

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

MAY 2021



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VIRTUAL RAMGA PLANT SALE – order online at www.mgplantsale.org May 8 at noon – May 14 at noon and pick up plants on Saturday, May 15 at the Kerrs Creek Fire Station.

LOCAL HAPPENINGS

Saturday, May 8, 11am. RAMGA Virtual Plant Clinic. “Plant Clinic Topic: “Planning.....Purchasing.....AND Planting Tips...It’s that TIME!” The 3 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 . Please pass the word on to your friends, families, and neighbors.

Ongoing - Brushy Hills Wildflower Walk sponsored by the VA Native Plant Society



Brushy Apr17
phone.pdf



Brushy Flag
4-17-21_print.pdf

REASONS TO SUPPORT THE MASTER GARDENER PLANT SALE:

- **Good prices**
 - **A variety of perennials, annuals, shrubs and trees on offer**
 - **Vast majority of plants are locally grown**
 - **Ease of ordering online this year**
 - **One day pick-up on Saturday, May 15 at Kerr's Creek Fire Station**
 - **Plant descriptions and plant photographs online**
 - **Pay by check, credit card or PayPal**
 - **Large number of native plants**
 - **Supports the local RAMGA projects such as the Natural Elementary Schoolyard garden, the native plant trail at Boxerwood, the native garden at the Buena Vista Visitors Center**
 - **Some hard-to-find varieties of plants**
 - **Master Gardeners have over 25 years of experience selling plants**
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AREA HAPPENINGS...

Ecological Landscape Alliance, Wednesday Walks in the Garden, Free Webinar series, Noon – 1pm. <https://www.ecolandscaping.org/a-walk-in-the-garden-a-webinar-series/>

- **Wednesday, May 5, Webinar: “Beauty and Biodiversity at Cornell’s Mundy Wildflower Garden”**
- **Wednesday, May 12, Webinar: “The Journey of Edible Landscapes”**

Saturday, May 15, 2pm – 3pm. May Virtual Garden Workshop: “Tomatoes and Tomato Diseases” presented by the Piedmont Master Gardeners. Registration required: www.piedmontmastergardeners.org/events/

Sunday, May 23, 2 – 4pm. Free Virtual class, “Identify and Control Non-Native Invasive Plants”, Charlottesville Tree Stewards, <https://www.charlottesvilleareatreestewards.org/learn-about-trees/take-a-tree-steward-class/>

MAY GARDEN TIPS

By Donna Campagna

May is the month for gardening! In Rockbridge County you can begin to plant just about any warm weather vegetable. A risk-free way to plant your garden is to plant after May 15th. After that date the air and soil have completely warmed and the risk to crops from variable weather is over. However, planting this late may require a trip to the garden center to pick up some tomato, eggplant and pepper plants if you haven't started your own.

Planting cool weather plants is now over however, but you can begin again near the end of summer for a fall garden.

When buying vegetable plants for your garden, look for compact plants with sturdy stems and healthy green leaves. Try to avoid plants that are pot bound. If there a lot of hair roots sticking out of the drainage holes avoid buying them.

FLOWERS IN YOUR GARDEN

There are many benefits to adding flowers to your vegetable garden. Annual flowers in your garden add color, are pleasurable to look at and attract pollinators and birds. Some, like marigolds, help fend off pests and some also attract beneficial insects like ladybugs and parasitic wasps. Some are even edible, like nasturtiums, and add a colorful, nutritional benefit to salads. Occasionally you may like to cut a few flowers for your kitchen table. There are several flowers that are easy to direct seed. They are marigolds, zinnias, nasturtiums, cosmos, and strawflower. Sunflowers are easy too and are nice to have along one side of your garden. Adding some herbs is a good addition to any garden as well. You can harvest and dry your own herbs for the kitchen and when left to flower they will attract pollinators. You will be amazed at the wildlife that will visit your garden when you add flowers.

WARM WEATHER VEGETABLES/FRUITS

Beans are ready to be planted at this time. Lima beans do well here as do beans for shelling. Sweet corn is another warm weather vegetable. It will take up more room as it needs to be planted in square blocks. Cucumbers, summer lettuce, melons, okra, winter squash and water melon are some others. Each have their own special needs. The book *Dirty Knees* gives details on how to plant, care for and harvest your warm weather crops. *Gardening Basics* referenced below has a nice chart that shows which conditions each vegetable needs and how long it takes to produce. The pages following the chart list many varieties of vegetables, their care, harvest time, etc.



Happy gardening!

