

June 2022

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Editor: Faith Vosburgh
Proofreader: Penny Wilson

Submissions due the 20th of the
preceding month.

Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle, David Caldwell

As the busyness of spring has already set in, it's a good time to try to find balance - in life as well as in the garden. RAMGA volunteers have been busy organizing this year's Plant Sale, and we're sure all of you have been busy with family and friends, in the garden, and in your volunteering - with RAMGA and the other organizations you're involved with. It seems like even the rainy days - when we're not out tending to our outdoor tasks - lead to more work once the sun comes out. Plus, more daylight hours make it easy to spend the whole day laboring!

We encourage you, as we are trying to do for ourselves, to stop and smell the roses (or whatever is blooming at your place), drink some water, and maybe even sit and relax - a real challenge for some of us. Take some time to contemplate...maybe big life questions or little things like "what is that growing over there?"

This can be a great time of year to identify what's growing that

you didn't plant yourself - friend or foe? Lots of non-native, aggressive growing invasive plants have already shown themselves and everyone's favorite native plant that makes us itch is back - POISON IVY!



Keep an eye out for this 3-leaved, seemingly shapeshifting vine that seems to be growing very happily this year. Other than complete avoidance, if you are allergic to poison ivy, approach with caution! There are products you can use before and/or after skin exposure and remember to wash clothes and sanitize tools that may have come in contact with it. If you are choosing to remove poison ivy, be sure to dispose of it safely and DO NOT add it to your burn pile.

The other thing that has already shown up this season - TICKS. Even if you're not deep in the woods, ticks are something to watch out for around here. Little things can help - tucking your pants into your socks, your shirt

into your waistband, wearing light colors so that ticks are more easily seen, and insect repellent. It's important after outside activities to check yourself for ticks - it looks like experts are saying that this is going to be a bad tick year - to prevent something worse, such as Lyme disease or Alpha-gal syndrome. Remember that our 4-legged friends will often bring ticks into the house with them.

The good news is that with a little bit of care, we can keep ourselves healthy and find balance in our lives. Wear sunscreen (or cover your skin), be aware of your surroundings (for plants that will make you itch or poke you with their thorns - we're looking at you, multi-flora rose - and bugs that like your warm skin), stay hydrated, and treat yourself to some well-deserved breaks throughout the day. We want you all to stay well so that we see you on June 11th for the long-awaited Welcome Party for new MGs!

Jen, Anita, and David

RAMGA FYI

Don't forget the Welcome Potluck at Glen Maury Park in the pavilions by the Paxton House on Saturday, June 11 at 1:30. Sign-up below with your food contribution here:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20f044ca8ad29aafa7-potluck>

Welcome Kristi Flack, a new RAMGA member and a transfer from the Montgomery County Master Gardeners!

WELCOME, RAMGA CLASS OF 2022!

Meeting and Greeting the Class of 2022

By Tamara Teaff

Bugs Ultsey

Bert "Bugs" Utsey recently moved from Asheville, NC to Lexington in June of 2021 with his husband and two dogs. He works as a culinary teacher at the newly established Maple Hall Academy, where his goal is to create a full farm-to-table program. On Fridays, he works with his students at the school's farm, where he manages the school garden (which he built just this past year). Aside from gardening and cooking, he enjoys playing the piano and hiking.

Becoming a Master Gardener has been a longtime goal for him. While he has not done volunteer work in recent years, he is looking forward to the opportunity to get out into his new community, meet new people, learn, and share his love of gardening.

Pamela Wercinski

Known by all as Pam, she moved to Rockbridge County in March 2019. Her husband is retired military. As a result of his career, they have lived in various states through the years. Pam has worked as an LPN for 21 years. She is currently employed with Carilion Clinic working on an as needed basis at various outpatient offices in the Shenandoah Valley. She is the mom to two adult sons. Jason is married and lives in California. Chris is living in Arizona. Pam is passionate about running. Although her interest has turned to biking in the past few years as her “joints have been screaming in discomfort from pounding asphalt”. Hiking with her dogs is another enjoyable pastime. Enjoying vegetable and flower gardening, and sharing that enjoyment with others, is the reason Pam decided to become a Master Gardener.

Edward Whitmore

Known to his friends as Ed, he is fairly new to Rockbridge County, having lived here for only four years. Ed has three sons, of which two live in the Rockbridge area. He is retired after having served in three branches of the military. Ed admits that it has been some time since he volunteered his services in a community setting. However, he does help a blind neighbor with farm responsibilities such as “getting in hay for the animals”. Ed enjoys anything relating to nature, especially walking. In the 1970’s, Ed moved to Washington D.C. where he was currently employed. There, he enjoyed the cultural enrichment of the D.C. area. Ed has lived in multiple areas of the United States. Because of his many moves, Ed reports that he discovered pleasure in learning to know people of unique and diverse cultural backgrounds. Describing himself as being “ignorant” of horticultural facts, Ed appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Master Gardener program.

