

June 2011 Newsletter

OTHER EVENTS

- **Sunday, June 12, 1pm, Shenandoah National Park-North.** Richard Stromberg will lead a walk in the Jenkins Gap/Compton Peak area to see how the 2,000 acres that burned last February are recovering. Meet at Jenkins Gap at mile 12.3 of Skyline Drive. For information contact Richard
- **Sunday, July 10, 10am-2pm, Shenandoah National Park-Central.** Check out the flowers along two miles of the Mill Prong Trail from Milam Gap (mile 52.8 on Skyline Drive) to Rapidan Camp. Meet at Milam Gap parking at 10am. Pack a lunch to eat on President Hoover's Brown House porch. For information contact Marjorie Prochaska

PRESIDENTS REPORT by Cy Haley

Well, well, well, I hope everyone enjoyed their two days of Spring! Who expected this kind of weather this year?

I remember my Granddad reading a dog-eared copy of the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, listening to the *Noon Farm Report* and weather report on the AM radio we kept on the kitchen table, and listening to him, sitting around with all the other farmers, cuss and discuss the weather at our local Farmer's Co-op back in Kansas. He and his friends relied on the tools they had at their disposal to assist them in the operations of their farms. Of course the most important one was our Extension Agent. They may not have always agreed with him but when our Ag Agent (which is how we referred to him) told them something they all listened and usually took it to heart.

So, who expected this kind of weather this Spring? Well, I did. I know it sounds corny, and a lot of my non-gardening friends laugh at me, but I actually go online to the Farmer's Almanac website. Here's what it says for this month:

June 2011

1st-3rd. Fair.

4th-7th. Big thunderstorms for the Mid-Atlantic. Thunderstorms also continue over the Northeast.

8th-11th. Showers spread east to the Atlantic Coast. Could be a muddy track for the Belmont Stakes.

12th-15th. Pleasant weather.

16th-19th. Severe thunderstorms, especially New England.

20th-23rd. Fair, warm.

24th-27th. Showers initially, then clearing.

28th-30th. Fair.

Yup, we're going to keep getting the rain we longed for last year unfortunately it will probably be more rain than we need or want. And although the Almanac says it will continue through June, it doesn't say if we'll get it when we really need it—like this summer. It doesn't predict out that far yet.

I also use the "Gardening by the Moon" section in the Almanac. I try to plant by this calendar but Mother Nature's weather doesn't always cooperate so I have to do what I can, dependent on the rain/mud forecast.

But I don't just rely on the Almanac, I also check out the weather at The Weather Channel and the National Weather Service websites. As I'm writing this the temperature is 73 but it's only 8:45 AM. I wish it would stay at this temperature so we could turn off those energy sapping air conditioners. (I hate air conditioning in the Spring. One should be able to open the windows and enjoy the fresh air this time of year.)

I also investigate the Virginia Cooperative Exchange (VCE) website to see what they are advising. It's amazing what you can find out there. Everything from pest management to how to can (jar) those vegetables you're growing. My favorite section is "Publications and Resources". Just click on one of the topics and see how many articles there are. Amazing!

Now, I'm not trying to advocate or advertise for these websites (well, maybe for VCE), I'm just saying we have more tools at our disposal than ever before. With the Internet we can get all sorts of valuable information (as well as some pretty dumb stuff too, but more on that another time).

So just like Granddad, I too rely on the *Farmer's Almanac*, the weather reports, the farm report, and the VCE Agents. And while I may not hang out at a Farm Co-op anymore, when you get a bunch of Master Gardeners together it sounds pretty much the same...well...maybe not as much cussing.

FREDERICK COUNTY COORDINATOR'S MAY REPORT by Teri Merrill

It's that time of year when we remember exactly why we became master gardeners! Enjoy this wonderful season, but remember that many people don't have your gardening knowledge or experience.

You can share those talents with the public by answering questions on the Greenline, as there are still some dates open. What's that? You don't understand what the Greenline is? It's pretty simple, really.

The Extension Office gets phone calls or e-mails from the public with gardening questions that they forward to us. We would like you to respond within 24 hours, but don't panic!

That doesn't mean you have to have an answer within 24 hours, we just want you to contact them within that time and let them know you're working on finding the best answer. Then you can take a little time to conduct some research or go to the Extension Office and use their resources. At times, it can be a little like being a detective--someone gives you a few clues and you find the answer!

Contact Lynn Hoffmann or me about weeks that are still available. It's a great way to research questions and expand your own knowledge base.

Are you looking for something to do with our group that is FUN, FUN, FUN? I recently joined Lynn Hoffmann for a garden consultation at the county correctional facility. It was such a blast to share what we knew with the sergeant in charge of the project. I was a little worried that my knowledge wouldn't be sufficient, so I was really there to provide moral support to Lynn. But it's amazing--we all know more than we think we know! Most of the questions were really pretty basic, yet the sergeant was very happy to have us a resource.

