

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

DECEMBER 2021/JANUARY 2022



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Winter Gardening Events, p. 2
- Winter Garden Chores, p. 3
- Winter Tree and Shrub Care, p. 3-4
- Gift Giving with Plants, 4-5
- Seasonal recipe: Rosemary Shortbread, p. 6

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.

Don't miss the next Zoom RAMGA Plant Clinic...

Saturday, January 15, 11am – noon

This month's topic; "Growing Plants from Seeds". Many tiny seeds need to be started in February. Participants are encouraged to ask questions. To register for the Zoom Plant Clinic please go to www.ramga.org

DECEMBER/JANUARY GARDENING EVENTS

There is never much going on in-person even pre-Covid days from December – February, but there is a plethora of webinars and zoom presentations online. Here are a few sites to check out:

Mt. Cuba Center is the foremost native plant garden in the Piedmont area. They have plenty of great classes online, usually at a cost of \$15. www.mtcubacenter.org

The Smithsonian “Let’s Talk Gardens” series is consistently excellent and free. <https://gardens.si.edu/learn/lets-talk-gardens/> .

And the VCE Master Gardener website has a number of great webinars and videos available. <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/ce/>

DECEMBER/JANUARY GARDEN CHORES

Clean, then fill bird feeders

Top bird foods (from “Bird feeding in winter”, www.audobon.org):

- Black-oil sunflower seed – most birds like this
- Peanuts (de-shelled, dry roasted and unsalted) – woodpeckers, jays, nuthatches, chickadees, titmice love these high protein snacks
- Suet
- Mixed seed from a reliable source
- Nyger/thistle seed – Finches preferred food
- Safflower
- Cracked corn - sparrows, blackbirds, jays, doves, but also loved by squirrels, the bird feeder menace
- Mealworms
- Fruit

Continue to provide fresh water for the birds

Continue to compost

Finish Fall cleanup: put away hoses, garden furniture, ceramic and terra cotta pots

Prune dead or hanging branches



Continue to spread leaves on your garden beds

Winter is a great time to maintain, clean and sharpen your garden tools

Order catalogues, then work on your seed/plant orders for the spring

Apply horticultural oil to fruit trees to control aphids, mites, and scale

Label and store seeds you have collected

Bury any unplanted perennials in leaf mulch or sink them in the ground so they don't freeze

Protect newly planted trees. Bark splitting, especially dangerous on young trees, is caused by the extreme fluctuations in temperature. The afternoon sun on exposed trunks raises the temperature much higher than the air and the sudden drop at dark causes splits and cracks. It can be prevented by wrapping trunks with burlap strips or a commercial tree wrap or shading the southwest side.

Winter Care of Trees and Shrubs

By Faith Vosburgh

Trees and shrubs, especially new plantings, should not be ignored in the winter. The weather in our winters here in Rockbridge County can be quite variable. One day the temperatures might be in the '60s and the next, plummet to the '30s. In addition, our past few winters have been fairly dry, with little snowfall. There are three categories where good cultural practices will help protect your trees: desiccation, freezing, and breakage.



Evergreens, especially, suffer from drying out (**desiccation**). You may notice browning needles or leaves on your conifers or broadleaf evergreens such as boxwood, rhododendrons, or cherry laurel. There may be insufficient ground water because of a dry fall. Wind is a big enemy of evergreens. Sunny days can cause the stomates (tiny openings that allow for the gas exchange necessary for photosynthesis) on the lower sides of leaves to open, increasing transpiration (loss of water through the plant leaves) which dries the plant out

even more. The solution? Give the plants a good soaking before the ground freezes and continue to water on warm days during mid-winter. Smaller evergreens, such as boxwoods, can be wrapped in

burlap or straw. These materials allow the plant to breathe. Wrapping your mature rosemary plants may enable you to keep them through the winter. Mulch the soil. This will keep moisture in.

Freezing: Be sure not to prune your trees and shrubs in the late summer or fall. This may stimulate new growth that will be damaged by cold temperatures. A sharp freeze followed by warm sunny weather may cause the water within the tree trunk to freeze, causing it to split open. This is called frost cracking or southwest injury as the southwest sides of shade trees, which of course have no leaves in the winter, are especially susceptible. This can also happen to shrubs. Evergreen azaleas seem to be the most susceptible. Often these cracks will close in warmer weather. Trunks can be wrapped with burlap or commercial tree wrap, or even shaded by a board to prevent splitting. Warm weather may also cause buds to open and then freeze in cold night temperatures. The flowers won't return in the spring, but the leaves will. Make sure all your potted plants or ball and burlapped stock are protected. Perennials you have not gotten around to planting can be buried in leaf mulch or sunk into the ground to protect them. If the root ball freezes, your plant will die.

