

# THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

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April 2022



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Area Happenings, p. 2
- April Garden Chores, p. 3 - 4
- Asparagus, p. 5
- Weed of the Month, p. 6
- To Peat or Not to Peat, Part 2, p. 7
- Another Reason to Plant Sunflowers, p. 8

**RAMGA PLANT SALE – 8:30 – noon,  
May 21<sup>st</sup>**

**Mark your calendars! We are back to an  
in-person sale at Kerr's Creek Fire Station.**

**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.

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## LOCAL HAPPENINGS

**Saturday, April 23, 11am. RAMGA Virtual Plant Clinic.** “To Lawn or Not to Lawn: How does a Homeowner Decide?” Learn about the ways to make your backyard a ballfield for the kids, take into account the American Dream lawn and keep it environmentally friendly. Other options for outdoor space will be addressed. Send in your questions or concerns when you register for this zoom talk at [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org).

**Ongoing** – Annual self-guided Wildflower Walk on the Chessie Trail. Click here for the guide: <https://vnps.org/upperjamesriver/events/self-guided-tour-chessie-trail-2022/>

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**Saturday, April 23. Earth Day celebration at Natural Bridge State Park. Free native tree and seed giveaways.** Master Naturalists and the local Native Plant Society will lead a walk on the Blue Ridge Trail at 10:00. \$5 parking fee at trail pass.

Master Gardeners will be there with their Compost display and information table.

**Saturday, April 30, 9:00am to 2:pm.** Joint RAMGA and the local chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society native tree (oaks, red mulberry, persimmon, river birch) giveaway with some children's activities at the Tractor Supply parking lot on Rte. 11 to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Arbor Day.

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

**Saturday, May 7, 9am – noon.** Rockbridge County Council of Garden Clubs Plant Sale, Hopkins Green (rain or shine). Includes books, garden tools and supplies, and advice!

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

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## AREA HAPPENINGS...

**Saturday, April 30, 10:am – 2:00pm. Bedford Master Gardener Plant Sale,** Bedford County Extension Office, 1257 County Farm Rd., Suite B, Bedford, VA

**Central Shenandoah Virtual Plant Sale: Plant List & Pricing will be available starting April 22 on CSVMA.org, with the list being updated weekly through May 17** as new plants become available. A link to submit your plant order will be made available on the website. You can choose from three (3) separate pick-up locations in downtown Harrisonburg, Rockingham – Pleasant Valley area, and Verona. Upon submitting your order, you will receive an e-mail confirmation. When picking-up your order, simply drive through and pay (checks and cash only) – there will be volunteers who can assist loading your plants into your vehicle. Please see the ordering deadlines and associated pick-up dates and times below:

- Order by May 3 for plant pick-up on May 7 (10AM – Noon)
- Order by May 17 for plant pick-up on May 21 (10AM – Noon)

**Sunday, April 24, 1:00pm. Jefferson Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society Annual Native Plant Sale,** Ivy Creek Natural Area, Charlottesville.

**Saturday, April 30, 9:00am – 2:00pm. Native Plant Sale. The Nature Foundation at Wintergreen.** 3421 Wintergreen Drive, Roseland, VA, [info@twnf.org](mailto:info@twnf.org)

**May 5 – 8, all day. 60<sup>th</sup> 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, 10:00 – 2:00pm. Piedmont Master Gardener Plant Sale,** 600 Albemarle Square, Charlottesville.

**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://csvgma.org/event/spring-plant-sale-in-person/>

**\*\*\*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.

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## APRIL GARDEN CHORES

### General:

- Before working in your garden, make sure the soil is dry enough. It should crumble in your hand; if it is not, wait until it dries out before working the soil
- Clean up garden debris from last year
- Pull weeds from beds
- Work organic material such as chopped leaves or compost into garden beds
- Mulch garden beds 2 to 3 inches deep with an organic material. Leaf mulch from Boxerwood is always a good bet
- If you did not complete your garden fertilization in March, continue that in April
- Newly planted perennials, trees and shrubs will generally need 1 inch of water each week – either from rain or irrigation

### Insects:

“Insects to be on the Lookout for in April”, a great publication by Eric Day, Insect ID Lab, Dept. of Entomology, Virginia Tech

[https://albemarle.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/albemarle\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/files/hort-tip-sheets/4-14-insects.pdf](https://albemarle.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/albemarle_ext_vt_edu/files/hort-tip-sheets/4-14-insects.pdf)

## Fruits and Vegetables:

An excellent and useful VCE publication organized by climate zone (Rockbridge, for the most part is zone 6B heading towards 7) is “Virginia’s Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-331/426-331.html>

This is the big month for planting vegetables, however if planted too early, frost will kill your plants unless you are prepared to protect them on those cold nights.

