelines.

New System for Entering Your Volunteer Hours: In early March, we will be transitioning from VMS to Better Impact for entering your volunteer and continuing education hours. Entering your hours on Better Impact will be just as simple as with the discontinued VMS. Plus, Better Impact has apps for entering hours through your smart phone (iPhone or Android). There will be two training videos conducted

by the State Master Gardener Coordinator's Office on March 1 and March 3. Stay tuned for an email from Tech with your new logon. Once you are in the system, you can change your logon if you wish. In addition, Bob Kovach will be available to help anyone with the new system.

Abbreviated Board Minutes for January 13, 2021

Treasurer's Report (Jan Smith): The 2020 audit will be deferred until we can hold in-person or outdoor meetings. There was discussion on how to invest some of our assets.

Class Steering (Peggy Agnor): A Project Involvement Report for the Class of 2020 was submitted.

Records (Bob Kovach): Bob filled the Board in on the upcoming volunteer management system for VCE, Better Impact. Training for members will begin in March.

Help Desk (Karen Lyon): A community newsletter is being developed.

Website (Bob Kovach): The seed sale will go active on the website on Saturday, January 16th.

Plant Sale (Margaret Howard): The Kerrs Creek Firehouse has been reserved for the plant sale for the week of March 15 for a virtual sale.

School and Demonstration Gardens (Dave Bryer): Since the Willow Ave. site is unavailable, the committee is looking into using a site at the BV Dabney Lancaster Community College campus. Dave and Faith are looking into a list of projects that members can do at home, possibly with a subsequent presentation or an article for the newsletters.

Seed Swap (Karen Lyons): Karen reported that there are eight people helping put the upcoming seed swap together.

New Business: Deb and Anne will be revising the Board book, and anyone with changes to suggest should contact them.

Continuing Education (calculate CEUs by the length of the program)

Thursday, March 4., 7:00pm. "Better Backyard Tomatoes" with Ira Wallace of Southern Exposure Seeds in Louisa County. Piedmont Master Gardeners Virtual Spring Lecture Series #1.

"Landscaping with Virginia Natives" Webinar Series. Plant VA Natives partners are offering a series of 12 webinars this spring and fall. Only \$10 to register for all 12 webinars. Keynote speaker will be Doug Tallamy, Friday, March 5, 6:30pm – 8:00pm. Learn more and register here:

<https://www.plantvirginiannatives.org/webinars-landscaping-with-virginia-natives>

Saturday, March 6, 9:00am - 4:00pm. Virtual “Gardening in the Valley Symposium” sponsored by the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners. Topics include urban beekeeping, herbs for health, raised beds vs. traditional gardens, growing apples. Fee - \$45. Register at www.nsvmg.org/events/symposium

Wednesday, March 10, 7:00 – 8:00pm. “Starting and Maintaining a Successful Composting Program in Staunton, VA”, sponsored by the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council. Virtual. Register in advance at www.rockbridgeconservation.org

Register for the following virtual series here: www.piedmontmastergardeners.org/events

Thursday, March 11, 7:00pm. “What is Conservation Landscaping” with Carol Heiser, a retired habitat education coordinator and education section manager of VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources. Piedmont Master Gardeners Virtual Spring Lecture Series #2.

Thursday, March 18, 7:00pm. “What a Warming World Means for Plants, Pests and Their Natural Enemies” with entomologist Mike Raupp.

Thursday, March 18, 10am. “Vegetable Grafting for Home Gardens: Why and How to Graft Your Own Transplants”. Register in advance:

https://viriniatech.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwtduigqzgsG9Al5hgp3lrvi_iunj6KjO4w

Saturday, March 13 at 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. Zoom talk, “To Prune or Not to Prune: When? Where? How? And It’s Tool Tune-Up Time,” put on by The Plant Clinic, part of the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Assoc.; Register at www.ramga.org by 10am on March 13th.

Saturday, March 20, 9:00am – 3:15pm. Loudon County Master Gardeners 11th Annual Gardening Symposium. Virtual. “Woody Natives” with Ginger Woolridge; “Sugar, Sex, and Poisons: Shocking Plant Secrets Caught on Camera with William Cullina; “Grow Great Vegetables in Virginia” with Ira Wallace; “Introduction to Native Bees of the Mid Atlantic” with Sam Droege. \$40. Registration:

<https://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/annual-symposium/>

Saturday, March 20, 2:00 – 4:30pm. Virtual. “Select, Plant, and Care for Trees” with the Charlottesville Tree Stewards. Registration:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdhkfwkGQB2tQW665IX9i0oDafciDpKw4jjKHfJ8p00IM2tCQ/viiewform>

