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IN THIS ISSUE

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE	1
UPCOMING EVENTS	2
NEWS FROM ACROSS THE STATE	3
GOLDFINCHES IN YOUR GARDEN	7
STATE MG LIAISON REPORT	8
GRAINE THUMB	10

NEXT BOARD MEETING

10 AM - 2 PM, April 12, 2008,
River Shore Baptist Church,
4501 River Shore Road,
Portsmouth, VA 23703



Things to Share

Cheri Haggerty, VMGA President

- **VT Engage**

At the December meeting, MG Coordinator Dave Close spoke about VT Engage. VT Engage is a website, located at www.engage.vt.edu, provided via Virginia Tech. This is a challenge for students, alumni, friends of VT and anyone connected to the university to volunteer 300,000 hours of service by the end of the spring 2008 semester. This is to honor the victims of the April 16th shooting. The MG program has been invited and is encouraged to join the effort. You would not be volunteering above and beyond what you normally do, just self-reporting it to the VT Engage program as a means of support to the community. Enrollment is pretty simple and they send you a reminder to enter your time. Whatever you turn in monthly to VCE, you would enter at VT Engage. (This does not replace reporting your hours as you normally do.)

- **Brag Boards**

Christy Brennan is the Chair of our committee on establishing criteria for Search for Excellence. (Search for Excellence is our new name for our old standby, Brag Boards.) Brag Boards are a vital part of MG College as it is where we showcase a special or ongoing unit project. Christy reports that this year will be a transition year as we will be setting our Search for Excellence criteria while still accepting traditional Brag Board submissions. At the April meeting, the committee will be reporting in more detail. The Search for Excellence is how a unit wins one of the Brag Board awards. The criteria are being adapted from competitions at the regional and international Master Gardener conferences called Search for Excellence.

There are several benefits to changing to this award system. By focusing on one project rather than the traditional 'shot gun' approach, the Search for Excellence competition allows for a more level playing field between large units and small. More details on one project provides other units with the information they would need to implement the project/program in their unit. Reserve a table through me before June 2. That's it!

Judges from VT/VCE staff will rate the competing Search for Excellence Brag Boards. (Continued on page 2)

UPCOMING EVENTS

13-16 March, Washington Home & Garden Show, Washington Convention Center
<http://www.washingtonhomeandgardenshow.com>

20 March, "Native Plants & Wildlife in the Managed Landscape", State Arboretum of Virginia
<http://www.virginia.edu/blandy>

3 April, "Mulch: Types, Benefits & Pitfalls", State Arboretum of Virginia, 10 AM - 12 PM
<http://www.virginia.edu/blandy>

12-13 April, Camellia Show, National Arboretum
<http://www.usna.usda.gov>

18-20 April, African Violet Show and Sale, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden
<http://www.lewisginter.org/index.php>

19-27 April, Historic Garden Week In Virginia
<http://www.vagardenweek.org>

26 April, Garden Fair Plant Sale, National Arboretum
<http://www.usna.usda.gov>

26 April, 2008 Plants Galore Sale, Williamsburg Community Building
<http://www.claytonvnps.org>

1 May, "Trilliums of the Thompson Wildlife Management Area, Northern Virginia Community College, 9 AM
<http://www.virginia.edu/blandy>

Send VMGA calendar inputs to Kathryn Debnar, k2garden@cox.net.

Things to Share (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

To convince judges, use all the vehicles we have always used - photos, text, samples, newspaper articles, etc. Brag Boards must be able to be displayed on no more than one table (about 2' x 6').

Your unit may present a Brag Board without participating in the Search for Excellence. The main objective of the Brag Night is to share your unit's accomplishments with other MGs around the state. A lot of valuable networking takes place over Brag Boards! Your Brag Board is very welcome, whether or not you enter the competition.

- **Silent Auction at Master Gardener College**

All proceeds from this auction will go towards the State Master Gardener Coordinator Endowment Fund. Lively bidding on enticing items donated by MG Units and by individual Master Gardeners are of the utmost importance to the success of this effort. Please be as generous as possible for this worthwhile endeavor.

