

May 2022

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Submissions due the 20th of the preceding month.

Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle, David Caldwell

May is a frenetic time for RAMGA members. We've wrapped up spring breaks, spring cleaning, and planted early vegetables in our gardens. Some of us also have flower and veggie seedlings under grow lights. This month we'll observe Mother's Day, attend graduations, plan Memorial Day get-aways, finish tasks, and fulfill responsibilities necessary for everyday life.

RAMGA hosts a phenomenal Plant Sale that asks every member to contribute. The proceeds from the event fund all our other projects and activities throughout the year. None of this would be possible without the Herculean efforts of the Plant Sale Team. Peggy Bateson, Margaret Howard, and Sandra Martis who work tirelessly to coordinate and plan the sale - it all comes together on Saturday, May 21 this year.

Another remarkable accomplishment is the new and improved website. It has vastly improved with the network mastery of Mackenzie Brooks and IT assistance from Bob Kovach and team. Check out

ramga.org and get lost in the plethora of botany examples available in our [Plant library](#) ...the hard work of Karen Lyons and her team has paid off with the new [Seed Library](#) ... AND we now have both [community](#) and [members](#) events calendars!

Karen Lyons was instrumental in making RAMGA a qualified non-profit organization and taking steps to invest in the future and sustain our organization for the long haul with an ad-hoc treasurer's Investment Committee. We thank each of you for volunteering in ways meaningful to our community. We encourage you to find your comfort zone and surround yourself with like-minded individuals and share knowledge and grow. Let's support RAMGA this month by signing up for Plant Sale duties promptly when the call goes out!

Master Gardeners are some of the best people on the planet. During a time of year when we most want to be working in and enjoying our own gardens, we volunteer for so many other activities that come around each spring. With the energy that comes from longer, warmer days, it's easy to commit too

many hours to everything except ourselves.

This May, please take time to take care of yourself. Carve out opportunities to walk, go to the gym, hike each week, eat healthy, try some yoga, whatever works for you. Find 15 minutes or more each day to simply meditate, sit outside, listen to birds and observe all the busy lives of the creatures around you. Rockbridge County VA is a remarkable place. Take time to savor the fresh food that comes from your garden. Pause long enough to appreciate all you do to make the earth more beautiful and sustainable. Happy May!

Jen, Anita, and David

RAMGA FYI and VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES...

The next RAMGA board meeting is Friday, May 13th at 1 PM at the Rockbridge Library in the Piovano room. The doors open at 1pm and the meeting will start after setup.

Three new RAMGA projects have been approved and are looking for volunteers. Volunteer hours on these projects will count towards the required 28 hours per year needed to maintain Master Gardener certification. All three programs provide educational outreach to RAMGA members and the community at large. Further information can be found on your shared google drive under "Projects".

1. **SEED SAVERS:** RAMGA volunteers will provide relevant, scientific-based instruction to the community regarding the methods and processes needed to preserve new seed varieties, including native seeds from our region. An inventory of suitable seeds for Rockbridge County is in the process of being developed. Future goals include expanding the seed swap to include other gardening groups and the community at large and to develop a "lending" seed library. **If you are interested in volunteering, contact Karen Lyons, klyons0221@gmail.com or Ginger Reed, farcountrygrl@gmail.com**
2. **INVASIVE SPECIES EDUCATION – IDENTIFICATION & MANAGEMENT:** This project focuses on invasive plant identification and management. Invasive plant species are smothering native flora. Volunteers in this project would help develop and present educational programs that work to increase awareness and knowledge of responsible landscape management and natural resource conservation. Working with volunteers at Brushy Hill removing invasives, for example, would count as volunteer hours for this project. **If you are interested in volunteering with this project, contact Jan Smith, janhuntersmith@gmail.com.**
3. **FRUIT TREES – BERRIES & VINES:** Volunteers in this project, in collaboration with community members, will provide educational outreach through field trips and programs on the best management practices in growing fruit trees, berries, and productive vines. **Contact Project Leader, Dave Bryer, dmbryer@gmail.com, if you would like to volunteer.**

WELCOME, RAMGA CLASS OF 2022!

Meeting and Greeting the Class of 2022

By Tamara Teaff

Beverly Lorig

More than twenty years ago, Beverly moved to Rockbridge County from New Haven, Connecticut when her husband joined the faculty at Washington and Lee University. However, Beverly was born and raised in Georgia where she earned a Master's degree in Career Development Counseling and Higher Education from the University of Georgia.

