

NORTHERN SHENANDOAH VALLEY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION NEWS

UPCOMING MONTHLY MEETING

- **Sunday, April 17 4-6pm, Kernstown Business Center** Conference Room 100, 125 Prosperity Drive, Winchester, Virginia. Colin Campbell of Iris Hills Farm will talk about "Growth, Culture, and Hybridization of Irises". Colin has grown and hybridized irises for at least six years.

Directions: From the go north on US-11 from VA-37 a half mile and turn right onto Prosperity Drive.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Master Gardener 2016 Class**, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 to 4pm at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit
- **Sunday, April 10, 1pm, Calmes Neck Registry Site Walk.** Kristin Zimet will lead a walk at this VNPS registry site walk along the Shenandoah River. Rich mesic forest and ravines promise a spectacular show of Bluebells, Twinleaf, Blue Cohosh, Columbines, ferns and many other plants. The walk is moderate but expect to climb over downed trees. To register and request more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com. Limit 20 people.
- **Saturday, April 23, 9am-3pm, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy Native Plant Sale.** Nurseries will bring a wide variety of plants for you to select from as well as other items. All of the plants are carefully labelled with growing instructions, and volunteers will be on hand to answer your questions and provide advice. For details check the LWC website at <http://www.loudounwildlife.org/>.
- **Sunday, April 24, 2-4pm, The Barn Series at Belle Grove Plantation: Springtime in the garden, Presented by Lynn Hoffmann and Rodney Dowty (family friendly class*)** Attendees will learn which plants to plant to attract birds and pollinators to their home gardens. Once you know what kind of plants will keep birds coming to your garden you can add a bit of splash to your landscape by adding a birdhouse for wonderful little birds like Wrens, Chickadees, and Bluebirds. This will be a fun, hand-on workshop decorating a hand-made Bluebird, Wren or Chickadee house. We will have a presentation about Bluebirds, Wrens and Chickadees and their nesting requirements. Students will learn how to make a nesting ball; nesting materials will be available to take home. Each participant (or parent/child duo) will receive a locally made bird house; you will see how it was made and how to maintain it over the years. Students will paint and decorate a birdhouse to take home for their own garden. The fee for one class is \$25 to cover the cost of materials and workshops. Register for all seven classes for \$125 per person--two free sessions. Register at www.bellegrove.org/calendar or by calling Belle Grove at (540) 869-2028. **Registration due by April 15. *Sign up with a child age 10 to 15 years old and pay only \$40 for both to attend.**
- **Saturday, April 30, 1-4 pm, Hill and Valley Garden Club Anniversary Party and Small Standard Flower Show, "Celebrating 60 Years with Nature's Art"**, Warehouse Art Gallery, 15 Campbell St. Luray, Va. 22835
- **Wednesday, May 4, 5pm, Trillium Walk.** Virginia Native Plant Society Piedmont Chapter walk in Thompson WMA. Contact piedmontvnps@gmail.com.
- **Saturday & Sunday, May 7 & 8, Wildflower Weekend at Shenandoah National Park** Appreciate the diversity of wildflowers growing in the Blue Ridge. More than 1,300

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species of plants thrive in Shenandoah National Park, a haven for native woodland wildflowers. Choose from among many activities at the Park website.

- **Saturday & Sunday, May 7 & 8, 9am-4:30pm, State Arboretum Garden Fair.** Select vendors with perennials, small trees and fine items for garden and home. Also: children's activities, gardening information, food and much, much more. Directions at www.virginia.edu/Blandy.
- **Sunday, May 15, 1pm, Dickey Ridge Sunday Walk.** See a large population of Yellow Lady's Slippers and other spring flowers in Shenandoah National Park. For more information, email piedmontvnps@gmail.com.
- **Saturday, June 4, 7am-5pm, Garden Fest.** Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners' annual festival at Belle Grove Plantation on US rt. 11 north of Middletown. Educational sessions and plants and other items for sale.

PLANTS FOR GARDEN FEST by Stacey Smith

If your gardens are at all like mine, this recent nice weather has brought everything to life. The forsythia went from buds to full bloom in 48 hours, the daffodils are just starting to peak, and the lilacs are showing their buds.

April is prime time to divide your perennials. While you're dividing, please consider donating some of the divisions to Garden Fest!

Garden Fest, held annually the first Saturday in June, is our opportunity to help publicize our Association. In addition to educational displays, wonderful vendors, engaging speakers, fun children's activities, and other events, we sell Master Gardener grown plants to the public at wonderful prices. The only way we have plants to sell is if we all donate a little time and a few plants.



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On Wednesday, March 30th, Belinda Palmer, Russ Watkins, Sari Carp, Sue Rogers, Susan Finlay, and I joined Paula Brownlee at her home to dig and pot up some of her plants. We dug what was ready, including thornless blackberry, iris, sweet marjoram, clustered bellflower, and a handful of other plants. Because most of the plants were small, they were easy to dig. Though mature, the iris was also easy to dig and divide. All will be lush and beautiful by June!



