

Shenandoah Valley GARDENING

Newsletter of NSVMGA, the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association

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Outstanding Volunteer for Frederick County

Mark Sutphin

Robert (Bob) Gail is the Virginia Cooperative Extension-Frederick County, 2019 outstanding volunteer. Bob has served Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Master Gardener Program since 2016.

As a retired businessman in the Winchester/Frederick County community, Bob has also been heavily involved as a board member of Fremont Street Nursery, and has served as interim director of the Sinclair Health Clinic (formerly Free Medical Clinic). He has held the office of Treasurer in the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association and presently serves as President of this association that supports our local Extension Master Gardeners and projects.

Bob has been active with the youth garden program at Fremont Street Nursery, the 4-H Junior Master Gardener program at Greenwood Mill Elementary, the 4-H Junior Master Gardener home-school program at CCAP, and can often be found assisting community members with gardening advice and best management practices at the Master Gardener booth at the Old Town Farmers Market in Winchester.

His humor, his hard-working can-do attitude, and his leadership skills are great attributes that he freely gives to Virginia Cooperative Extension.

We are very thankful for all of Bob's support to Virginia Cooperative Extension and the VCE-Frederick office.

*photo, from left: Bob Gail, our larger-than-life Spotted Lanternfly Colleen Liszewski, and Jeff Burke
photo by Stacey Morgan Smith*





From the top: Karin French of the USDA talks about organics; Stacey Morgan Smith presents an overview of butterfly gardening; Suzanne Boag applauds a speaker; Wendell Combest, professor of biopharmaceutical sciences, discusses medicinal plant and herbs, and author Marianne Willburn wraps up the day with a presentation based on her book about gardening in small spaces. photos by Joyce Watson

From the President Bob Gail

The Coronavirus pandemic has impacted, in a very negative way, the joy I always get when spring arrives. But, I hope you are able to enjoy the bright blooming colors from the spring bulbs you planted in the fall in your own garden and are watching as your perennials come back to life.

Virginia Tech, Virginia Cooperative Extension and the State of Virginia Master Gardener office are following the Governor's and CDC orders to shelter in place, making it necessary to cancel all Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener projects until June 10, 2020. Hopefully, this restriction will be removed June 10th, but if necessary, it will be extended.

Thankfully, we were able to hold the annual Seed Exchange on January 25th at the Blandy Experimental Farm and it was just great. It was bigger and better than ever with seeds galore. Hundreds of guests came and enjoyed the day! And, we were also fortunate to hold our largest scholarship fund raising event, the Gardening in the Valley Symposium, on March 7th at Shenandoah University. Hester Auditorium was filled to capacity. The speakers were outstanding and the book sale and vendor sales were well received by the attendees. *Please see the photos at left.*

We will not be able to hold GardenFest as planned on June 6th at Belle Grove Plantation. The severity of the COVID-19 pandemic and government requesting us all to shelter in place make it obvious that we cannot complete the necessary activities required prior to the event. I know this is disappointing, but the decision was made with the health and safety of our members and their families in mind.

Sorry for all of the bad news in this article. I hope everyone remains safe and healthy and that we can all get back to normal very soon!

Got Worms? Making Compost from Kitchen Waste

Will Daniels

Chances are that longtime, dedicated gardeners are finding a way to put kitchen food wastes back into the ground. You might be burying your vegetable and fruit scraps, a practice that goes by the names “trench composting” or “dig-and-drop.” Or you might be placing this waste into a backyard compost heap.

Either way, you’re putting bacteria and fungi to work to convert the organic matter into a form that plants can use for growth. There is another way of transforming waste into soil. It’s been around for years and shows steady popularity. It’s known as worm composting, or vermicomposting. In this, you’re exchanging the digestive system of hungry red wiggler worms (*Eisenia fetida*) for the decomposing genius of the microbes. (photo at right by Suzanne Carter-Jackson)



Although worm composting can be done on a large scale, most people stay small by depositing the vegetable and fruit waste they produce in the kitchen into a vermicomposter kept nearby. One of the nice things about vermicomposting, after all, is convenience. But doesn’t this raise concerns about odors or even bugs? Not necessarily—the worms themselves have no odor, and the food scraps aren’t more likely to produce bad odors or bugs than the scraps container you already keep on a counter. In the warmer months you can put the worm bin just outside the door. That said, there is a management aspect to keeping a healthy worm bin—feeding the worms just enough, controlling moisture, chopping or grinding the scraps, harvesting the finished castings—that will either be part of the interest of the hobby or an extra duty you could do without.

People often compare vermicomposting with conventional composting, asking whether one is better than the other. They’re very different processes, and in fact worms technically do not compost the material; they digest it and expel its waste. Composting will get the nod simply because it is a more practical way to produce large amounts of soil amendment. What about the product of each method; is one better for plants than the other? That is difficult to judge, because the raw materials used have so much to do with the mix of nutrients present at the end. Neither product is a high-powered fertilizer, but fertilizing isn’t the only reason for using any compost. It’s also about good soil structure, water retention, and biological action.

