

March 2023

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Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jen Coluzzi, Anita Tuttle

What a crazy-weather February we've just been through! As the climate continues to change, we'll likely see more mixed-up weather happening with increasing frequency. How do we continue to garden in such a scenario?

The subject of Climate Resilient Gardening, Regenerative Agriculture, and many other terms for various similar practices are being studied in universities. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), US Department of Agriculture, states that, "Soil health is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans. Healthy soil gives us clean air and water, bountiful crops and forests, productive grazing lands, diverse wildlife, and beautiful landscapes. Soil does all this by performing five essential functions: Regulating Water, Sustaining plant and animal life, Filtering and buffering potential pollutants, Cycling nutrients, Providing physical stability and support."

(<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/soils/soil-health>)

In Virginia, some of the participants in the dialogue are



NRCS, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, Virginia Tech, and the Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, who convene for a quarterly meeting under the umbrella of the Virginia Soil Health Coalition. Among their other activities, "Green America and our members work to shift the United States towards sustainable food systems that are safe for workers, healthy for families, free of forced labor, and puts carbon back into the soil." (<https://www.greenamerica.org/food>)

A Google search for 'Climate Resilient Garden' produces links to the University of Maryland, the American Public Gardens Association, the American

Planning Association, LA2050, and the National Wildlife Federation among the top results. What are some of the tenets of these many organizations? Growing food locally, in sustainable ways, is a path to ensuring that Americans are not dependent on global networks for survival. Post-pandemic, supply chain issues are still responsible for bare areas on some grocery shelves. Making certain that we care for the soil by keeping it covered helps us conserve soil and promotes water quality by :

preventing sediment from entering our streams, rivers, and oceans. Composting keeps vegetative matter out of landfills where it can generate methane through anaerobic decomposition. Giving up the use of chemicals allows the flora and fauna of the soil to flourish and perform their ecosystem functions. Encouraging biodiversity through planting natives helps to create complex food webs that are resilient.

There are many books and websites that can provide

detailed information on climate resilient gardening. On an individual level, this approach helps us all contribute to the health and beauty of our gardens while doing our part to take care of Mother Earth. It's almost Spring - let's get out there and save the planet!

Happy Gardening!

Jen and Anita

RAMGA FYI...

Hummingbird Hill Native Plant Nursery in Charlottesville (4190 Free Union Rd.) has a consistently excellent free newsletter. The Jan./Feb.2023 issue is on native plant volunteers. Subscribe here: www.hummingbirdhillnatives.com

WELCOME, RAMGA CLASS OF 2023!

Meeting and Greeting the Class of 2023

By Tamara Teaff

Laurie Bassi- Laurie has been a backyard gardener for decades. She moved to Lexington one year ago from Brooklyn. Laurie has served as a hospice volunteer for 17 years and was a member of the Threshold Hospice Choir.

Joanie Beverley- Presently residing in Glasgow, Joanie grew-up in Buena Vista. Joanie is the mother of five children (ages 14, 13, 9, 6, and 4). She grows herbs both outside and inside her home. A quote from her application: "I just love plants and gardening and want to learn more." She volunteers at tribal events and has worked with residents in nursing homes. She currently works at The PX Café on the Virginia Military Institute Post. Joanie was encouraged to apply for the class by another Master Gardener.

Mindie Goodwin- Mindie comes to the class having taken a landscaping class at Virginia Western Community College. She is a nurse who works part time to full time shifts. Residing in Buena Vista for 13 years, her main interest is in school gardening with hopes to link RAMGA to Enderly Heights Elementary School. Her various volunteer activities include coaching soccer for her son's team and assisting with basketball, both through RARA. She also volunteers at the food pantry in Buena Vista. Mindie reported that she and her son attended the RAMGA program on mushrooms at the Rockbridge Regional Library. She was given information about the class from a Master Gardener.