Bring your donated items with you to College or arrange for items to be transported with your local Master Gardener office. Include your name on the item, value of the item, and your recommendation for a minimum bid on each item. Below are examples of the wide variety of items that we are looking for at this upscale auction. This list is not meant to limit your donations.

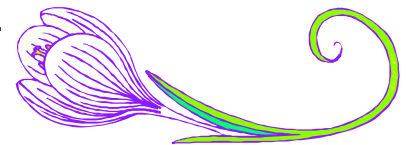
You can help by donating any of the following:

- gardening tools
- home décor
- planters
- straw hats
- bird baths
- plant baskets
- fountains
- bird feeders
- bird houses
- gardening gloves
- garden art
- hand-crafted toys
- culinary items
- new and "gently" used books

Contact Leslie Paulson (ljp6651@comcast.net or 703-330-9441) or Sharon Corbin (sharonandtrish@comcast.net) if you have questions or would like to assist.

- **Unit Representative Openings**

We have a number of MG Units represented throughout the 6 VCE districts but not all MG Units have a VMGA representative. Augusta, Rockingham, the towns of Harrisonburg, Staunton and Charlotte come to mind as those areas we miss hearing from and about. Being a VMGA rep is fairly easy. There is a page at www.vmga.net that defines the responsibilities. If you are interested in representing your unit, please contact me any time. The VMGA is all about Master Gardeners and communication.



February News From Across the State

The full report of the units can be found at <http://www.vmga.net>.

Central

Amherst, Campbell and Lynchburg (Hill City) <http://www.hcmga.com>

January brought our five School Program Coordinators together to plan our 3 school programs for the third and fourth graders. Some of the programs will include the children potting up Spider Plants to take home and planting petunias in their respective school gardens. We will share more on these programs later.

Bedford

During our plant sale this year we are offering six workshops: Hypertufa Pot making, Herb Garden planting, Dahlia growing, Container gardening, Beekeeping, and a demo of composting from Royal Oak Farms. Veteran and intern MGs are working together to order seed and start plantings. We have obtained use of a Green House at the local high school and BMG members are manning the temperatures, watering, humidity, etc. to get plants ready for the BMG's April 26 plant sale.

Halifax (Southside)

Plans are being made for outreach to our community during 2008. We will participate in several 4-H programs. The education committee is working on several "green" ideas plus conducting workshops.



Northeast

Chesterfield <http://www.chesterfield.gov/extension>

An Urban Tree Specialist Training for the MGs began 1/9/08 and entails 6 classroom sessions and field trips in the spring. The MGs will be available to homeowners for site visits starting in June.

Gloucester <http://www.gloucesterva.info/ext/mastergardener/home.htm>

Celebrate Families, Maymount, Horticultural Therapy, a "Repotting Plants Demo" in the local library and preparation for the Daffodil Festival will keep us from hibernating much this winter. In spite of this busy schedule, we are all looking forward to signs that perhaps the groundhog was mistaken this year and spring is right around the corner.

Goochland/Powhatan <http://www.qpmga.org>

Ongoing in January has been the planning for our major event for 2008, our Spring GardenFest. This event takes place at the Goochland campus of J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College with their cooperation and participation.

Hanover

The membership welcomed the new class of interns at the January meeting where Mr. Holt gave a wonderful presentation on Native Orchids. The new Master Gardener Classes have started with the afternoon class of 13 members and an evening class of 16 members.

February News From Across the State

Northeast

Henrico

The Henrico Master Gardener Association has made a fundraising arrangement with Botanical Interests seed company. They have offered us the opportunity to earn **15%** of all seed sales made through a special link: <http://www.botanicalinterests.com/nonprofits.php>.

This page lists the Henrico Master Gardener Association as a non-profit organization. When you click on that link and shop, your seed order will automatically be recorded and all funds raised through this endeavor will be donated to the MG Coordinator Endowment Fund. This offer is not just for Master Gardeners. Anyone who uses this link to order seeds will have their order recorded and 15% will be donated. This is an ongoing fundraiser, so any future orders through this link will also benefit the Fund.