Breakage: Heavy snow and/or ice, especially coupled with high wind, on branches may break them. Japanese Maples are especially susceptible. Remove the snow with a broom and sweep upward to brush snow off.

Resource: VA Cooperative Extension, publication 426-500, "Winter Injury to Trees and Shrubs".

Gift giving with plants!

By Karen Carlton

Now is that time of year when my thoughts turn to Christmas and gifts: what to give the special people in my life as tokens of my gratitude and love. This article will attempt to give you some plant-related ideas for gift giving this season. I always enjoy this time of year, but it can be a stressful season to give a present. I love the idea of giving a plant as present. Some in my family on the other hand, do not think it is such a great idea. My mother basically says, "Karen, you are not listening! I'm going to end up killing it, not intentionally of course!" Then, the LOOK! The same with my daughter-in-law. My daughter has already informed me the only plants she wants for the holidays are flowers, the kind in a vase, not a pot.

What to do; when plants in a pot would not be appropriate, I have some plant-inspired craft ideas that may solve your gift giving dilemma. This is instead of giving someone an actual living plant. The first idea would be to do a culinary gift basket. You could have a theme like Italian night with items like dry pasta, canned tomato sauce and a few culinary herbs to put in the sauce or on the bread, and maybe a pasta bowl.

The second idea is making bath salts. The two recipes followed would make nice plant-related gifts. The ingredients can be obtained at your local grocery store and the essential oils can be obtained at Walmart, Amazon or CVS.

BATH SALTS

Materials for each:

12 tall jelly (12 oz.) canning jars with lid and rings, washed and dried

Two 4-pound cartons Epsom salt (approximately 16 cups)

4 pounds of sea salt or kosher salt (approximately 6 cups)

½ teaspoon glycerin, divided

2 pieces of card stock for tags (I thought you could use old Christmas cards)

For Candy Cane Bath Salts:

12 to 15 drops of peppermint essential oils

12 to 15 drops of red food coloring

For Peaches and Cream Bath Salts:

12 to 15 drops of peach essential oil

12 to 15 drops of orange food coloring



Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, empty one carton Epsom salt. Add 3 cups of salt and stir well. Stir in ¼ teaspoon glycerin and 6 to 8 drops of essential oil of your choice. Mix well. Set aside
2. In second mixing bowl of a heavy duty stand mixer (I think a hand mixer will be okay but may take longer), empty one carton Epsom salt. Add 3 cups salt and stir well. Add ¼ teaspoon of essential oil of choice, and food coloring. Set mixer to lowest setting and mix until color is even.
3. Holding canning jars at an angle, layer salts in jars, alternating white and the colored mixture of your choice. Seal the jars.
4. Cut gift tags apart and attach to jars. On gift tags, write the name of the bath salt and "Use 2 to 3 tablespoons for a refreshing bath."
- 5.

Makes 12 12-ounce gift jars (plus 3 to 4 cups extra bath salts, which you can package in small plastic zipper- top bags for easy stocking stuffers).

I wish all of you reading this article a Safe, Happy and Healthy Holiday.

Reference: *The Frugal Woman's Guide to a Rich Life*, page 200.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

ROSEMARY SHORTBREAD (my favorite shortbread recipe from Melissa Clark, NYTimes Cooking)

Ingredients:

2 cups all-purpose flour
2/3 cup granulated sugar (I use cane sugar)
1 Tablespoon fresh rosemary, finely chopped
1 teaspoon plus 1 pinch kosher salt
2 sticks unsalted butter cut in 1" chunks

Heat oven to 325 degrees.

In a food processor, pulse flour, sugar, rosemary, and salt to mix. Add butter and pulse to fine crumb size. Pulse a bit more until the ingredients start to clump together, but do not let them form a ball.

Press dough into an ungreased 8 or 9" square pan. Lightly prick dough all over with a fork. Bake until golden brown about 35-40 minutes for a 9" pan and 45-50 for an 8". Lightly score the cookies into squares or bars. Cool on a wire rack and then finish cutting.

Easy and delicious!

To subscribe to this newsletter, click
<https://www.ramga.org/what-s-happening>

EDITOR: FAITH VOSBURGH, fvosburgh@gmail.com



Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg