



VMGA REPORT

Winter Edition

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A Message from the President

It is hard to believe the Holidays are here. I hope everyone has a wonderful holiday and a very Healthy and Happy New Year.

In case you were unable to come, we had a wonderful meeting in Lexington thanks to a dedicated group of Rockbridge Master Gardeners. During the meeting, we discussed defining what is expected in the VMGA Unit Reports. Answering the President's Question has been very effective and I would like to continue this practice as the basis for Unit reporting. This has been an excellent format for revealing how individual Master Gardener groups are structured, how plant sales and other fund raising activities are carried out, and how project development is handled. The President's Question is attached to the meeting agenda; an answer can either be discussed or sent in by email for inclusion in the minutes. I hope that by obtaining answers throughout the state we will be able to share ideas and news from each unit around the state. Please let me know if your Master Gardener group would like more information on a certain topic and I will be sure to work it into the President's Question.

One of our goals is to focus on the importance of communication with VMGA members. Two special committees have brought some great recommendations to improve communications with members. The special committees have submitted reports to be included in the VMGA report.

Please continue to send copies of newsletters and newsbytes from local papers about your MG group to VP Angela Cingale (vice-president@vmga.net) to be included in the VMGA newsletter. Please be sure to highlight the items of particular interest in your email.

Remember that VMGA.net has a wonderful calendar page which is the page most visitors review during visits to the web site. Be sure events from your unit are listed by contacting Katherine Debnar (k2garden@cox.net or Calendar@vmga.net).

VMGA is starting a catalogue which will include title of presentations (speaker bureau topics) and contacts of Master Gardeners who write. Please send this information to Tom Bolt (pastpresident@vmga.net).

Did you know that the first VMGA meeting was held in Hanover on Feb. 9th twenty-five years ago? The next bi-monthly meeting will be celebrated in Hanover on February 14th 2015. Please be sure to come and celebrate our Silver Anniversary!

Remember VMGA merchandise makes great gifts for the Master Gardeners in your life and these purchases support the VCE MG Coordinator Endowment!

I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and I hope to see you at our Twenty Fifth Anniversary celebration.

Christy

VMGA OFFICERS

President

Christy Brennan, Hanover

Vice President

Angela Cingale, James City County/Williamsburg

Treasurer

Pat Reilly, Prince William

Secretary

Joan Richards, Fairfax/Green Spring



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THE GRAINETHUMB NOOKS AND CRANNIES IN THE GARDEN

By George Graine, Fairfax County Master Gardeners

Nook – A small recess or secluded spot.

Cranny – A small narrow opening; fissure; crevice; chink or crack, as in a wall.

---Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language



The title of this article might cause you to wonder how does the description of an English muffin fit into landscape design? Answer – They both have nooks and crannies, but in quite a different way. Nooks and crannies are another way to think about crevice gardening and these words are sometimes used to describe rock gardening. This article heralds another form of crevice gardening, that is, planting in really tight spaces such as a dry stacked stone wall and gaps between pavers and stepping stones. The concept of right plant-right place is just as valid for a crevice garden as for most other landscape plants. Perhaps this concept is even more critical due to the limitations of available space for the plants. In order for crevice plants to survive and thrive, you need to provide several things that these little beauties require. Excellent drainage is an absolute. This can be readily achieved by using a mixture of sharp sand (not play sand), turkey grit (tiny granite pieces), maybe some permatil a.k.a. vole bloc – (expanded shale), and top soil with just a smidgen of compost. The crevice should be deep enough so that the plant root system has the ability to search out a cooler area. It is important to consider the fact that these restricted planting areas heat up quickly especially during a sunny day and can even stay warm in the evening. The deeper you are able to bury the roots (not the crown) the better off the plant will be able to adapt. In addition to the gardener's mantra of right plant-right place, also take into consideration that crevice plants need to be tough plants for tough times.

Crevice gardening can be a little tricky. Whereas the USDA hardiness zones (average low temperature) are useful they are not absolute. Likewise, the newer heat zone concept indicates how to choose plants that thrive in your region's warmest weather. Again, this is not absolute. The reason for these qualifications is because crevice gardening will probably have to deal with microclimates. This is a situation that most likely differs from the norm of your planted areas. For example, a southern or western wall or paver location will probably be warmer than the rest of your yard. The opposite may be true in a low lying area because the environment could be the home of Jack Frost. Do not become frustrated as it may take a season of "experimentation" to find those plants that can withstand the rigors of out of the ordinary planting circumstances and weather conditions.

We often tend to subscribe to the notion that a weed is a plant that is growing out of place. Surely you have seen opportunist weeds growing in cracks between pavers and flagstone paths. Eliminate these pesky weeds and replace with something that you can enjoy. Many durable low growing and trailing perennials are available at full service garden centers and they are sure to compete for your attention. You can find them under labels such as Stepables, Jeepers Creepers and Treadwell. Plant tags that accompany each plant provide sufficient cultural information as well as noting how much foot traffic can be tolerated. The design possibilities are endless as there are varieties with colorful flowers, colorful leaves and interesting textures that are suitable for stone walls (foot traffic exempted), ground covers, walkways, and the aforementioned rock garden. Consider cascading (trailing) plants for use in stone wall crevices.

