

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

November 2023



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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.

Up-coming RAMGA Program

Join us Saturday, November 18 at 10:30am in the Community Room, RARA Building, 350 Spotswood Dr., Lexington for a free presentation about the healing properties of cannabis given by Sarah O'Hanlon.

Sarah has been a resident of Virginia since 1997. She served as a volunteer for seventeen years in search and rescue for the Albemarle County Sheriff's Office and the Virginia Dept. of Emergency Management and in emergency medical services as an EMT with Louisa County. She has a BA in Psychology and a MS in Medical Cannabis Science and Therapeutics from the University of Maryland's School of Pharmacy and has advocated for medical cannabis legislation at the General Assembly in Richmond to support patients and their families to improve access to medical cannabis for the Commonwealth. Sarah started an educational service in 2021, CannEducate and incorporates 8 years of experience as the parent of a medical cannabis patient along with her formal education to provide consulting services for patients, practitioners, and caregivers.

GARDENING EVENTS

Identify and Control Non-Native Invasive Plants in Fall/Winter sponsored by the Charlottesville Area Tree Stewards. Blue Ridge PRISM will present this two-part class by Zoom:

- **Tuesday, November 14, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.** Part 1: Introduction and Identification Zoom presentation: [Register here](#)
- **Thursday, November 16, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.** - Part 2: Control Methods [Click here to register for this session](#)

Managing the invasive plants that are threatening our food chain is a challenge. But any of us can do it with the knowledge to identify and treat them. This class will show you how to identify common invasive plants in the Virginia Piedmont and illustrate a wide range of options for treating them. We will cover: 1) Identifying invasive plants. 2) Why fall/winter is a good time to control invasive plants. 3) Planning your control program. 4) Using manual & mechanical control methods.

There is never much going on in-person from November – 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 a number 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. Episodes are archived. <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/>

Want to Be a Master Gardener?

Each year, Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners recruit and train a new group of Master Gardener Volunteers. The course work includes online modules in key areas of gardening ranging from soil nutrition to landscape design. Central to the instruction is the importance of native plants and pollinators. Part of the training involves hands-on labs where a trainee can work in a problem-solving team atmosphere.

This prepares the trainee for volunteering to educate the community in all-things horticultural. RAMGA maintains multiple demonstration gardens and sponsors several school teaching gardens throughout the area. The next training class will run from January through June of 2024.

TO LEARN MORE: Go to www.ramga.org . Click on the JOIN US tab. Under the registration tab, complete the “class information request” form.



LATE FALL GARDEN TASKS

- Plant your spring bulbs if you haven't gotten them in yet. Most bulbs need three months of cold weather to produce blooms. To see if your bulbs are viable, dump them in a pail of water before planting. The rotten ones will float.
- Remove spent annuals and compost them.
- Save seeds from desirable plants. Remember, if the plant is a hybrid, it may not come true.
- Compost your dead leaves instead of bagging them. Run over them first with your lawn mower so when added to your compost pile, they will break down faster. See VCE publication 426-703, “Making Compost from Yard Waste”, https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-703/SPES-393.pdf
- Prune late summer and fall flowering shrubs after they go dormant or in the spring.
- Male deer scrape their horns in the fall along the bark of young trees to rub the summer velvet off their horns and to mark their territory. Wrap the trunks with plastic tree guards, chicken wire or plastic mesh to prevent deer damage and remove in the spring.
- Start some paperwhite bulbs inside for seasonal flowers and scents.
- Drain and store water hoses.

- If you are planting a live tree after Christmas, dig the hole now before the ground freezes and fill with leaves.
 - Clean, sharpen, and organize garden tools.
 - After a frost, cut back mums to about 3”.
 - Clean up the vegetable garden as garden debris can hide unwanted pathogens and the eggs of pests.
 - Cut asparagus stalks to 2”.
 - Weed the vegetable beds.
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From the RAMGA Help Desk:

Drought in Rockbridge County

By Marybeth Sharkey

It seems strange to talk about drought when it’s raining! However, we have experienced a very dry August and are far below normal rainfall throughout September.

What we are seeing is early leaf drop and color change mimicking what we expect when the seasons change. What does this mean to the health of our trees and plants? Well established trees and plants will recover but are in a weakened state. This makes them more susceptible to insects and disease. Since we are their custodians, we need to be vigilant correcting problems before our plants’ survival is in jeopardy. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

1. Water plants deeply Watering deeply promotes a stronger and deeper root system
2. Stop fertilizing Fertilizer encourages fast growth stressing plant health. Also added fertilizer salts without ample water can cause plant burn.
3. Tackle those weeds. Weeds and/or grass compete with plants for water and nutrition. Use a nice layer of mulch under your trees and in your garden. The mulch (1-3 inches) will cool the roots during hot spells and make it easier to weed. Mulch absorbs ~ 10X the water versus normal soils. It can be used to surface cool the roots or directly supply water and nutrients to the plant when incorporated into the soil proximal to the plants root system. Mulch is a very attractive addition to any garden area.

