THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

October 2021

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners brand-new 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.

Zoom RAMGA Plant Clinics Start up Again…

Join us Saturday, October 16th from 11:00am until noon for a Zoom presentation on how to get your landscape and garden ready for fall. Topics will include tips on what to plant, how to test your soil and tree planting best practices. There will also be a 20-minute question and answer periods for all attendees. If interested, visit our web page at https://www.ramga.org/ for the Zoom link.

OCTOBER GARDENING EVENTS

Saturday, October 9, 10am – 3pm. FallFest, sponsored by the Virginia Cooperative Extension with support from the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association. Richard's Fruit Market, 6410 Middle Rd., Middletown, VA. Garden talks, demos, craft workshops, and giveaways, music, kid activities. Free.

Saturday, October 9, 9am – 3pm. 2021 Fall Plant Sale at the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants, 1354 Tufton Farm, Charlottesville. Preregistration required, https://www.monticello.org/house-gardens/center-for-historic-plants/visit-us/

Saturday, October 16, 11am – noon. Virtual RAMGA Fall Plant Clinic. Tips on what to plant in the Fall; how to plant a tree; how to test your soil. Includes 20-minute Q&A for all attendees. Register on our website for the Zoom, www.ramga.org

You can still register for the "Grow Native" series offered by the Plant Virginia Natives partnership – a real bargain at $10 for the whole series. The 12-part series began in the spring and continues into the fall and your $10 gets you access to the entire virtual series. The webinars are sponsored by Richmond's Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and Blue Ridge Prism.

Upcoming:

- Tuesday, October 12, 6:30pm – 8pm, "Selecting native plants for fall and winter interest and ecology" with Kim Eierman
- Tuesday, October 26, 6:30pm – 8pm, "Common invasive plants in Virginia: identification, control and native alternatives" with Elizabeth Mizell from Blue Ridge Prism
- Tuesday, November 9, 6:30pm – 8pm, "Conservation landscaping with natives" with Carol Heiser.

Register here: https://www.lewisginter.org/event/grow-native-series/

Wednesday, October 13, 7pm – 9pm. "Seasons at the Quarry Garden" presented by the Jefferson Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society, Ivy Creek Natural Area – Education Building, Charlottesville. For more information: https://vnps.org/jefferson/events/seasons-at-the-quarry-gardens/

Saturday, October 16, 10am – 12pm. Fall woods walk at James Madison's Montpelier with Montpelier's Horticulture department and Virginia Master Naturalists $25. Registration: https://www.montpelier.org/events/nature-exploration-series-spring-ephemerals

Sunday, October 17, 2pm – 4pm. Invasive Plant Field Session with Blue Ridge Prism, Rappahannock County Park, Washington, VA.

FALL GARDEN TIPS

- Take a stroll through your garden and assess areas that need additional planting. Photographs and notes will help you remember.
- Stake mums if needed and continue to water and fertilize
- Lift tender bulbs such as cannas or dahlias after the first frost.
- Finish your planting before the first frost, usually around October 15 in Rockbridge County.
- Divide daylilies, peonies and iris.
- Plant bare root roses.
- Continue to plant spring bulbs. Bulbs usually need 3-4 months of cold to bloom, so December 1st is a good cutoff date.
- Prune late-flowering shrubs and trees once dormant.
- Bring houseplants inside.
- Shred or chop fallen leaves and compost them to use next year on the garden.
- Don't mulch until after the soil freezes, usually in November or December.
- Save seeds from annuals and perennials.
- After a killing frost, do one last weeding, pull dead annuals and cut back some perennial foliage, but leave seed heads and some stems for the birds and overwintering insects.
- Male deer scrape their horns in the fall along the bark of young trees to rub the summer velvet off their horns and to mark their territory. Wrap the trunks with plastic tree guards, chicken wire or plastic mesh to prevent deer damage and remove in the spring.
- Check trees and shrubs for bagworms.
- Don't be alarmed if some evergreens begin to shed their yellowing interior needles. This is natural this time of the year.
- Make sure you thoroughly clean under roses and discard the debris. This will help prevent black leaf spot in the coming year.

