

Summer 2023

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Submissions due the 20th of the
preceding month.

Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle

What a remarkable Spring we've had this year! From the blooming of snowdrops through the month of June, there have been few disruptive weather events. Forsythia blooms actually persisted for over two weeks - that doesn't happen often, Serviceberries, redbuds, dogwoods: all bloomed beautifully for an extended time. April did *not* bring those three days of 90 degree temperatures that burn everything. In short, Lexington has seen 3 months of spring weather and that's a fairly rare occurrence.

Winter was also relatively mild, discounting the sharp temperature drop on Christmas weekend. There was no measurable snow for most of us. According to online sources, Lexington receives 41 inches of rain per year, on average. As of mid-June, we had seen 12.9" thus far in 2023 which left us lacking about 7" for the year. Rain finally came just as the summer solstice arrived. Many of us have no doubt had a weed explosion, but that's a far better problem than drought.

Let's talk about how to build resilient gardens. Even if El Nino turns out to be a bust and July and August bring weekly rains, we all recognize that climate change has arrived. We need to take a thoughtful look at how we're growing what we're growing and see if we can enjoy gardening in a more sustainable way. Most of us have already improved our practices to better conserve resources.

Choosing native plants for ornamental beds is a great place to start, but make sure we're siting them in appropriate spots on our properties. Woodland plants need not only partial to full shade, but also the soils typical to where we find them in the wild. Deep layers of humus, formed by decaying leaves and other organic matter, retain moisture and nutrients, and promote the mycorrhizal associations that underpin forest health. You can create similar conditions even in a small yard with planning.

Many native plants thrive on little moisture and still produce colorful displays for people and oases for pollinators. butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), threadleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*), bergamot

(*Monarda fistulosa*), and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) fall into that category. Building rain gardens is a way to store soil moisture and support plants such as Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), mallows (*Hibiscus* spp.), Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*),

and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

There are even great ways to grow sustainable vegetable gardens. We'll learn more about that topic when RAMGA's own vegetable guru, Jim Kvach, shares his wealth of knowledge

with us at the July 15 program in the Dunlap Auditorium at Lexington Presbyterian Church. See you there!

Jen and Anita

RAMGA CLASS OF 2023

Lab #7 Good Bug/Bad Bug

By Tamara Teaff

On May 6, the Class of 2023 met at the RARA Building for their Entomology Lab which was led by Dr. Jared Lee, biology professor at Southern Virginia University. With his support, the trainees analyzed the role of insects in the ecosystem of the garden.

With the arrival of the Spotted Lantern Fly in Virginia, the discussion turned to invasive insects. Dr. Lee shared a valuable resource: EDDMapS. Sponsored by the University of Georgia, this web-based mapping system documents invasive species and pest distribution. According to its website, as of June 2023, EDDMapS recorded 7.6 million observations. Dr. Lee stressed the importance of mapping as a positive step toward control and eradication of invasives. Check it out here: www.eddmaps.org.

Lab assistants were Anne Riffey-Buckner and Sue Piepho.



LAB # 8 WATER QUALITY

By Tamara Teaff

On May 13, the Class of 2023 met at Boxerwood Gardens and Nature Center for the Water Quality and conservation Lab. Shawn Jadrnick, Associate Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources for

Roanoke County and the cities of Roanoke and Salem teamed with our Tom Stanley to educate the trainees in all things water conservation.



Irrigation system example

Shawn informed the trainees about irrigation and rainwater harvesting. The trainees received specific guidelines for installing a simple drip irrigation system in raised bed gardening along with formulas to determine how often and for how long a garden bed needs to be watered for maximum efficiency.

Tom highlighted the importance of riparian buffers as one of the best management practices for water quality as they stabilize and protect streams by capturing and filtering surface runoff. He encouraged planting of native species to support riparian areas. Tom outlined the efforts underway to protect the health of the Chesapeake watershed area in a government funded flow chart of participating watershed protection agencies.

Lab # 9. Vegetable and Fruit

Gardening Wisdom

By Tamara Teaff

What a treat to visit Jim Kvach's garden for the Master Gardener trainees! On the evening of June 6, they received multiple gardening tips from where to best purchase gardening equipment to recommendations of local plant nurseries. Throughout the event, the trainees toured Jim's productive space for fruits and vegetables as well as received a bit of Jim's gardening wisdom. Much of what he grows is donated to a local food pantry.

