

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- Area Happenings, p. 2
- April Garden Chores, p. 3 - 4
- Collards, p. 5
- Weed of the Month, p. 6

RAMGA PLANT SALE – order online at www.ramga.org starting May 8 and pick up at the Kerrs Creek Fires Station. Sale will continue through May 14

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.

LOCAL HAPPENINGS

Saturday, April 17, 11am. RAMGA Virtual Plant Clinic. “The 3 Gardening P’s ----Planting guidelines -----Propagation types; Cuttings & Division -----AND Plant Sale information”. The Plant Clinic Team will be sharing details on the 3 Gardening P’s plus answering any of your gardening concerns. Send in your questions or concerns when you register for this zoom talk at www.ramga.org.

Ongoing - W&L Back Campus Wildflower Walk sponsored by the VA Native Plant Society



W&L Wildflower
Walk, Spring 2021.p

Saturday, April 24, 10am – 4pm. Lexington Garden Day. The tour will feature three gardens in Lexington (Jacob Ruff, The Gables, 30 Edmondson Ave.) and the grounds at Thorn Hill. Headquarters will be the Lexington Visitor Center, where all guests will check in. The Herb Guild’s garden, the Campbell House garden, and the Stonewall Jackson House garden are included as points of interest, as is Boxerwood. Tickets are \$20 and can be purchase online at <https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/499/lexington> .

Saturday, May 8, 9am – noon. Rockbridge County Council of Garden Clubs Plant Sale, Hopkins Green (rain or shine). Includes books, garden tools and supplies, and advice!

AREA HAPPENINGS...

Native Plants for Sale at the Nature Foundation at Wintergreen Greenhouse, 725 Beech Grove Rd., Roseland, VA 22967. Opening Saturday, April 3, 10am – 4pm. Call 434-325-7452 for more information.

Thursday, April 8, 9am – noon, Wildflower Identification Webinar with Marion Lobstein and Sally Anderson. Participants will practice using Newcomb’s Wildflower Guide and the Flora of Virginia Mobile App (if you do not have this app, you can download it for \$19.99 on your mobile device prior to the program). \$10 registration fee through Blandy Experimental Farm, www.blandy.virginia.edu

Wednesdays in April, free webinars from the Ecological Landscape Alliance, Register at www.ecolandscaping.org

- April 7, 12pm – 1pm. “Proper Landscaping Planting: Are We in a Deficit Mode”
- April 14, 12pm – 1pm. “Maximizing Space in the Garden: Creating More of a Good Thing”
- April 21, 12pm - 1pm. “Creating Community with Our Insect Neighbors”
- April 27, 12pm – 1pm. “Going Underground: Unearthing the Role of Soil Organisms in Plant Health”

Tuesday, April 13, 7 – 8:30pm. Tree identification by season: Spring. Charlottesville Tree Stewards. <https://www.charlottesvilleareatreestewards.org/learn-about-trees/take-a-tree-steward-class/>

Saturday, April 17. Virtual “Herb Gardening Tips on Growing & Design” sponsored by the Piedmont Master Gardeners. Registration: <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/upcoming-events-25/>

Sunday, April 18, 10am - 3pm. Plant Sale at Pharsalia, 2333 Pharsalia Rd., Tyro, VA.
www.pharsaliaevents.com

Saturday, April 24, 9am – 1pm. Bedford Master Gardener Plant Sale, 1257 County Farm Rd., Bedford.

Virginia Historic Garden Week Events, April 17 – April 24:

- **Saturday, April 17, 10am – 5pm. Staunton,**
<https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/469/staunton>
- **Tuesday, April 20, 10am – 5pm. Lynchburg Garden Day,**
<https://www.vagardenweek.org/main/tour-details/477/lynchburg>

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.
- Edge garden beds.
- Mulch garden beds 2 to 3 inches deep with an organic material. Leaf mulch from Boxerwood is always a good bet.
- Do not work in the garden when the leaves are wet since this may enhance the spread of plant diseases.
- 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

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. Use row covers to protect tender plants.
- Set out plant 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.

