

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

March 2024



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Community Happenings, p. 2

March Garden Tips, p. 2-3

Kohlrabi, p. 4-5

Gardening for Wildlife, p. 5-6

Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardener community newsletter.

Each month we bring you relevant seasonal scientific-based horticultural information for Rockbridge County. If you enjoy this newsletter, please pass it on. Subscription information is on the last page of this newsletter or on the RAMGA website, www.ramga.org.

Virginia Master Gardeners are Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers, extending horticultural and environmental outreach across the commonwealth. Volunteers receive fifty hours of training and are required to do, at the minimum, 20 hours of volunteering per year and 8 hours of Continuing Education to maintain their MG status.

Save \$ on Native Trees and Shrubs: The Virginia Dept. of Forestry is partnering with retail nurseries to offer discounts on eligible native trees and shrubs. The program is called “Throwing Shade VA.” and will offer customer discounts of \$25 on eligible trees valued at \$50 or more from March 1 – May 1. [Eligible Native Species](#). The tree or shrub will have a “Throwing Shade VA” tag. Scan the QR code on the tag and record where the tree will be planted. Show the cashier that the info on the QR code that was collected and receive your discount. **Waynesboro Landscape and Garden Center, 2032 W. Main St., Waynesboro is participating in this worthy program.**

COMMUNITY HAPPENINGS...

Saturday, March 16, 10:30am. “Truffles in Virginia” with Pat Martin and Olivia Taylor, Virginia Truffles. Piovano Room, Rockbridge Regional Library, Lexington. Sponsored by RAMGA.

Saturday, March 16, 2:00pm – 4:00pm. “A Year in the Life of a Vegetable Gardener – A Gardener’s Path” sponsored by the Piedmont Master Gardeners. Trinity Episcopal Church, 1118 Preston Ave., Charlottesville.

Wednesday, March 12, 7am – 4pm. Roanoke Tree Care Workshop, Virginia Western Community College, Whitman Theatre, 3099 Colonial Ave., SW, Roanoke. \$85. Register here: www.treesvirginia.org/events

Friday, March 15, 8:00am – 4:15pm, Wayne Theatre, Waynesboro. Waynesboro Shenandoah Plant Symposium. The roster of speakers includes Marianne Willburn, an award-winning garden blogger, Heather Holm, an expert on native bees, Bob Brzuszek who’ll be speaking on hummingbird gardening, and Mark Weathington, director of the JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State University. For more information and to register: <https://www.waynesboro.va.us/971/Shenandoah-Valley-Plant-Symposium>

Tuesday, March 19, Timber Ridge Presbyterian Church, 73 Sam Houston Way, Lexington, 6:00 – 8:00 pm. “Small fruit basics: berries and raspberries”. \$25/person or \$30/couple. Cash or check payable to Treasurer VA Tech. Participants must register by noon on Monday, March 18th. Dinner provided.

MARCH GARDEN TIPS

Margaret Roach’s advice in her popular blog, “A Way to Garden” (and catch her weekly column in the *New York Times*) for the month of March is to “make like a daffodil”. In other words, poke your head up, look around and see what needs to be done and be quick to assess the weather. March can be so variable.

Please note: Our USDA Plant Hardiness zone designation has changed in the last year or so. Zonage is determined by the average annual extreme minimum winter temperature in which perennial plants are likely to survive. We used to be 6b but are now 7a (0 to 5 degrees Fahrenheit).

- Start your garden clean-up, but it is wise to take it slowly, as our last frost date hovers around May 7th. Remove twigs and other debris. Pull weeds, especially those winter annuals such as chickweed and hairy bittercress before they bloom and set seed in the spring. Cut back dead stems.
- Cut back dead hellebore foliage to give the new growth and those beautiful flowers a chance to shine.
- Cut back your ornamental grasses to 4-6”.
- Liriope and butterfly bushes need to be cut back about now.
- Clean out your bird boxes. Nesting birds don’t care for a dirty house.
- Now is the time to start seeds indoors.
- Direct sow cool-season vegetables such as peas, carrots, leeks spinach, arugula mid-March
- Corn gluten meal is a natural pre-emergent weed and feed for lawns. It needs to be applied before the temperature reaches 55 degrees at 4” deep. This is usually when the redbuds bloom.
- March is a great time to plant trees and shrubs.
- There is still time to prune summer blooming shrubs such as beautyberry, clethra, oakleaf hydrangea.
- A rule of thumb is to prune your roses when the forsythia blooms.
- Get out the deer repellent. Hungry pregnant does will ravage new plant growth. Deer will get used to any repellent, so switch off repellents throughout the season.
- Top dress your vegetable beds with compost.
- Sow grass seed in your lawn’s bare spots and keep it moist until it sprouts.
- Late March is a good time to divide daylilies and Shasta daisies.
- Now is a good time to have your soil tested.

