THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

Summer 2023

New Rockbridge Area Master Gardener swag!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners 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.

LOCAL HAPPENINGS

Thursday, July 20, 7:00pm, "Snakes Ahoy!" with guest speaker Peter Del Vecchio at Jordan's Point Pavilion (in case of rain, the meeting will be held at the Rockbridge Regional Library's Piovano Room). Learn about these slithery creatures and their role in the ecosystem. Rockbridge Conservation's 2023 Seminar. The program features live snakes.

LOCAL FARMERS' MARKETS:

- **Lexington Farmers Market**, behind the Southern Inn, Weds., 8am – 12:30pm
- **Rockbridge Baths Farmers Market**, Rockbridge Baths Fire Station, Sat., 9am – 11am
- **Glasgow Farmers Market**, corner of 10th St. and Kanawha, Fri, 10am – 2pm and Sat., 9am – noon
- **Kerrs Creek Community Market**, 27766 West Midland Trail, Sat., 9am – noon
- **Fairfield Farmers Market**, 5613 North Lee Highway, Sat., 9am – noon
- **Seasons' Yield Farm M**arket, 165 Oakland Circle, Raphine, 2nd and 4th Saturdays, 10am – 2pm

SUMMER GARDEN CHORES

General

- Watering is essential in the hot months of July and August. Don't neglect your containers. They often need to be watered daily.
- Harvest vegetables as soon as they are ripe to encourage further production.
- Weed, weed, weed.
- Continue to apply mulch to shade plant roots and retain moisture.
- Avoid pruning trees and shrubs now, except for dead or diseased branches.

Insects:

- Watch out for Japanese Beetles. We usually see them the end of June here in Rockbridge County although I spotted the first one the second week of July this year. If you are going to use traps, be sure and place them far away from the plants you want to protect

Fruits and Vegetables:

- Keep an eye on your tomatoes. Late blight is often a problem in this area. Check out this great article on tomato diseases in the Piedmont Master Gardener's great newsletter, "The Garden Shed": https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/tomato-diseases/ . With this hot sunny summer weather, tomatoes can be susceptible to sun scald. Place row cover or shade cloth especially on plants that aren't caged.

- A second crop of summer squash started in July often deters the dreaded squash beetles.
- Cabbage, Turnips, Collards, Lettuces, Mustard can be started from seed starting August 14 as cool weather crops.
- Sow cover crops such as annual crimson clover once areas become empty.

Flowers:

- Deadhead perennials and annuals to keep them blooming.
- Keep fallen rose foliage cleaned up to help prevent fungus.
- Iris may be divided now through September.
- Deadhead your flowering plants to promote more bloom. Pop the seed heads off your ever-blooming daylilies such as 'Stella d'Oro's. This will allow the plant to put its energy into more blooms rather than seeds.
- Pinch back lanky annuals.

Seed Saving 201: Why Shouldn't I Save Seed from a Hybrid?

By Karen Lyons

Why would anyone want to save seeds? For many backyard gardeners, this practice could be for personal use for next year's garden. After all, paying $6 or $7 for a packet of seeds may be affordable if you only grow one type of plant, but quickly escalates to outrageous if you're like most gardeners and desire a mixture of vegetables, herbs, and ornamentals.

Besides the economic advantages, saving seed is also a way of developing plants that are well-adapted to your locality, a goal often shared by community seed swaps and libraries. On another level, you may be interested in stewarding a new named variety. Whatever your reason for seed saving, let's examine some basic concepts of plant selection to ensure your success. But first, we will need to understand some basic botanic and genetic concepts.

Remember that a fertile seed is produced when pollen from the male part of the plant (stamen) is transferred to the female part of the plant (pistil) uniting their respective half-portions of genetic makeup. The seed embryo will then grow into a plant with some characteristics of both parent plants.

Hmmm, this scheme should sound similar to human genetics; however, in the plant world we want our plants to be almost exactly like the parent plant. In botanic terms, we want the seed to breed true. After all, who wants to plant a pumpkin seed and get a zucchini?

So, we need the parent plants to already be genetically similar, i.e., of the same species and variety. Otherwise, if parents cross-pollinate with a different variety, a hybrid seed will develop that when planted, will have a mixture of characteristics of each parent. That is, the seed will not breed true.