James City County/Williamsburg

<http://www.jccwmq.org>

On March 14th, we will receive the Sustained Excellence Award at the annual Arbor Day Awards. Turf Love received a \$500 PRIDE Grant for their Nutrient Management Plan for Stonehouse Golf Course. Mattie's Garden received a \$1,500 grant from the Williamsburg Garden Club and will be featured on the Historic Garden Week Tour in April. Our MGs and the Ried Garden will be featured at this year's Colonial Williamsburg Garden Symposium on 26 April, 12-4 at the Williamsburg Community Building.

Newport News

<http://www.nnmastergardeners.org>

The Newport News Master Gardeners collaboration with the Juvenile Detention Center greenhouse project was very successful in 2007. We will begin a third, nine-week session at the end of February 2008.

We will have our annual plant sale supporting our scholarship fund at Christopher Newport University's 11th Annual Gardening Symposium, Saturday, April 19th. For more information visit <http://gardening.cnu.edu>.

Northumberland, Lancaster, Richmond, Westmoreland and Essex (Northern Neck)

<http://www.nnmq.org>

On Saturday, March 29th, the Northern Neck Master Gardeners will present their annual Gardening in the Northern Neck Seminar. This year's program is "Living Shorelines: Conservation Landscaping for Waterfront Property". Learn how you can create a waterfront landscape that protects your property while providing water quality and wildlife habitat benefits. Registration forms and further information is at <http://www.nnmq.org> or call 804-580-5694.

Northern

Fairfax

<http://www.fairfaxmastergardeners.com>

A budget shortfall based on newspaper accounts and past experience of the state legislature proclivity regarding their priorities appears to be on the horizon. In anticipation of a worst-case scenario, pro-active measures are in the early development stage and will be carefully considered for future use as appropriate.

February News From Across the State

Northern

Fairfax – Green Spring

<http://www.fairfax.conty.gov/parks/gsgp>

Adopt a Library is the newest program. Fairfax County has 21 libraries with 13 being neighborhood libraries. Most of the regional libraries have plant clinics during the spring and summer. We want to get the word out about the VCE Master Gardeners program so we will work with the neighborhood libraries to display information about our program. We will be setting up seasonal displays on topics of interest such as Lawn Care, Composting, and Soil Sampling to name a few.

Fluvanna

www.fluvannamg.org

Fluvanna Master Gardeners, Interns, 2008 Trainees and guests celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Fluvanna Master Gardener Unit. Special guests were the three founding members (Vivian Himes, Paul McGuire and Bob O'Keefe). Over 30 people attended and two \$100 door prizes were awarded for attendance at the Master Gardener College in 2008. It was a very special celebration of success and service.

Fredericksburg, Stafford, Spotsylvania, King George, Caroline (Central Rappahannock)

www.mgacra.org

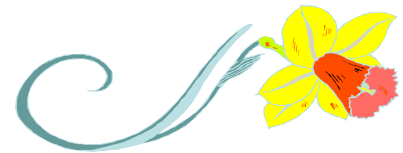
On April 4, our First Saturdays in the Garden program will begin with a morning spent at Combs Hall at the University of Mary Washington at 9:30. The topic will be wildlife gardening. On May 3, at 9:30 at Chatham Manor, near Fredericksburg, the topic will be water gardening and cool critters. For more information on First Saturdays, contact the VCE office at 540-658-8000.

Loudoun

<http://www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org>

We have launched a Spring Gardening Series, which starts February 13th. The theme will be on native plants covering topics such as Our Native Heritage, Native Flowering Perennials, Native Ferns, Vines & Grasses, Native Trees and Shrubs, Native Turf & Turf Alternatives and Native-scaping (tying it all together).

Northwest



Rockbridge, Bath (Rockbridge Area)

RAMGA Programs committee has planned a special program for Saturday, May 17th from 9:00 am to Noon to be held at the Rockbridge County High School Auditorium outside of Lexington, VA. The two speakers are: Dr. Holly Scoggins, speaking on "Plant Pairings and Design Ideas from Public Gardens throughout the US" and Dr. Alan McDaniel, VA Tech Horticulture Department, speaking on "Budding and Grafting". A Q&A session will follow the presentations.

Southeast

Norfolk

<http://www.nmgv.org>

Norfolk will be the host unit for Regional Advanced Training for master gardeners this spring. The event is planned for April 11 at Norfolk Botanical Garden. The theme will be tree care.