How About Kohlrabi for Spring Planting

By Karen Carlton

I have to admit I didn’t know much about the vegetable called Kohlrabi. The word Kohlrabi is German, Kohl meaning Cabbage and Rabi meaning Turnip. It is not a Cabbage or a Turnip, but it has the flavor of both vegetables. Kohlrabi as a vegetable stands on its own merit in the vegetable pantheon. It is a nutrient dense vegetable that can be used in salads to stews. The leaves of the Kohlrabi also can be used in the same way as Kale. It is part of the Brassica family, think Brussel Sprouts or Kale.

Kohlrabi is a great cool weather plant and actually prefers the cooler weather. The hot weather will just make Kohlrabi a dry, woody bulb and certainly not much fun to eat! Kohlrabi is a frost tolerate plant and doesn't mind if you have a late spring frost visiting your garden. You can directly sow the kohlrabi seeds in the ground now, but depending on the variety you are growing, it will take 42 to 70 days for mature plants. As I said before, you don't want Kohlrabi to mature in the heat of summer or you will have dry, wood bulbs. The plant can handle a variety of soils. You need to plant Kohlrabi about 4 weeks before the last frost date. If you have seedlings make sure you harden them off before planting them in your garden (hardening is where you take the young plants grown indoors from seed and get them acclimated to the outdoors during the day and take them in at night). You usually do this about 4 weeks before planting outside. You need to keep in mind that this plant will cross pollinate with Brussel Sprouts, Kale and others in the Brassica family so make sure that you don't plant them near each other.



I encourage you to grow this wonderful plant and look online for the variety of different recipes where Kohlrabi is an ingredient. Maybe you'll find a favorite recipe that will add to your gardening and food adventure.

Surprise your family, friends and neighbors with a dish made from Kohlrabi!

Resources: www.eater.com

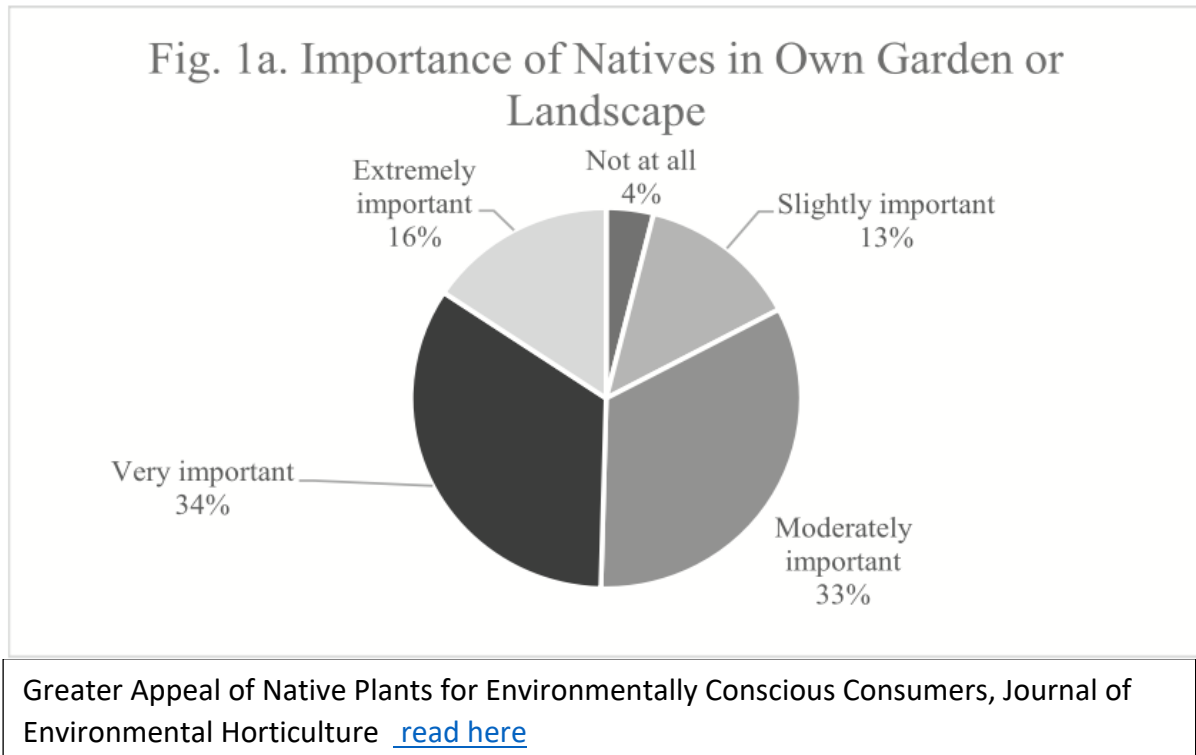
Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast by Ira Wallace