Confusion is sometimes introduced when a plant is touted as open-pollinated, but this term just refers to plants that are pollinated via natural processes, such as through transfer of pollen via wind or insect, as are most of our garden plants. In nature, there is constant intermingling of the genetic makeup of open-pollinated plants within a species. When environmental stresses challenge the species, those members having traits that withstand the stress will survive and breed to produce seed for future generations. In this way, the local seed bank will favor members adapted to our ecoregion.

But cross-pollination can occur unintentionally in open-pollinated plants and intentionally via man-made methods, the latter termed closed-pollination. Plant breeders use closed-pollination techniques to intentionally produce hybrids incorporating desired features of two different varieties, perhaps selecting for vigor, flower appearance, fruit taste, etc. The seeds of this first generation are termed F1 seeds, a genetic abbreviation for Filial 1 or first children. You may see this term in seed catalogues. Plants produced by F1 seeds will have desired target traits, with half of their genetic material from each parent. But when these F1 plants further cross-pollinate openly in your garden to create the next generation, their seeds will have random mixtures of genes from their "grandparents" so they will have traits differing from the target hybrid plants.

So, for the average gardener, the bottom-line recommendation when considering candidates for seed collection: harvest seed from multiple healthy plants of the same species and variety that are open-pollinated. Avoid hybrids unless you can accept a plant with unpredictable features.

Next up in a future article: isolation techniques to avoid unintentional cross-pollination. For an overview of seed saving, see my article "Seed Harvesting 101" published in the October 2021 issue of The Garden Gate.

References:
https://extension.umn.edu/planting-and-growing-guides/saving-vegetable-seeds
https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/2750e/
https://www.seedsavers.org/saving-seeds-for-beginners

RECIPE

The following is my version of caponata. My family eats this all summer long.

Eggplant Caponata

1 large onion, chopped (can be yellow or red)
1 large red pepper, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 large globe eggplant, peeled and cubed
Extra virgin olive oil
3 Tablespoons tomato paste
1 teaspoon sugar or honey
1 teaspoon dried oregano (or to taste if you are using fresh)
½ teaspoon dried basil
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
2 Tablespoons drained capers
1 14.5 oz. can diced small tomatoes
2 Tablespoons ketchup (yes, really!)
2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
Salt and pepper to taste
Large handful of chopped parsley

Spread the cubed eggplant on a sheet pan and dribble with olive oil. Roast for about 25-30 minutes at 375 degrees until soft and somewhat browned.

In the meantime, sauté the onion in 2 Tablespoons olive oil for about 6 minutes or until translucent. Add the diced red pepper and sauté for another 5 minutes, then add the minced garlic and sauté for another minute.

Add the tomato paste and sauté until incorporated and the paste is somewhat browned.

Add the tomatoes, capers, sugar, oregano, basil, crushed red pepper to the mixture and simmer until most, but not all, of the moisture is absorbed.

Add the roasted eggplant, the ketchup, and the balsamic vinegar. Simmer on low heat for about 10 minutes.

Let cool and then fold in the parsley.

Sometimes I add diced celery for crunch and/or raisins for sweetness. Or I might use kalamata olives instead of raisins. Whatever your fancy…

Serve as a salad or as a spread with seeded crackers or crostini.

Trees: The Ecosystem's Stalwart Workers
By Karen Carlton

I attended Virginia Tech's Master Gardener College last month and went to one of the keynote presentations given by Frank Reilly. He talked about how trees in our environment are not only beautiful, but useful. Mr. Reilly feels there needs to be even more awareness about the importance of trees in our suburbs and cities. The most obvious reason is that trees breathe in CO2 and breathe out O2.

There are other reasons to have trees. They provide provisions such as wood, fruit, and nuts. Tree culture is important to the environment and trees themselves give great educational opportunities. The most important, I think, is that they are the backbone of any ecosystem in terms of habitat by preventing soil erosion and also by providing nutrients to the various living creatures that depend on the plant. Trees in short, make the environment healthy not only for animals and other living organisms, but also for humans.