February News From Across the State

Southeast

Suffolk

We continue to have the Learning Gardens around the perimeter of the Human Resources Building that house the VCE Suffolk Office. Interns and members maintain these gardens with the supervision of project leaders. This is one of the ways we earn the required volunteer hours. The other two continuing programs we have are "Horticulture Therapy" and "Ready, Set, Grow".

Virginia Beach

<http://www.vbmg.org>

During the year 2007, 214 active Virginia Beach Master Gardeners provided 19,889 volunteer hours in 26 different projects throughout the city. We are in the process of considering a few other projects to our volunteer activity schedule that provide excellent opportunity for our volunteers to demonstrate their Master Gardener talents.

Southwest

Carroll, Grayson, and city of Galax (MGs of the Blue Ridge)

Programs/Projects: We are holding Youth Certification training in Feb with the eventual goal of a JMG program. We will participate in Green Day on March 17 at Matthews State Forest. Activities include a rain barrel workshop and conservation related activity for all ages. We are holding grafting workshops April 12 at the Foggy Ridge Cider House in Dugspur with an additional session in Grayson Co to be scheduled. We will participate in the Grayson Cares Earth Day Festivities in Independence on April 25 & 26.

Giles, Montgomery, Floyd and Pulaski (New River Valley) <http://www.civic.bev.net/nrvmg>

We have 20 trainees enrolled in our evening MG training classes this year. VCE agent, Barry Robinson, has coordinated training classes. We look forward to Master Gardener College in June!



"The more I am acquainted with agricultural affairs the better I am pleased with them. Insomuch that I can nowhere find so great satisfaction, as in those innocent and useful pursuits. In indulging these feelings, I am led to reflect how much more delightful to an undebauched mind is the task of making improvements on the earth, than all the vain glory which can be acquired from ravaging it, by the most uninterrupted career of conquests. The design of this observation is only to shew how much, as a member of human Society, I feel myself obliged by your labours to render respectable and advantageous an employment, which is more congenial to the natural dispositions of mankind than any other."

-- Letter from George Washington to John Bordley, 1788



Goldfinches in Your Garden

By Dave Lear, Green Spring Master Gardener

If you're anything like me, then a big part of your garden plan is attracting colorful wildlife to your blooms and leaves. My favorite garden visitor is the American goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*). The Goldfinch is a year round native to our area, but most people only notice them in the summer months when males take on their distinctive yellow and black plumage. In winter, they molt their bright coats of yellow and tend to blend in with the flocks of sparrows sheltering in bushes and feeders. In the wild, the Goldfinch prefers open country where weeds thrive. Of course, all of our gardens are completely weed free! However, with a little planning you can make your gardens a Goldfinch haven.

The Goldfinch seeks out seeds from a wide variety of plants such as thistle, teasel, dandelion, ragweed, mullein, cosmos, sunflower and alder. They will also feed on tree buds, maple sap and many berries. They will freely feed at bird feeders, particularly in the winter months, preferring thistle seeds or black oil sunflower seeds. Unlike some finch species, the American Goldfinch uses its feet extensively in feeding. It frequently hangs from seed heads while feeding in order to reach the seeds more easily and is known to hold down large catkins and seed heads with its feet to strip them with its beak.

I've found that many of the Goldfinches prefer native foods as well as those of the midwestern species, which make fine garden plantings in our area. In my garden, one of the most welcome sights in the late summer and fall is a flock of Goldfinches perched atop the Coneflowers (*Echinacea* sp.) plucking the seeds from the ripe flower heads. Of course they miss many seeds, instead sowing them in my garden space to make more plants the next season. Other Goldfinch favorites in my garden include common teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*—a biennial), various 'volunteer' thistle (biennial), tickseed coreopsis (*Bidens polylepis*—an annual), anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*—a perennial), and mammalian sunflower (*Helianthus maximilianii*—a perennial). All of these plants have the added benefit of a low water requirement. As natives, they are relatively free of pests.

Next time you are planning a new flowerbed or simply renovating an old bed, think of including any of the many flowering plants frequented by the American Goldfinch. Hold back on deadheading until October and you will be rewarded with an added splash of yellow color and a twitter of pleasant music, compliments of the Goldfinch.