VEGETABLES OF THE MONTH

OUTSIDE:

Green Beans-Continue planting until August 1
Lima Beans- Plant from last week in May to June 15
Shelling beans-Plant from last week in May to July 4
Beets and Carrots-Continue planting until July 15
Corn-Depending on maturity date, plant from May 15 to June 15
Cucumbers-Plant from May 15 to June 15
Summer Lettuce-Plant heat resistant varieties in shade until August 1
Melons-Depending on maturity date, plant from May 20 to June 10
Okra-Plant May 25 to June 30
Peppers-Transplant from May 10 to June 1
Potatoes-Continue planting until June 15
Summer Squash-Continue planting until July 5
Winter Squash-Depending on maturity date, plant May 20 to July 5
Swiss Chard-Continue planting until August 1
Tomatoes-Can be direct seeded in early May or purchase transplants
Watermelon-Depending on maturity date, Plant May 20 to June 5

TRANSPLANTS:

Eggplant-May 20 to June 1
Peppers-May 10 to June 1
Tomatoes-May 1 to June 1
Sweet Potatoes-May 15 to June 1

References:

Johnston, N., (1995), Dirty Knees, Nancy Johnston Books

Ziegler, L, (2018), Vegetables Love Flowers, Quarto Publishing Group USA, Inc.

Beckett, K., Bradley, S., Kingsbury, N., Newberry, T., (1999), Gardening Basics, Sterling Publishing Co., Inc

Cicada Sirens

By Karen Lyons

Anyone who has spent time outdoors in the summer is likely familiar with the demonic appearance and deafening song of the cicadas, an insect group comprising several species with variable appearance and behavior.

Cicadas are classified into two groups: the annual or dog-day cicada and periodical cicadas. The term annual is a bit of a misnomer since insects in this group typically have lifespans that vary from 2 to 5 years. However, they emerge from their larval stage asynchronously resulting in appearance each

year. Periodical cicadas conversely have lifespans of either 13 or 17 years with limited geographic range. They emerge en masse, usually within the same week, and are designated as Broods that have been numbered sequentially beginning in 1893.

Most of the cicada life cycle is spent as a nymph below ground feeding on the xylem fluid of tree roots. In Virginia the periodical cicadas emerge in May and climb onto nearby vegetation, then molt to the winged adult stage leaving behind their exoskeletons. Males sing their typical song using a structure



Periodical Cicada, Eric Day, VA Cooperative Ext.

on the abdomen called a tymbal to attract the female. After mating the female lays her eggs via an ovipositor that slices into woody twigs and deposits the eggs. The adults only live between 2 and 6 weeks. Eggs hatch into nymphs after 6 to 10 weeks, which then fall to the ground where they burrow to feed on tree rootlets for 13 or 17 years.

Cicadas pose no threat to humans other than their frightening appearance. They do not bite or sting. However, a chorus of singing males can pose a noise nuisance with a sound level that can reach 100 decibels.

Plants generally tolerate the nymph feeding on the roots. The splitting of the bark for egg deposition usually causes death of that twig which appears in contrast to adjacent unaffected foliage, a condition called “flagging”. Mature trees generally tolerate flagging, but young trees (particularly apple, dogwood, peach, hickory, cherry, and pear) may suffer since females favor pencil-sized twigs abundant in small specimens. Also, the wounds caused by the females may predispose to disease.

When a brood is predicted to emerge in your region protect young trees with fine netting beginning in early May and removing at the end of June. Prune flagging damage and destroy clippings within six weeks of egg deposition to lessen nymph feeding. Chemical controls are not recommended for non-commercial plantings.

Records of periodical cicada emergence are chronicled on brood maps. It is anticipated that Brood X will emerge this year in Northwest Virginia including neighboring Augusta and Albemarle Counties, but none are expected in Rockbridge County. Our next periodical cicada visitation is anticipated in 2029 by Brood I. So, enjoy the peace and quiet till then!

Resources:

Day, E., Pfeiffer, D., & Dellinger, T. A. (2021, Mar 15). Periodical Cicada. Retrieved from Virginia Cooperative Extension Publications:

<https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2402&contentname=Periodical%20Cicada>

Williams, K. S. (1995). The Ecology, Behavior, and Evolution of Periodical Cicadas. Annu. Rev. Entomol., 269-95.

VEGETABLE OF THE MONTH

Black-Eyed Peas; A Pea by any other Name

By Karen Carlton

Black-eyed peas are also known as southern peas, Crowder peas or field peas, a fact I was not aware of until I did some research. Black-eyed peas can be a good combination with collard greens, soups, and stews. They originated in Africa and this warm weather legume is usually planted in the early summer.



