

NORTHERN SHENANDOAH VALLEY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION NEWS

December, 2015

UPCOMING MEETING

No meeting in December

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Master Gardener 2016 Class**, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 to 4pm starting February 9 at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit
- **Saturday, March 12, 2016 Symposium.** Sandy Ward and Karen Brill are requesting gently used or like-new gardening-themed books and magazines for re-sale at the symposium on March 12, 2016. We would appreciate any children's books as well. You are welcome to bring these to the November 15 meeting.

FROM THE PRESIDENT by Susan Garrett



It's hard to believe that the year is almost over. There have been highs (the documented 102 degrees at one of our summer meetings) and lows (it felt like the 40's with wind chill at our outdoor October meeting), but they were great meetings nevertheless. Throughout this year MG's have continued their creative work of sharing our love for horticulture and appreciation for good care of our natural world with our neighbors in the five county area. As your 2015 President, I wanted to thank you for the many ways each of you found to make a difference, and the wonderful ways we worked together. We started some new major projects like the Blandy Garden and "The Gathering", welcomed the awesome MG class of 2015, and

supported very successful continuing projects that give joy to our communities (and to us) each year.

On a personal note, I wanted to thank all of you for your concern and kindness during my recent surprise pacemaker surgery. I read every single one of the messages on the card you sent me, and realized again how much support and friendship mean in one's life. I am thankful (I write this in Thanksgiving week) for each and every one of you, and I am especially thankful that the NSVMGA is more than just a collection of individuals each doing their own thing. At its best, the NSVMGA is a community--a community that knows how to work together and what it means to support each other.

FREDERICK COUNTY REPORT by John Kummer

Thanks to all of the Frederick County Master Gardeners for contributing to the year's activities. At least 1300 hours were logged on county projects and events by the nearly 50 on the association roster. A gaggle of us met on November 22 at the Bonnie Blue Southern Market and Bakery in Winchester to review the year and look forward to prospects for 2016. While several programs continue from year to year, ideas for new activities, especially educational/community involved, are always welcome. Hint to shorten the dreary, cold months of winter, borrow some money due in early spring. Have a festive holiday season and keep in touch.

CLARKE COUNTY REPORT by Ginny Smith



As the year winds down our county projects went very well. We had ten active projects all with project leaders and good participation. We added two new ones this year: one at Clarke County High School and one at Johnson Williams Middle school. Our year end ac-

tivity for the group will be a wreath making and cookie exchange at the home of Cathy Dickey on December 7. We will have a meeting in March to discuss projects for next year.

SHENANDOAH COUNTY REPORT by Sharon Bradshaw

Most of our projects are dormant for the winter months, although the Green Help Line questions do not cease with the onset of cold weather. It continues to be monitored from home by volunteers who serve a month at a time.

During a family outing over Thanksgiving week, we visited a 'yard art' center with the expected frogs, gnomes, garden pots and St. Francis statues. I am still waiting to wander through one of these and see a statue of St. Fiacre, the patron saint of gardeners. For a good description and remarks on pronunciation, check out this link and be sure to read the discussion thread at the end of the article, <http://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/view/2616>.

PUBLICITY AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE by Stacey Smith

The Communications and Publicity Committee members continue their work on Association events, including January's Blandy Seed Exchange (publicity lead Elaine Specht), February's Class of 2016 (publicity lead Sari Carp), and March's Symposium (publicity lead Joy Brunk).

I have enjoyed being your committee chair this year. The committee looks forward to working with the next chair in 2016. If you're organized and would like to help with the leadership of the Association, please consider this role. The chair's primary responsibilities are administrative--reporting to the board and Association at two monthly meetings, preparing a newsletter article, and sending a few monthly meeting notices to newspapers, as well as helping with press. We have a process, templates, and a list of media contacts!

To end my last committee report, I'm adding the recipe for the graham cracker toffee squares I brought to the November meeting. I hesitate to call this a recipe since it's so simple, but so many people asked for it that I'm sharing here. If you have a church cookbook, there's a good chance you've seen something similar. I found a recipe online that used graham crackers as the base, and it's now my favorite quick treat for the holidays.