Billy Grose- Billy moved to Lexington one year ago. While living in North Carolina, he was appointed to serve on the Soil and Water Conservation board. He brings with him background knowledge in the raising of corn and hay, since he worked as a dairy farmer for 30 years, along with 18 years of experience as a home vegetable gardener. Connecting with the community and learning more about gardening are the two reasons he linked with Master Gardeners. Currently, he is a part-time employee at Tractor Supply in Lexington. Billy learned about Master Gardeners through the Plant Clinic and the Plant Sale.

Will Guild- Before serving for 30 years in the Navy's Special Operations Community, Will worked as a landscaper and has a background in planting shrubs, trees, vegetables, berries, and fruit. To quote from his application "I have found the process of growing plants to be quite therapeutic and healing." While stationed in Monterey, California at the Defense Language Institute, he volunteered in the Naval Post Graduate Chapel, served meals at Dorothy's kitchen, and conducted home repairs with a program called Christmas in April. During his time at the United States Military Academy, he worked as an ethics instructor and mentor to midshipmen. Moving to Lexington in April of 2022, Will discovered RAMGA through an online search.

Margaret Herman- Growing-up in Upstate New York, Margaret has had a garden since she was a child. While living in the Hudson Valley, she owned a small farm. Margaret moved to Glasgow from Raleigh, North Carolina. Her husband is a Washington and Lee Law School professor. She has volunteered with literacy programs, working with elementary school children. From her application, Margaret states that she has "no particular training other than fifty years of hands in the dirt". She learned about Master Gardeners through following schedules of events in the newspaper, plant clinics, and the plant sale.

Haley Huffman- As a music teacher in the Augusta County Schools, Haley brings with her experience in planning and hosting community events. Living in Fairfield, Haley has been gardening in her new home for three years. Her massive success last summer was jalapeno peppers. She inherited her great grandfather's (Ed Huffman) greenhouse along with his love of gardening. From her application, she states that she is "interested in vegetable gardening and creating a more welcoming environment for pollinators". Halley met Master Gardeners at one of our community outreach booths.

Kit Kaufman- Kit is currently working at Project Horizon where she has experience in managing events to support the organization. Having moved to Lexington in 2016 from Columbus, Ohio, Kit has tended a small garden of her own. She also worked for a few years at Virginia Gold Orchards, so she has some experience with fruit trees. In her application, she describes her gardening experience as that of a "novice". Kit learned about Master Gardeners from talking to a Master Gardener.

Bobbi Lahah- Bobbi, her husband, and her dog, Jersey, relocated to Lexington after her husband retired from the United States Coast Guard. Bobbi enjoys outdoor activities like camping, canoeing, disc golf, and gardening. She learned about the Master Gardener Volunteer Program at the Community Festival last year. She is especially interested in vegetable, herb, and companion gardening. Bobbi is also an avid pickleball player and belongs to the Rockbridge Pickleball Club.

Diane McLain-Skillicorn- Diane lives in Glasgow with her son and six dogs, She moved here one year ago from Harrisonburg. She is a retired computer programmer and is eager to learn more about gardening. Her volunteer work has been with Pet Harbor Animal Rescue as well as being a Girl Scout and Cub Scout leader. She learned about the training program through picking up an informational pamphlet at the Mountain Days Festival.

Lynda Primke- Having moved here from North Carolina, Lynda has been living in Goshen for two years. She took the Master Gardener course in North Carolina but feels the need to refresh in order to learn about gardening in a different region of the United States. She volunteers at events and at elementary schools where she shares information about honeybees and products from the hive. She learned about the course from talking to a Master Gardener.

Marybeth Sharkey- Having moved to Lexington two years ago from California, she wants to learn about plants that grow in Rockbridge County. She has a special interest in plants that support pollinators and birds. She learned about Master Gardeners at the Plant Sale.

John Sheridan- Growing-up in Lexington, John returned to his hometown about eight years ago. After practicing medicine for over 40 years, he retired in June of 2022. John has experience in landscaping on his own property plus growing vegetables, herbs, and various trees and shrubs. John enjoys hands-on learning and is hoping to support Master Gardeners with youth programming. He learned about Master Gardeners from attending the Plant Sale.

