

April 2021

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Submissions due the 20th of the preceding month.

Into the Garden

President's Letter

Faith Vosburgh

Isn't it great to finally get outside again? Sorry, Ezra Pound, around here February is the cruelest month. March is better, but April is best – and the busiest. And as more and more of our population get vaccinated, we can finally look forward to better days ahead.

Although many of our events are still virtual - such as the amazing RAMGA plant clinics - the next one being April 17th at 11am – more and more events will be held outside. The Upper James River Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society is organizing self-guided walks on the Chessie Trail, Brushy Hill, and the back campus of Washington and Lee (more information on p. 2). Many of our projects are back to work. We have some partnering activities with RACC and with the Rockbridge Waste Reduction Roundtable. I am scheduling a Work Day in our new learning Garden at Dabney's Rockbridge Regional Center on Saturday, April 10th. Since the volunteer hour requirement for Master Gardeners has been reinstated, you can see there will be plenty of opportunities for volunteering.

I am hoping that by the fall we will be able to get together in



person again. To that end I would like to plan some big social event. If you have some ideas and would like to join a committee to plan something, please get in touch with me.

In September, the International Master Gardener College is being held and registration will open on April 5th. I encourage everyone to attend. Yes, I know, it is not quite the same as the in-person MG College, but there is always something to learn. I glanced at the different modules being offered and they look great. Virginia is the host for this college, but the speakers are from all over the country. It is also an easy way to earn your Continuing Ed hours for the year all at once. I was very surprised when I looked at the member hours for the last year and approximately half of our membership did not complete their Continuing Ed hours.

April 22nd is Earth Day, a day that should be near and dear to all gardeners' hearts. In the spirit of the Day, Phyllis Fevrier has these recommendations:

1. Compost your food scraps at home
2. Create brush piles for your woody yard debris
3. Think twice about your single-use plastic consumption

4. Educate yourself and others to refuse, reuse, recycle.

Check out the volunteer opportunities on the next page. Phyllis needs help with several Earth Day initiatives.

Here is to a better year ahead –

Faith

RAMGA FYI...

The famous RAMGA Plant Sale will be held May 8th – 14th. Bob Kovach has created an E-commerce site on www.ramga.org. MGs and the general public will be able to order from the website and then pick up their plants at an assigned time at the Kerrs Creek Firehouse. Pass the word to your friends and neighbors.

RAMGA is now registered for the **Amazon Smile program**. Register under smile.amazon.com. Once you are registered, when you go to shop on Amazon (and we all do, especially during this pandemic), start your shopping at smile.amazon.com. Everything is the same as it is on amazon.com, but when you shop under the smile address, 0.5% of your purchase will be donated to RAMGA.

Take A Walk...on the Chessie Trail.

Members of the local James River Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society have marked notable wildflowers and a few invasives with flags on the Chessie. They've also put together an illustrated Wildflower Guide to help you identify the plants. You can download the Smart Phone Version and the Printer Friendly Version here: <https://www.friendsofthechessietrail.org/wildflower-guide.html> When I walked the trail the other day there were also a few copies of the guide available at the Chessie Trail kiosk at the Lexington end of the trail. **Coming soon – a spring guide and flagged walk of the wildflowers on the back campus of Washington and Lee and one for Brushy Hills.**

Virtual International Master Gardener Conference 2021. The program has been released here <https://www.internationalmastergardener.com/schedule/> and registration will open on Monday, April 5th. Register early to sign up for the modules you are interested in; they fill up fast.

VOLUNTEER NEEDS...

There will be a **Work Day at the proposed new Teaching Garden** at the Rockbridge Regional Center of Dabney Lancaster Community College in Buena Vista on Saturday, April 10 from 9 – 4pm (2 shifts, 9-noon

and 1-4). Bring gloves, pruners and a shovel. There is lots to do. Contact Faith to sign up, fvosburgh@gmail.com

Environmental Stewardship Opportunities:

1. The Rockbridge Area Conservation Council's Earth Day Fundraiser is a boxed dinner to be picked up at Jordan's Point on April 24th, from 3 – 5pm. More information on the fundraiser can be found here, <https://www.rockbridgeconservation.org/>. **Master Gardener volunteers are needed to help with the traveling Compost Exhibit to be displayed there from 2:30 – 3:15pm, answering questions and possibly distributing compost information.**