Studies at Ohio State University (ref. 1) and Cornell University (ref. 4) have indicated that worm castings in potting mix increase growth for some plants in greenhouse production, while also suppressing some pathogens and plant pests. The reason is thought to be the high microbe count in worm castings. The Cornell study found “limited

benefits associated with direct soil application,” perhaps because microbial action in the soil was already high enough. The findings may point the way to the best use of our worm castings—as additions to potting soil. When dried, castings mix easily with other mediums.

If you’re interested in worm composting, you’ll want a complete how-to, easily found on the internet and in books. Here are a few things to do and to keep in mind.

1) Whether you buy a composter or make one yourself (ref. 2), a tray system is handy. The tray bottoms are mesh. You put the worms on the lower tray, feed them, and when they’ve eaten their way to the top of the tray, start putting food in the upper tray. The worms migrate to that level, so that after a couple of weeks you can harvest the castings in the lower tray.



DIY worm bin with two trays, photo by growinggreenerworld.com

2) If you don’t keep the composter in the kitchen, keep it in a fairly warm place. The worms will survive if kept from freezing, but at low temperatures they won’t be eating and reproducing much. If you go away for a week or two, feed before you leave. If the worms run out of food it will just slow their metabolism.

3) Your worm population will grow, which is good, but at a certain point you’ll want to cull the worms, or they may sense the overcrowding and try to escape. Give some to friends or put them into an outside compost pile that won’t heat up (bad for the worms). These compost worms won’t survive in regular garden soil.

4) Some worm composting bins have pans in the bottom for catching drips, which is often called compost tea. While this is a good feature for keeping the bin from becoming too swampy, the drippings are mostly leachate, not tea brewed from pure worm castings. It is probably not wise to use this liquid on plants (ref. 3).

Vermicomposting--one more way that Extension Master Gardeners can be master recyclers.

Please note: The NSVMGA does not endorse specific products, photos or sites mentioned in this article.

References

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2. *How to make a custom worm bin*. Growing a Greener World. Retrieved February 28, 2020 from <http://growinggreenerworld.com/how-to-make>
3. Slocum, Kelly. *Compost teas: brewing a sweet blend*. Casting4growth. Retrieved February 28, 2020 from <http://www.casting4growth.com/research.html>
4. *Vermicompost: a living soil amendment*. (2010). Cornell University. Retrieved from <http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/vermicompost.htm>

Spring Tips: Proper Hand Tool Care and Practices Elaine Specht

Ideally, tools should receive some final maintenance before they are put away for that last time in fall. Many of us, however, fall short of the ideal, and instead need to show our tools some tender loving care when we resume our gardening tasks in the spring. Here are a few maintenance tasks that will help ensure your tools are ready to serve your gardening needs. They're also good habits to keep up throughout the gardening season.

- 1) Wash tools with water. Use a wire brush to loosen soil if necessary. Use dish soap and a nylon scrubber to remove sap from pruning blades.
- 2) Sharpen blades of shovels after each use and pruning tools when cuts become difficult.
- 3) Lubricate blades and moving parts with oil and wipe off any excess with a cloth. Vegetable, canola, lubricating (such as "WD-40"), and honing oils are all options. Do not let the oil run or collect.
- 4) Lightly sand wooden handles and treat them with linseed oil.
- 5) To avoid spreading plant disease while pruning, disinfect tools when going from plant to plant. "Lysol," "Listerine," and rubbing alcohol are good disinfectants to use. "Lysol" is very effective when used undiluted or diluted (up to 1 part per 10 parts of water). "Listerine" must be used full-strength. Use rubbing alcohol of 70 percent, 91 percent, or 99 percent concentration. Don't use "Pine Sol" or household bleach because tests show they are highly corrosive to metal.



photo by Elaine Specht

To learn more about hand tool care and pruning basics:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/BSE/BSE-51/BSE-51NP-PDF.pdf

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-455/430-455_pdf.pdf

published by Virginia Cooperative Extension

Master Composter Training in West Virginia Press Release

The Berkeley County Solid Waste Authority (BCSWA), with support from Apple Valley Waste and the Tabb and Son Compost Facility is hosting a popular three-day training class to assist residents, organizations and businesses in becoming a backyard composter. Participants will learn how to effectively compost kitchen and yard waste in the backyard. This practice reduces landfilling and produces a soil amendment that reduces herbicide and pesticide levels in local watersheds.

The Master Composter class will include both classroom and hands-on instruction. The class will meet from 6 pm to 9 pm on June 4 and June 5; and from 8:30 am to 5 pm on Saturday, June 6. The location is at the Kearneysville Tree, Fruit Research and Education Center at 67 Apple Harvest Lane, Kearneysville, WV, 25430.

The cost for the training is \$40.00. This fee includes the three-day training, Tabb Composting Facility tour, the Rodale Book on Composting, a Reotemp Thermometer and a lunch on Saturday, June 6. West Virginia, Maryland and Virginia residents are welcome to participate. Class size is limited to 25 students and reservations are on a first-come, first-serve basis. Registration forms and additional information can be obtained by contacting the BCSWA at (304) 267-9370 or email: office@berkeleycountyrecycling.com.

At this time, registrations are being accepted. Should any person be unable to attend or the event is canceled, a refund will be issued.