Mount Vernon in the Fall

The VMGA Education Committee is in the process of putting together an interesting program at Mount Vernon. Your Mount Vernon experience will start with two presentations, including the history of the estate and the gardens. It will be a full day, so registration will start at 9:00 am, Friday, September 19. After the presentations, we have arranged for a two-course luncheon in the charming environment offered by the Mount Vernon Inn located just outside Mount Vernon's main gate. When you finish lunch, you can go to the new Orientation Center where you will see an 18-minute action adventure film, which re-introduces young, heroic GW. Moving on to the new Museum and Education Center, you will have a multi-media experience that illuminates the detailed story of GW's life that made him "First in war, first in peace, and first in the heart's of his countrymen." (You can even learn the truth about GW's teeth.) Now it will be time for a self-tour that will enable you to soak up many experiences including the mansion, the many specialty houses such as the smoke house, coach house, wash house and yes, the slave quarters too. Of course, let's not forget the various gardens as GW was known to experiment with many plants. If your feet can stand it, then you can mosey down the hill to see GW's and Martha's tomb.

Stay tuned as more information should be available at the VMGA meeting in April. There is so much to see at Mount Vernon that you may want to consider making a weekend of it!

State MG Liaison Report for February

By David Close, Virginia MG State Coordinator

- Working on the winter issue of **In Season**. It will highlight some of the keynote speakers for our 2008 MG College. I am in the process of updating our mailing records and email records so I will likely be coming to each unit asking for the most current mailing and emailing lists. There has been a serious disconnect in getting it in the hands of volunteers, both in print and electronically. I have abandoned the In Season listserv due to spam problems. I have a new alternative that will hopefully resolve the problem.
- Update on **State Record Keeping System**. Met with Dr. McCann, Craig Woods (director of CALS Information Technology division), and Michelle Prysby (my counterpart in the VA Master Naturalist program) on December 18 to discuss the status of the project. The IT division currently does not have sufficient staff to complete the project. We are looking at the possibility of outsourcing the project or at the very least hiring someone for the express purpose of finishing the project. Dr. McCann is looking at the feasibility of hiring someone in light of the current budget crunch. I followed up with Dr. McCann in mid-January and he wants me to meet with some other VCE administrators to see if other areas of Extension would benefit from a volunteer data management system. If so, more demand for the system would provide greater justification for hiring someone to complete the project.
- **MG College** planning is coming together nicely. The MG College Advisory Team met on February 1 to finish laying out the schedule. To date we have the following speakers confirmed as keynotes: Rick Darke, Colston Burrell, Michael Raupp, Robert McDuffie, and Rick Fell (entomologist at VT). I'm working on finalizing details with Bob Lyons and Holly Scoggins, plus a few more. We also currently have more than 40 concurrent session choices and a nice list of tours. More details to follow in issues of In Season and updates on the MG website.
- I'll be working with a team of VCE administrators (Jim Riddell), VCE specialists (Mike Goatley, Greg Evanylo, Laurie Fox), and VCE agents to develop a **turf nutrient management program template** based on existing programs such as Lawn Knowers, Great Scapes, Smart Lawns, and Turf Love. We are working with the VA Turf Grass Council to promote this program in other parts of the state where there is need and interest. Our team will be meeting in early April to create the template. We will use the template as a basis to offer a Turf Track at our 2008 MG College. Also, agents will hopefully be given a chance to receive advanced training in turf nutrient management to take the lead in organizing interested VCE MGs and implementing a program, which doesn't currently exist.
- **Handbook Revisions** – – I think we are still on track for a fall 2008 release of the next edition. Charley just completed editing of the chapters submitted so far. Have a few more chapters to be assigned and reviewed. At least 4 more are currently in the process of being revised.
- Just a reminder. . . . just because I forward **training opportunities for MGs** don't assume they will be approved locally by your agent. You must get prior approval for any training you intend to count toward continuing education from your extension agent and/or local coordinator. Some units have more strict guidelines on what does and does not count. I send things out if they meet the minimum standards I would expect, but local agents have the discretion to maintain higher standards for what will and will not qualify as continuing education credits.





