

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

JANUARY 2023



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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.

RAMGA SEED GIVE-AWAY OPEN TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC

**Saturday, January 21, 10am – 1pm
Piovano Building (RARA), 350 Spotswood Dr.**

Over 90 varieties of packaged seed, including annuals, perennials, vegetables, herbs, and shrubs, will be available, all collected by local Master Gardeners. Mark your calendars for this special event. More information on p. 2

LOCAL GARDENING EVENTS

After several years hiatus due to COVID, the Piedmont Landscape Association is back to hosting their annual seminar on Thursday, February 2 at the Paramount Theater in downtown Charlottesville. This year's speakers include Colston Burrell, Peggy Cornett, Thomas Rainer, and the ubiquitous Doug Tallamy, all well known in their fields. This is a consistently excellent series and one I (Faith) have attended for many years. Registration: <https://www.piedmontlandscape.org/seminar2023.html>

The annual Waynesboro Shenandoah Plant Symposium (another one I try not to miss) is scheduled for Friday, March 24 at a new location, the Wayne Theatre in downtown Waynesboro. The roster of speakers include 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>

There is never much going on in-person even during pre-Covid days from January – February, but there is a plethora of webinars and zoom presentations online. Here are a few sites to check out:

Mt. Cuba Center is the foremost native plant garden in the Piedmont area. They have plenty of great classes online, usually at a cost of \$15. www.mtcubacenter.org

The Smithsonian "Let's Talk Gardens" series is consistently excellent and free. <https://gardens.si.edu/learn/lets-talk-gardens/> .

And the VCE Master Gardener website has a number of great webinars and videos available. <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/ce/>

FREE RAMGA SEED SWAP

The Seed Saving Group of the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Association (RAMGA) will be sponsoring a free seed give-away on Saturday, January 21st between 10 am and 1 pm at the Piovano Building (RARA), 350 Spotswood Drive in Lexington.

Our RAMGA members have been busy harvesting, processing, and packaging seeds from over 90 different varieties, including annuals, perennials, vegetables, herbs, and even shrubs. Each entry has been researched and recorded in our online seed library including information on plant description, cultural requirements, and planting instructions with pictures and web links for even more information.

We encourage you to visit our Seed Library in advance to help select seeds for feeding birds naturally or designing a butterfly or hummingbird garden. We also feature collections of native

species and plants that tolerate deer browse. The library is located on our website RAMGA.org or use the QR code below.

Our Plant Clinic Team will also be joining us on the day of the event to help with seed selection and answer any questions about planting seeds or other plant-related questions.



Take a photo of the code with your phone and it will direct you to the seed library on the RAMGA website.

JANUARY GARDEN CHORES

Clean, then fill bird feeders

Top bird foods (from “Bird feeding in winter”, www.audobon.org):

- Black-oil sunflower seed – most birds like this
- Peanuts (de-shelled, dry roasted and unsalted) – woodpeckers, jays, nuthatches, chickadees, titmice love these high protein snacks
- Suet
- Mixed seed from a reliable source
- Nyger/thistle seed – Finches preferred food
- Safflower
- Cracked corn - sparrows, blackbirds, jays, doves, but also loved by squirrels, the bird feeder menace
- Mealworms
- Fruit

Continue to provide fresh water for the birds

Continue to compost

Finish Fall cleanup: put away hoses, garden furniture, ceramic and terra cotta pots

Prune dead or hanging branches

Continue to spread leaves on your garden beds



Winter is a great time to maintain, clean and sharpen your garden tools

Order catalogues, then work on your seed/plant orders for the spring

Apply horticultural oil to fruit trees to control aphids, mites, and scale

Label and store seeds you have collected

Don't Throw Away Your Amaryllis Bulb!

By Faith Vosburgh

A blooming amaryllis is a gorgeous sight, a hallmark of the holiday season. Most people treat these large bulbs as annuals and throw them away when they've stopped blooming. But, with a little effort, you can get your amaryllis to rebloom.