- Plant out starts for cool season vegetables: broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, spinach, swiss chard, kale
- Sow seeds for cool season crops: peas, radishes, lettuce, onions, beets, parsley, Swiss chard, spinach, kale, leeks.
- Plant cane berry plants
- Plant blueberries and strawberries
- Spray fruit trees with dormant oil spray if temperatures are over 40 degrees
- Time nutrients to fruit trees at the fruit setting time. A good rule of thumb is to fertilize after the petals fall

## Perennials:

- Fertilize perennials and spring bulbs as soon as possible if not already done. I am a big fan of osmacote, a time release fertilizer
- Spring is the ideal time to divide most perennials, both summer and fall bloomers. Replant the divisions or share with friends
- Remember that some perennials are late getting started in the spring; mark the spot in some way so you do not inadvertently plant over them
- Delay organic mulching to allow soil to warm up, but act before weeds become established



## Trees and Shrubs:

If you are planting new trees and shrubs, remember to consider hardiness, light requirements, soil drainage, wind tolerance, mature size, insect or disease problems, maintenance levels, etc. when choosing your plant. Remember the “plant right place” rule. Here is another good Tech publication, “How to Plant a Tree”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/SPES-226/SPES-226.html>

- Prune roses to an outward facing bud

### Lawns:

- Sharpen mower blades
- Finish seeding early in the month

### Pruning:

- Prune spring flowering shrubs after flowering is completed.

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## VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH - ASPARAGUS

### Asparagus, a Perennial Vegetable

Asparagus is one of the few perennial vegetable crops for Rockbridge County. Others are rhubarb and horseradish. Those purplish tips emerging from the earth in the garden are one of the first signs of spring. With proper site selection and maintenance, asparagus can live up to fifteen years or more. A well-drained soil is a necessity. Full sun is ideal. One can grow asparagus from seed, but it will then be at least three years before it is ready to be picked.

Asparagus crowns (the buds and roots) can be ordered from various seed catalogs, but can often be found locally in nurseries or the Farmers Co-op. They need to be planted about a month before the average frost date, usually around May 7<sup>th</sup> in Rockbridge County. There are green varieties and purple varieties. Dig a trench 6-8" deep and place the crowns with the buds up and the roots spread out. Green varieties need to be about 8-14" apart, while purple varieties, 6-8". Purple asparagus spears are narrower than the green. Cover the crowns with 2-3" of soil and as the spears grow, gradually fill in the furrow. Keep the new bed watered. A layer of mulch will help keep down the weeds. Let the ferny parts grow all summer and cut them in the fall after they have been killed by frost. The fern creates the energy that will be stored in the underground roots.



The first year after planting, pick for 7-10 days, the second year 2-3 weeks and the third year, up to 6 weeks.



Resources: <https://extension.unh.edu/resource/growing-vegetables-asparagus-fact-sheet>  
<https://www.johnnyseeds.com/growers-library/vegetables/asparagus/asparagus-key-growing-information.html>

## WEED OF THE MONTH – DEAD NETTLE

### Is It Dead Nettle or Henbit? And Does It Really Matter?

I know the best way to eliminate weeds in your mixed border or perennial garden is to plant as heavily as possible and eliminate all bare soil – and I do. But when those perennials begin to emerge in the spring, they are tiny and there is lots of bare earth for those sneaky winter annual weeds to propagate. These annual weeds have been growing quietly throughout the winter and in the spring, they proliferate. As temperatures increase, they die off, but in the meantime, they have spread their seeds everywhere. In the fall when the weather is cooler, they will germinate.

I know everyone has seen this; it is everywhere this year as it loves this cool weather we've been having. Yes, I am talking about Dead Nettle, aka Purple Archangel, *Lamium purpureum*. This is the low growing plant in the mint family (notice the square stems) with pretty purplish flowers that have a top hooded petal and two lower lip petals. The leaves are heart-shaped and tend to overlap with the upper leaves being a purplish color with greenish undersides and hairy. The leaf margins are wavy. This is often confused with Henbit, another invasive weed. Henbit has stemless leaves, but the flowers are very similar to Dead Nettle and Henbit's leaves are more green than purple. Both plants are completely edible and there are many culinary and medicinal recipes on the internet.



Dead Nettle is an annual weed that emerges in April long before other invasive weeds have had a chance to emerge. As you have probably noticed, it grows in leaps and bounds. The early pollinators love it. Both Henbit and Dead Nettle self-pollinate so they don't really need those bees to reproduce. These weeds do pull easily, but you can wait until the heat of the summer when they will die off.

**Sources:** Nafici, Saara. "Weed of the Month: Purple Deadnettle". Brooklyn Botanic Garden.  
"Lamium purpureum", North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Tool Box.

