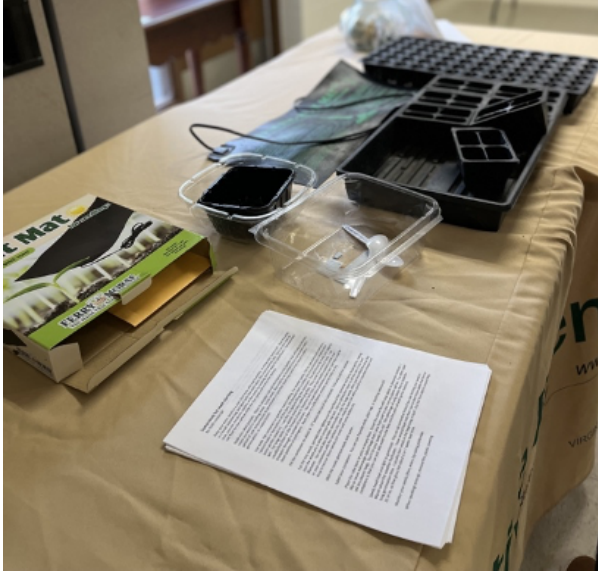


THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

February 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.

Upcoming RAMGA Webinar

“Growing Native Plants from Seeds 101”, Thursday, February 16, 7:00pm.

Growing plants from seed doesn't have to be hard. Join a panel of Master Gardeners for an introduction highlighting the differences in starting native plants vs. cultivated plants from seed with helpful references. Free. Register on the RAMGA home page, www.ramga.org

LOCAL GARDENING EVENTS

Saturday, February 25, 2:00 – 4:00pm, “Winter Sowing: Starting Seeds in the Winter”, sponsored by the Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association. \$5. Rockingham Cooperative Extension Office, 965 Pleasant Valley Rd., Harrisonburg, VA 22801. To register: <https://csvgma.org/event/winter-sowing-starting-seeds-in-the-winter-harrisonburg/>

Saturday, March 11, 9:am – 3:00pm, Bethlehem United Methodist Church, 13586 Old Moneta Rd., Moneta, VA. The Bedford Extension Master Gardeners present their yearly seminar, “Grow the Good Life”, this year featuring Mark Angelini of Mt. Run Permaculture, MG Jim Revell on alternative vegetable gardening and Peggy Singlemann, host and co-producer of VPM/PBS’s “Virginia Home Grown” on native perennials for every garden. The seminar will be offered in-person (\$35) and on Zoom (\$25). Lunch is included. For more information and to register: <https://www.bedfordareamastergardeners.org/event/grow-the-good-life-2023/>

Wednesday, March 15, 7:00am – 4:00pm, “Staying on Trend: Revolutionized Tree Care Practices for a Changing Future”, Roanoke Tree Care Workshop sponsored by Trees Virginia. Whitman Theatre, 3099 Colonial Ave., SW, Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke, VA. Register here: <https://treesvirginia.org/events>

Saturday, March 18 10:30am – 11:30am, “Edible Mushrooms” presented by Stephen Kaplan of Kaplan’s Welcome Home Farms, sponsored by the Rockbridge Master Gardeners, RARA Community Room (Piovano Building, 350 Spotswood Dr., Lexington). Free.

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>

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/>

FOLLOW UP ON RAMGA SEED SWAP

The RAMGA seed give-away on Saturday, January 21st was a huge success with only about 60 seed packets left from over 1600.

If you were one of the beneficiaries of the exchange, remember to scan the QR code on your seed packet or check the link to the seed library on the RAMGA website's homepage for cultural information.



Be sure and check the germination information in the seed library. Some seeds are trickier to start than others. They may need to be stratified (pre-treated to stimulate the natural conditions the seeds would experience over winter, often 30-60 days at 35-40 degrees) or scarified (nicking the hard seed coat).

Almost every state Extension Agency offers information on seed starting. Their websites often end with ext.edu., making it easy to do a web search. Extension information is consistently reliable. And, of course, there are dozens of YouTube videos. Often seed catalogs often excellent cultural information. It is in their best interest to hope you succeed with their seeds. One of my favorites is Johnny's Selected Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com). Their Grower's Library is very good and they offer a series of free webinars each year that are also archived. In fact, I see they are offering a webinar on growing lettuce at 2pm on February 16th.

If you have questions, you can always contact the RAMGA Helpline at 540-463-4734 or helpline@ramga.org

Best of luck with your seeds!

JANUARY GARDEN CHORES

- Once it starts to warm up a bit towards the end of the month, start cutting back the dead hellebore foliage.
- Having problems with deer browse (aren't we all!)? Check this out from Virginia Tech Extension: <https://mgnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HORT%E2%80%90062%E2%80%90-PDF.pdf>
- Finish up your seed orders and inventory leftover seeds.
- Develop your vegetable garden plan.
- Trim back dormant ornamental grasses.
- Sharpen garden tools.
- Take that mower to be serviced before the mad rush in the spring.
- Force some flowering branches.

- Start broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and lettuce seeds indoors.
- Continue to provide supplemental food and water for the birds.

Winter is the time to prune many trees and shrubs. Use these handy pruning calendars from Virginia Tech Extension:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-462/430-462_pdf.pdf

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-461/430-461_pdf.pdf

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How to Cut Through the Seed Catalog Jargon

By Faith Vosburgh

So many seed catalogs. How to decide which catalog to order from? Those beautiful photos can be quite appealing as are the plant descriptions. Did you have luck with a particular catalog last year? Or did you have a low germination rate from a new catalog? The best catalogs are the ones that give you good photos and lots and lots of information. That goes for the seed packet, too. And, what do all those numbers and symbols mean?