Being a volunteer is nothing new for Beverly. She has worked with Rockbridge Area Hospice as a volunteer and Board Member. Other areas of volunteering are with the Children's Tumor Foundation and the Annual Cupid Undies Run Fundraising Event.

Beverly enjoys biking. As a volunteer and participant, she has taken part in BIKE NEW YORK, a 34-mile ride on the streets of New York City. She describes the experience as "awesome".

Just a few of her creative outlets include felting, block printing, drawing/painting, and sewing. She admits that she is "attempting to learn how to play piano". Attending the dedication of WWII Memorial in Washington, DC with her family is a memorable event which she treasures. Her father, a retired United States Navy Chief Submarine Service, WWII, was honored at that ceremony.

Her family includes Ozzie, a 14-year-old Cairn Terrier, as well as her husband, Tyler, who is a neuroscientist with expertise in olfaction. A quote from Beverly: "I am thrilled to be learning with this amazing group!"

Terri Palmer

Just under a year ago, Terri moved to Rockbridge County from Roanoke. This was not the first move in her life, as she has lived in West Jefferson, North Carolina along with many other places.

Terri has had an opportunity to experience a variety of interesting job, most recently an overseas teacher. Her list of professional opportunities includes working in a print shop as well as more than one employment stint at Busch Gardens. She was an office manager for a long-distance phone company and a real estate firm.

While owning and operating her own retail children's shoe and clothing shop, Terri volunteered with the local Chamber of Commerce in Lambertville, New Jersey. There, she wrote and successfully received a grant from the New Jersey Department of Travel and Tourism to fund the Shad Festival and Arts and Crafts Fair in Lambertville.

Teri has two grown sons who both have their own families with ties in China. She looks forward to meeting more folks here in Lexington and learning about various gardening practices in this region.

Amy Schwartz

Known as Amy, she also answers to the name, Mom. She has four children. Her oldest daughter is married and lives in Michigan. Her second daughter is a Rat at the Virginia Military Institute while her two sons attend Rockbridge County High School. She and her family relocated to the Lexington area when her husband took a job at VMI. He moved in 2020, while Amy remained in Michigan to get the house ready to sell, with the help of her dad. They must have done pretty well because it sold within a week. She moved in August of 2021.

Amy has a Bachelor's degree in business administration and psychology in addition to being a Registered Nurse.

Since her days in high school, Amy has been volunteering including school programming, church groups, and community outreach at assisted living and nursing facilities. Admitting to being a craft nerd, Amy enjoys all types of art. She owns and operates two spinning wheels. Amy can take a fleece from the sheep to fully dyed and spun yarn. Amy and her family have recently found a permanent home in Rockbridge County where they live with one horse, three dogs, four cats, and an assortment of chickens.

CLASS OF 2022

LAB 3, Soils & Nutrients Module

By Tamara Teaff

With trowels in hand, RAMGA's eager trainees found themselves at Boxerwood on Saturday, March 19 to learn about "Soil Matters" with instructors, Barbara Thomas and Phyllis Fevrier. To prepare for this lab experience, the trainees read the Soils and Nutrients Chapter of the *Master Gardener Handbook*, viewed the online module, and took the soils quiz.

Barbara Thomas led the conversation on soil by noting that soil is a nonrenewable resource in that it may take hundreds of years for soil to naturally regenerate if it is damaged. She advised the trainees to get to know their soil before attempting to cultivate. Important details to learn about garden soil include color, texture, structure, pH, depth, drainage, nutrient, and mineral makeup.

In her discussion about adding NPK amendments to the soil, Barbara introduced the trainees to the characters of *Nellie Nitrogen*, *Phyllis Phosphorous*, and *King Paul Potassium*. (Note that this representation of NPK was developed for a fourth-grade garden lesson at Natural Bridge Elementary.) The trainees were informed



Barbara Thomas shares a favorite soils publication

that the Rockbridge area soils vary in depth and physical qualities with clay being a major factor in most of our local soils.