Below is a list of visually appealing and varied plants to consider in case the trademarked plants are not available at your local garden center. These suggested plants are not in any particular order but it is important to look for dwarf varieties for most of these plant families. Some of these plants are exceedingly drought tolerant; however, they all need TLC in order to become established.

Nooks and crannies continued on page 3



Nooks and crannies cont.

dianthus succulents gypsophila delosperma woodruff campanula eriogonum
 arabis creeping thyme sedum mondo grass Irish moss(green) Spanish moss (golden)
 euonymus (winter creeper) saxatile (rock loving plants) mini bulbs real moss

For planting in crevices, use a chop stick or something similar like a slim short bamboo stick or dowel. Use this tool to force the soil mixture (noted above) into the crevice (wall or paver). "Soften" the root ball as you gently separate the roots (with your fingers) being careful not to break the roots. Do not let the root ball dry out or let it hang out of the crevice. Keep the plant moist by using a spray bottle of water occasionally until the plant becomes established. Because these plants are not growing in a hospitable environment, you need to be vigilant regarding the plant needs. Give gardening in crevices a try and you will be rewarded with a unique addition to your property.



Permaculture: The Keyhole Garden

By Laura Kerson

Though I'm sure we all want our gardens to be beautiful, its important to design them to be efficient and easy to use too. So often, we think of a vegetable garden as a rectangular plot of land where we place our plants in rows, a path between each row. In this traditional model, we lose about half of the planting area to walking paths. Obviously, making your rows wider and your paths smaller means more planting space. Even better still, if we take that vegetable bed and wrap it around into a horse shoe shape, we can reduce our area for walking to a very small amount.

This horse shoe shaped garden is known as a Keyhole Garden. In addition to being an efficient use of space, keyhole beds have aesthetics going for them as well. As we know, nature rarely follows a straight line and the rounded beds lend themselves to surprise and whimsy in a garden design. They can be multiplied into a mandala-like shape that is both beautiful and spatially efficient.

As if all that wasn't enough to send you out to build a keyhole garden, these beds have many other benefits, too. The raised nature of these gardens makes for less bending over by the gardener and the shorter pathway means less walking for you too! Most of this garden can be reached by standing in one place. The blocks or stones you use to build the walls double as insect hiding places and if you turn your horseshoe so the path faces south, you can trap the warmth of the sun by planting tall things along the back, like sunflowers or tomatoes. The microclimate formed in front of these taller plants is great for tender or heat loving plants. Not yet convinced? They're also easier to water! A single mini-sprinkler placed in the center will drench the whole bed.

The walls of your bed can be built with just about any material that is stackable and will hold the soil. I used leftover pavers, but bricks, stone, or cinderblocks would work too. I've even seen keyhole gardens made by stacking pieces of wood, using sheet metal to form the curve, hammering in pieces of bamboo close together to form a sort of fence, and by stacking repurposed glass bottles. The possibilities are only limited by your creativity.



Safe Food Facts for Community Gardens

Quick Facts...

- Community gardens offer unique opportunities to enjoy the rewards of growing your own food.
- To ensure safety and quality, community gardeners should manage gardens and handle fresh produce properly.
- Following these practical tips can help you enjoy safe garden grown fruits and vegetables.

Microorganisms can be difficult to remove by washing – the most effective way to ensure the safety of fruits and vegetables is through the prevention of contamination. To promote safety from the garden to the table, gardeners can follow these recommended steps when gardening, transporting, serving, preparing, and preserving fresh fruits and vegetables.



At the Garden

Water. Use potable water (equal in quality to tap water) in community gardens and when rinsing fresh produce following harvest. If well water is used, regular maintenance should be performed to prevent contamination of the water from surface runoff or soil penetration. Test well water every one to two years and more frequently when the well is in poor condition. Irrigation practices such as soaker hoses or drip irrigation, which minimize contact between the water and edible parts of plants, reduce the potential for contamination.

Soil Amendments. Manure and other materials must be composted to proper temperatures to kill harmful bacteria. Disease-causing bacteria may survive in un-composted (raw) manure up to a year or longer. Thoroughly wash tools and gloves that have been in contact with manure before using in the garden area. Composting plant materials alone (without manure) will help avoid potential problems with bacteria that cause human disease.

Soil and Plant Treatments. The use of fertilizers, insecticides or weed repellents that may affect other plots is generally prohibited. Most community gardens follow organic production standards and do not allow the use of products not certified as organic.

Animals. To prevent contamination of soil and produce with fecal material, restrict garden access to pets, livestock, and wild animals.

Debris. Limit vegetation surrounding garden areas. Patches of vegetation or debris can serve as gathering places for rodents and other pests. Remove decaying produce from the garden to avoid attracting flies and other insects.