Open Pollinated (OP): OP plants will come true from seed. These are the seeds you want to save for next year, as opposed to F1 hybrids. OPs are pollinated naturally by wind or bees.

Organic: No chemical pesticides or insecticide were used on the parent plants of these seeds. The parents were also not genetically engineered/genetically modified (GMO).

Heirlooms: Open-pollinated seeds of older plant varieties. These seeds have been saved throughout the years due to their flavor and/or appearance, but they are often not as disease resistant as hybrid varieties.

F1, Hybrid or an X in the name: This is a cross between two pure-bred parents, F1 referring to first generation hybrids. If you see an F2 or second generation, these plants should only be propagated vegetatively because the plants produced are more variable and may contain some of the characteristics of the parent plants. This often happens with indiscriminate pollination of F1 hybrids. That is why when I planted three varieties of F1 hybrid winter squash too close together last year, I got many different sizes of squash. They cross pollinated.

There should be codes, especially with the vegetable seeds as to their resistance to various fungi or viruses. Each catalog may have different codes so look for their key. A common code for tomatoes is EB (Early blight) or LB (Late blight). My tomatoes always seem to be susceptible to Late Blight so that is something I look for.

Days to bloom or bloom season: This refers to how long it will take a plant to flower or the length of bloom time. For vegetables, it is usually the number of days to harvest.

Start Indoors: Seeds that need to be started under lights or in a greenhouse before the last frost date.

Direct Sow: These seeds do best when planted directly into the ground.

Determinate/Indeterminate: This refers to the height of tomato plants. Determinate plants grow to a certain height, fruit all at once and then stop growing, while indeterminate plants, usually much taller and more vining, will grow and fruit until the first frost.

Sowing instructions: Some seeds need light to germinate. Other seeds need to be scarified, nicked or rubbed with a bit of sandpaper to soften the hard seed coating (nasturtiums are a good example) or stratified. Stratification occurs naturally when seeds are sown outdoors through the cold winter. Many seeds, especially wildflowers, need that period of cold to germinate. These seeds can be planted outside in the fall or they can be wrapped in a damp paper towel, placed in a zip lock bag and kept in the refrigerator for the set number of days those particular seeds need to germinate. The Prairie Moon catalog of native plants has an excellent chart for the germination of the seeds in their catalog.

Scientific name: Especially for flowers, the inclusion of the scientific name is important because there are so many regional common names. For example, I have heard many people in Rockbridge County mention their beautiful japonica shrubs. What is a japonica? That was new to me. I eventually figured out they were referring to flowering quince. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the most common quince grown was a *Chaenomeles japonica*, hence the name japonica. However, nowadays that variety has gone out of favor and is seldom seen in the trade.

One of my favorite general seed catalogs for cultural information is Johnny's Select Seeds (www.johnnyseeds.com). Even if you never buy a packet of seeds from them, it is worth sending away for a catalog. The information they provide is exhaustive with loads of charts, and, yes, even more abbreviations.

And, of course, there is a plethora of information online. You can depend on any of the state Extension websites for scientific based research with no market driven agenda. It's best to always check the Virginia Cooperative Extension first, www.ext.vt.edu.

Houseplants Make a House A Home

By Karen Carlton

Now I know there are articles on the internet and magazine articles that tell how houseplants purify the air and help with dust and mold in one's home. There are other articles stating that houseplants as a rule, do it too slowly to purify the air. Studies have been done by NASA and other institutions of learning that indicate houseplants do help with air quality.

I want to write my subjective point of view for why houseplants are a good addition in one's home. I realize there will be people saying they can't have plants because they have a black thumb. There are plants that are so forgiving that they practically take care of themselves. Any cactus plant is a good choice and spider plants are the best. You just need to do some research and the plant will be waiting for you. Okay, yes you will have to buy the plant and get the other things to encourage the plant grow. Once done you have something that I feel will enhance your domicile. One of the best plants is the Tillandsia otherwise known as an air plant. You can hang it in your bathroom and the steam from your shower will water it.

Some of the plants I have in my home are part of it because of the memories attached to a few. My daughter knows I'm a Master Gardener and has gifted me with several plants that grace my home. The air plant in my study is one of them. I also have a lovely dwarf orange tree. When it blooms it has such a lovely fragrance of orange blossoms. My home is cozy with my plant friends sharing living space.

Consider the possibility of having a plant roommate. You may be surprised how much a plant can be companion.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Winter is the time for cruciferous vegetables such as cauliflower, featured in this recipe. The following is a Ruth Reichl (former editor of the now defunct magazine, *Gourmet*) recipe with a couple of additions.

Ruth Reichl's Savory Sweet Pasta for Michael (serves about 4, depending on the size of the cauliflower head)

1 head of cauliflower, broken into flowerets
Olive oil
Salt
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
6 anchovy fillets
2 minced garlic cloves
2 teaspoons capers
12 ounces dried penne or other similar shaped pasta. I like campanelle.
10 Kalamata olives
½ cup toasted walnut, roughly chopped
Parmesan cheese
Chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Spread the cauliflower flowerets on a baking sheet and sprinkle with olive oil and a bit of salt. You might want to use a sheet of parchment paper or a silpat to save on clean up. Roast for 25 minutes, or until they just start to brown.

Melt the butter with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a large skillet. Rinse the anchovies and add them to the pan, stirring until they have disintegrated. Add the minced garlic, golden raisins, and capers and stir.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the pasta al dente.

While the pasta cooks, chop the olives and add them to the skillet along with the roasted cauliflower. Cook, stirring, for about 5 minutes. If the brown bits are sticking to the pan, add a little water.

Drain the pasta, toss with the cauliflower mixture, sprinkle with the parmesan cheese, and scatter the chopped walnuts and parsley on top.

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

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