Off the Beaten Path: Edith J. Carrier Arboretum Elaine Specht

Less than a mile and yet a world away from Interstate-81 is an urban oasis worth visiting. The Edith J. Carrier Arboretum is part of the James Madison University campus in Harrisonburg. The Arboretum is named for the wife of a former JMU President. Edith J. Carrier served the university community alongside her husband throughout the 70s, 80s, and most of the 90s, the entire time without pay.

Spring is a great time to visit the Arboretum. April features the Daffodil Garden with many daffodil varieties in



photo by Elaine Specht

groupings that burst through the woodland floor in a naturalized setting. There also are a wide variety of native wildflowers and spring ephemerals, such as Trout Lily (*Erythronium americanum*), several varieties of Trillium, and Dwarf Larkspur (*Delphinium tri-corne*). In May, Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Fringe Tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*), Sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*), and Sweetbay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) are among the native trees in bloom. Hydrangeas begin their show in June. Well-maintained walking paths wind throughout the Arboretum with several bridges spanning streams and a pond.

With the COVID-19 outbreak, the grounds remain open and free to the public from dawn to dusk, but the restrooms are closed and all events are canceled until further notice. There are two small areas with free parking for visitors. Visit the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum website: <https://www.jmu.edu/arboretum/> for the schedule of programs and to see month-by-month pictures of what is in bloom. Submit your own picture through Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/EJCArboretumJMU> to enter their monthly photo contest.

Ten Misconceptions of Tree Care Lesley Mack (Adapted from Joe Lehen, VA Dept of Forestry)

1) **Tree roots don't breathe – not true!** Tree roots near the surface of the soil absorb oxygen through the pore spaces of the soil. This is why soil compaction or addition of too much soil around trees often can lead to tree health problems or death.

2) **More mulch is always better – not true!** Deep mulch against the trunk of a tree (volcanoes) can lead to bark-rot and the eventual death of the tree. Three to four inches of mulch in a saucer-like circle (deepest on the outside, thinnest near the trunk of the tree) is preferred.

3) **All trees have "carrot-like" tap roots – not really!** As a general rule-of-thumb, 80% of a tree's roots are in the top 12 inches of the soil. Very few trees have a deep tap root.

4) **The more I water the tree, the better it will grow – not really!** Newly planted trees should get one inch of water (rain or irrigation) per week. Young trees need consistent supplies of water to become established, but you can actually "drown" trees and cause root rot, especially in heavy clay soils.

5) **Trees should be topped yearly – not at all!** Topping, or severely pruning a tree, will reduce a tree's lifespan by decades. Topping removes the leaf cover by which the tree makes food for itself. Severe pruning also leads to rot and disease entering the branches and trunk of the tree due to large open wounds that seldom ever heal. Think right tree in the right place, first.

6) **Trees can be kept small – not true!** People often plant large trees in small growing spaces and then

attempt to keep them "small" by pruning or topping. This does not work well as the tree will soon outgrow your pruning efforts. It is always best to choose an appropriately sized tree for the planting space. When selecting a tree, make sure to ask about its mature height and crown spread.

7) **Trees should be staked when planted – not really!** Unless the tree planting site is in a very windy location, staking is not recommended for newly planted trees. The action of the wind blowing the young tree back and forth stimulates root growth and also increases the trunk strength of the tree. Stake trees only when necessary, and then be sure to remove stakes and support wires as soon as the tree becomes established.

8) **Trees make great foundation plantings – not really!** Many trees grow quite tall and wide, and planting them too close to the home can cause damage to the house, electric wires or damage to the tree. Any tree needs to have adequate growing space and protection from root damage from traffic.

9) **Trees will grow well in sun or shade – not really!** Very few trees grow well in shady places. The vast majority of trees need full or at least partial sunlight in order to grow well. Always ask about the tree's needs when purchasing.

10) **Trees are great to chain the dog to – not at all!** The dog's impact on the roots, bark and trunk of the tree can kill the tree. The dog can compact the soil over the roots. Dog urine, in concentrated areas, can contribute to declining tree health. The chain can girdle the tree's bark which interrupts the tree's ability to absorb water or grow.

Soil Sampling Info and Equipment Available at Shenandoah County Libraries

Press Release

Virginia Cooperative Extension is partnering with libraries in Shenandoah County to make soil fertility analysis better and more accessible to Shenandoah County farmers and homeowners. A soil probe (for collecting soil samples) and soil boxes and forms (for submitting samples) are available at all libraries in the Shenandoah County Library System, as well as the Woodstock Town library. This includes libraries in Fort Valley, Strasburg, Woodstock, Edinburg, Mount Jackson, New Market and Basye/Orkney Springs. The soil probe can be checked out just like a book or video. **Please check with your local library for availability.**

The Virginia Tech Soil Testing Laboratory is providing free soil analysis to fulfill statewide legislative goals of ensuring farmers have ready access to good soil fertility analysis. Homeowner samples cost \$10 per sample.

"A good soil fertility analysis from a reputable laboratory is part of a good foundation to growing successful crops, pastures, lawns or gardens" says Bobby Clark, Senior Extension Agent and Unit Coordinator, in the Shenandoah County Extension Office. "We can use shovels or hand spades to take these samples but it is difficult to get a representative sample. The soil probes we have placed at the county libraries are specifically designed for this purpose. Small farmers and homeowners typically do not have access to these soil probes. Collaborating with libraries throughout the county will make this better for everyone."