Tuesday, March 30, 7:30pm. “50 Shades of Green – and Yellow, Pink, Lavender, White...Native Spring Wildflowers and Foliage” with Carol Bergmann, a retired field biologist. Virtual. Registration is required at <http://www.mdflora.org/event-4153390>

Garden Book Reviews

By Tamara Teaff

The Pollinator Victory Garden: Win the War on Pollinator Decline with Ecological Gardening/ Attract and Support Bees, Beetles, Butterflies, Bats and other Pollinators by Kim Eierman with photography by Kim Eierman, Heather Holm, Carolyn Summers. 2020. Quarto Publishing Group.

The title is inspired by the passion people had for their Victory Gardens, during WWI and WWII. To support the war effort, people grew food for their families. Actually, the extremely long title reveals that the Pollinator Victory Garden is about more than gardening. Yes, you will read about bees, but you will also learn to value wasps and flies.

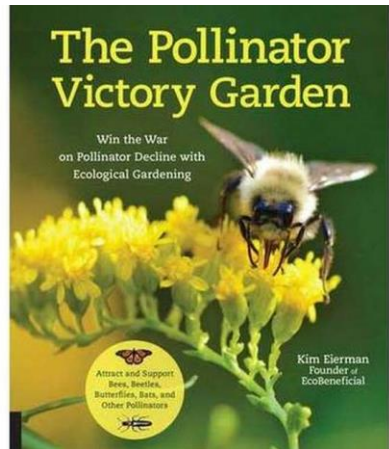
Although packed with information on how to ensure a healthy habitat for pollinators, this book is not an intimidating read. Simple enough for the non-expert to follow, the book doubles as a guide for the most advanced of gardeners.

The author explains how many landscapes have little to offer pollinators. She calls them “ecological wastelands”. The information will help the reader make wise choices when deciding what to plant. It encourages the reader to make decisions that support pollinator life cycles and ensure pollinator survival. Topics include the following:

- Importance of native perennials, trees, and shrubs that bloom in succession so there is always something to offer the critters
- Profiles of pollinator types and their needs
- Project ideas to provide areas for egg laying and overwintering

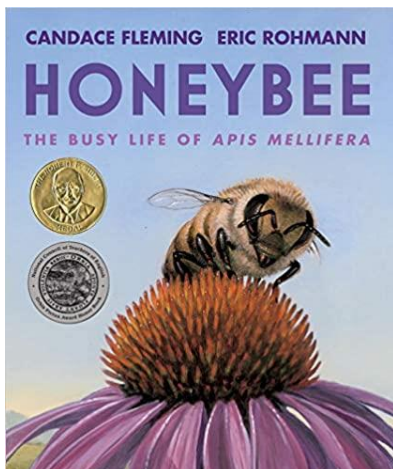
This book is not designed to read cover-to-cover but as a resource to learn how to make changes in the how, why, and what of growing plants. Vivid photos of caterpillars and blooms abound. Scattered though the 160 pages are tidbits such as bee tongue lengths, or the most numerous pollinators are beetles. For those who want more, there are extensive plant lists and a bibliography for further reading.

The author is an environmental horticulturist and landscape designer who specializes in native plants. Just skimming through her book may give the reader an exuberant feel of Springtime and hope for our pollinator friends.



Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera by Candace Fleming with Illustrations by Eric Rohmann. 2020. Neal Porter Books, Holiday House.

This is a really big book (11.95”X 10”). But its size is needed to journey through the life cycle of a worker honeybee, a total of 35 days. It is really an insect biography.



Does children’s literature need another honeybee book? The answer is yes when the book is this book. Thoroughly researched, the reader follows the worker bee as she hatches, cleans the hive, nurses larvae, tends the queen, builds comb, processes food, and guards the hive. All this is done before the bee leaves the hive in search of nectar and pollen. The author presents the facts through the use of narrative as the reader waits for the bee to fly. (“flying? Not yet!”) When the bee finally does fly, a 4-page-gatefold opens in the book, and the reader is treated to a bee’s eye view of a luscious meadow. The oil-based illustrations help the reader become “up close and personal” with the bee. At one point, the illustrator uses two full pages to depict the head of the bee. By the end of the book, it is clear that the bee’s hard work is not for herself but for the survival of the colony.

In the back matter, there is more information: a two-page labeled diagram of the worker bee, definition of terms, a list of on-line resources, and an age-appropriate bibliography of honeybee books. This book may be designed to be read multiple times just to savor the language and to discover new information in the pictures. A perfect gift for the young naturalist in your life.