Kaila Holmes and Patti Jansen were the lab assistants.



Buddy, the garden greeter!



Words of gardening wisdom from Jim Kvach

Lab #10 Herbaceous Plants and Tree ID Lab

Plants, Glorious Plants!

By Tamara Teaff

On Saturday, June 17, the Class of 2023 participated in their last training lab by visiting the home garden of Faith and John Vosburgh. Touring their garden, the trainees observed the basics of landscape design. Faith pointed out examples of the use of the balance of color and texture throughout the garden as well as an emphasis of the importance of applying vertical shapes in garden design.

Later, John taught the Class how to use the dichotomous key section of their copies of *The Common Trees of Virginia Identification Guide* which was followed by a scavenger hunt in the garden to identify specific trees. The lab ended with each member of the class selecting a plant, propagated from the garden, to take home.

Petra Visscher and Sue Piepho acted as lab assistants.



Tree ID instruction with John, the Tree Guy



Haley Huffman. Proudly displays her adopted plant



Tree scavenger hunt in action

GRADUATION!

Members of the RAMGA community greeted the Class of 2023 with a celebratory picnic held at the Rockbridge Baths Volunteer Firehouse on the afternoon of June 17. In this year's class 11 members graduated with intern status and 3 with certified Master Gardener status. To graduate, members of the training class met the requirements of reading the online handbook, studying the accompanying modules, passing all online quizzes, and attending, at least, 8 out of 10 labs. For those who have already completed their 50 volunteer hours, a RAMGA hat was awarded. Each class member will receive a hat upon completion of their volunteer hours. It is important to note that the Class of 2023 already is involved in the RAMGA mission as they have recorded a total of 467.14 volunteer hours in *Better Impact*. The Class Training team is proud of the energy and enthusiasm demonstrated by this training class.





Laurie Bassi (class of 2023) earned her 50 volunteer hours to become a certified Extension Master Gardener

Barbara Thomas received acknowledgement of achieving 9000 volunteer hours at Master Gardener College in June. Photo by Will Guild



MASTER GARDENERS AT WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

Happenings at Natural Bridge Elementary School Garden

By Tamara Teaff

Before school ended, fourth graders at NBES were exposed to the world of herbs. Extension Master Gardeners, Barbara Thomas (dressed in colonial garb) and Maureen Becker discussed how herbs may have been used for medicinal, culinary, and aromatic purposes in the past. The session ended with an herbal tasting party where the students tried to identify the herb enhancing the food they were eating.

After school ended, the NBES team supported the summer DREAMS (Developing Resilient Empathic and Motivated Students) Summer Camp by offering instruction in the art of flower arranging. The completed vases were delivered to residents of a local extend care facility.

Becky Herndon assists with flower selection.



Maureen Becker and Barbara Thomas discuss the wonders of herbs.

Will Guild assists with flower arranging.



Seed Saving Project expands: can you help?

By Karen Lyons

This year, in addition to hosting our annual seed sharing event in January, our group is partnering with the Rockbridge Regional Library System to establish an ongoing Seed Library to be located in the Lexington Branch. Development of a local seed library enables building an inventory of seeds well-suited to our region, helps to address food insecurity by encouraging home food production, and provides opportunities for education in horticultural practices, nutrition, and biodiversity. But we will need seed and we hope that our fellow Master Gardeners can help.



To ensure the quality of our seed offerings, our team has developed the following criteria: Plants chosen for harvest should be healthy and disease-free, open-pollinated (not a hybrid), properly isolated if they are cross-pollinators (for further information on this, see references below), saved from multiple plants of the chosen species, and NOT listed as invasive or patented. Seeds should be mature, dry, clean, properly stored (dry, dark, cool environment) and in an appropriate container (e.g., sealed plastic bag, jar with secure lid). Labeling should include scientific and common name, general location and date of harvest and your name. If you are donating extra seed that you purchased, keep it in the original package but make sure it is secure.

If you plan to offer seed for either the swap or the library, If you need assistance with seed harvesting or if you would like to join our project, contact me (klyons0221@gmail.com) or Ginger Reed (farcountryglr@gmail.com).

Here are just a couple of the many resources out there about seed saving:

Saving vegetable seeds. University of Minnesota Extension

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

At Home Seed Processing. U tube video by Seed Savers Exchange Heritage Farm

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjmMdgHtjO> |



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