Information about how to collect a soil sample can be found at the Virginia Tech Soil Testing Laboratory, <https://www.soiltest.vt.edu/>. Additionally, Extension Master Gardener Volunteers can help answer homeowner questions about how to collect samples and can assist Extension Agents with interpreting results for home lawns and gardens. Master Gardeners can be reached by calling (540) 459-6140 or by e-mail via greenhelpline@gmail.com. Farmers, whether big or small, can reach Extension Agents by calling (540) 459-6140 or by e-mailing Bobby Clark at raclark@vt.edu.

Good fertility analysis is also important for water quality protection. This applies to both home lawns/gardens and farmland. "We (Extension Agents) often see examples where homeowners accidentally apply double or triple the recommended rate of fertilizer. A double rate of fertilizer on one acre of home lawn might only cost \$10 which is not a huge financial burden to many people. However, that double application across 100 lawns can collectively cause noteworthy negative impacts to water quality. Proper fertilization of farmland is both economically important and environmentally important. Farmers do not want to under apply fertilizer because yield suffers. If a farmer accidentally spends an additional \$10 per acre the cost becomes significant when it is done across 25 or 100 acres.

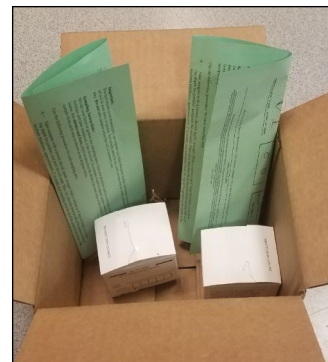
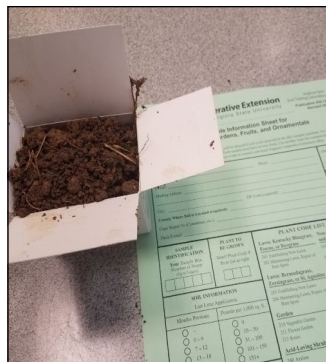


photos courtesy of VA Cooperative Extension

left: The soil probe is filled with soil from a lawn.

center: A soil box is filled with soil.

right: Two samples and forms are ready to be mailed to VA Tech.



Extension Master Gardeners in the Community

Frederick County Mary Mitchell Turner

Like other Extension Master Gardener projects, Frederick County programs have come to a virtual standstill this spring. Still, by practicing social distancing, veteran volunteers Mary Romanowski, Mary Turner and Bob Gail took advantage of fall prepped beds at Timbrook Community Park to plant two veggie plots and clean up the pollinator plot.

Veggies including leeks, red and white cabbage, Brussels sprouts and broccoli were donated by Lowe's Home Improvements and Weber's Nursery. Produce from the garden, tended and harvested by EMGs, will be donated to Highland Food Pantry. In the pollinator garden, *Thermopsis cardinana* was in full bloom, a treat for early insects.
(top photo)



Bob Gail and Mary Romanowski practice the CDC's social distancing recommendations.

photos by Mary Mitchell Turner

Clarke County Ginny Smith

As most of you know Ann Levi has accepted the position of Vice President. I will fill in as the Clarke Coordinator until the end of the year.

Currently we have two projects: the Clarke County Fair and Xeriscape Garden at Chet Hobert Park. Cathy Dickey is the project leader for the fair and Ginny Smith is leader for the garden. Please let me know if you have a project to add.

We have several new members this year. I would like to schedule a meet and greet meeting when it is appropriate. In the meantime, if you have questions please call (540) 955-3019 or email me at va_dare@msn.com.

Shenandoah County Kathy Doyle

Volunteer activities at Corhaven Graveyard include getting the native bee house ready for monitoring, cleaning up the monarch way station, and working on a stone path around the information kiosk, which will have creeping thyme between the stones. Weeds don't stop for pandemics, so we're trying to keep on top of those. The Graveyard is open to visitors from dawn to dusk, seven days a week.

Shenandoah County Extension Master Gardeners are collaborating with the Friends of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River in their development of the Seven Bends State Park's children's outdoor education area. EMGs will assist in planning a hands-on sensory garden that will be incorporated into the physical design and in the educational outreach program. The park is a few miles from downtown Woodstock and is currently open to hikers. Development as a more accessible site is ongoing.

The Children's Garden in Strasburg has been cleaned up and prepared for spring planting in the Sensory and Pollinator Areas. It will be open to families who come to the park. Although workshops are currently on hold, the garden is still available for walk throughs. Now is the time to begin posting some signage explaining things about the different plants. The water wall will be refurbished and, when it's warm enough, different varieties of sunflowers will be planted in the straw bale meeting area. As the season progresses, this makes a somewhat shaded area for kids to enjoy. The gourd tunnel may transform into a green bean tunnel this year.