I know there are lots of readers out there. Read a good gardening book lately? Write a review for the newsletter and you get volunteer credit and Continuing Education credit. Deadline is always the 20th of the previous month to publication.

Penny's Garden Musings.....

Winter Rosemary?

I have to say, rosemary is one of my favorite herbs. I just love the aroma it emits when you brush by it in the garden. I tried a new variety a couple of years ago, 'Franeaux Hardy Rosemary' (purchased at The Herbery on Decatur Rd.). I am pleasantly surprised that it survived this year's winter. We had some temps in the low teens in my area, and it is as green as when I first planted it. I found out that the trick to it surviving, is to plant it out of the brutal winter winds. This variety will survive single digit temperatures. I have it planted on the south east end of my yard, close to the house. My neighbor has been clipping it all winter for her son's bread making!

If you are looking for a hardy Rosemary, I would suggest trying this one. You won't be disappointed!

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts." William Shakespeare, Hamlet



Penny's 'Franeaux' Rosemary

Rosemary officinalis

To 4', similar to the more common 'Arp', but a bit more compact

*Retail Sources: The Herbery on Decatur Rd., Fairfield
Edible Landscaping, Afton*

Faith's Garden Notes...

Round about now we are all hankering for some sign of spring. Here are some more unusual flowering shrubs to check out for early spring bloom.



Wintersweet (*Chimonanthus praecox*) – The only place I've ever seen this shrub is at Boxerwood – and I want it. It is not a very prepossessing shrub when it is not in bloom, but when it blooms in January and February, it is a sight to behold – and its sweet fragrance is an added bonus. Wintersweet is a deciduous shrub of Chinese origin at the edge of hardiness in our zone. It can get to be about 10' tall or so and 8' wide, but Boxerwood's is considerably smaller. The 1 – 1.5" flowers bloom on bare branches and are a creamy yellow with a purplish center. Full sun is preferable, but it can take part shade. It is in the same aromatic family as Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*)

*Wintersweet blossoms at Boxerwood
(slightly frozen!)*

There are several shrubs in the Corylopsis family, all in the family Hamameidaceae, but the following is my favorite:

Winterhazel (*Corylopsis spicata*) – Winterhazel is a shade-loving multi-stemmed deciduous shrub, 4-6' tall and about as wide. This shrub is an early spring bloomer with 1 – 2" drooping clusters (racemes) of yellow fragrant flowers. The purplish emerging leaves turn to a pretty blue green. I think this shrub is attractive even in winter with its arching, zig zagging branches. This is one of Michel Dirr's (author of *The Manual of Woody Landscape Plants* and the authority on the subject) favorite early blooming shrubs. This plant prefers a bit of shade.



www.plants.ces.ncsu.edu

Witchhazels

Our native Witchhazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) blooms in the fall and early winter, but most of the other witchhazels bloom in the early spring.

Vernal Witchhazel (*Hamamelis vernalis*)- This is a big rangy multi-stemmed shrub (there is one at Boxerwood on the path down to the Great Oak), 8-10' tall and wide. The yellow or orange fringed flowers appear before the leaves unfurl and last about 3 or 4 weeks. There is a faint spicy fragrance but nowhere near as strong as the Wintersweet. The flower petals will curl up in extreme cold to avoid freeze damage. The new foliage is a bronze to reddish purple turning to a dark green in summer. The fruit capsules dry up in the fall and split, expelling black seeds that are a favorite of birds. Vernal witchhazels often sucker.



My favorite witchhazels by far are the hybrid witchhazels, *Hamamelis x intermedia*, a cross between the Japanese Witchhazel and the Chinese Witchhazel. The intermedias have by far the best flowers. Check out red-flowered 'Diane' just outside the lodge at Boxerwood or copper-flowered 'Jelena' next to the lower parking lot. There are many, many different cultivars of all shapes and sizes

'Jelena' at Boxerwood

The yellow blooms of the native **Spicebush** (*Lindera benzoin*) will start to appear in March. I am just starting to see the buds starting to swell on the numerous spicebushes we have in our garden. These flowers also appear before the leaves. I have never noticed much of a fragrance in the flowers but crush the leaves or the stems and you will smell a pleasing spicy scent. This is a highly adaptable shrub and will grow just about anywhere. It can grow from 8 – 15'. Rockbridge County is full of it. An important note: the plant is dioecious, needing both a male and a female for cross pollination. The pretty bright red berries hide under the foliage until the leaves fall and then are a feast not only for the eyes, but for the birds.



www.unh.edu/planting-native-shrubs-privacy-and-wildlife



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