To learn very specific information about their soil, gardeners should submit soil samples to Virginia Tech for testing. Barbara explained the Soil Test Report results will include instructions about adding lime or fertilizer to address the specific needs of a garden’s designated crop (whether it be a residential lawn or plantings of blueberries). At this point, the MG Trainees moved to the areas of Boxerwood Gardens, maintained, and supported by Master Gardeners, to practice taking a soil sample. These soil samples will be analyzed to provide feedback to the RAMGA volunteers who work at Boxerwood. The purpose of this activity was for the trainees to have a real-world experience in taking a soil sample. Each trainee was provided with boxes and instructions for submitting their own soil test samples.

Phyllis Fevrier and trainee, Bev Loring, inspect the Boxerwood compost bins

Phyllis Fevrier facilitated the composting section of the lab. The trainees were told that composting is defined as decomposition in a controlled environment or turning waste products into soil. The advantages of composting are numerous. Using composted soil increases organic content of the soil. It invigorates the soil’s food web and helps plant resistance to disease. Phyllis demonstrated composting techniques and methods. After observing the compost bins used by Boxerwood, the trainees became compost detectives and they searched small amounts of compost for the decomposers living and working there in the substance.



Taking soil samples for a Boxerwood rain garden

Composting Recourses Recommendations

The Complete Compost Gardening Guide by Barbara Pleasant and Deborah Martin

Compost, A Family Guide to Making Soil from Scraps by Ben Raskin

Websites: <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/composting/>

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/composting/>

To learn about the soil food web, visit “Soil Biology and the Landscape” by Elaine R. Ingham.

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/soils/health/biology/?cid=nrcs142p2_053868

LAB 4, Virtual Plant Problem Solving

By Tamara Teaff

The Class of 2022 met Mary Ann Hansen, from the Virginia Tech Plant Disease Clinic, via Zoom on Thursday, March 29. With that simple encounter, they became plant disease detectives. Before the lab, Ms. Hansen emailed each trainee a prepared hour-long *YouTube* video discussion about the multiple aspects of plant pathology. Along with the *YouTube* link, the trainees were assigned a comprehension assignment that

involved analysis of diseased plants photos. The trainees were instructed to come to the Zoom meeting with prepared investigation of each plant problem.



Ms. Hanson opened the Zoom lab by stating that determining the specific problem with a plant is much like solving a murder mystery, with the plant being the victim. Questions to consider when diagnosing a plant problem include the following: What is normal for the specific plant? What symptoms or patterns are displayed? What was the weather like when the problem occurred?

The trainees were then assigned to Zoom Break-Out rooms to discuss the plant problems that they had reviewed. Master Gardeners who monitored the Break-Out Rooms were Karen Lyons, Jan Smith, Peggy Agnor, Barbara Thomas, and Tamara Teaff. After those discussions, the group reconvened, and opinions were shared with Ms. Hansen. The instructor was impressed with the knowledge and critical thinking that trainees put into each individual plant diagnosis. The lab started at 6:00 p.m. and did not end until 9:00 p.m. as the trainees were eager to share (and defend) each diagnosis with Mary Ann Hansen and each other.

Barbara Thomas, and Tamara Teaff. After those discussions, the group reconvened, and opinions were shared with Ms. Hansen. The instructor was impressed with the knowledge and critical thinking that trainees put into each individual plant diagnosis. The lab started at 6:00 p.m. and did not end until 9:00 p.m. as the trainees were eager to share (and defend) each diagnosis with Mary Ann Hansen and each other.

Question: Why is this tree sick?



MASTER GARDENERS ON THE ROAD

By Tamara Teaff

During two Saturdays in April, RAMGA volunteers seized the opportunity to educate the public about the importance of native trees. As a collaborative effort of the Upper James River Native Plant Society and



RAMGA, representatives arrived bright and early on Earth Day, April 23, at Natural Bridge State Park and again on April 30 at Lexington's Tractor Supply store for an Arbor Day event. Between the two sessions, approximately 200 trees were distributed. Before a tree was selected, each recipient was given an opportunity to research the physical growing requirements of each tree through handouts designed specifically for each tree. Note that, also, at Natural Bridge, the Compost exhibit was manned by RAMGA trained Compost Coaches.

Trainee Pascale Couturier, volunteering as a Compost Coach during Earth Day at NBSP

At Natural Bridge, those trees received by the public included gray dogwood, red osier dogwood, river birch, red maple, and pin oak. The selections on Arbor Day were oaks (black, chestnut, white, and pin), red mulberry (not invasive non-native white mulberry), persimmon, river birch, and red maple. At that event, 25-150 trees were distributed in about one and half hours, despite a drizzling rain. These events were made possible through the leadership of Jan Smith and Jill Alvarado. A cadre of Master Gardeners, plus trainees from the Class of 2022, assisted in the research to identify the appropriate tree for a specific location and lovingly wrapped each tree for transport to its new home.