Gloves. Wearing gloves when gardening is recommended; gardening gloves with nylon liners or rubber coatings offer more protection than canvas gloves. Always wash hands after working in the garden, even if gloves are worn. In addition to wearing gloves, gardeners should be up-to-date on tetanus boosters as *Clostridium tetani* bacteria live in the soil and enter the body through breaks in the skin. To reduce risk of exposure to *Toxoplasma gondii*, potentially harmful parasites associated with cat feces, pregnant women should always wear gloves when gardening.



Safe Food Facts cont.

On the Way Home

Harvest Totes. All equipment used in harvesting such as bins, totes, gloves, buckets, and baskets should be made with food grade materials and cleaned routinely with soap and water to prevent microbial contamination.



Transport. Heat can take a toll on freshly harvested greens and other types of produce, causing a decrease in nutrients, quality and safety. Bring a cooler with ice packs for transporting fresh produce home, particularly if you have other stops to make along the way.

At Home

Storage. Most fruits and vegetables store best in the refrigerator at 35 to 40F. Tomatoes and melons can be stored at room temperature until ripe or cut, and then refrigerated. It is recommended not to wash produce before storing. Washed produce may deteriorate faster during storage, especially soft fruits such as strawberries. Before storing produce, separate and discard spoiled fruits or vegetables to prevent the spread of spoilage organisms.

Preparation. Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables just before use. Under running water, rub fruits and vegetables briskly with your hands to remove dirt, insects, and surface microorganisms. If immersing in water, a clean bowl is a better choice than the sink. Produce with a hard rind or firm skin may be scrubbed with a vegetable brush. Fruits and vegetables should not be washed with detergent or bleach solutions. Many types of fresh produce are porous and could absorb these chemicals, changing their safety and taste. **If you plan to sell or share fresh produce that has been grown in the community garden, let users know that it needs to be washed thoroughly before consuming.**

M. Bunning, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition, Extension food safety specialist and assistant professor; M. Newby, CSU student, 3/2010. Colorado State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Colorado counties cooperating. CSU Extension programs are available to all without discrimination. No endorsement of products mentioned is intended nor is criticism implied of products not mentioned.

The National Sustainable Agricultural Information Service has an online database of biorationals (pesticides). To use the pest management data base to obtain information on pests and pesticides, formulation or pesticide trade names simply fill in four drop down menus and click the search button. Here is the link: <https://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/biorationals/index.php>





Coming to You Electronically!

President Christy Brennan has placed importance on communication with members. Seeking improvement in communications with members, the Board identified one issue as the increasing number of members' emails that are not valid – they “bounced.” A second issue is the number of members who have said they require printed and mailed newsletters.

VMGA relies on electronic dissemination as a timely, comprehensive and cost-effective way to reach members. More than our newsletter, *The VMGA Report*, is sent by email. The membership directory, announcements of MG College scholarships, education event registration and bi-monthly meeting details are also sent electronically. Because the newsletters and membership directory run 14 to 16 pages, it would be impossible to print and mail copies and keep dues at the reasonable \$12 annually. It would also be unrealistic to print and copy the other infrequent – but important announcements.

A committee consisting of VMGA officers undertook the task of contacting members whose email addresses had become invalid or who were listed in the membership database as requiring postal delivery. Sixty-three members were contacted by email, phone or letter. In some cases, the member's Unit Rep, agent or coordinator assisted in updating information. The committee found that only four of the 63 did not have email. The reasons for emails bouncing included hand-written email addresses on Membership Forms that were hard to read or the member had not informed VMGA of a new email address.

The committee made several recommendations which were adopted after discussion at the December Board meeting. To minimize errors from hand-written email addresses, VMGA will use all methods to increase the number of members who join or renew electronically. The Membership Form will notify the member that VMGA uses electronic means to distribute newsletters, the directory and other announcements. VMGA will make sure that everyone knows that it is the member's responsibility to update their email address with VMGA. However VMGA will follow up immediately when email addresses seem to have become invalid. The Board will continue to implement these recommendations in the coming weeks.

VMGA will make reasonable attempts when emails to you bounce, but you can do your part:



Email the [Membership Chair](#) with changed email addresses

Make sure you have no blocks on emails from VMGA

Don't let your Inbox get “full”!

Renew online

Thank you!



2015 Eco Savvy Symposium: Evolving Gardens

February 21, 2015

Gardeners quickly learn that no garden is ever finished and that success requires embracing change. Over time, what once was a sunny spot is shaded by the growth of a tree, a favorite plant fails to thrive through a harsh winter, or a collection of plants has matured, resulting in spaces that are out of balance and difficult to maintain. As trees mature, the growing conditions of your garden change. With the growth or loss of the canopy, available light, moisture and space change, requiring new plants and new design.

As our gardens change, so do we. Research shows that gardening and being out in nature are some of the best activities you can do for your health, both physical and mental. But it is hard work and one wrong move can put you in pain for days.

In this year's symposium, our lineup of fabulous speakers will teach you strategies for working with your evolving garden.

- **Thomas Rainer** of Grounded Design will teach strategies for changing your garden to adapt to the challenges of ever-changing landscapes.
- **Paul Westervelt** of Saunders Brothers Nursery will tell us what's new and promising for the shade garden.
- **Mary Stickley-Godinez** of Countryside Nurseries will discuss gardening in the golden years.
- **Tom Mannion** of Thomas Mannion Landscape Design will discuss fresh approaches to planting for sustainability, efficiency, and ease in the garden.