Graham Cracker Toffee Squares (or Triangles)

Ingredients:

- 15 whole graham cracker sheets (rectangles, not squares)
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 cup butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup chopped pecans or pecan pieces

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a large baking sheet with a silicone liner or aluminum foil.
- Lay out the graham cracker sheets in three rows of five, which should just about fill the pan.
- Melt the butter and sugar in a medium saucepan over medium heat until the mixture comes to a boil.
- Boil for two minutes, stirring constantly.
- Remove from heat and stir in the vanilla extract and kosher salt.
- Pour the butter/sugar mixture over the crackers and spread with a spatula to ensure even coverage.
- Sprinkle the pecans over the butter/sugar mixture.
- Bake for about 12 minutes, until it bubbles up and looks puffy.
- Remove from oven and allow to cool slightly.
- As it cools, use a bench scraper or sharp knife to divide into 30 squares or 60 triangles. (The triangles are about 60 calories each.)

Variations:

- Sprinkle the salt over the bars after removing from the oven instead of mixing in for a saltier bite
- Sprinkle chocolate chips over the bars after removing from the oven [Editor's note: that's what we do, except we use Saltine crackers so you don't need to sprinkle salt. Yum!]

"THE GATHERING" by Suzanne Boag

A heartfelt thank you for a successful MG Booth at the Gathering! Special thanks go to Rose Fairman for her beautiful Bulb Display Board and children's hand-out and to Lynn Hoffmann for gathering & donating supplies, which included several hundred river rocks and peat pots. Thank you to all for your time and dedication to NSVMGA.

NSVMGA volunteers made over 500 contacts with children and families interested in fall bulbs, making stone markers, learning about the Ground Water Model loaned to us by Mark Sutphin, the 2016 MG Class, and many gardening topics.

We braved the wind and cold on Friday, October 30, and enjoyed the nice weather provided to us by Mother Nature on Saturday and Sunday. Some of us were serenaded by a talented flutist. I hope that you all had the good fortune to taste the Three Sisters Stew, fried bread and hot apple cider. I know I enjoyed watching the Native American Dancers with their beautiful and unique costumes. A few of us also squeezed in a class or two at the Gourd Festival. And let's not forget the majestic turkey that strutted around the Fair Grounds showing off his beautiful tail feathers. So much to see and do at The Gathering!



BELLE GROVE CHRISTMAS DECORATING 2015 by Lynn Hoffman



This year's theme, Christmas Around the World, was enhanced with by MGs decorating the downstairs of Belle Grove in Russian *Matryoshkas* gourd dolls and Scandinavian *Tomten* and *Nisse* gnomes.

We had over 25 gourds painted and on display, with countless little gnomes hiding all over the place. Our workshops and training is demonstrated by the talent of all the MGs who helped pull this decorating theme together. Belle Grove Manor house will be open for the Christmas season and we encourage you to come and visit Belle Grove and tour the house and see the MG work on display.

ONLINE VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT FINDER by Richard Stromberg

Mary Flagg's forwarded email from John Freeborn announced The Virginia Native Plant Finder provided by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation Natural Heritage's Native Plant Finder at <http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/n>. It allows you to find native plant species that suit your needs. It based on their "Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration and Landscaping" brochures. You enter either the name or part of the name (common or scientific) or characteristics you are looking for, and the system will come back with a list of plants that meet the specifications. The resulting list shows the information that you would find on the brochures. For example, if you enter common name "rose", the system lists three species:

COMMON NAME

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Scientific Name	Common Name	Duration	Max Height (ft)	Uses				Region			Light			Moisture			Grassland Species	Riparian Buffer Species
				W	H	C	D	M	P	C	S	P	F	L	M	H		
Herbs																		
Hibiscus moscheutos	Eastern rosemallow	Perennial	8	x	x	x		x	x	x			x			x		x
Shrubs & Small Trees																		
Rhododendron prinophyllum	rose azalea	Perennial	12	x	x			x			x	x	x	x	x		x	
Rosa carolina	pasture rose	Perennial	3	x		x		x	x	x		x	x	x	x			

If you enter "Herbs", "Shade", and "Low Moisture", the system lists nine species:

REGION

PLANT TYPE

USES

LIGHT

MOISTURE

MAX HEIGHT (FT)

SPECIES

PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS

Scientific Name	Common Name	Duration	Max Height (ft)	Uses				Region			Light			Moisture			Grassland Species	Riparian Buffer Species
				W	H	C	D	M	P	C	S	P	F	L	M	H		
Herbs																		
Anemone acutiloba	sharp-lobed hepatica	Perennial	1		x				x			x		x	x			
Anemone americana	round-lobed hepatica	Perennial	1		x				x	x	x	x		x	x			
Clitoria mariana	Maryland butterfly pea	Perennial	3		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
Desmodium paniculatum	narrow-leaf tick trefoil	Perennial	3	x		x			x	x	x	x		x			x	
Heuchera americana	alumroot	Perennial	3		x				x	x	x	x		x				
Micranthes virginensis	early saxifrage	Perennial	2		x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Penstemon canescens	gray beardtongue	Perennial	2		x				x	x		x		x				
Polygonatum biflorum	Solomon's seal	Perennial	3		x				x	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Pycnanthemum incanum	hoary mountain mint	Perennial	6	x		x			x	x	x	x		x			x	