After the amaryllis has finished blooming, cut the stem(s) back to about 1" above the bulb but do not cut the leaves. The leaves provide the food/energy to the bulb so the plants can bloom again. Move your amaryllis to a bright window and water and fertilize regularly. In other words, treat the plant like a regular houseplant. Be sure and water sparingly so the bulb won't rot.

Once there is no longer a risk of frost, move the potted bulb outside, first to a shady spot to acclimatize it and then in a week or two, to a part to full sun location. Feed the plant a water-soluble fertilizer every other week or so.

Bring the bulb inside in the fall and let it go through a period of dry dormancy. Stop watering and allow the leaves to yellow and die off. Once the leaves die off, move the plant to a cool, dry location (a basement or a garage with temperatures around 55 degrees works best). At this point you can take the bulb out of the pot if you'd like and place it in a paper bag, although it is not necessary. The amaryllis will need to go through a resting period of about eight to twelve weeks. Check on the plant periodically and if you see a bud starting to appear, move the plant to a warmer, sunny location and resume watering and fertilizing. In no time, you should have another beautiful amaryllis flower or two.



Sources: Johnson, Ken. "How to take care of your amaryllis", www.extension.illinois.edu
Hill, Shannon. "The gift of a reblooming amaryllis". www.gardens.si.edu

Wondering About the Song “The Holly and the Ivy”?

By Karen Carlton

I think what I love most about the holiday season is the music, especially the carols. I got interested in one carol, “The Holly and the Ivy”. The research into it is very interesting. It apparently is a very old song that the early Christians used in their Christmas celebrations.

The reason the Celtic pagans used the holly and ivy in their ceremonies is because in the dead of winter these plants are one of the few that are green. Holly was thought to repel evil and the Christians used it to represent Jesus. The spiky leaves symbolized the crown of thorns and the red berries, his blood. Never mind that the holly that has the red berries is the female of the species. The holly is a dioecious plant and needs a female **and** a male.

The Ivy was used as a symbol of prosperity and charity. In the northern cultures, the plants represented hope and rebirth. The sources that I looked at also mentioned that the holly represented man and the ivy, woman. The reason being that the holly plant was seen as upright and strong, while the ivy represented a woman, twining and clinging. The Christians symbolized the holly as the coming of Christ and the ivy as the Virgin Mary. The song, for the most part, talks about the holly and the how the different parts all have to do with the Crucifixion and not with Christmas per se.

My source also reasoned that the song comes from an earlier medieval song that stated that the male (Holly) was the dominant sex and was supposed to support the weaker more fragile female (Ivy). I still think it’s interesting that the two plants are evergreen in the winter, suggesting to me that both are tough in their own way, just as we all are in this winter season.

So, whether a holly or an ivy, remember they both are considered symbols of hope and rebirth. Happy Holidays and A Merry New Year!

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

This has been one of my favorite winter soups for years. From *Betty Rosbottom’s Cooking School Cookbook*, NY, Workman Publishing, 1987 with a few tweaks.

White Bean Chowder

1 ½ cups white dried beans (Navy, Great Northern, Cannellini)
6 cups water
6 Tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon finely chopped garlic
¼ cup chopped carrots

½ cup chopped onions
1 ham hock or ham bone
1 sprig rosemary
5 cups chicken broth
½ - ¾ heavy cream
Salt and pepper to taste
Chopped parsley for garnish

Place the beans in a large pot of water and cover with water. Bring to a boil and boil 2 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and let sit for one hour. Drain the beans.

In a large heavy saucepan, melt the butter. Add garlic, onions and carrots and sauté until softened. Add the drained beans, ham hock, rosemary and chicken stock. Bring the mixture to a simmer and cook for about an hour or until the beans are tender.

When the beans are tender, remove the rosemary sprig and ham hock. Use an emulsion blender to blend the soup to a chunky puree.

Stir the cream into the soup and taste for seasoning. Serve garnished with the chopped parsley.

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<https://www.ramga.org/what-s-happening>

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