In addition, MG volunteers will have created a “gift box” to include with the box dinners. The origami gift box made of recycled paper will hold RAMGA information about our website, plant sale, help desk, plant clinic, and a Seed Swap packet of seeds. **There will be an origami workshop (5-10 people needed) to be announced soon. Contact Phyllis Fevrier, phylfred@gmail.com, if you are interested in volunteering for the traveling compost exhibit and/or the origami workshop.**

2. **Boxerwood's Backyard Composting Challenge**, <https://boxerwood.org/composting-march21/>. **MG volunteers are needed to answer the Compost Hotline for families in need of composting advice.** MG volunteers will help distribute purchased compost bins at Boxerwood after the first phase of ordering is completed. Volunteers will then be on site to answer questions and run the traveling Compost exhibit. **Contact Phyllis Fevrier if you would like to help.**
3. **Choose to Refuse Plastics Initiative: As individuals and households, MGs can participate in the county-wide audit of single use plastic trash.** Sign up to participate on RACC's website, www.rockbridgeconservation.org and start collecting your own single use plastics for the month of May. Bring your plastics to the Rockbridge High School on June 5th to be weighed and recorded. The Flippy the Whale sculpture will receive plastics and continue to serve as an educational symbol of reducing plastic waste stream. MG volunteers might also help at the high school June 5th (5-6 people). Again, **Phyllis Fevrier, is your contact point.**

Abbreviated RAMGA Board Minutes, February 25, 2021

Treasurer's Report (Jan Smith): RAMGA will be obtaining a debit card to pay for purchases over \$100 to take advantage of the exemption from sales tax for nonprofits. Karen Lyons (Co-Treasurer), David Caldwell, and Barbara Walker will explore options for investing excess RAMGA funds.

Records (Bob Kovach): Bob will be training on the new Better Impact volunteer system. VMS will be gone by the end of March

Class Steering (Peggy Agnor, Tamara Teaff): Nine people have expressed interest in the class of 2022. Peggy and Tamara reported on their attendance at an EMG webinar on Mentoring. A surprising fact was that the average retention of an MG member is 7.7 years.

Help Desk (Karen Lyons): The Question of the Month for February was on pruning roses.

Website (Bob Kovach): Bob has added a full eCommerce store platform to the website.

Plant Sale (Saundra Martis): A virtual plant sale open to the public will be held May 15 – 21 (although this has now been changed to May 8 – 14). A new reusable advertising banner is being purchased.

Plant Clinic (Peggy Agnor): The Virtual Plant Clinic had almost 40 views in January.

School and Demonstration Gardens (Dave Bryer): Projects are still up in the air due to Covid restrictions. A motion to restrict RAMGA project activities due to Covid was discussed. Deb Price reported on the RAMGA Working Group. Working Group members have been contacting project leaders about developing a Memorandum of Understanding with their project partners. It was decided that we should wait to vote on the motion until the Working Group finishes working through the MOUs.

Motion: The Board approved a motion to establish a Teaching Garden at the Buena Vista location of Dabney Lancaster Community College if all parties agree to the Memorandum of Understanding. This will replace the prior motion adopted by the Board to establish a Teaching Garden at the Village Way, Lexington location

Seed Swap (Karen Lyons): The Seed Sale made about \$150. The leftover seeds can be provided to other projects or members can grow the seeds for the plant sale.

VMGA Report (David Caldwell): Registration for the International Master Gardener College will open April 5. The event will be held virtually September 12 – 17.

Continuing Education Opportunities

Saturday, April 17, 11am. RAMGA Virtual Plant Clinic. “The 3 Gardening P’s ---- Planting guidelines -----Propagation types; Cuttings & Division -----AND Plant Sale information”. The Plant Clinic Team will be sharing details on the 3 Gardening P’s plus answering any of your gardening concerns. Send in your questions or concerns when you register for this zoom talk at www.ramga.org. **Please pass the word on to your friends, families, and neighbors. This will also help get the word out about the upcoming virtual Plant Sale, May 8 – 14th!**

Native Plants for Sale at the Nature Foundation at Wintergreen Greenhouse, 725 Beech Grove Rd., Roseland, VA 22967. Opening Saturday, April 3, 10am – 4pm. Call 434-325-7452 for more information.