Hit or Miss Pet Friendly Gardening Jennifer Mathias

How to have a peaceful union between plants and pets:

- Train Your Dog (or Cat) - It is necessary to train your dog in basic obedience at the very least. Find the training method that works for you and your pet. If your pooch knows the basic commands of sit, stay, and come, you will have a head start in achieving that peaceful union of flora and fauna.
- Make Use of Barriers - Build a raised wall. This is more ambitious but works great especially if you have slope or hill. Use edging materials. Plastic edging and sturdy wrought iron are options. Bricks and 4x4 beams can be used to build a barrier as high as needed to hinder your specific breed. Sturdy shrubs can make good blockades. Think of boxwoods, hollies, yews, and junipers.
- Utilize Containers and Raised Beds - Container gardening is awesome for those who have small yards, balconies, and patios. If the containers are not too large, you can perch them on a table to help keep curious noses out of the soil. We know that raised garden beds are great for growing because of better soil control and less weeding, but it will also help Fido from taking a bite of your vegetables.
- Put up a Fence - Whether or not your animals are behaved, sometimes you may want a place that is solely for your planting pleasure. The fenced area can be near your house for your enjoyment or at a distance. If the fence will be near your house where family and pets congregate, you can always use transparent material, such as post and wire.
- Provide Dog Interest - in tandem with your training skills
 - Give your critters a path. Cats and dogs love to meander and sniff the air and surrounding objects. Winding pathways in your garden will slow your pets down, provide them with interest and a way to use their instincts; you may even discover that barriers are not needed.
 - Put in a water feature. A small fountain can provide your pets with fresh water and a place to bat their paws. Dogs perspire through the pads of their feet, so a small water area would help them to cool off in summer heat.
 - Furnish a digging area. Choose an area of your yard entirely dedicated to tunneling. You can use a sandbox or create a digging spot from scratch. Give your pet their favorite toys and redirect their energy toward what they were born to do. Always praise your dog for being in this burrowing arena.



photo by
Stacey Morgan Smith

**Call Poison Control
IMMEDIATELY when you
suspect or know that
your pet has eaten
something that is toxic
or
potentially toxic.**

ASPCA Poison Control -
888-426-4435 or call your
local area poison control
center.

Any plant can cause GI upset in your pets and many are toxic.

See the link below from the University of California.

References

https://ucanr.edu/sites/poisonous_safe_plants/Plant_Toxicity_Levels_523/

<https://www.designscapescolorado.com/news/pet-friendly-tips-for-water-features>

Creating an Oasis with a Fringe Tree Lesley Mack

What would you need in your Five-Star Oasis? Definitely the basic necessities – water, shelter and food.

If you are creating a garden, you are also creating an oasis for birds, insects and wildlife. What would make their garden a Five-Star Oasis? A good water source will draw all manner of birds, butterflies and critters. The motion and sound of dripping water is irresistible to many birds.

Shelters can include: dense shrubs, nesting boxes, secluded trees for perching, native plants, even old tree snags. All of which benefit a large variety of inhabitants to your garden.

For a food source; of course, you can put up a bird feeder or plant flowers, but also consider planting some fruit-bearing native trees or shrubs. Plants that hold their fruits through the months provide vital food sources for birds, insects and wildlife.

The southeastern native Fringe Tree, *Oleaceae Chionanthus virginicus* (hardy to USDA Zone 3; 12-25 feet tall), is a splendid Five-Star Oasis feature in any season. The Fringe Tree's very showy, fragrant flowers hang in long, silky panicles that give the tree its other common name, 'old man's beard'. The pollinated flowers turn into dangling, dark blue oblong drupes, $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, which are sought out by many birds and insects as they ripen in late summer.

The long green, tapered foliage, somewhat thickened, appears before the flowers and continues to expand as the flowers are pollinated in mid to late spring. The foliage remains handsome well into autumn, slowly turning clear gold as cold weather arrives.

Fringe Trees have a gray-brown single or multi-stemmed trunk. The natural shape is usually multi-stemmed with an overall open and airy crown.

Given good garden soil, adequate supplemental water in hot or dry summers, and a site offering plenty of light and free passage of air, Fringe Trees will add to your Five-Star Oasis.



photos by Lesley Mack at
Birdsong Pleasure Garden

[http://
www.birdsongpleasuregarden.info/](http://www.birdsongpleasuregarden.info/)

For more information on this tree:

<http://dendro.cnre.vt.edu/dendrology/syllabus/factsheet.cfm?ID=27>

Volunteer Coordinator's Report Stacey Morgan Smith

Spring isn't going as planned for our EMG program volunteers or the world at large. Fortunately, even from our homes, we're able to support each other and our communities!

One way you can still reach Extension Master Gardener volunteers is through our **county help desks**. Get each county's information at <http://nsvmgga.org/more/contact/>. Our volunteers can help you as you plan a new garden, revive an old garden, or deal with insect/disease issues.

Speaking of gardens, if you're thinking of **putting in a vegetable garden**, whether it's new or established, visit Virginia Cooperative Extension's vegetable gardening resource page at <https://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/home-vegetables.html>. It includes useful research-based home-horticulture publications.

This is also the time of year to **add a new pollinator garden** or habitat garden. VCE's *For the Birds, Butterflies & Hummingbirds: Creating Inviting Habitats* is a wonderful guide to help. View or download it at <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/handle/10919/70651>. Then register your garden with our habitat program at <http://nsvmgga.org/programs/habitat-gardens/>.