Registration details and more information can be found at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/greenspring/gsg-symposium.htm>

Wanted: Articles that are current and pertinent to the sustainability of our gardens and community projects. Let's share our successes, learning experiences, or opportunities for learning with the membership. Please remember to send your unit report or newsletter to Angela Cingale, VMGA VP at arcingale@cox.net or Jan Worthy at jancwva52@gmail.com. We'd like to make the VMGA newsletter as interesting, informative and current as possible. Get your computer fired up and send us an article and knock our trowels off!!!! Thank you.





Virginia Tech Plant Clinic Disease Update December 2014

At this time of year after leaves have fallen, black galls or “knots” may be evident on the branches of plum or cherry trees. These galls are covered with the fungal fruiting structures of a common pathogen that infects many *Prunus* species, but is most common on cherry and plum trees. This disease is aptly called “black knot”. In the first year after infection, galls are greenish and develop slowly and may not be very noticeable, but during the following growing season they enlarge dramatically and turn black as fungal fruiting bodies form on the surface.

Galls expand lengthwise annually and can expand to about a foot in length over time. The fruiting bodies release spores for new infections in the spring, so galled branches should be pruned out 4” below the galls in the winter or as soon as they are noticed. Pruned branches should be buried, burned or removed from the location. Severely galled branches can result in branch loss and, when numerous, eventually kill the tree. Preventative fungicides sprays to protect new growth in the spring can help control this disease, but only if pruning is also practiced. Note that fungicide products labeled for control of this disease on ornamental trees differ from those labeled for use on fruit-producing trees and be careful to follow label directions.

Wild cherry and plum are very susceptible to black knot and often serve as an inoculum source for fruit-producing or ornamental plum or cherry trees growing near wooded areas. When planting plum trees, select black knot-resistant varieties when possible. No cherry trees with reliable resistance to the disease are available. If you have plum or cherry trees and haven’t taken a good look at them since the leaves have dropped, now is a good time to check carefully for the presence of galls and prune any galled branches.



Its never to early to plan ahead. The 28th annual Master Gardener College featuring Tree Steward training will be held June 24-28, 2015. For more information go to <http://blogs.lt.vt.edu/mastergardener/current-master-gardeners/mg-college/faq-2/>

Scholarships are available. Talk to your unit representative. Also if you received a milestone award in 2014, you may be eligible for a discount on the 2015 Master Gardener College registration fee.



Permaculture: Hugelkultur

By Laura Kerson

One of the goals of permaculture is to create a closed system, with no waste products, just like we see in nature. Forests don't produce things that they don't need and use. When you prune woody plants or when tree limbs come down in storms, what do you do with all that material? You could put it in your compost pile, but it will take a lot longer to break down than your food scraps and lawn clippings. One solution is to build a Hugelkultur or "mound culture" bed.

The process of building this super-charged raised bed is very straightforward. Pile up debris ranging in size from whole trees to small branches and twigs. The recommended size is a 3 foot by 6 foot plot of land, stacked 3-6 feet tall. However, these piles can really be as large or small as you wish or have space for. Place the largest materials on the bottom and work your way up to the smaller pieces. (It is best to avoid locust, walnut, cedars and any other trees that are slow to break down or contain tannins.) Water the bed thoroughly at this step. You can then plug the holes and open spaces with clumps of sod, kitchen scraps, fallen leaves, and any other natural debris you have laying around your site. After your pile is made, cover the entire thing with 1-2 inches of top soil so that none of the woody debris is showing. To hold the soil in place, cover with some mulching material like straw, pine needles, or wood chips.



If the woody material used was freshly cut, the nitrogen in the pile will be bound up for the first year or so and you should plant some sort of cover crop the first season. But again, this process is forgiving and flexible so you can go ahead and plant it right away or wait a season to plant anything at all. Once the logs start to break down, the nitrogen will begin to release into the mound.

As with all things in the Permaculture world, there are many benefits to building a Hugelkultur mound. The woody materials in the pile soak up massive amounts of water to help keep your raised bed moist. Also, all your soil nutrients will break down and release in place so your bed will feed itself for years to come without any effort on your part – no carting compost around your property and no need to use fertilizers. The raised nature of the bed keeps you from having to bend over and the mound creates microclimates depending on how you face it on your site. Best of all, you can clean up your yard in style and not let any of that material go to waste!

In addition to the traditional Hugelkultur, there are many adaptations you can make depending on your site. For example, you can dig a pit first, and bury the logs in the pit. Digging the hole first provides you with the top soil you need to re-cover the pile at the end and it increases the water holding capacity for the mound. You can also place the Hugelkultur on a slope and it will slow the path of water down the hill and act as a swale. The possibilities are endless!