Note: If you do one of the Native Plant guided walks (p. 2) you can count that as Continuing Ed. hours. Just calculate how long it took you to do the walk

Thursday, April 8, 9am – noon, Wildflower Identification Webinar with Marion Lobstein and Sally Anderson. Participants will practice using Newcomb’s Wildflower Guide and the Flora of Virginia Mobile App (if you do not have this app, you can download it for \$19.99 on your mobile device prior to the program). \$10 registration fee through Blandy Experimental Farm, www.blandy.virginia.edu

Wednesdays in April, free webinars from the Ecological Landscape Alliance, Register at www.ecolandscaping.org

April 7, 12pm – 1pm. “Proper Landscaping Planting: Are We in a Deficit Mode”

April 14, 12pm – 1pm. “Maximizing Space in the Garden: Creating More of a Good Thing”

April 21, 12pm - 1pm. “Creating Community with Our Insect Neighbors”

April 27, 12pm – 1pm. “Going Underground: Unearthing the Role of Soil Organisms in Plant Health”

Tuesday, April 13, 7 – 8:30pm. Tree identification by season: Spring. Charlottesville Tree Stewards. <https://www.charlottesvilleareatreestewards.org/learn-about-trees/take-a-tree-steward-class/>

Saturday, April 17. Virtual “Herb Gardening Tips on Growing & Design” sponsored by the Piedmont Master Gardeners. Registration: <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/upcoming-events-25/>

Sunday, April 18, 10am - 3pm. Plant Sale at Pharsalia, 2333 Pharsalia Rd., Tyro, VA. www.pharsaliaevents.com

Saturday, April 24, 9am – 1pm. Bedford Master Gardener Plant Sale, 1257 County Farm Rd., Bedford.

Virginia Historic Garden Week Events, April 17 – April 24 :

- Saturday, April 17, 10am – 5pm. Staunton, <https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/469/staunton>
- Tuesday, April 20, 10am – 5pm. Lynchburg Garden Day, <https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/477/lynchburg>
- **Saturday, April 24, 10am – 4pm. Lexington Garden Day.** The tour will feature three gardens in Lexington (Jacob Ruff, The Gables, 30 Edmondson Ave.) and the grounds at Thorn Hill. Headquarters will be the Lexington Visitor Center, where all guests will check in. The Herb Guild’s garden, the Campbell House garden, and the Stonewall Jackson House garden are included as points of interest, as is Boxerwood. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchase online at <https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/499/lexington> .

BOOK REVIEWS

By Tamara Teaff

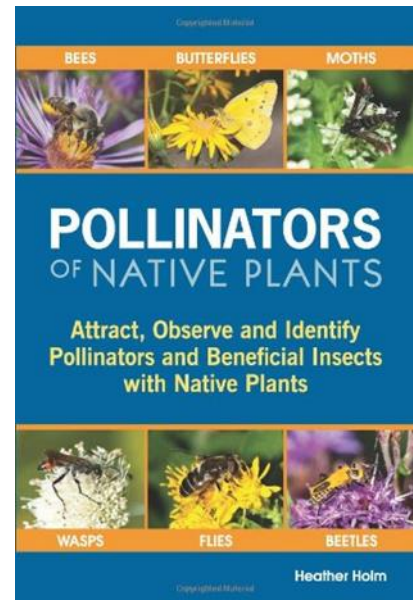
Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe, and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants by Heather Holm. 2014. Pollination Press LLC.

This is both an introduction to the intricate interconnection between pollinators and native plants as well as a resource guide for learning which plants attract pollinators and other beneficial insects. In other words, this book matches pollinators to their perfect host plant. In the preface, the author states that “pollinators have evolved with native plants over thousands of years developing unique and interdependent relationships.” And this book gives instructions on how to establish just such a native ecosystem.

The first three chapters of the book are packed with valuable information. Chapter 1 explains the importance of pollination. In chapter 2, there are basic facts about pollinators (bees, wasps, butterflies, moths, and flies). Pollinator conservation is the focus of chapter 3 with emphasis on plant diversity that provides nesting and foraging environments.

Next comes the colored coded sections that highlight 65 perennial plants of wetland, woodland, and prairie habitats. For each plant, there is information about its flowering period, range location in North America, description, and basic needs of each native (amount of sunlight, soil type, and rainfall). That is all on one page. On the opposite page are pictures and descriptions of the insects that interact with that specific plant. This book begs to be carried on a tour of a garden.

The author has a landscaping background and includes customized landscape designs and garden layouts. The book ends with a visual glossary (and a visual index) of the featured plants and insects. In all, there are 1600 colorful photos of plants and insects. This is the perfect handbook for the gardener who wishes to support the pivotal role of the native plant community in supporting pollinators.