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.
- Add compost when transplanting into an existing garden bed.
- 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.
- Time nutrients to fruit trees at the fruit setting time. A good rule of thumb is to fertilize after the petals fall.
- 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>

Lawns:

- Finish seeding early in the month.
- Pre-emergent weed controls, especially crabgrass preventer, go on in the middle of the month for established lawns. This should be done no later than when the forsythia blooms.
- Do not mow the lawn until it has grown at least 2 inches. The roots are being renewed in the spring and grass needs vigorous top growth initially.

- The first grass clippings of the season are rich in nutrients and contain fewer weed seeds than those collected later. Mow frequently and leave the clippings on the lawn.

Pruning:

- Prune spring flowering shrubs after flowering is completed.

VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH - COLLARDS

Collards – The Green that Packs a Nutritional Punch!

By Karen Carlton

I learned about collard greens when I moved down to Virginia. It is the vegetable eaten with black-eyed peas on New Year's Day for good luck throughout the new year. I have since found out it is a powerhouse of good vitamins for you. Dr. Andrew Weil, the American doctor for integrative medicine,



states it is good for your bones, eyes and it contains lutein and zeaxanthin, and also a good source for Vitamin K which helps your body absorb calcium. Besides being a traditionally southern vegetable, it is grown in other countries: Brazil, Portugal, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, the Balkans, Italy, northern Spain and India. This vegetable has been grown and eaten for 2000 years.

Collard greens can be planted in the ground a few weeks before the last frost date. Sow the seeds $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " deep about 2 inches apart in rows 36 inches apart. This is a good plant to grow both in the spring and fall. In the Spring and Fall it is best to have them under row covers to discourage pests like cabbage worms and cabbage aphids. You also need to make sure the ground is constantly moist and to mulch the area where they are growing.

The mature Collards are ready to be harvested in a few weeks. In the fall it is best to harvest them after a frost. The lower temperature sweetens the leaves and make them tastier if you plan to freeze them.

There are a lot of interesting internet recipes for cooking collards. For a food adventure, go on a collard recipe hunt. Then enjoy eating what you have found.

Resources: *Home Grown Pantry* by Barbara Pleasant
Vegetable Gardening in the Southeast by Ira Wallace

WEED OF THE MONTH – HAIRY BITTERCRESS

What Would Spring be Without Weeds?

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.

To me, the worst offender is **Hairy Bittercress** (*Cardamine hirsute*), one of the wild mustards. I am sure you have seen it. The plant has tiny kidney-shaped leaves that grow pinnately along a leaf stalk with the leaves emerging from a basal rosette. Tiny white flowers appear at the end of the stem, the petals in the shape of a cross. These flowers turn into long thin brown capsules called siliques, each containing about 30 seeds. As the seeds begin to mature, they coil tightly and a touch or a breeze triggers the pods to explode, sending seeds as far away as 3'. In our house, we call bittercress the “popper” plant. I find it nearly impossible to eliminate. Pulling it is really the only control, and of course, that disturbs the soil and forces even more weeds to come to the surface and germinate. With weeds, you can never win. However, with Hairy bittercress, you can take your revenge – it is edible.



Hairy Bittercress Pesto

15-20 good-sized heads of bittercress
1 clove garlic
2 Tablespoons olive oil
A good grate of parmesan cheese
Pinch of sugar
1 Tablespoon of freshly squeezed lemon juice
Salt and pepper to taste

References:

Hylton, Joyce. “It’s Spring and Everything’s Blooming...including the Weeds”, mgnv.org

Spencer, Gretchen, "Two Winter Weeds on the March", Fairfax County Master Gardeners, fairfaxgardening.org/winterweeds/
Orr, Eric. "Hairy Bittercress", wildedible.com for the recipe
Nafici, Saara. "Hairy Bittercress", Brooklyn Botanic Garden, *Plant and Gardens Blog*, April 6, 2107.

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<https://www.ramga.org/what-s-happening>

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