What to do this Month: January



- Test your garden soil for its pH levels. Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for a soil kit. Then, apply lime, sulfur, and fertilizer according to the soil-test results.
- Spread manure or compost over the garden and plow it under if you did not do so in the fall.
- Plant hardy vegetables and other cool-season crops, such as lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, beets, carrots, radishes, turnips, spinach, peas, and cauliflower. Start seeds of warm-season vegetables indoors.
- Make successive plantings of vegetables so you have a continuous harvest through the growing season.
- Get plant beds or seed boxes ready for growing plants such as tomato, pepper, and eggplant. Have beds ready for planting in early February.
- Deadhead flowers to encourage new blooms.
- Refrigerated bulbs should now be planted in prepared beds. Provide a layer of mulch for protection from cold temperatures.
- Plant cool-season annuals in the garden beds, such as carnations, pansies, petunias, and snapdragons.
- You can start seeds of warm-season flowers now to have transplants ready for spring.
- Plant any trees and shrubs now. Water until established.
- Fertilize established fruit trees. Plant dormant fruit trees.
- Prune any damaged or dead branches from your trees and shrubs. Fertilize.
- To control scale on fruit trees, apply horticultural oil while plants are dormant.
- Ensure that your garden is watered if it is getting less than 1 inch of rain per week.
- You can apply dormant oil spray to deciduous fruit trees. Prune dormant fruit trees if needed.
- Use lukewarm water to wash any dust off of your houseplants; check them for any diseases or insects.
- Every month, mow your lawn at recommended heights (St. Augustine and Bahia: 3 to 4 inches; Centipede: 1.5 to 2 inches; Dwarf St. Augustine: 2.5 inches).



EDUCATIONAL CALENDAR



January 20-23, 2015. (Weds-Friday, All Day) "Mid-Atlantic Horticulture Short Course".

Nationally-recognized annual training for professionals in the Green Industries, sponsored by the Virginia Horticultural Foundation. Newport News, VA. Cost varies, best rates through December

21. For more information: <http://www.mahsc.org/>

January 22, 2015. (Thursday, 6:00-7:30) "A Rich Spot of Earth: Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden at Monticello," Peter Hatch, Director of Garden and Grounds at Monticello.

\$20 general public/\$15 Friends of the Garden and Smithfield Patriots. Blacksburg, VA. To

register, contact Stephanie at vtgarden@vt.edu or 540-231-5970.

January 31, 2015. (Monday, 8:30-4:00) "Spring to Green Horticulture Symposium", Danville, VA.

Key Note Speakers: Dr. Bryce Lane, Clare Roberson, Lisa Anderson. Numerous Breakout Sessions.

Registration \$45 by January 19. Details and Registration at

<http://www.danvillemastergardeners.org/conference.html>

February 18, 2015. (Wednesday, 8:00-6:30) "Piedmont Landscape Association Seminar", Charlottesville, VA. Speakers include Julie Moir Messervy, Joan Maloof, and Dave Jacke. Tickets between \$50-\$60. Details and Registration at <http://piedmontlandscape.org/seminar.html>

February 11-13, 2015 (Weds-Thurs-Fri). Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens "Winter Symposium and CVNLA Short Course: The Science and Art of Placemaking", Richmond, VA. Description: How

we bring people and plants together to create more satisfying, ecologically sensitive, and sublimely beautiful environments. Cost: \$70 per day, \$125 for 2-day combo, CVNLA (Friday)

\$75. For more information and registration: www.lewisginter.org.

March 27-29 (Fri-Sun). 2015 WV Master Gardener's Conference, (Pipestem Resort, Pipestem, WV). Key note speakers: Peggy Cornett, and Dr. Bryce Lane. Numerous breakout sessions. For

more information go to: <http://mastergardeners.ext.wvu.edu/calendar>



MORE EDUCATIONAL EVENTS



Paul Gibson's classes on Sustainable Vegetable Gardening

Saturdays, January 24th, February 7th and February 21st at Chinn Library in Woodbridge (13065 Chinn Park Drive)

Part I is January 24th, Part 2 is February 7th, and Part 3 will be on February 21st. Each part will be from 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The snow date for makeup class is March 21st. Share these dates with those you think would be interested in attending. Please reserve your space with the Help Desk at 703-792-7747.

Schedule of Classes

January 24 - Planning your organic vegetable garden & soil preparation

February 7 - Best Practices for organic vegetable gardening

February 21 - Interactive workshop: Applying Best Practices for Part I and II to plan your organic vegetable garden

Annual Pruning Class, Saturday, February 14th at the Saint Benedict Monastery

(9535 Linton Hall Road, Bristow, VA)

Our annual Pruning Class will be on Saturday, February 14th at 1:30 p.m. in the living room of the Monastery. We will start with instruction inside, and then go outside for an actual hands on demonstration of the correct pruning techniques. Please dress for the weather; this usually means layers and long underwear. Please rsvp to the Horticulture Help Desk at 703-792-7747.

Master Gardeners of Prince William Sponsored Bus Trip to the PHILADELPHIA FLOWER SHOW,

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

Our annual bus trip is scheduled for Wednesday, March 4, 2015. Please tell your family and friends, so we can have a full bus and make some money for the Teaching

Garden. Your check for \$85 will hold your place. For more information, contact Leslie at ljp6651@comcast.net.