CLASS OF 2022

LAB 5, Soils & Nutrients Module

By Tamara Teaff



The trainees met on Saturday afternoon of April 2 at the RARA Building to participate in a hands-on experience with plant propagation. To prepare for this lab, they studied the online propagation module, reviewed chapter 10 in the Master Gardener Handbook and took the propagation quiz.

Training class leader, Peggy Agnor, with trainees Mary Katherine Lawrence and Beverly Loring

During this lab, various RAMGA members shared their knowledge of propagation. Karen Lyons demonstrated growing plants from seeds. Faith Vosburgh modeled techniques of dividing plants. Angelika Matuik provided an opportunity to propagate a plant with cuttings

and Molly Delappe exhibited the mechanics of grafting. The trainees left the lab with plant specimens that they proudly propagated during the lab demonstrations.



Propagation take home treasures

Plant division in action



LAB 6, Entomology Lab

By Tamara Teaff

After completing the entomology online module, reading Chapter 5 in the Master Gardener Handbook, and taking the entomology quiz, the trainees met at the RARA Building on the afternoon of Saturday, April 9 to participate in the entomology lab. The instructor was Dr. Jared Lee, Assistant Professor of Biology at Southern Virginia University. He arrived with a variety of “bug” specimens along with dissecting microscopes. He presented the trainees with the challenge of observing 5 insects of their choice. Using the microscopes, they analyzed each insect and described the antennae, mouthparts, legs, and wings. Based on their observations, they were asked to decide if the insect was harmful or an asset to the garden.



Dr. Jaren Lee demonstrating microscope use

Dr. Lee ended the lab with a discussion as of “ Good Bug/ Bad Bug” in the world of entomology. Fewer than 10% of insects are what gardeners would consider harmful. This means that 90% are beneficial or benign.



Even the “bad” guys may serve a function. They may be pollinators, decomposers, or food for creatures higher on the food chain. He stressed that it is important to watch the insects in action. Observe if they are eating leaves, buds, or other insects. Research the insect before you take measures to destroy. Balance is the key.

Trainee, Bert “Bugs” Utsey, observes a specimen while trainee, Pascale Couturier, takes notes

LAB 7, Native, Non-native, Invasive Plants/Habitat Gardening for Wildlife

By Tamara Teaff with photos by Mackenzie Brooks

Meeting on the afternoon of Earth Day, April 23, at Natural Bridge State Park, the trainees were introduced to the importance of planting native plants. As part of this lab, they were required to identify both native and non-native species. Leading the investigation were instructors, Jan Smith, Peggy Dyson-Cobb, Karen Lyons, and Phyllis Fevrier. Assisting in the lab were Master Gardener volunteers, Jen Coluzzi, Mackenzie Brooks, and Peggy Agnor. The lab ended with a walk along Cedar Creek Trail to observe native plants in their natural locations.



Walking Cedar Creek Trail

To prepare for this lab, the trainees reviewed Chapter 20 in the Master Gardener Handbook along with the Native, Non-native, and Invasive Plants online module. The quiz on “Gardening for Wildlife” was also required. Each trainee was given a copy of *Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas*, published by the National Park Services and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A link to the publication can be found here.

<https://www.invasive.org/alien/pubs/midatlantic/midatlantic.pdf>



Learning to identify native plants from Jan Smith

Better Impact Training

By Tamara Teaff

Bob Kovach and Kaila Holmes met with the trainees to provide instruction to access the Better Impact program. The trainees were provided the option of Wednesday evening of April 13 or Saturday morning of April 16 to learn about the program. Meeting in the Piovano Room of the Rockbridge Regional Library, each trainee was given a guided tour of the Better Impact program and the features that it offers all Master Gardener volunteers. As they begin exploring RAMGA projects and activities, the trainees are encouraged to record volunteer and continuing education hours.

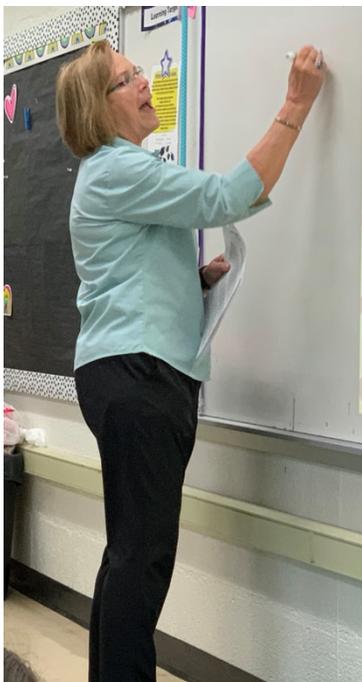


Master Gardeners in the Community...