I would encourage all of you to think about getting involved in these type of consultations, whether it be community gardening or home consultations. Shadow a veteran a few times if you don't feel ready to do it alone. It's a wonderful service and lots of fun to talk to members of the public who are so thankful for our help.

Don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns or are looking for a way to get more involved.

FREDERICK COUNTY COORDINATOR'S JUNE REPORT by Teri Merrill

The Greenline is up and running and calls/ e-mails are steadily coming in. Here are three questions that I received so far during my week on the Greenline. I also have included my answers. Let me know if you think I should have answered differently. I used the Extension website for my research at www.ext.vt.edu.

First caller has been growing Cantina and Concord grapes for 3 years. This year they noticed that the leaves are being chewed up and are falling off and her husband thought he spotted a worm that was dark brown.

After some research, I think it's the larvae of the grape flea beetle, as it seemed to match the description of the worm they saw. This is the first bug that attacks grape crops in the spring here. I told her that keeping the garden tidy of weeds and debris all year helps to control this population, as the adults overwinter in the soil. Also, I told her to keep an eye on the problem before resorting to sprays, as it may not be necessary to do anything. If she does use a spray, it's



recommended to use a broad-spectrum insecticide and read the label to use it correctly. Finally, I asked her, before spraying, to go to the website and look at pictures of the larvae to ensure that the bug they saw matches the description of the grape flea beetle larvae.

Second caller read that sunflowers are toxic to other flowers in garden. She has some growing around her roses, salvia, and peonies. She wanted to know if this was true and should she remove them? I looked to see if sunflowers are toxic to other plants and didn't see any evidence of that. I wrote her and told her they are native annuals and can be planted with other plants. However, they do bring in many birds when they are full size, and the birds spread seeds everywhere and poop everywhere too. So, while they aren't toxic, they can be messy, do require lots of space, and probably should be placed where they can grow large and not crowd out other plants.



Caller also bought a gardenia plant from Costco and wonders if she can plant it outside and should she dig it up in the fall? My answer: Based on the website information, gardenias are not hardy outside of the temperate areas of Virginia. Therefore, they should be dug up and repotted in the fall, after checking for pests. I told her to cut back on watering and make sure they get good light in the winter when they are inside.

See how fun that was? And I learned something through researching the questions.

There are still many weeks open when we need volunteers. Please contact me or Lynn Hoffmann to sign up for a week this summer. We need you to step up and help out.

GIVE US YOUR INPUT

This newsletter is your opportunity to communicate with all the other Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners.

So if you have anything you want to say, get it to editor Richard Stromberg

We would like to get recipes from you, and we would like to hear from you about "Plants I used to like". Tell us what has fallen off the favorites list.

GET TREES FOR VIRGINIA PARKS

Odwalla is donating \$100,000 to state parks across the country to help parks buy trees to plant. The money is divided between the states based on "votes" on the Odwalla site. For every tree vote designated for Virginia, we get \$1 to buy trees



Vote at <http://www.odwalla.com/plantatree/VA.jsp>. This will take you right to the Virginia voting page. Odwalla requires authentication either by a Facebook login or email address. They do absolutely nothing with that information. It is used to restrict the number of votes per person and keep cheaters from creating bots to pad the votes.

Odwalla has donated \$350,000 to state park systems in the last three years. They also have a real commitment to environmental stewardship. Click here for information on their 100% PlantBottle™ initiative and other stewardship activities.

EDITORS CORNER by Richard Stromberg

I have been particularly impressed this year with some flower populations that I have seen along the trail, but they wouldn't work in a garden.

First to strike me was Pink Lady's Slippers (*Cypripedium acaule*). I knew that a significant population grows up the hill from the Saddle Trail on Old Rag Mountain just below Byrd's Nest 1 shelter, but this year as I walked down the trail, a clump of about 20 popped into my eye, surrounded by some smaller clumps and individual plants scattered under the Mountain Laurel up the hill. A couple days later I was again impressed by large clumps of them on Hazle Mountain Trail in Shenandoah National Park—over a hundred along one stretch of trail. But they will not grow in most gardens because they require special mycorrhizal fungi.

On Memorial Day weekend I went to Big Schloss, west of I-81. I know to look for Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) there. Before getting to Big Schloss, we encountered Rock Harlequin (*Corydalis semper-virens*). The hot pink flowers tipped with yellow are spectacular up close, but are too small to show up in a garden. A whole field of them cascaded down the hill but did not look like much on my photo because the flowers are so small and the foliage grayish. The Columbine did not disappoint, big plants taller than I am, flashing red in the shady woods. We use a lot of Columbine varieties in gardens, but our native red sparkler often disappears after two or three years though it may regenerate by self-sowing.