- Plant a cover crop in your vegetable garden. This will help prevent erosion and add organic material to the soil. Rye or crimson clover are both good choices.

Did you know Rockbridge has an active chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society?

The VNPS https://vnps.org/ is a statewide organization established in 1982 to further the appreciation and conservation of native plants. VNPS prepares wonderful educational materials available to the public, and host for its members educational workshops and field trips throughout the state and country to observe unique native flora and ecology.

At a local chapter level our small chapter, the Upper James River chapter, holds native plant sales and hosts the popular spring wildflower walks on the Chessie Trail, W&L back campus, and Brushy Hills. Before COVID we gathered in the winter months for Talking Native Plant lunches, informal educational gatherings to ask questions and share our observations about native plants and associated wildlife. We have formed an outreach group to inform landowners how to deal with burgeoning invasive plants. We also try to act as a clearing house to provide people with information on webinars and other educational opportunities throughout the state. **Come see our Native Plant Sanctuary at Boxerwood Woodland Garden and Nature Center.** We meet weekly to manage and learn from this public garden site.

Many Master Gardeners are also members of the chapter**. If interested in more information, contact Jan Smith http://janhuntersmith@gmail.com or Phyllis Fevrier http://phylnfred@gmail.com**

FROM THE HELP DESK

Brown Marmorated Stink Bug

By Katherine Smith

This month we honor an invasive alien. One that has been around long enough to have received recognition as an ECONOMICALLY IMPORTANT SPECIES by the Virginia Agricultural Council. This puts it in the same category as this summer's least favorite native - the Harlequin Bug (*Murganita histrionica*) known to wreak havoc on market crops. Both are Hemiptera. However, the lifestyles are different in that the latter does not overwinter as an adult, and this alien does.

YES! It is the Brown marmorated stink bug. Since its introduction in Allentown, Pa., in 1988, it has spread far and wide on the east coast of our country. In the past, I'd only known the overwintering form. A quick look online (*Halyomorpha halys*) revealed the extensive damage it causes in a wide variety of agricultural crops, including orchards, vineyards, commercial vegetable productions such as tomatoes, and for market gardeners, the disfiguration of many vegetables, excepting peppers. The only saving grace I found were the leaves it loves to chew when it emerges from overwintering in our space-Ailanthus and Paulownia-also invasive aliens!

Photo credit: https://njaes.rutgers.edu/stink-bug/identify.php

As with other insects from East Asian countries, BMSB looks for overwintering habitats resembling its homeland. In this case, it's forests. If we localize this to Rockbridge County, we know why we are at risk. We are a patchwork quilt of woods, fields, houses, barns, etc. It craves dark, safe, warm places away from predators (even though none of the usual ones are known to exist hereabouts.) Beginning as cool nights set in, and daytime highs are sufficient to warm up their bodies, they begin to hunt for places to overwinter.

Their population this year seems smaller than that of 2020. Here at Persimmon Tree Farm, the battenboard siding on our house hosted a dozen or so by midafternoon for several days, as did the window & door screens on the sunnier side. As the sun went down, I collected many more each day. And we all know the bug's YUCK factor- that odor released the minute they're touched. What to do?

My method reflects that devised for 2004's invasive alien by John Repair when he was our Extension Agent. That bug was the Asian Lady Beetle (*Harmonia axyridis*). Both focus on Population Control. Here's mine for BMSB: Realize the critters' weaknesses, add in simplicity and the tools to hand. John recommended using a vacuum cleaner hose with a nylon stocking poked in so that the sucking of the vacuum removed lots of the critters at once, could the tied up to remove, and then disposed of more or less humanely. For the ALB, John suggested finding every entrance to your home's foundation (rocky areas), such as wiring, plumbing, and old-style window frames (the ones with the weights) and closing them up. Our home has mostly wood paneling, so that's where BMSBs head. There I can collect them with a hearth broom, and since they cannot swim, I can escort them to the utility sink, in which I have about a gallon of water waiting. In they go! I remove the plug and watch them go down the drain. Replace the plug & run more water in. Let that drain. Replace the plug. OK, some will still find a way to the top of the drain. Then I use a little bit of paper, gently pick them up and flush them down the toilet. Don't squash them!