The codes in the list columns are the same as in the brochures:

Uses

W = Wildlife
H = Horticulture
C = Conservation
D = Domestic livestock

Region

M = Mountain
P = Piedmont
C = Coastal Plain

Light Requirements

S = Shade
P = Partial Sun
F = Full Sun

Moisture Requirements

L = Low Moisture
M = Moderate Moisture
H = High Moisture

CHRISTMAS TREE by Lesley Mack

We all seem to 'love' the story of Charlie Brown's Christmas Tree, that small, scrawny tree that somehow is cherished for its gentle unobtrusive ways. As an opposite effect, try the short story by Hans Christian Andersen, called The Fir Tree, with the thoughts surrounding the idea of a real or fake tree, the story tugs at your heart strings.

Here are a few thoughts about Christmas Trees.

Fake trees:

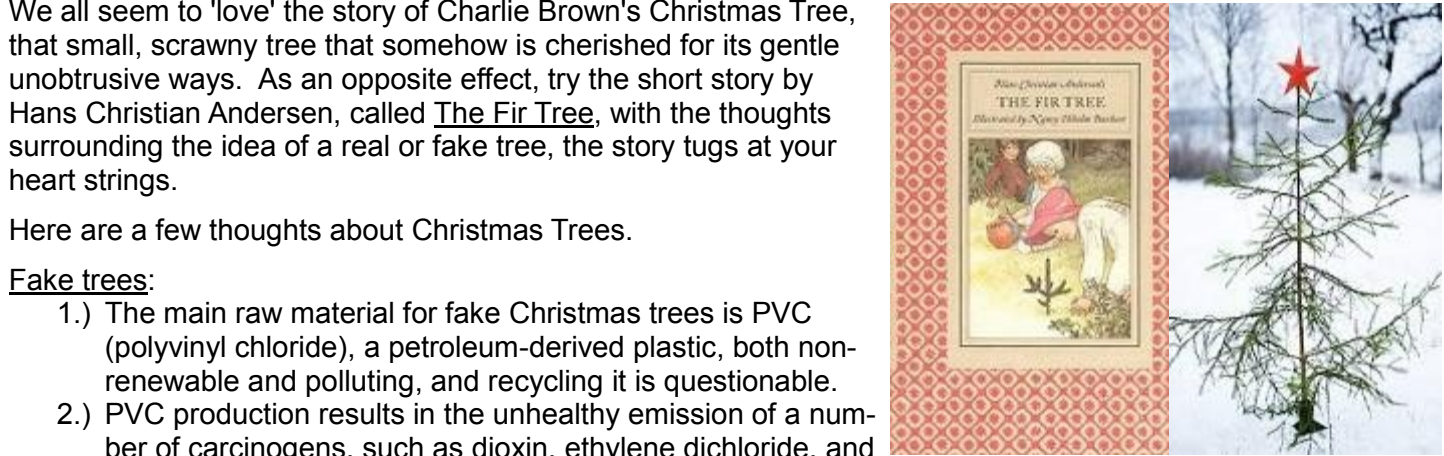
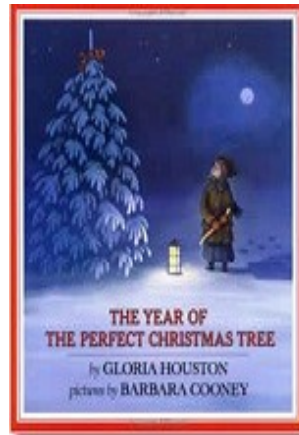
- 1.) The main raw material for fake Christmas trees is PVC (polyvinyl chloride), a petroleum-derived plastic, both non-renewable and polluting, and recycling it is questionable.
- 2.) PVC production results in the unhealthy emission of a number of carcinogens, such as dioxin, ethylene dichloride, and vinyl chloride.
- 3.) To create and transport the fake trees requires a lot of energy.
- 4.) Transportation of fake trees can cause excess emissions if 'made in China'.