Territorial Seed Company Catalog (Spring 2024) pgs. 44

Gardening for Wildlife: How to Get More Bang for Your Buck

By Jan Smith, edited by Tamara Teaff

Purchasing native plants is my ongoing effort to reduce my lawn. I am often shocked to find that most plants are sold out or super expensive. I guess that I am seeing the results of this 2022 survey that shows many gardeners recognize the importance of native plants. Finally, people are beginning to understand that native plants provide significant wildlife benefits, as well as beauty. So, while it pleases me to see so many people buying native plants, I am also



worried that well intentioned plant shoppers may be wasting their money and time purchasing unsuitable cultivars of native species. Given the cost of plants today, that is a shame.

Because some cultivars have their flower so extensively changed, the pollinator may not be able to either “land” on the plant or to access the nectar. Other cultivars may have their color altered. Bees see in the ultraviolet spectrum so changing the flower color may make it unrecognizable. Some cultivars lack pollen – what native bees feed their larvae. Some shrub cultivars have purple leaves which make them unpalatable to feeding, etc., etc. Fortunately, a local resource pulls together the current scientific research, from Penn State, University of Vermont, Mt. Cuba, and others, about which cultivars serve basically the same function as their straight species counterparts.

The [Native Plant Nursery Survey Project](#) lists native flowers, shrubs, trees, vines and cultivars sold by various Roanoke area nurseries. The Nursery Survey Project was initiated by Sharon Burnham as a project of the Roanoke Master Gardeners. The project includes members of the Roanoke Master Naturalists, the Blue Ridge Wildflower Society, Plant SWVA Natives, and other

dedicated gardeners. What is great about this list is that it indicates whether the cultivar has the same wildlife benefit as the straight species. So, if you are planting to help pollinators, this list is a key resource.

Here are a few examples:

- *Asclepias incarnata*, Swamp Milkweed 'Ice ballet' has a white flower not recognized by the Monarch butterfly. It does not hold the same wildlife benefit as the straight species.
- *Coreopsis verticillate*, Threadleaf Coreopsis 'Zagreb' is just a shorter version of the straight species, while 'Crazy Cayenne' is a hybrid with a different color which reduces its pollinator benefits.
- *Hydrangea arborescens*, Wild Hydrangea 'Annabelle' has no pollen for bees. To achieve that large flower, horticulturists modified the flowers which made them sterile.
- *Rhus aromatica*, Fragrant Sumac 'Gro-low' is just shorter than the straight species but a fine choice.
- *Physocarpus opulifolius*, Ninebark 'Diablo' has purple leaves so inhibits herbivory.
- *Echinacea purpurea*, Purple Coneflower 'Pow-Wow' is a just a shorter version of the species. Good choice. The 'Cheyenne Spirit' hybrid, with a different color, is not the best choice.

This survey is a great resource and covers many of the most common cultivars carried by nurseries. I hope this survey makes your native plant garden shopping a bit easier.

PS. Would you buy this plant?

Echinacea purpurea 'Meringue'

Photo: courtesy of Terra Nova



The Garden Gate, a monthly newsletter by the
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