It's Back! Herb Day at Natural Bridge Elementary

By Tamara Teaff

The fourth grade Natural Bridge Elementary RAMGA gardening team end each school year with an Herb Day. That has been missing throughout the pandemic. In May, Barbara Thomas and the members of the NBES Garden Team were able to return to this tradition. Through this activity, the classes are exposed to



herbal facts, both past and present. The students are surprised to learn that herbs, in the form of pollen grains, were found in caves over 60,000 years ago. Even before the pyramids of Egypt were built, people were using herbs for their distinctive flavors, smells, and usefulness to sickness. People in different countries had their favorite herb that they would use for certain ailments. For example, people in China used ginger root for an upset stomach while people in England made chamomile tea. Herbs were used to flavor food, provide a pleasurable fragrance, or restore good health. For example, deer meat would have been wrapped in sage to help preserve the freshness of the meat.

As Barbara Thomas discussed the culinary, aromatic, or medicinal purposes of each herb, the students were given plates of herbs to explore. They were encouraged to touch, smell, and even taste each herb. Following this exposure, the students had an herb feast where they were given food flavored by the various herbs. After tasting, the students were asked to become Herb Detective by recording the herb they think was used to flavor each food. The team was impressed with their accuracy of their choices. All students agreed that the mint cookie was their favorite.

MG Barbara Thomas explains herbs to the class

Back in the Garden Again

By Tamara Teaff

Before the end of the school year, the Natural Bridge Elementary Garden team was able to return to the garden with the students for a session of weeding and potato planting. Third, fourth, and fifth graders participated. At the end of each gardening experience, the students were given the opportunity to select a plant of their choice to take home.

Master Gardener Lea Braford assists with potato planting



Continuing Education Opportunities:

(Local opportunities in **Bold and a larger font**)

Wednesday, June 8, 1:00 – 3:00pm. Glasgow Garden Club will be giving tours of Centennial Park in Glasgow. There will be free plants and refreshments.

Wednesday, June 8, 1:00pm – 2:00pm. Webinar, “Ask the Experts About Phlox”. The National Garden Bureau via Bedford Extension Master Gardeners. <https://ngb.org/great-garden-webinars/>

The New Perennialist website has several interesting free webinars by well-known landscape designers. <https://thenewperennialist.com/new-perennialist-talks/>

Saturday, June 18th, 11:00 – noon, Rockbridge Area Master Gardener Association Online Plant Clinic, “Plant ID: There’s an App for That”. Register for the Zoom link on www.ramga.org

Faith’s Garden Notes...

The Chelsea Chop

The first week in June is when I usually give my fall-blooming perennials the Chelsea Chop. Tracey DiSabato-Aust’s book, *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting and Pruning Techniques* (a must for any gardener’s reference shelf – and there is a new edition) introduced me to this technique. Basically, the chop refers to pruning perennials to control the flowering season or to reduce the size of the plant. Do your asters and goldenrod bloom in the fall with an unsightly leggy stretch of dead leaves at the bottom 6-8” of the stem? The chop is a way to prevent that from happening. Or do your Maximillian sunflowers grow to about 8’ and start to flop? Pinching chrysanthemums throughout the summer to maintain a tight growth is one form of the chop. The chop makes the plants bushier with more flowers.

So why ‘Chelsea’? Chelsea refers to a famous garden show in England in late May which corresponds to when plants should be pruned in England. Late May or early June is best for the chop here in Rockbridge County.

This week I will be pruning my plants. The deer have already pruned some of them. I’ll cut the goldenrod and asters back by about a third. My summer blooming balloon flowers tend to flop, so I’ll cut them back by about a third, too. Depending on how tall my Maximillian sunflowers are – and they look quite tall right now – I’ll cut them in half. The ‘Gateway’ Joe Pye weed will get a third lopped off. Phlox, Beebalm, Yarrow, Coneflower, Black-eyed Susan’s, Sneezeweed, Catmint and Shasta Daisies are other perennials that can benefit from a chop. There really is not that much of a delay in flowering if one cuts back now. The plants

recover quickly. To extend the season of bloom rather than delay it, another option is cutting only half the stems back.

Your garden will look neater later in the season and your compost bin will benefit from all the fresh cuttings.

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