Now, the overwintering adults do stay inside until late April or early May. When they emerge, they'll feed for 2 weeks, then develop "sex on the brain", as very little time exists to reproduce the hoards

necessary to wreak havoc. At this point, they only eat to sustain egg-laying. These are barrel-shaped "pearls" laid on the undersides of leaves. In our area there is only one generation a year, fortunately. These hatch, giving rise to 5 instars before mid- August. Recognizing these is pretty easy once you've seen one: sort of light brown with lighter brown stripes. You can collect these in a bucket of water, too. Although research is ongoing, I've been able to find only one commercial trap for adults. It is similar to those marketed for Japanese beetles; in that it is based on pheromone attractants.

NOW FOR THE BIG NEWS YOU'VE BEEN WAITING FOR, regarding our most recent invasive alien insect. Tom Stanley, our Extension Agent, reports that the only instance of the **spotted lantern fly** in our area occurred in July at a local truck stop. The team responsible for follow-ups, collected the egg mass for examination. And trucks with similar origins that day were inspected. Maybe cold weather will halt the spread further south for 2021.

Seed Harvesting 101

By Karen Lyons

Gardening enjoyment does not have to end as the blooms fade or the produce is brought to table. The adventure continues with the prospect of seed harvesting.

But first, recall that a fertile seed is produced only when pollen from the stamen or male part of the plant is transferred to the pistil or female portion of the bloom. A plant is considered **open-pollinated** if this occurs naturally via wind or insect. For some species (e.g., beans) this happens within the same flower, termed **self-pollination**. For others this requires separate male and female flowers (e.g., squash). If pollination occurs on the same plant or a plant of the same species, it will produce seed that grows a plant identical or nearly so to the parent. However, if pollination occurs with a different species, the seed resulting from this **cross-pollination** will produce plants with characteristics from both plants, as frequently seen when different types of squash or corn are grown in close proximity. **Closed pollination** occurs only with human intervention by systematically cross-pollinating two different varieties with the aim of producing plants with desirable characteristics. These **hybrids** will produce seed that grows plants differing from the parent.

So, after this botanic digression, the ideal seed parent is open pollinated with self or same variety. The donor plant should also be healthy with good quality fruit or flower.

The ideal time to harvest seed is highly species dependent and may vary from days to weeks. Harvest too soon and the seed may not have matured enough to be fertile; too late and the seed may have already dispersed. Flowers usually develop into seed heads that are brown or dried. They can be cut

and allowed to dry completely in a paper bag for 1-2 weeks, then thrashed, crushed, or put through sieves to separate seeds from chaff. Some vegetables can be dry harvested similarly such as peas or beans. Others such as tomatoes need to be "wet harvested", a process that involves putting seeds with their surrounding gel into a glass of water, stirring twice daily and allowing them to ferment for about 5 days after which seeds sink to the bottom where they can be rinsed off and dried.

Store dried seeds in a tightly closed container (plastic zip bags or canning jars work well). Keep in a cool, dark location, about 40 degrees F (e.g., refrigerator). Maintain low humidity (add a desiccant such as silica beads, powdered milk, or uncooked rice to storage container).

Don't forget to label your seeds with the name, variety, and date. Spring is a long way off. The seeds will remember who they are, but you may not.

Reference:
https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/saving-vegetable-seeds#start-with-clean-seeds-and-transplants-823212

Photo credit: https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/resources/info-sheet/tips-on-saving-your-own-seeds

We're Putting the Gardens to Bed!

By Karen Carleton

Well, it's that time of year when the nights are becoming cooler, and the days are shorter. Our thoughts turn to putting the gardens, that have given us our summer harvest, to bed for the Fall and Winter. The time we take to prepare our garden beds now will pay off in the end during the Spring and Summer.