Natalie Stevens- Having retired from a career in Customer Service, Natalie moved to Lexington three years ago from Suffolk, Virginia. She already has embraced the volunteer scene here by working at Hoofbeats Therapeutic Riding Center, RARA, and Boxerwood. From her application, Natalie states that she “enjoys having a garden and growing herbs. I also love my plumeria”. She learned about the class from a Master Gardener.

Claire Wallace- A medical provider for the Augusta Health System, Claire moved here six years ago. From her application: “I have a particular interest in native plants, roses, and shrubs. But would love to know more about all of it.” She grew-up in the Caribbean but has spent the last 20 years traveling throughout the United States. She volunteered for a nonprofit organization in the Bahamas establishing 4H clubs and reading groups for underprivileged children. One of her joys is gardening with her three-year-old son and two teenage daughters in their large flower garden and annual vegetable garden on her 40 acres of property. She learned about the program from a Master Gardener.



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John Sheridan



Natalie Stevens



Claire Wallace

RAMGA Class - 2023

RAMGA's Fruit Trees, Berries, & Vines Team

A Visit to Halcyon Days Orchard

By Bugs Utsey and Dave Bryer

On Saturday, February 18th, the Fruit Trees, Berries, and Vines project met at Halcyon Days Orchard for a pruning workshop. One of the orchard managers, Kirin, helped to organize this meet-up, while another, James, guided us through the orchard. James has extensive experience in orchard management and gave the group in-person training on several pruning techniques.

Halcyon Days is an orchard with over 2000 trees and 50 different apple varieties, including Neidzwetskyana (semi-standard), and dwarf trees- Amere De Berth, Ashmead's Kernel, and Golden Russet. They use their fruits to produce cider, and the large diversity of apples and crabapples allows them to create a wide range of ciders. Many of these trees have been espaliered, a method of training trees or shrubs to grow along a flat surface, like a wall or fence. Halcyon Days used this technique to design a labyrinth within their orchard.

As we made our way through this labyrinth, James explained the reasons for pruning and how to decide on the next cut. First, he handled the 3 D's – dead, damaged, or diseased branches. Next, he removed any inward growth to maintain airflow. Finally, he considered the overall growth habit of the trees. For those that had been espaliered, he pruned to maintain their 2-dimensional shape; for others, he prefers a vase shape to aid in the harvest. After sharing all of this, the Master Gardeners (and many Master Gardener Trainees!) pulled out their pruning shears and got to work. This proved to be great hands-on experience!

Along with pruning techniques, James also spoke on his integrated pest management plan, which is important as apple trees are susceptible to a multitude of pests and diseases. He applies organic dormant oil and copper sprays just before bloom to help combat insects and fungi, like cedar apple rust. He also uses 2-3 applications of streptomycin spray after bloom to control fire blight. As a bonus, he even discussed the root stock used for grafting apple scionwood.

After completing this training, we were invited back for the next few Saturdays to participate in further pruning before the trees begin to wake up. And yes, we got to taste some excellent ciders once the work was done. (Dave's favorites were the Occum's Razor and Fruition.) All around, this was a very informative and fun workshop for master gardeners, and I'm sure Halcyon Days appreciates the pruning help!



Continuing Education Opportunities:

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

Tuesday, March 7, 7:00pm – 8:00pm. “Good Fire: Prescribed Burns in State Parks” by Al Cire, Natural Resources Specialist, NBSP. Natural Bridge State Park Visitor Center.

Saturday, March 18, 10:30am. Stephen Kaplan of Kaplan's Mushrooms will speak on Edible Mushrooms. RARA Community Room, 350 Spotswood Dr., Lexington. Sponsored by RAMGA.

Piedmont Master Gardeners' 2023 Spring Lecture Series:

“Gardening for a Healthy Planet” will be the theme of the Piedmont Master Gardeners' 2023 Spring Lecture Series. Presented **online from 7 to 8:15 p.m. on four Thursdays in March**, the series will feature lectures on organic food crops with roots in Africa, water features that attract birds and other wildlife, climate-resilient gardens that support pollinators, and landscapes that protect our waterways. Admission is \$10 for each lecture. **To register** for the webinars, visit <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/events/>.