Fortunately, our rain shortfall has been short-term, hitting us in late summer and into the fall. This enables our plants a time to recover. For new tree and bushes supplemental water is needed through the dry season since they have not yet established a robust root system. Provide extra water to all plants when needed and apply the water to the roots versus foliage where possible. If you are installing a new sprinkler system, consider soaker hoses or drip for water efficiency.

Most importantly get out and enjoy your garden!

Houseplants

A Plant with Lipstick? What's That All About!

By Karen Carlton

The Lipstick plant (*Aeschynanthus radicans*) is a native to Southeast Asian jungles. It makes this plant ideal for inside the home environment. The plant does require warmth in the 65-to-70-degree range. The Lipstick plant would give a tropical flavor to your living space.

The reason the plant is called the Lipstick plant is that its tubular flowers look like a tube of lipstick. The plant is a vine, and it looks wonderful in a hanging basket. There are different varieties of the leaves of the plants. One variety that I saw at the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden Conservatory was one called the Twisted Lipstick plant. It has densely curled leaves and it likes partial sun or shade and drier conditions than other Lipstick plants, which like humidity and partial light.

The Lipstick plant needs the right amount of light in order to bloom properly and to produce nice showy flowers. It definitely does not want to be overwatered; just moderate watering will do. The Lipstick plant's leaves will drop off if it doesn't have enough light. If it has too much light, it will scorch the plant. You could put it near a window that gets indirect light and if near a humidifier, it would be very happy. The plant is pet-friendly and non-toxic to humans. It would be a perfect plant to have in one's home.



Source:
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/aeschynanthus-humilis/>

Just a little TLC and the Lipstick plant will start an interesting conversation to have with your family and friends. Who knows, maybe you 'll get them interested in trying to grow and take care of a Lipstick plant themselves.

Sources: www.logees.com, www.masterclass.com, www.thegreenmadhouse.com

Bark: The Neglected Landscape Element

By Faith Vosburgh

When purchasing a new tree for your landscape, there is one element I would like you to consider: bark. After all, most trees are bare from November until the end of March, almost half the year. Walk through your yard, or better yet, walk through Boxerwood this winter and keep an eye open for beautiful bark. I've always thought this was an unappreciated element. One of my favorite trees at Boxerwood, now no longer there (it fell in one of our heavy snow storms) was the **Lacebark Pine** (*Pinus bungeana*), an Asian pine with gorgeous bark that looks just like gray camouflage.

Lacebark Pine

Photo: <https://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/sylabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=304>



Another favorite is our native **River Birch** (*Betula nigra*). The beautiful exfoliating bark peels away year-round. If there is a good wind, I find pieces of bark scattered yards from the tree. The tree can grow to about 30' and is often multi-trunked. And this is one tree that can take flooding, hence its name.

River Birch

Or how about the **Seven Son Flower** tree (*Heptacodium miconiodes*)? This is another Asian exotic, but a beautiful 10-20' small tree or shrub with bark that reminds me of a crape myrtle. The tree is covered with tiny white flowers in late summer and when the petals fall, the calyxes extend the season of bloom with their bright fuchsia color.

Seven Son Flower



And I love the look of the Dawn Redwood's (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*) trunk and bark. These deciduous conifers (yes – a conifer that loses its leaves) really look like something from the “Lord of the Rings” movies. The bark is a pretty red color and the tree itself looks like it has just erupted from the ground. It is a fast-growing tree and usually gets to be about 50-60' tall. The largest one I have seen in town is at Boxerwood.



These trees have a unique story. During the Tertiary Period, 66 million to 2.6 million years ago, these plants were one of the most widespread tree species, but up until the 20th century were thought to be extinct. However, a Chinese forester in 1944 found a huge redwood in the Sichuan province of China and in 1948, a small group of scientists traveled to the area and found a few thousand dawn redwoods growing in lowland canyons. All the redwoods grown today are descended from this grove.

Dawn Redwood



And I am sure all of you are aware of our native American sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*). These fast growing, large, majestic trees, 75-100' tall, can be seen all throughout Rockbridge County, usually along stream beds. As the trees age, the bark sloughs off leaving a smooth ghostly inner bark.

American Sycamore

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