I want to talk to those who might still want to have a harvest in the autumn as there are a few plants that love the cooler weather and the shorter days. It does take some planning on your part, but the work is well worth it, and you get a longer harvest. For example: plant garlic now and you will be harvesting in May or June, but if you plant, say spinach, now you will be harvesting in November or December. You can also plant turnips now in time to harvest in November. These are just a few ideas to extend your harvest season.

For those of us who are finished with planting and harvesting our garden produce, we need to think about lovingly getting our garden beds ready for the next year's planting season. This means that we need to think about replenishing our soil and about what springtime flowers we want to see in the next year. You need to plant bulbs now if you want to enjoy them in the months after winter. It also means that we need to make sure that we clean up the debris of the plants that have been providing food for us during the summer. It might be prudent to get a soil test for your garden to see if you need to amend the soil. The soil test is a great starting point to finding out what has been depleted during the growing season.

After getting the soil test, the next job is basic garden housekeeping such as getting rid of the dead plants to see if any of them looked diseased. Don't compost them and it would be best to bag and take them to the landfill. If the plants are not diseased, then by all means compost them if you are able to do it. Once the garden it's clean and all the dead plants are eliminated' then mix compost into your soil to provide nutrients for it during the fall and winter months. Then you will be ready for planting in the spring. The author of *The Vegetable Garden in the Southeast*, Ira Wallace, says to use black and white newspaper or cardboard on top of the garden bed, then put mulch on top of it. One gardener in our area uses burlap, then puts mulch on top of that. He says by the springtime the burlap has disintegrated into the soil. The reason you would want to do the above actions is to prevent weeds.

The joy of gardening is a lot of preparation, but the time and effort are well worth it in the long run to have a garden that will respond with brilliant blooms and fruitful harvests.

Overwintering Chrysanthemums

by Faith Vosburgh

So, you went out and bought several pots of beautiful fall mums for your front steps or porch. But did you know you can overwinter those plants, save yourself some money next year and have a beautiful perennial that will come back year after year? Does that sound too easy? There are a couple caveats. Here is the easy part: first, make sure you buy a strong healthy sturdy plant with deep green leaves. Buy them from someone local, perhaps at the Farmer's Market. You'll know they weren't transported miles in a big box's hot truck. Make sure you keep your mums watered. Drying out and wilting weakens the plant, and you want one that will last until you are ready to put it in the ground. Remove spent flowers (deadheading) to encourage new blooms.

Now for the trickier part: Plant your mum in your sunny flower bed. Dig a hole twice as wide as the diameter of the pot and just as deep as the root ball. Tease the roots apart. If the roots are a solid

mass, you can slice them a bit with an old kitchen knife. If you have a ready source of compost, mix some of that with the backfill from the hole and then fill in around the plant. Press down firmly so there are not any air holes. After the first frost, mulch to keep the soil moist. And don't fertilize until next spring.

And here is the trickiest part: In the spring, cut the foliage back to 3-4" above the ground. Once the new growth is about 6 – 8" tall, remove about an inch of the branches with your thumb and index finger. This is called pinching. When the plant grows another 6", pinch again. You might have to pinch a third time if your plant is very fast growing. This keeps the plant from growing tall and leggy with few flowers. Usually, that last pinch should be about mid-June to mid-July. Three months is required between the last pinch and the bloom. Fertilize monthly with a water-soluble fertilizer.

Chrysanthemums need to be divided every couple of years. Do this when the new growth is about 6-8". Dig up the plant and gently pull it apart, then replant any rosette that has leafy growth and a root system. Be careful not to plant the new plants too deeply.

With not too much effort, you can have loads of new, free mums in your gardens next year.

Sources: www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/Portals/0/Gardening/Gardening%20Help/Factsheets/Chrysanthemums11.pdf
Campbell, Julie and Cari Mitchell. "Caring for your fall mums". North Carolina Cooperative Extension

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