When life returns to some semblance of normal, our volunteers will again be out and about at county fairs, farmers markets, and other community events. We miss working with our communities face-to-face, and we look forward to seeing you all again!

Lilium: Perilous to Cats Jennifer Mathias

Nearly all plants in the family *Liliaceae* are toxic to cats! All parts of a *Lilium* can be deadly to cats, even if only a small amount is ingested. Renal (kidney) failure happens quickly and death can happen within 72 hours or less.



photo by Stacey Morgan Smith

Do not wait for symptoms to occur, but call ASPCA animal poison control at 888-426-4435 and contact your local veterinarian if you know or suspect that your cat has eaten any portion of the *Lilium*. Some lilies can be toxic to dogs, and while some, such as the Easter Lily, *Lilium longiflorum*, is non-toxic to canines, the plant can still cause GI upset.

Reference

<https://vet.osu.edu/vmc/about-us/news/lilies-no-friend-cats>

Thanks to our MG Sponsors

Lynn Hoffmann

It's cold or rainy and you can't get outside comfortably to work in your garden, what are you going to do? There are so many projects on your personal to-do lists, but you just don't want to tackle one! My idea for a mini-outing is to go to a greenhouse at one of the local nurseries. The aroma of plants and soil, that greenhouse smell, and the sight of beautiful flowers and plants is uplifting. So, if you venture out, consider thanking our wonderful local program sponsors. (If they are open, please adhere to social distancing guidelines.)

Local businesses often support our projects and we thank all of them for helping. Every year **Ft. Valley Nursery** donates a door prize for the Symposium. **Weber's Nursery** helps with our plant needs for the Junior Master Gardener kids programs. **Southern States** is always a help with things that we need at the C-Cap garden. **Lowe's** and **Frogale's Lumber** have donated lumber and materials for our projects and **Martin's Super Markets** have always supported us with gift cards. **Wilkins Shoe Center, The Final Yard** and **Marker Miller Orchards** along with MANY others helped make the 2020 Symposium a success. Our list of supporters gets bigger each year! Thank you!

This year we had a new sponsor for a Symposium door prize. This support came from an organic garden market in my neck of the woods, **Wardensville Garden Market** in Wardensville, West Virginia. They are currently closed, but when open, you can see how everything is grown with row covers, hoop houses and non-spray methods. They are a non-profit working on organic farming; teaching young people about job training, responsibility and commitment to a work ethic.

This time of year always brought lots of events and gatherings that will not be happening. We must be careful of what we do at this time. Sharing our love of gardening is always a good place to start. Remember the adage: "Ten years of hard work landscaping and gardening, can be destroyed in one season of neglect." So keep on gardening and donate your extra produce to the local food bank.

Here's a food bank list for Frederick County:
https://www.facebook.com/highlandfoodpantry/?ref=br_rs

For informational purposes only and does not indicate endorsement.

Wilkins Foundation Grant

Lynn Hoffmann

On March 20, the Extension Master Gardeners and Belle Grove received great news! **Our Wilkins Foundation grant application for a rough terrain vehicle (RTV) was approved.**

The Teaching Garden at Belle Grove has been used by the EMGs since 2002. Most of our volunteers range in age from 55 to 75 years old. Although we love to work in the garden, lugging mulch and weeds just isn't as much fun anymore. We prefer to work smarter, not harder.

Extension Master Gardener Donna Downing suggested we apply for a Wilkins Foundation grant to purchase a RTV with a dump bed. This is like a two-woman wheelbarrow on four-wheel drive that dumps everything from the garden into the compost pile, without walking or shoveling or raking it a second time. It's a mulch mover that can drive to any part of the garden and you don't have to carry bags or push wheelbarrows.

A RTV will be used for GardenFest and other events. We won't need to lug tents.....we'll just put them in the vehicle and drive there. Tables and plants will be easy to transport and Second Hand Rose can load it up and move their items around.

The other wonderful thing is that it solves many of our handicapped patrons' dilemmas. The RTV will be used to move people and plants safely across the street into the parking area.

This news is a great blessing to the Extension Master Gardeners. I hope we will be able to use it soon and the Covid-19 crisis will pass and let us get back to normal.

Thank you Wilkins Foundation and Donna Downing.



Belle Grove Groundskeeper Dennis Campbell receives the Kubota RTV from Winchester Equipment .

photo by Kristen Laise

Plant Profile: Bleeding Heart Joyce Watson

Bleeding heart emerges during the first warm days of spring and remains in bloom for about a month before dying back to the ground by mid-summer. The fleshy 2- to 3-foot tall, ferny leaves are individually divided into segments of three. On the ends of the stems and upper leaf axils, flowering arms are produced from which dangle pink or white heart-shaped blossoms.

The outer pair of inflated petals folds back as the flower opens to reveal a teardrop-shaped structure at the base of the flower that contains the stamens and pistil. The flowers are created by two-spurred petals with a protruding inner petal that creates the “drop of blood” common for bleeding hearts.