Learning about native trees from Anne Riffey-Buckner during the Arbor Day Event



Deciding on a native tree to plant for Arbor Day



Creating Arbor Day poster at the Kidz Korner

Continuing Education Opportunities:

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

*****Saturday, May 21, 11:00am – noon. Rockbridge Area Master Gardener Plant Clinic at the Master Gardener Plant Sale. Register at www.ramga.org**

May 5 – 8, all day. 60th Annual West Virginia Wildflower Pilgrimage, Blackwater Falls State Park, Davis, West Virginia. A wide variety of tours and workshops each day. For more information:

<https://wvdnr.gov/programs-publications/wildflower-pilgrimage/>

*****Saturday, May 7, 8:30 – noon, Valley of Virginia Herb Sale, 8:30 – noon. Robertson Park (across from the Visitors Center off Varner Lane), Lexington.**

Saturday, May 7, 10:00 – 2:00pm. Piedmont Master Gardener Plant Sale, 600 Albemarle Square, Charlottesville.

*****Saturday, May 7, 9:00am – noon. County Council of Garden Clubs Plant Sale, Hopkins Green, Lexington.**

Saturday, May 14, 9:00am – 1:00pm. Central Shenandoah Master Gardeners In-Person Plant Sale, Rockingham County Administration Offices located at 20 East Gay Street, Harrisonburg. <https://csvmga.org/event/spring-plant-sale-in-person/>

Saturday, May 14, 9:00am – noon. Roanoke Master Gardener Plant Sale, Brambleton Center, 3738 Brambleton Ave SW, Roanoke, VA 24018. Cash or check only.

*****Saturday, May 21, 9:00am, RAMGA Plant Sale, Kerrs Creek Fire Station, 2880 W. Midland Trail. Lexington.**

Saturday, May 28, 9:00am – noon. Blue Ridge Wildflower Society Native Plant Sale, Roanoke Council of Garden Clubs, 3640 Colonial Ave., Cave Spring, VA.

Faith's Garden Notes...

Spring at the garden centers can be overwhelming. There is so much to choose from, even for me, a landscape designer and horticulturist (now retired). It is so easy to get seduced by the “latest and brightest”. Coneflowers (*Echinacea spp.*) come to mind. When the new colors started coming out, about fifteen years ago, those beautiful red, orange and yellow flowered plants all reverted to the standard pinky mauve color in my garden. What a disappointment. Now you can let someone else do the work and check Mt Cuba's plant trail results for the plant (www.mtcubacenter.org) to see which coneflowers have the highest rating. Other published trials include Penn State (<https://agsci.psu.edu/flower-trials/index.cfm/fuseaction/plants.main>), the Chicago Botanical Garden (https://www.chicagobotanic.org/research/ornamental_plant_research/plant_evaluation).

Visit public gardens. Richmond's Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, voted America's #4 public garden by USA Today, is only a couple hours away. Richmond is a bit warmer than we are (zone 7 as opposed to our 6B) but many of the plants you see there will thrive here. Consult with your friends and neighbors to see what has done best for them. **And, of course, shop RAMGA's plant sale.** The vast majority of plants in the sale were grown here in Rockbridge County.

Another source for the very best plants is the Perennial Plant Associations' Perennial Plant of the Year Program. The program began in 1990 to showcase perennials that are standouts among its competitors. These plants must fit several criteria: suitability for a wide range of climatic conditions, low-maintenance,



Little Bluestem 'The Blues'

relative pest and disease resistance, readily available, multiple seasons of interest. I have grown most of them, and I can attest to their desirability. The 2022 Perennial Plant is one of my favorite native grasses, Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). This warm season clumping grass is about 3' – 4' tall and often has blue foliage that turns red and orange in the fall. 'The Blues' is a popular cultivar and one I enjoy in my own garden. The 2021 choice was *Calamintha nepeta subsp. nepeta*. Nepeta usually refers to a catmint. This is a bee-friendly edging plant with tiny lipped white flowers in the mint family. I now have six of them. Here is a list of the last twenty years of recommended plants: <https://perennialplant.org/page/PastPPOY> . Many of them will be in the MG Plant Sale on May 21.

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