We have several more potting parties planned this spring, including at least one at Carolyn Wilson's, one at Barb Hallar's, and another at Paula's. If you are interested in helping dig plants OR if you need help digging your own, please let me know.

Oh, and potting parties are not all work! Most parties include a refreshment break, and it's a great time to get to know your fellow Master Gardeners and our wonderful new trainees.

So how many plants do you need to bring to Garden Fest? Some people bring two or three, and a couple people bring two or three hundred, but we need everything in between. Every single plant helps!

As I've learned more about digging and dividing through hands-on work with other Master Gardeners, I've gotten more comfortable with and more inspired to dig in my own yard. That's why we encourage members to join at least one potting party. If you cannot make a party and you have any questions about how or what to dig and how to pot-up or label, please see the recent meeting handouts or email me.

By the way, we supply pots and labels. Your only cost is a little potting mix and your time. To save money, make a simple blend: pick up a bag of cheap potting soil and a bag of good potting mix (one with a built-in fertilizer is best) and mix 50/50. Then mix that with your garden soil. (If you are hosting a potting party, we have a small budget for potting soil.) Thank you to everyone helping with our effort!

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FROM THE PRESIDENT by Susan Garrett

New babies are such fun! (I believe Mark knows something about this. Congratulations, Mark and Courtney, on Jacob's birth on March 11--and congratulations, big sisters, as well!) A day before Jacob, my new (and first!) granddaughter, June Dinh Garrett, otherwise known as Junie or Junebug, was born in Costa Mesa, California. My husband Dan and I went out to California for three weeks to help the new parents. We visit California often, because both our sons and their families live in Southern California, and although I am a born and bred Easterner, I have fallen in love with the landscape and plants of California.

One Sunday on this trip I had a nice discussion with a woman who turned out to be a California Extension Master Gardener. She and I had started discussing the differences in plant care required by various climates. She had moved to Southern California from Washington State, and was bemoaning how much she had to learn about plants in her new home. One of the issues, obviously, is the arid climate, which as many of you know, has been in a multi-year drought. So gardeners here are very conscious of the importance of conserving water.



The sign in my son's front yard was put there when he qualified for tax credits from the town of Costa Mesa by digging up all the grass in his front yard and landscaping with mulch and native California plants. Xeriscaping is becoming a really important part of conserving water, not only in California, but across the world. Water is a key natural resource.

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Virginia's different climate and greater rainfall do not mean we do not need to do our part. Master Gardeners have been in the forefront of this effort: just think of the Clarke County MG's xeriscape demonstration garden in the park in Berryville, which has been in existence for many years. Or think of the VCE "Virginia Healthy Lawns" program to improve water quality.

Clean water will be a world-wide issue for years to come. I'm glad we Master Gardeners are doing our part!

CLARKE COUNTY REPORT by Ginny Smith

Clarke County Project Review Meeting was held March 22nd. Current projects were reviewed and names were assigned to those who volunteered to be project leaders:

- Millwood Community Garden – Mary Flagg
- Home Consultations – All Master Gardeners
- Community Garden Talks – All Master Gardeners
- Clarke County High School – Mary Flagg
- Green line – Cathy Dickey
- Clarke County Fair – Cathy Dickey
- Johnson Williams Middle School gardens – Ginny Smith
- Xeriscape Garden – Suzanne and Ginny

Cathy volunteered to keep the bulletin board updated.

I am stepping down as Clarke County coordinator effective immediately. I have enjoyed the year I have served and will help with the transition when a new coordinator is named.

PAGE COUNTY REPORT by Lesley Mack

The Page County Master Gardeners had a lovely March meeting at Cheryl's home. We made plans for having a Farmers' Market MG table once a month on the third Saturday. Cheryl will head the efforts in providing Page County residents some gardening information or answers to their gardening questions. Everyone else signed up for a day or two to help Cheryl.

We also discussed doing some spring cleanup work around the Chinquapin Oak Tree, getting rid of any of the wayward ivy and privet, and eventually having a dedication of the informative granite bench.

For the kids at Shenandoah Elementary School, we will be pre-potting vegetable seeds for a "Farm to Table" day they are hosting. We will prepare 450 pots for kids, their teachers, and an extra pot for the classroom so everyone will be able to see the same progress the seedlings should be making.

Charlie is planning on working with Chris Riley's middle school 'Plant Club' to teach the kids how to prune the fairly new trees that were planted on the school's property by the Page County Tree Board.

SHENANDOAH COUNTY REPORT by Sharon Bradshaw

Our county planning meeting last month was well attended and project leads were identified. Several projects are already well staffed with volunteer commitments.