I was very impressed with Mr. Reilly's presentation. It did make me think about what to do with my 80' tall Red Oak tree in my backyard. I was unaware that my Oak tree was not feeling well until it started to show that it wasn't. The tree was showing dead limbs. When a good windstorm came through, it would drop rather large branches on my yard and my next-door neighbor's yard. I began the process of getting estimates of what to do about the tree. This was definitely an education on my part of the cost and the various approaches to taking care of an 80' tree. The first arborist thought it best to cut it down. The second wanted to trim it and have a schedule of once a year inoculating it against diseases that may affect it. The third was willing to trim the dead limbs but also pointed me in the direction of a tree doctor who came out looked at it and made suggestions to help with whatever was ailing the tree. I love this tree. It is an elegant tree, and it provides shade; birds nest in it, squirrels too. The tree just brings so much character to the backyard and to the home I have here in Lexington. In short, I'm taking care of the Oak tree because for me, it is a part of the family and I do take care of my family.

Plant a tree in your own yard and find how the joy of having one will provide so much satisfaction in your life. Not to mention the small part in helping moderate the world's climate.

Layering: A Simple and Free (almost) Way to Get More Plants

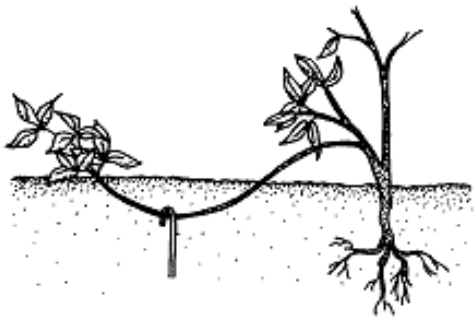
By Faith Vosburgh

What is layering? Layering is a way of propagating plants where the new plant is still attached to the mother plant while forming new roots. Once the new roots are formed (usually a season) the new plant can be severed from the mother plant and potted up. In essence, you are cloning the mother

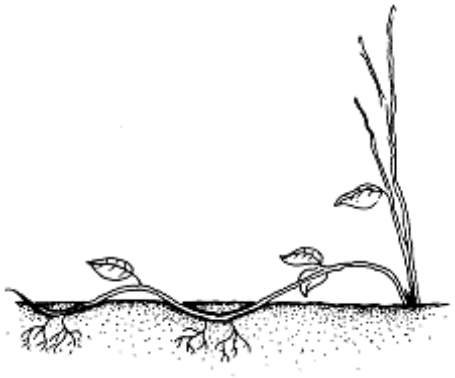
plant. If you've grown blackberries, you've seen this happen. A tip of a cane hits the ground and roots. With layering there is no need for the fuss needed with taking cuttings and babying them to maturity. Mother Nature takes care of that. Layering can be begun in spring or summer and new plants will usually be ready by the fall.

There are five different types of layering: tip, simple, compound, mound or stool, and air. The first three are the easiest. I'll talk about stool and air layering in another newsletter issue.

Tip layering: Current season shrubs with arching branches are the easiest to tip layer. Dig a hole about 3-4" deep and insert the stem tip and cover it with soil. The tip will grow downward and then bend to come back up into air. Roots will form at the bend. This method works well with trailing blackberries, raspberries, and black raspberries.



Simple layering: Trailing shrubs such as forsythia, abelia, beautyberry, Japanese spiraea, honeysuckle, and weigela work best with this method. Choose an arching branch that will bend to the ground. Scratch the ground and bend the tip into a vertical position over the scratched area. I find it is easiest to use a landscape staple to hold the branch to the ground, but a handy rock will work too. Roots will form at the bend of the shrub where it has been stapled to the scratched area. I find spring works best for this method and by fall, the new little shrub will have rooted, can be cut away from the mother plant and either potted up or planted.



Compound layering also works best with long flexible stems. This method is practically the same as simple layering, but you can nick the stem in several places and alternately cover and expose stem sections. In this method, obviously, you'll be able to get several new rooted baby shrubs.

Sources:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-002/426-002.html
https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/layering-propagation-for-the-home-gardener.html
https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/plant-propagation-by-layering-instructions-for-the-home-gardener

Extension Master Gardeners Rockbridge

The Garden Gate, a monthly newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners, www.ramga.org

Editor: Faith Vosburgh, fvosburgh@gmail.com

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