As a biologist and pollinator conservationist, the author is dedicated to restoring the habitat of native species, both plants and insects. She states that “every individual gardener can make a difference by planting native plants”. Pollinators of Native Plants is an important addition to the native plant gardeners home reference library.

Seeds Move! written and illustrated by Robin Page. 2019. Beach Lane Books.

Although the RAMGA seed swap should be included in this picture book, the reader will learn about multiple other ways that seeds are distributed. Plants need sunlight, water, and an uncrowded space to put down roots. This book explains how seeds get to that perfect place to grow.

Using simple text and big bold illustrations, the author/illustrator focuses on one kind of seed dispersal on



each page of the book. There is the “hitchhiking” seed stuck to a racoon’s tail and the “exploding” seed from a cucumber plant. Use your imagination to picture the “plopping” seed. (CLUE: It involves a bear’s digestive system.) Other pages illustrate seeds that “roll”, “catapult”, “drift”, “plunge”, and “parachute”.

Although book is designed for children, it is a testimonial to how nature supplies plants with clever methods of transporting their seeds. The reader is sure to discover a unique collection of seeds and the creatures who help them move about. The dedication page states “for all children who plant seeds” which makes this book a perfect addition to your favorite young gardener’s library.

Faith’s Garden Notes...

As I cut back dead foliage and weed innumerable tufts of hairy bittercress, better known in my family as that “popper” plant for the pods that explode and launch seeds up to several feet from the pod, I spy the new growth of some of my favorite plants. Baptisias (*Baptisia australis*) top that list. I cannot have enough of them. Not only are they beautiful, but they are also deer resistant and very low maintenance. I think of them as a four-season plant: the beautiful spring bloom, the clean green foliage in the summer and in fall, the interesting seed pods. In winter, the stems stay upright and turn black with the seed pods hanging off them like fat little Christmas ornaments. Baptisias are in the legume family, which means the plants are nitrogen fixing, one reason they are so carefree. They fertilize themselves. Their only detriment to my mind is that the straight species will often self-sow. And with their very long tap roots, even on the baby plants, it makes them difficult to transplant. I have one very stubborn one growing in the middle of a gravel path that I have never been able to uproot.

The common name for the plant is false indigo – and the plant was used by Native Americans and early settlers for many years. However, the color we think of as indigo, a rich dark blue, is actually

from *Baptisia tinctoria*.

Screamin' Yellow Baptisia



Baptisia australis is a native plant found from Pennsylvania to North Carolina and Tennessee. It grows about 3-4' and as wide. The purplish-blue flowers are arranged atop flower spikes above a mound of green-blue pealike foliage. *Baptisia* prefers sun but will grow with some shade although if there is too much shade, the plant will flop. Most grow to about 3 x 3', but some are a bit taller and there are a few dwarf cultivars.

When I started gardening many years ago, it was the startling blue flowers of the straight species that caught my interest. Then, in the 1990s and early 2000's, interest in baptisias took off when the first new cultivar appeared in 1996 – 'Purple Smoke' with smaller leaves, lavender flowers, and beautiful gray stems. I just had to have it. Unfortunately, I did not bring it with me when we moved to Rockbridge County. Now there are dozens of new cultivars. I think I have about 6 or 7 of them and probably 5 of the straight species. 'Screamin' Yellow' and 'Cherries Jubilee' are both about 3.5' tall and 4' wide now and are covered solid with flowers in the spring – just gorgeous!

Mt. Cuba Center in Delaware is an amazing botanical garden that features native plants. Many of us MGs visited the Center in 2019 during our last RAMGA field trip. (Hopefully, we can start up the field trips again in 2022). Anyway, Mt. Cuba trialed 46 baptisias over four years including representatives of 11 different species. I visited Mt. Cuba during the trials of *Baptisia* and the display further cemented my love of the plant. You can read the fully illustrated report online here <https://mtcubacenter.org/trials/baptisia/>.



'Purple Smoke' *Baptisia*

Use this guide to determine your next baptisia purchase. You really cannot go wrong.

Photo credits: Mt. Cuba Center

References: "Baptisia Trial Garden", Mt Cuba Center, Hockessin, Delaware,

<https://mtcubacenter.org/trials/baptisia/>

"*Baptisia australis*", Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder,

<https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?kempercode=b660>

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