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## To Peat or Not to Peat, that is the Question! Part 2

By Karen Carlton

In the last month's article, I wrote about using different soil substrates other than peat. In this month's article, I will introduce the idea of Hydroponics and its cousin, Aquaponics. It is the idea of using water with nutrients in it to feed plants instead of using soil. It also is more labor intensive. The reason is, that you the gardener are the one making sure the plants have enough of the right nutrients to grow. This could mean that you would also have to think about how much light your plants are getting as well as what kind of light they are getting within the hydroponics system.

Information about hydroponics growing systems can be found on the internet or in books. The basic hydroponics system requires a soilless substrate, nutrient packed water, and grow lights. The work involves keeping your plants happy and growing in this system.



The simplest growing system to use is self-watering pots but you are limited to what kind of crops you can grow in them because of the size of the pot. The net cup, the part of the planter that will hold the nutrient solution is filled with clay pellets, then the solution to cover the pellets slightly. The plants or seedlings should be put in hydroponic plugs with the plants placed in the net cup and more clay pellets to stabilize the plants. The next stage is finding a sunny window with 6-8 hours of sunlight or an arrangement with grow lights that will

give the required 6-8 hours of light. Make sure the plants have the right Ph, the right nutrients and no clogged filters, pests and no disease as the plants grow.

The next hydroponics system that I would like to introduce is Aquaponics. It also is labor intensive, but a delightfully way to grow plants. This system is basically using live fish, for instance trout. You feed the fish and the fish by eliminating waste, feed the plants. With this system, you've become a symbiotic farmer.

The two best resources I found are:

*Home Hydroponics* by Tyler Baras; he also has a website [www.FarmerTyler.com](http://www.FarmerTyler.com)

*Aquaponics For Beginners* by howtoaquaponic.com

Happy Gardening!

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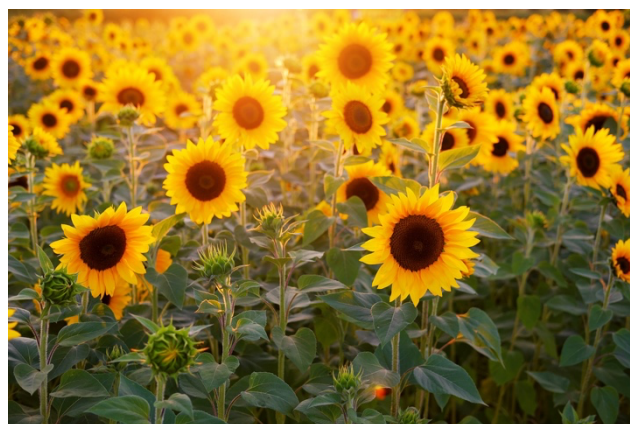
## Another Reason to Plant Sunflowers

By Anita Tuttle

While watching a newscast recently, I wondered what the national flower is in Ukraine: Sunflowers! Sunflowers have always charmed gardeners with their bright faces and edible seeds, but I decided to find out how a North American species became a symbol for a European country.

Research is ongoing to pinpoint the areas where *Helianthus annuus* is truly native. In its wild form, sunflower is a tall, many-branched plant with multiple flowerheads. The wild sunflower most likely originated in Mexico and Peru. Archaeological evidence indicates the Native American people domesticated the sunflower into a single-headed flowering plant more than 3,000 years ago. Many pre-European cultures in the southwestern USA, Mexico, and Central America used sunflowers as religious emblems signifying a sun god. David L. Lentz suggests that Spanish colonial leaders suppressed the growing of sunflowers in the New World because of the plant's importance in native culture and religion.

In the early 1500s, Spanish explorers introduced the sunflower to Spain. From there, the plant spread throughout Europe. Some lore recounts that Tsar Alexander the Great became enamored of sunflowers while visiting the Netherlands and brought them to Russia. Sunflowers grow particularly well there and in Ukraine, where the climate is dry, and the soil is rich. In fact, the major commercial cultivars 'Mammoth Russian' and 'Peredovik' were bred in Russia. In Ukraine, so the story goes, sunflowers became critical to people's comfort when the Eastern Orthodox Church published a list of foodstuffs forbidden during Lent. Butter and lard, as animal products were prohibited, but no mention was made of sunflower oil. It quickly became the most popular oil in Ukraine.



As of 2017, Ukraine led the world in sunflower exports valued at roughly \$20 billion that year.

#### **Global Top 10 Sunflower Seed Producers 2017 (yield m t)**

Ukraine 12.24

Russia 10.48

Argentina 3.55

Romania 2.91

China, Mainland 2.58

Bulgaria 2.06

Turkey 1.96

Hungary 1.89

France 1.62

USA 1.00

Source: FAO 2017



<https://www.sunflowernsa.com/all-about/history/>, <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.0711760105>  
<https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/lifestyle/food/2017/02/22/in-y-but-mighty-sunflower-seeds/46717059/>  
<https://nuseed.com/eu/history-of-the-sunflower/>  
<https://blog.russianflora.com/blogs/the-sunflower-national-flower-of-ukraine/>

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