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A Green Help Line Workshop was also held last month, with additional leads coming on board. From April through October, we will be on hand at the VCE classroom on the first and third Fridays of the month to address gardening dilemmas.

The two farmers' markets begin for us this month: Strasburg with Belinda Palmer as the lead at Pot Town Organics on King Street and Woodstock with Sharon Bradshaw as the lead at the South Street Barn Market. This year we will promote a 'theme' for each month. April's display will feature starting seeds inside with an open egg carton. Seedlings will be growing from egg shells, egg crate divisions, with newspaper pots and paper towel cardboard sections sitting in the lid of the carton.

Sarah Kohrs chaired a planning meeting in late March for the landscaping of Corhaven Graveyard, the historic slave graveyard that will be open to the public. Her project committee is developing a plant list and planting design for the immediate area around the site. A dedication ceremony will be held at the site at 2 pm on April 30.

Elena Lycas has already surveyed the New Market Teaching Garden to determine the needs of our Rain Garden. Last year's efforts are still in evidence and the garden is in good shape to begin this year's growing season.

COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY COMMITTEE REPORT by Kris Behrends

What draws you to a booth at an event, whether it is GardenFest, a farmer's market, or a craft show? Is it the appearance of the booth that pulls you in? How about the information they have to offer? Do the event participants offer freebies? Do they have a craft for you or your kids to create and take home? Do the people at the booth welcome you in?

Think about it. Our Master Gardeners' booth can really make a statement or it can be just one of the many other booths at the event. I'm pretty sure we want to stand out and make a good impression!

So how do we go about this? Do you have ideas? If so, please e-mail Kris Behrends at dvrchic@shentel.net by April 15. The Publicity committee will be giving a presentation on Setting up a Successful Booth at the May meeting. We welcome your thoughts—what to avoid and/or what to do!

The next event on our busy calendar is the Barn Series at Bell Grove Plantation on Sunday, April 24, 2-4pm. The class, "Springtime in the Garden", costs \$25, and you can register online at www.bellegrove.org/calendar or by calling Belle Grove at (540) 869-2028. This class will be presented by Lynn Hoffmann and Rodney Dowty.

Also, the county help lines are getting ready to help out the public with their gardening questions! The 2016 class is progressing well, and the Jr. MG Homeschool class is also in full swing.

EDITORS CORNER by Richard Stromberg

I spent the first week of March hiking in Big Bend National Park, Texas. Big Bend contrasts drastically to our Shenandoah NP. While Shenandoah is within easy reach of millions of people, Big Bend is a four hour drive from the nearest airport. And the lush deciduous forest of Shenandoah is starkly different from the sparse vegetation of the Big Bend Chihuahuan Desert, even dryer than the Southern California climate Susan Garrett mentioned above.

Several flowers I saw are garden-worthy.

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Right away as I looked down from the balcony at the back of our room in Chisos MountainLodge, I saw purple-flowering members of the pea family and grabbed my camera to run around behind the building. From past trips to the western deserts, it said, "Milkvetch (*Astragalus*)," to me. From the Peterson *Southwestern and Texas Wildflowers* guide I had with me, I determined it was Ground Plum Milkvetch (*Astragalus crassicaarpus*) because of the large seed pods that give it its name. Since *Astragalus* is also known as Locoweed, maybe not a good choice for a garden.



The Park newsletter boasted seventy cactus species—another contrast to back home, where we have only Eastern Prickly-pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) (which is still lying flat on the ground in my yard, not yet awakened from its winter nap). I was able to identify a dozen species. Only two had flowers open this early: Rainbow Cactus (*Echinocereus pectinatus*) and a single Purple Prickly Pear (*Opuntia violaceae*).



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Similarly, while we have only one native Lupine species in Virginia, Sundial Lupine (*Lupinus perrenis*), there are myriads out west. Some stretches of the road in Big Bend were lined with blue Lupines, but they weren't the famous Texas Bluebonnet (*Lupinus subcarnosus*). The Big Bend area has its own, Big Bend Bluebonnet (*Lupinus havardii*).



Walking through a dry wash we came upon a plant on the ground with striking yellow flowers and then saw many others clinging to the rock cliffs above us. It was Yellow Rocknettle aka Stingbush (*Eucnide bartonioides*). The common names indicate we may not want it in our garden.



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Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja*) is always astonishing, and especially in the barren terrain of Big Bend. The one we saw was Mexican Indian Paintbrush (*C. Mexicana*). *Castilleja* does not appear in Virginia. As a semi-parasite, probably not a good garden choice.



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One flower had me baffled for a while. It looked like half-inch, purple mickey-mouse ears atop a naked, three-foot stalk. Finally I realized two more petals were curled beneath the mickey-mouse ears and saw a silique below a flower, so I knew it was Mustard Family (Brassicaceae). Some more research took me to Slimleaf Plains Mustard (*Schoenocrambe linearifolia*).