State Coordinator Endowment Update Progress Report

Hopefully, you thought about VMGA's State Coordinator Endowment as you were making any year-end donations! Your donations make such a difference, as the table of 2014 account balances shows.

State Coordinator Endowment Account Balances - 2014						
	1 Feb	1 April	27 June	5 Aug	2 Oct	2 Dec
Market Value	\$270,530	\$271,439	\$287,986	\$307,776	\$308,842	\$310,023
Cash and Pledge Payments	\$210,817	\$212,319	\$227,016	\$235,514	\$236,114	\$237,815
Outstanding Pledges	\$ 5,075	\$ 5,875	\$ 6,175	\$ 6,275	\$ 5,725	\$ 5,575
Deferred Commitments	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$233,986	\$233,986	\$233,986	\$233,986
Interest Income Account	\$ 14,159	\$ 17,036	\$ 19,931	\$ 19,931	\$ 22,980	\$ 22,980

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs) Development Office provides VMGA's Fund Raising Chair and the team leader for the Endowment fund raising with balances the first of the month of VMGA Board meetings. One thing you might notice in the table is that the "Interest Income Account" remains the same over some of these reports. That is because the interest is calculated and any earnings added to the account on a quarterly basis.

Of note is that the "Cash and Pledge Payments" has increased by \$26,998. Part of that was due to the matching funds challenge posed by VMGA's President last spring, Tom Bolt. The Endowment team of the Fund Raising Committee has set a goal of reaching \$250,000 in cash and pledge payments by the end of Master Gardener College this year.

Reaching one-quarter of a million dollars means much more than a very impressive number. Take a look at the increase in earnings in the interest income account. When cash and pledge payments was at \$210,000, the amount earned was around \$14,000. By increasing the cash and pledge payments by about \$27,000, the interest earnings went up almost \$9,000.

"Deferred Commitments" represents amounts that have been designated in individual's wills. Some of the donors have made commitments for large sums; others for smaller amounts. Large or small, it shows a passion for our program and an appreciation for the work done by the State Coordinator and staff.

"Outstanding Pledges" are also promised funds, mostly from the pledge forms and donors who are paying over a period of time.

Market Value is not as straightforward. When the initial donation was made, the Virginia Tech Foundation took the market value of units and through simple division, determined how many units the initial donation would 'buy.' Think of it like shares of stock. As donations are received, more shares (units) are 'purchased.' Just as the value of shares increases over time, the value of endowment units increases. Sometimes this is quick with larger increases, sometimes slower with smaller increases. Wise investment by The Virginia Tech Foundation have seen that the value grows.

Master Gardeners across the state don't always know the extent to which they benefit from having a State Master Gardener Coordinator. The positions in the State Master Gardener Coordinator's Office enjoy fairly stable funding right now. What's important is to think about all the 'extras' that we have, made possible with extra funds. However, we know that there are lots of other resources and reference materials that would make our Master Gardener jobs so much more effective. That is the vision – to build VMGA's State Coordinator Endowment to where we can have refreshed *Handbooks*, new curricula and new program materials.

If you've decided that it's time to contribute, a form can be found online at www.vmganet.net; click [here](#). If this isn't a good time, you can still contribute by informing new Master Gardeners about the Endowment. And if you did include the State Coordinator Endowment in your year-end giving

– THANK YOU!



VMGA Celebrates 25 Years

It's time for a party! The Virginia Master Gardener Association will celebrate its 25th anniversary at the February 14, 2015 Board meeting in Hanover, VA. It was on February 9, 1990 in the Hanover County Courthouse that 13 Master Gardeners witnessed the birth of VMGA and became its first members. Twenty-five years later, we can revel in our organization's accomplishments towards meeting the original goals of providing unity and funding in support of statewide consumer horticulture programs.

Events are planned for the Board meeting to commemorate the anniversary. All Master Gardeners are invited to meet "celebrity" members. Special treats are planned for attendees. We have a lot to be proud of; it's appropriate to take time to recognize how and why VMGA started, and how far we have come.

The beginnings

The idea for a state Master Gardener association had been raised at the first "Advanced Master Gardener Training" in 1988. The MG program had grown to more than 800 Master Gardeners across the state, creating opportunities that could best be taken advantage of by a formalized, statewide organization. After almost two years of investigation, survey, research and discussion, the meeting held on February 9 saw the election of an interim Board of Directors and 13 attendees immediately joined and paid dues.

Board members were mostly long time Master Gardeners and served on the MG program Advisory Board. They came from every region of Virginia. They are Reggie Vaughan (Hanover), Diane Morris (Virginia Beach), Mayer Littman (Arlington), Cen Waters (Chesterfield), Rita Voke (Norfolk), Hank Haines (Charlottesville), Jim Crute (Henrico), Beryl Lemmon (Prince George), Aileen Bartlett (James City), David Lowry (Lynchburg) and Liz Montgomery (Extension Agent, Arlington).