A bleeding heart plant in bloom in late March. The pink blossoms dangle like ear-bobs.

photo by Joyce Watson

*“Love is the flower you’ve
got to let grow.”*

John Lennon

Botanical name: *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*

Common name: Bleeding Heart

Plant type: herbaceous perennial

Hardiness Zones: 3-9

Bloom time: spring

Bloom size: 2-3 1/2”

Bloom colors: white, pink

Height/Spread: 24-26”, 18-30”

Site: partial to full shade

Soil: well-draining, moderately moist, neutral to slightly acidic

Characteristics: easy-to-grow, rapid growth rate and moderate spread, deer-resistant

Interesting fact: native to China, Korea and Japan

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How to Keep Cut Flowers Fresh Susan Martin

Susan Martin is an Extension Master Gardener with the Piedmont Master Gardeners in Albemarle County, VA. She is a writer for The Garden Shed. <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/garden-shed/>

Cut flowers need three main ingredients to preserve freshness: 1) **Sugar** to provide nourishment; 2) **Citric acid** to reduce the water's pH level. This allows the water to travel through the stem quickly, preventing wilting and 3) **Antibacterial agent** to keep down the growth of **microflora** (bacteria and microscopic algae and fungi). Plant leaves and stems carry bacteria. As soon as you place cut flowers in a vase, bacteria will begin to feed on the nutrients that are released from the base of the stems. As bacteria multiply, they will completely overgrow the cut portion and clog the stem, making it difficult for the stem to absorb the water and nutrients it needs.

DO HOME PRESERVATIVES WORK?

There are many home-brewed recipes for prolonging the life of cut flowers. Concoctions include ingredients such as vodka, gin, apple cider vinegar, mouthwash, clear soft drinks, aspirin, and copper pennies. Each of these remedies provides sugar, acidity, or antibacterial action. But how much of each ingredient should you use? According to the Chicago Botanic Garden and other sources, a purchased floral preservative remains the best solution for extending flower freshness. The preservative will provide the optimal ingredient combination, as long as you **follow the directions for the amount of water to add**. Most cut flowers are delivered with one small packet, so it is good to keep some floral preservative on hand to use when you change the water. In a pinch, you might just add a couple of drops of bleach to fight bacteria. But a purchased floral preservative is the best option, along with keeping the flowers in cool temperatures.

PRACTICES TO EXTEND FRESHNESS

Several recommendations to preserve cut flowers seem to be broadly accepted. These practices are effective for purchased flowers and for flowers cut fresh from the garden. Cut flowers from the garden in the cool of early morning or evening.

Bring a bucket of warm water so that the cut flowers can be placed immediately into water; most flowers take in warm water more efficiently than cold. (There are exceptions such as bulb flowers and lilacs.)

Use **sharp, clean scissors, pruners, or a knife**; dull instruments might crush the stems and keep water from being absorbed.

Cut at an angle to help increase surface area for water absorption and prevent the stems from sitting flush on the bottom of the container.

Once you take the flowers inside, **re-cut the stems about 1" at an angle under water**. Recut the stems of purchased flowers, as well. Cutting stems under

water reduces the chances of air bubbles forming in the stems, which may interfere with the uptake of water.

Make sure the **vase is clean and free of any soap residue**; if in doubt, wash the container in a solution of one part bleach and nine parts water. Rinse thoroughly before adding flowers.

Fill the vase with warm water and **add a commercial preservative** that is specifically formulated for cut flowers; make sure the granules are dissolved.

Gently **remove all lower leaves or thorns** that would otherwise be submerged in water.

Place the vase of flowers in a **cool room** away from vents and drafts; avoid placing flower arrangements on windowsills and other areas with full sun where flowers can wilt due to overheating.

Do not store flowers and fruit together. Fruits, especially apples, release ethylene gas that shortens flower life.

WATER TEMPERATURE

What water temperature is recommended for keeping cut flowers fresh? Most florists put flowers in water that is between 100-110 degrees, and then place the flowers in a cool area. The idea behind this process is that the warm stems are able to soak up a lot of water while the cool air up top keeps the blooms fresh.

WILTING

Plants continually lose water through their stems, leaves, and flowers. Wilting occurs when the flowers do not take in water as fast as it is used or lost. If you receive a batch of flowers that look somewhat wilted, re-cut the stems, place the flowers in warm water, and then refrigerate for a couple of hours. After that, they should be ready for some room-temperature tap water.

SPECIAL TREATMENTS

Bulb flowers such as hyacinths, iris, daffodils, and tulips have soft stems and should be cut where the green on the stem starts—just above the **white bulb**. Place the **flowers in cold water**. Since most bulbs bloom when the air and ground are still at low temperatures, they do better in a vase of cold water.

Roses: When cutting roses from the garden, water rose bushes well the night before; then cut roses early in the day before it gets too warm. Roses will last longer if cut just beyond the bud stage with the petals just starting to unfurl. Promptly put the cut roses in a bucket of luke-warm water. Then, re-cut the rose stems **under the water** to eliminate air bubbles. Next, condition roses by letting them drink up the warm water in a cool, dark room for about an hour. Make sure that most of the stem is under water, but don't let the bloom get wet. Then, refrigerate at about 38 degrees for at least two hours or until ready to use.