The annual Waynesboro Shenandoah Plant Symposium is scheduled for Friday, March 24 at a new location, the Wayne Theatre in downtown Waynesboro. The roster of speakers includes Kelly Norris (one of my favorite garden speakers), Heather Holm on Native Bees, Felder Rushing of NPR's Gestalt Gardener, and Yolima Carr of the Elizabeth River Project at Paradise Creek Nature. For more information and to register:

<https://www.waynesboro.va.us/971/Shenandoah-Valley-Plant-Symposium>

Faith's Garden Notes...

More on Asian Jumping Worms

By now, I hope everyone is aware of jumping worms (*Amyntas spp.*), our latest invader. To review, jumping worms differ from earthworms in that their clitellium or collar goes all the way around the body, is smooth and a light color, usually light gray to milky-white. But an even more distinctive feature is their wild thrashing motion when we uncover them. They can flip themselves up to a foot in the air!

They can be found in the upper 2 – 3" of the soil and feed on leaf litter and mulch. This removes the organic matter, changes the moisture level of the soil, and greatly diminishes the soil structure beneath. Nutrient levels fall and soil erosion is increased. Not only do our gardens suffer, but the forest floor also bears the burden of these creatures. By disturbing the soil, they can also help spread invasive plant species.

Asian jumping worm – the head is on the left end closest to the band



These worms reproduce readily, and each year can have two hatches. They are asexual and mature in just 60 days. We will start to see small ones in March/April, depending on when temperatures reach 50 degrees. The best time to see them is June and July. Fortunately, the worms are annual and will die off at the last frost – but by then the soil will be full of cocoons about the size of a mustard seed, just waiting to hatch the following year.

There is no one solution for eradicating these worms. One of the reasons there is not going to be RAMGA's large annual May plant sale this year is the need to develop protocols for dealing with these invaders.

What can we do? And remember, currently, there is not one good solution.

- Keep an eye out for the worms. Scratch the leaf litter or mulch and you will see them wiggling away. Their castings (feces) look like coarse coffee grounds. The cocoons and then the worms can

be found not only in the ground, but in delivered mulch, potted plants, tire treads, and landscaping equipment.

- Clean off the bottom of your garden shoes and hiking boots. The tiny cocoons can easily be caught in the shoe's treads and moved around the landscape.
- Purchase mulch or compost from a reputable dealer who has heat-treated the materials for at least 3 days at 130 degrees or purchase bagged mulch.
- This may work (there have been mixed results): mix a gallon of water with 1/3 cup mustard powder and pour into the soil. This will drive any worms to the surface where you can easily destroy them. Note: Mustard is not lethal to earthworms.
- Solarize your soil in late spring or summer by covering the infested area with clear plastic for two or three weeks until the temperature reaches 104 degrees for at least three days.
- Buy bare root stock whenever possible.
- When digging plants from the garden, shake and then spray off **all** the dirt from the roots. Swish them in a pail of water and be sure to work carefully around tiny root hairs. Repot the bare-rooted items in a soilless mixture or a bagged sterile potting soil. Strain the water and place any solids in a trash bag in the sun.
- Incorporate biochar or diatomaceous earth into your soil.
- Handpick the jumping worms and place them in a clear plastic bag and leave in the sun for at least 10 minutes. Or – dump them in a pail of soapy water.

Here is a great homeowner handout I came across from the NY Invasive Species Research Institute and their Jumping Worm Outreach & Management Working Group.

<https://cctompkins.org/resources/jumping-worm-fact-sheet>

If it is not one pest, it is another. As you all know, a gardener's work is never done. Stay vigilant!

<https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/103692>

<https://warren.cce.cornell.edu/gardening-landscape/warren-county-master-gardener-articles/invasive-asian-jumping-earthworms>

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/features/invasive-jumping-worms-can-change-their-world>

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/ENTO/ENTO-427/ENTO-427.pdf

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