Real trees:

- 1.) A real tree is a crop that is being raised for that purpose, and replanted in rotation after cutting.
- 2.) Real trees provide suitable habitat for wildlife, as long as there is good management of the trees and soil.
- 3.) Real trees are only used for a short while, but they are biodegradable and highly recyclable when used as mulch or used to prevent erosion.
- 4.) Real trees are carbon-neutral, though emissions can occur from farming activities and transportation.

Another solution? If you want to lower your negative environmental impact, do not buy any tree. Decorate your house with some pruned or fallen branches. Or get creative and make your own Christmas tree.

Or just read a wonderful book like, The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree.



CHRISTMAS CACTUS by Mary Flagg



A beautiful holiday plant (botanically known as *Schlumbergera* or *Zygocactus*), the Christmas Cactus, unsurprisingly blooms at Christmas. From my own observations, a couple months prior to Christmas you can watch the tips of the leaves beginning to grow. As each day passes, the tips grow darker, until a bud forms. By Christmas, the buds open to a beautiful flower that will add beautiful color and warmth to your holiday season.

The following tips will help prolong the life of your cactus plant after the holidays. Place the plant in bright but indirect light in a well-draining humidity container and fertilize. When watering, thoroughly water the plant. Encourage blooms by lowering the temperature.

EDITORS CORNER by Richard Stromberg

Prompted by the large Persimmon tree (*Diospyros virginiana*) on the banks of the South Fork of the Shenandoah I wrote about in the November, 2013, newsletter and the large Chinkapin Oak (*Quercus muehlenbergii*) in Luray that Lesley Mack wrote about in the January, 2014, newsletter, I led an auto caravan to look at big trees in Page County for the Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society on November 8th.

I looked up Virginia Tech's website listing the largest trees in the state for each species. I found several more trees listed in Page County. Bigness is specified by "points" calculated by adding trunk circumference (inches) 4½ feet from the ground + tree height (feet) + ¼ crown spread (feet). I loaded coordinates from the website on my GPS to locate the trees we visited.

Sixteen tree lovers joined me near the Skyland Conference Center in Shenandoah National Park to start the caravan. First we went left of the Conference Center to see the second and third largest Fanleaf Hawthorns (*Crataegus flabellata*) in the state. At 25 feet tall and 10 inches in diameter, they are large for their species. The leafless trees had typical Hawthorn red fruit and long spines. We found fan-shaped leaves on the ground.

Next we walked back past the Conference Center into the Judd Garden down the road that was the original route to Skyland Resort before the National Park was formed. George and Marion Judd were long-time lot/cabin owners before the Park was formed and were strong supporters of the Resort and, later, the Park. They created a twelve acre garden with a wide variety of native and non-native trees, shrubs and flowers and maintained it until 1950.

We looked at a Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens*) rated at 168 points, seven points short of the biggest one in the state. It is not native in our part of the country and has only half the points of the national champion in Utah. A few feet from it was a native Eastern Redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) almost as big as the Blue Spruce but not rated in the state as the state champion in Southampton has 304 points. Also close by were two large European (aka Copper) Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trees, not quite big enough to be listed. On the way back up the hill we saw the third largest American Cranberrybush (*Viburnum opulus*) in the state and the largest Japanese Yew (*Taxus cuspidata*).

Then we drove to the Page County Government Office Building in Luray to see the Chinkapin Oak in a park next to the building. This is a tree to ooh and ah over: 96 feet tall, 122 feet crown spread, and 79 inch diameter. Its 374 points are only thirteen points behind the state champion in Rockingham and thirty points behind the national champion in Kentucky. It is featured on page 74 of Remarkable Trees of Virginia by Nancy Ross Hugo and Jeff Kirwan. The County Building architect adjusted the design of the Office Building to accommodate the tree. We were happy to see that the situation has improved since the picture in the book was taken: the shed in front of the tree has been removed and English Ivy has been taken off the tree.

Next we drove west out of Luray, crossed the South Fork of the Shenandoah and turned north for several miles up the west bank to the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Fosters boat launch parking lot where the large Persimmon tree stands alone. It is not on the big tree list, but has been very impressive in past years when it produced thousands of persimmons. Production was down this year with only a few hundred. Nearby along the river is a copse of American Bladdernuts, tree-form here rather than shrubs. Among them are the two largest in the state. The biggest is 22 feet tall and five inches in diameter. Looking up at the mass of three-pronged, puffy fruits made up for the reduced crop of persimmons.