Concerns from the founders

The initial members spent much time discussing reports from the subcommittees that had been developing proposals for the state organization. Organization structure, membership and finance all received considerable attention. By the end of that first meeting, the By Laws had been discussed line-by-line. Of note were several decisions. Only MGs who had completed training and paid the \$10 annual dues could be active, voting members. A free, one-year "provisional" membership was offered to each MG upon graduation from training.

The relationship among the state association, Extension and the local programs was debated. From the winter issue of the Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter:

"The Members of the State Advisory Board envisage the state association as a vehicle through which interested MGs can address consumer horticulture issues at the state level – not as a tasking body which dictates activities and standards to MGs at the unit level. No provision in the proposed bylaws... is a connection mandated between the state association and local groups of MGs... As far as uniform standards for Master Gardeners are concerned, a state association will perform only an advisory role. This is because the Board felt that Extension, as the agency which created and which administers the Master Gardener Program, bears the final responsibility of establishing standards for the Virginia Master Gardener Program."

Adapted from "History of the Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc. (VMGA), 1988 – 1993" compiled by Karen Sacasky. Available at <http://vmga.net/PDF/History-1988-1993.pdf>.



VMGA Celebrates cont.

Formalities completed

Articles of Incorporation were submitted to the state on March 6, 1990 and a Certificate of Incorporation was issued on March 26, 1990. Signing as incorporators were Aileen Bartlett, James Crute, Hank Haines, Beryl Lemmon, Cen Waters, David McKissack, Mayer Littman, David Lowry, Diane Morris, Reggie Vaughan, Rita Voke and Elizabeth Montgomery. The Horticulture Department at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA was listed as the Registered Office.

The new association was announced in the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter*. MGs were invited to join and to make nominations for officer positions and committee chairs. The first annual meeting would be at MG College in June of 1990 when the following officers were elected: President Reggie Vaughan (Hanover), Vice President Diane Morris (Virginia Beach), Secretary Monty Kier (Hanover) and Treasurer James Crute (Henrico). The association was ready to take on its stated mission: "To foster communication and education among those involved in gardening."

Since then

While some organizational details and programs have changed, VMGA is pretty much the same as established 25 years ago. Many dedicated MG volunteers have carried out the work of the association. When Extension needed assistance, VMGA has provided funds, input and effort. And we look forward to many more years supporting and improving the program for which we have so much passion. Please join us for a celebration of our first 25 years!

Watch for the email announcement of the February Board meeting and 25th Anniversary Celebration, and plan to join us in Hanover!



TIPS FOR Winter Composting

Winter composting takes planning and preparation. Decomposition of waste materials does slow down as the temperature drops, but bacteria, molds and mites all survive and need energy to keep working. It's important that you emptied your compost containers or bins out at the end of the harvest season – this frees up space to start your new winter bins. If you have material left, use it in houseplants or spread it around shrubs. Your new pile should be smaller than the summer pile. Move it into full sunlight. Place straw or hay bales or packed leaf bags around the bins to cut the wind and keep them warmer. In winter, the size of the materials you add makes a big difference: be sure to finely chop veggie trimmings and run leaves through the mower or wood chipper before adding. Start with a new layer of "brown" material (straw left from your bale garden, shredded newspaper, torn pieces of cardboard and mulched, dead leaves) in the bottom; then add "greens" from garden waste and kitchen scraps. Cover again with an insulating layer of "browns." You can also add a dark tarp for extra warmth. Keep the pile moist, but not dripping wet. It's not necessary to turn the pile as frequently as during summer, since frequent turning will allow precious heat to escape. Of course, if we get snow, this also provides a layer of insulation. If you don't want to make frequent trips outside in the cold to the compost pile, you could freeze your kitchen scraps to make soup – or simply put the trimmings aside in large plastic bags to save for spring in the freezer. These large frozen masses will take up empty corners of your freezer, making it run more efficiently.

Thanks to The Southside Master Gardeners Association for these tips.



Retention of Volunteers – A Pervasive Problem

We all know the benefits of retaining volunteers. We want the all the effort and hours put into recruiting, screening and training volunteers to be worthwhile. There is real disappointment when a number of trainees do not complete the Internship to become certified Master Gardeners. Likewise, we wish that volunteers stuck around for longer than their first, or even second, year.

A lot of work has gone into helping agents and coordinators with recruitment and screening techniques. The State Coordinator’s office covers the subject at Leadership Development Training sessions and in the Coordinators’ Manual. About 10 years ago, data was gathered in an attempt to see what could be expected. The ‘normal’ percentage would then help units evaluate their retention efforts. It would also help with staffing numbers – an answer to “How many volunteers do we need to recruit / train?”

VMGA President Christy Brennan would like Unit Reps to report on their unit’s retention rates at the February VMGA meeting. The retention rate is not used as a judgment, it is calculated without regard to reasons why someone didn’t complete the training course and Internship or left so soon after certification. The method is as follows:

1. Select an evaluation date that will be consistent year to year. Perhaps this is the date of the last day of training class or the date of annual recertification training.
2. Gather the data. You’ll need the number of trainees in the training classes for as far back as you wish to go, but try for the last three to five years. You’ll also need old rosters or directories that show the year the MG took their training. Count the number of MGs still active from a training class, and do so for each training class. Record in a spreadsheet.
3. Divide the number still active from the specific class by the number in that class to get the percentage retained.