These peas like full sun and well-drained soil. For planting you will need a trellis for the plants. The plants will need to be spaced about 3-6 inches apart in rows 18-42 inches apart. You can pick them green as shelling peas or wait until the pods are brittle, papery with tan husks. If you dry the shelling peas, do it at room temperature. When dried, peas will need to soak in water overnight in order for you to cook with them. To store dry peas, the peas need be in airtight containers in a cool, dry place.

The best part of planting the black-eyed peas is that it is a nitrogen-fixer for the soil. After harvesting the peas, you could plant another crop that loves to be planted in the fall for instance spinach, collards, lettuce or kohlrabi. Bottom line advice, plant the peas or greens you love to eat.

Resources: *The Edible Front Yard* by Ivette Soler
Vegetable Garden in the Southeast by Ira Wallace
Home Grown Pantry by Barbara Pleasant

PEST OF THE MONTH

Four-Lined Plant Bug

By Katherine Smith

May's Pest of the Month is the Four-lined Plant Bug, family Miridae. Its proper name is *Poecilocapsus lineatus*. So, to save time & space, we will just call it F.L.B. for short.

F.L.B. is a general plant pest for gardeners east of the Rockies. In its list of preferred hosts are currants, perennial ornamentals and herbs of interest to culinary gardeners, too.

About this time of year, F.L.B. appears in its larval coat (nymph form) of bright red as a small dot easily ignored. As adults, this colorful clothing theme continues, 1/4" of yellow with 4 dark black lines down the back of the hard wing coverts. It is in this adult form that the feeding damage occurs.

Now for the UGGHHH part. F.L.B.'s mouthparts are not sucking straws; rather they're designed to macerate tender plant cells. Then a solution of digestive juices is added. The resulting mush is slurped up. F.L.B. moves on, to create a few more spots.



The plant's response to the injury is quick...and results in bunches of small tan, black or sometimes black spots on the leaves. Most of us will find these on mints of the European persuasion (*Mentha* species).

Master Gardeners at the Help Desk are frequently asked for identification of the cause of these spots, and then for assistance in preventing more damage.

www.entnemdept.ufl.edu

Alas, once the spots are found the damage has been done. It's not all that helpful to let the gardener know that F.L.B.'s life span as an adult is short, about 6 weeks. Mating occurs, the males die, and the females find their way to the stems of the host plant. After making slits in these, the eggs are laid for safe keeping over winter. And the females die. Just six weeks! In time, apparently, to make way for Japanese Beetles.

At RAMGA's Help Desk, we have calls when those little discolored spots show up, usually on the mints of the European persuasion (*Mentha* species). Our counsel is to practice population control by harvesting the plants while the eggs are in the stems, being sure to discard all the stems. The mints regrow quickly, and if spots reappear, repeat the population control measure.

Also, we suggest that *Mentha* species be grown in pots. These can be placed on decks, and in various places in the garden. Separation helps control outbreaks, and clean-up is easier. We have also noticed that mints with fuzzy leaves are not relished by F.L.B. Moreover, chefs use these fuzzier ones in cooking with mints.

As an aside, our native mints, family *Pycnanthemum*, offer a variety of leaf forms, none of which seem to attract F.L.B. They are good pollinators and have stiffer stems than menthas. Juleps, anyone?

A PLANT SALE HIGHLIGHT - HEPTACODIUM

Seven-Son Flower

By Faith Vosburgh

You can keep your crape myrtle – give me a seven-son flower (*Heptacodium miconioides*) any day! I love this small tree and have several myself – and since it occasionally self-sows, I have put a few in our upcoming MG plant sale. One might mistake this for a crape – the shape is similar (fountain-shaped) and the exfoliating bark has the look of a crape. But the plants are not even in the same family.

The name seven-son comes from the arrangement of the seven-part creamy white flower clusters that appear in early fall. The flowers are beautiful in floral arrangements. And the cool thing about this tree is that when the white petals fall off the clusters, the calyxes are a bright fuchsia, extending the bloom for another few weeks.

This 15 – 20' tree is usually multi-stemmed but can be trained to a single trunk. Hummingbirds and late season pollinators love this tree. Seven-son flower likes sun but will grow in dappled shade. An added benefit is their fast growth.



There is a fairly new shorter Heptacodium on the market that I have seen locally, 'Temple of Bloom'. It is more like 8-10'. Be the envy of your neighbors and plant a seven-son tree. Because of their relative rarity, the plants can be pricey, but you can find a bargain at the Rockbridge Area Master Plant Sale!

Photo credit: www.plants.ces.ncsu.edu



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