If healthy cut roses suddenly develop drooping heads, it may be due to air bubbles trapped in their stems. Wilted roses may be revived by re-cutting the stem at an angle under water. Then submerge the entire rose in warm water by laying it in a sink or bathtub. After 20-60 minutes, the rose should have absorbed enough water to reinvigorate it. When the flower head hardens to a straightened position, the rose may be placed back in the vase.

photo by
Susan Martin



Peonies: Peony blooms are often frequented by ants drawn to the sweet peony nectar. Dunk the blossom end of the stem in cool, clean water for 30 seconds to rid the flower of the ants before bringing it into the house. When cutting peonies, **leave at least two sets of leaves on the stem** so that the plant can continue to thrive. For best vase life, **select buds that have just begun to open** and feel similar to a marshmallow. If you have too many peonies flowering at once, **cut stems can be stored in the refrigerator for two to three weeks, but do not store the stems with fruit.** The ethylene gas emitted by ripening fruit will cause petals to drop, and buds to wilt and fail to open. Refrigerate the peonies upright in water (sometimes tricky to accomplish). The other method is to cut the stems and place them lying down in a plastic bag with a dry paper towel to absorb moisture.

Lilacs: Bring a bucket of fresh, **cool** water as you cut blooms. Pick flowers in the cool of the morning or evening. Lilacs open very little after harvest, so choose stems that have at least three-quarters of the flowers open. **Remove all of the leaves** so that the plant isn't putting its energy into keeping the leaves hydrated. Place stems in the water. Leave the bucket in a cool, dark place and **allow the flowers to take up water for at least an hour.** Using heavy clippers, **re-cut the stem ends, then slice vertically up the stem 1-2 inches.** Grasp one side of the sliced stem and twist backward. Immediately place the cut stems back into the bucket of water. Allow the stems to take up more water in a cool, dark place for another 1-2 hours. The lilacs will then be ready for arranging, and will last 3-4 days.

BEST FLOWERS FOR CUTTING

When considering what flowers to purchase or to grow in our own cutting gardens, it's helpful to consider what works in the trade. The vast majority of cut flowers are imported from overseas. These flowers ship well and make up the bulk of the flowers used in floral arrangements. They include roses, carnations, Gerbera

daisies, garden mums, and orchids. Most of the flowers that local growers focus on are those that do not ship well, or have shorter postharvest vase-lives. These flowers have come to be termed "specialty cut flowers." Examples of specialty flowers include sunflowers, zinnia, lisianthus, dahlia, ageratum, and peonies, to name but a few on this long list. See the [list of common types of cut flowers](#) grown for sale in the United States.

Also see the University of Illinois Extension's seasonal recommendations for [Top Perennials for a Cut Flower Garden](#).

For more ideas, see Penn State Extension's suggestions for [Creating a Cutting Garden](#).

HOW TO CARE FOR FLORAL ARRANGEMENTS

If your flowers came in a basket or other container with *foam*, add fresh water every day. Make sure the stems are seated firmly in the foam (heavier flowers such as hydrangeas sometimes wiggle loose). Immediately remove dead or wilting leaves and stems to prevent bacteria build-up.

SUMMARY

Cut flowers add beauty to our lives, communicate our feelings, and perk up a gray day or a blue mood! Basic steps to preserve freshness are: re-cut the stems at an angle; place in warm water in a clean vase; add purchased flower preservative; and keep in a cool temperature out of direct sunlight. Repeat these steps after a few days or if you see any green build-up in the vase. Enjoy your fresh flowers!

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From the Editor: Beautiful Blue Flowers

Blue, which has always been my favorite color, brings a sense of peace and tranquility to the human spirit. The 2020 "Color of the Year" from Pantone® is Classic Blue, #19-4052, a timeless and enduring blue hue. Consider planting these plants that produce blue flowers in your garden this year.

Balloon flower - Before blooming, the buds puff up like a bunch of balloons and open up into little star-shaped blooms. It's a fun perennial and easy to grow.



Blue Star, a native perennial, produces clusters of star-shaped flowers in late spring. They are heat, drought, deer and rabbit-resistant and grow in full sun or partial shade. This photo that I took in May of 2019 is Blue Star 'Grande' (*Amsonia tabernaemontana* var. *salicifolia*.)

Cornflower, is also known as Bachelor's Button. This annual flower is comprised of 10 trumpet-like petals. It often grew as a weed in cornfields, which is how it got its name.

Delphinium - These beautiful popular wildflowers stand tall and will need some support.

Forget Me Nots produce small and delicate flowers. The plant symbolizes true love and remembrance

Grape Hyacinths flower in the early spring from bulbs and produce small bundles of blue blossoms. They are easy to grow, attract honey and bumble bees, and are deer-resistant.

Hydrangea - Hydrangea species that produces big ball-like sky blue flowers are magnificent. They need to be protected though as the deer do love them.

Iris - These stately rhizomes are available in many colors, but blue irises are symbolic of hope and faith.

Lily of the Nile - These warm weather plants grown from rhizomes have long strappy stems that produce gorgeous clusters of blue tubular flowers. There is a new selection called "Little Galaxy" with hardiness to Zone 6. It will die back to the ground in winter here, but will bounce back in the spring. *Source: Taunton's Fine Gardening, January/February 2020*

Lupine also comes in a wide array of colors, blue being one of them, and appears similar to sweet peas with floral spikes that emerge from a tall green stem. They require full sun.