Tech Pubs

Did you realize Tech provided dozens of new publications in 2007? This is an outstanding source of the latest information on a variety of topics of interest. A partial list of the new information made available during the year:

[Invasive Plants – A Horticultural Perspective](#), 11/14/07

“A review of catalogs from U.S. wholesale growers shows that at least 50 percent of woody plant species are native to regions outside of North America. If one were to consider the species sold in any one area, the proportion of nonnative plants (not native to that particular ecosystem) would certainly be much higher. Most nonindigenous species have graced our landscapes with beauty and untold beneficial environmental effects. However, a significant proportion of these are invasive. Data from six nongovernmental organizations indicated that 34 percent to 83 percent of the total number of invasive taxa (species, varieties, or cultivars) in the U.S. had a horticultural origin.”

[Lawn Moss: Friend or Foe?](#), 9/17/07

“It is important to understand that mosses occur when some underlying condition allows them to out compete turfgrasses and other plants.”

[Considerations for Growing and Marketing Specialty Crops](#), 9/14/07

“Specialty crops can be defined in a number of ways. They can be classified as alternatives to crops typically grown, either in a particular part of the state or any given geographical region. In Virginia, this includes crops other than grains, forages, tobacco, and cotton...The production of most specialty crops is highly specialized and more labor and capital intensive than other crops. While defined as high-value crops (significant economic returns in the right setting), markets for specialty crops can be variable, competitive, and inherently risky with limited or no government support structures. New growers are well advised to spend time researching potential markets before planting a given crop.”

[Brown Rot on Peach and Other Stone Fruits](#), 7/9/07

“Brown rot is one of the most destructive diseases of peach and nectarine in Virginia, and also occurs on other stone fruits such as apricot, cherry, and plum. When environmental conditions favor this disease, crop loss can be devastating.”

[Specialty Crop Profile: Ribes \(Currants and Gooseberries\)](#), 4/2/07

“All ribes are long-lived perennial shrubs that are cold hardy, some to USDA Zone 2. Species and cultivars vary in plant size and form, but are usually upright to spreading (three to six feet) in habit. Disease and insect resistance are variable, depending on the cultivar. The fruit are versatile and nutritious with some currants being especially high in vitamin C. Fruit within species vary in presentation, ease of harvest, flavor, shape, size, texture, and color.”

[Reducing Pesticide Use in the Home Lawn and Garden](#), 3/22/07

“This fact sheet outlines general pest control tactics that can easily be implemented for home lawns and gardens, along with other information that home owners can use to make sound pest management decisions. The intent is to ensure that homeowners are aware of alternative control tactics and pesticide characteristics, and that pesticides are used properly and only when necessary.”

For a complete listing of the latest, check out <http://www.ext.vt.edu/cgi-bin/htsearch>, search for tech pubs and order by date. This is a great resource for all of us!

The Graine Thumb

Whither Organic Gardening?

By George Graine, Fairfax County Master Gardeners



Polarize (variant): Having or showing of two contrary qualities, powers, tendencies, etc.

If there is one word that seems to set gardeners against each other it is "organic." The Grainethumb hopes that organic (natural) gardeners and inorganic (synthetic or chemical) gardeners come to grips with the meaning of these bandied about terms that are often not truly understood. In the Jan/Feb 2007 issue of *VMGA Report*, Grainethumb wrote that "Organic gardening is not a new phenomenon but it can be confusing if you do not understand the facts." If you are intellectually curious and have an open mind concerning why natural and why synthetic gardening (not versus), then you might see how a middle ground approach to gardening can be used to your best advantage. Synthetic gardening will not destroy the ozone layer, upset the sewer system, or create other forms of imagined havoc.

Dr. Jeff Gillman, Associate Professor of Horticulture Science at the University of Minnesota, is the main source of information for purposes of this article on whither organic gardening. His academic credentials are a master's degree in entomology and a doctorate in horticulture. He is a person well equipped to write the book called *The Truth About Organic Gardening: Benefits, Drawbacks, and the Bottom Line* (Timber Press, 2008). This just over 200-page book is an easy read and truly understandable. Even though he includes 130 bibliographic references he states, perhaps in true academic fashion, that it is difficult to come up with real conclusive answers based on research as to why organic. Instead what you will find are many additional questions that have yet to be answered. From the get-go, Gellman recognizes that gardeners tend to assume that any product labeled or even thought to be organic is okay. This means safe to use on plant material, safe for the environment, and safe for gardeners. In most instances this is probably true (with the usual admonition of read the label and do what it says); however, when do you know it is not true, that is, not safe to use and can impose a significant threat to your person?