The data that VMGA gathered 10 years ago is presented, below. The Unit Reps involved in the study acknowledged that there are multiple variables that were not analyzed such as the size of the unit, community and training class and frequency of training classes. The data told us that classes are each unique - if data was plotted on a graph, straight lines would be rare when there were a good number of year’s data. It was apparent that two years after certification, only 40-60% of trainees would still be active.

2003 Comparison of Retention Rates and Class Sizes by Unit

The first number in the cell is the percentage of that class that was still active in 2003. The second number is the number of trainees in that year’s class. Data was gathered initially at VMGA meetings then at MG College.

	Fluvanna	Halifax	Nelson	NoNeck	NoShen	PW	York
2002	--	100% 9	100% 12	100% 19	95%	100% 27	100% 19
2001	100% 5	100% 10	92% 24	86% 14	84%	58% 24	79% 19
2000	42% 19	66% 15	82% 11	--	60%	63% 24	53% 19
1999	22% 23	75% 12	53% 15	80% 10	52%	41% 27	50% 20
1998	--	60% 10	--	--	38%	46% 35	38% 21
1997	--	12% 12	0% 4	73% 11	18%	16% 24	55% 22
1996	--	No class	--	--	44%	No data	38% 21
1995	--	No class	0%/1	20% 10	18%	No data	22% 18
1994	--	No class	--	12.5% 16	--	No data	40% 15

Obviously, this data is very old, and there is much more experience in recruiting and managing Master Gardeners. Please consider looking back at class sizes and old rosters and gathering the data. Bring it to the February 14, 2015 VMGA Board meeting. It will be interesting to look at what kind of retention rates we all can expect! If you have questions or want to submit your data electronically, please write to treasurer@vmga.net.



1. Poor Location

Situating the greenhouse for the best summer sun instead of the best winter sun is a common error. Optimally locate your greenhouse to provide your plants with 6 hours of winter sun.

2. Built Too Small

By the time benches, shelves, grow beds and plants are added , people wish they had built 50% larger than originally planned .

3. Not Enough Cooling in the Summer

Didn't plan for enough venting or shading .

4. No Circulation Fan

A circulation fan is different from an exhaust fan (or solar vent opener) that lets hot air out at the roof level. Your plants and the interior environment also benefit greatly from **constant, gentle air circulation**. It promotes an essential supply of carbon dioxide to leaves, helps prevent disease, and reduces condensation on interior greenhouse walls

5. No Backup Heater/ Not Enough Heat Capacity

Unexpected harsh wind and weather can happen quickly. Even if your greenhouse is insulated and you are just over- wintering cool growing plants, you need to know you have a correctly sized, dependable heater to protect your plants through any cold snaps.



VMGA
A Voice for Virginia Master Gardeners

Deadline for March/April newsletter: February 15, 2015

Please submit any announcements or articles to be included in the next issue to:

Jan Worthy, editor
Central Shenandoah Valley MGA
jancwva52@gmail.com

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA MASTER GARDENERS AND VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Virginia Master Gardeners are volunteer educators who work within their communities to encourage and promote environmentally sound horticulture practices through sustainable landscape management education and training. As an educational program of Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Master Gardeners bring the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth.

Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments. Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative Action employer.



As a reminder, dues that are paid after January 1st of 2015 are good till May 31st 2016. No need to wait till late May to renew. Sending your dues in a few months early will help the Membership Committee in being able to timely process the applications. Renewing members have the option of submitting an online Membership Application <http://vmga.net/VMGAmembershipapplication.php> and paying by either check or PayPal OR downloading an application <http://vmga.net/PDF/VMGA-application-Rev-03-2014.pdf> and mailing it to the Membership Chair. Renewing members submit a Membership Application to ensure current choices for participation and contact information. Life Members are asked to keep VMGA informed of any changes in contact information – email the [Membership Chair](#).

Questions? Contact the [Membership Chair](#)



Submit a nomination for our *Volunteer of the Month* award. **We want to recognize the best volunteers in the state** each month on the VCE public website (maybe more depending on number of nominations received). Nominations can be submitted using this survey. Copy and paste this link to access the Volunteer of the month nomination form.

https://vce.azl.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_0NuDUwkeIMdPlrf

It is easy. Just requires a short write-up and a picture.

Also, make sure you recognize your Unit volunteers as well on your own Unit Website.

You can continually submit throughout the year, but the first selection will be made with the nominations received before February 1.



Like us on Facebook
VCE Master Gardener Program

VMGA Bi-Monthly Board Meeting

When: Saturday, February 14, 2015

Where: Hanover (Southeast)

For more details see vmga.net/meetings.htm

Newsletter Submission Deadline

The deadline for submission of articles and announcements for the March/April 2015 newsletter is February 15, 2015



Calendar of Events

If you wish to have your event published in future newsletters, please send to jancva52@gmail.com