One of the fun things about gardening is that you can do practically anything you want, money notwithstanding, because you are the lord and master over your property unless you have to deal with homeowner association rules and the grass police. You can try out new plants without the worry of a native plant society-type wagging his finger in your face. You can purchase a flat of invasive English ivy although this is not recommended. If you want to prune your plants so that they look like meatballs, who will dare to stop you? Of course people have strong opinions about lots of things but does that make them right? Just think about politics and religion. The same thing can be said about the home gardener. One should not make broad sweeping statements, let alone come to conclusions, unless you did the research. Can we agree to stop fighting the battle of perception, which is usually unfair? Guilty until proven innocent is not the American way. Instead, please understand that many organic products are poisons! You do not have to believe the Grainethumb: just check with any unbiased horticulture extension agent. Likewise, a gardener who uses synthetic products is not the devil nor will you end up in the hot place. All this talk about "going green" or "eco-friendly" has become the buzzwords of the day. Merchants are well aware of our vulnerabilities and seize upon them. This is like an impulse purchase from the end cap in the grocery store.

The key advertising slogan of Sy Sims the clothier is about an educated consumer. Gardeners too need to be educated. Can we find a balance between natural and synthetic products? Gillman has not chosen sides. As a scientist he deals in facts and not opinions. This is why his definitive work is an excellent book on the subject. Why? Because he tells it like it is. He does this by describing controls for weeds, insects, disease, birds, deer, rodents, and even slugs and snails.

(Continued on page 11)

The Graine Thumb (continued)

(Continued from page 10)

In each instance he lays out in the fashion of the book subtitle, the benefits, drawbacks, and the bottom line of organic gardening without being preachy. If natural is the way to go that is fine; if synthetics are the way to go that should be just as fine. In other words, a silver bullet does not exist and furthermore, probably never will.

An example: A raging discussion on soil enrichment (read amendments) and fertilization is taking place in the green industry. Gillman's book discusses these problems and also subjects them to the same construct noted above. No doubt you will be pleased to read that the first step is to get a soil test! If you attended Master Gardener College in 2006, then you probably heard Jeff Lowenfels (*Teaming with Microbes: A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web*) explain why it is important to improve your soil and the benefits derived from compost tea. The Gillman bottom line states in fairly strong terms to stay away from these teas. Again why? Research done on teas conflict with one another and it is difficult to cut through the rhetoric. This is a point well taken, like so many others in the Gillman "manifesto."

In summary, after reading the "truth" book you should be able to make an informed decision about natural and synthetic gardening. Perhaps the answer really is do both. For some of you the science may burst your balloon and others might say something like, I told you so. Gardening in a natural way is fine if you know and understand what and why you garden this way. As we learned in class, plants love food any which way they can get it. Keep this thought in mind: opinions are just that, but a fact is. Gillman teaches you the meaning of "is." Be careful out there because when you purchase any pesticide product at your garden center apothecary you are buying poison. Want proof? Look up the meaning of the word -cide in your dictionary.

Gardening Quiz

Answers can be found on the last page of the newsletter.

1. Which of these flowers has the nickname "heartsease"?
A. Lily B. Tulip C. Rose D. Pansy
2. What common pie ingredient is the rose related to?
A. Blackberry B. Rhubarb C. Pumpkin D. Cloves
3. Which side of the garden is the best place for tall or climbing plants?
A. South B. West C. East D. North
4. Which family is the potato a member of?
A. Tomato B. Pea C. Carrot D. Morning glory
5. Which of these bulbs can have yellow flowers?
A. Cyclamen B. Snowdrop C. Daffodil D. Bluebell
6. Where do pinks get their name?
A. The seeds make a "pink" noise when released
B. Most are pink in color
C. The petals have zigzagged edges, as though cut with pinking shears
D. The leaves are tinged pink
7. Which of these shouldn't be planted in a dry, sunny area?
A. Rosemary B. Artemisia C. Lavender D. Hydrangea
8. Which of these flowers come in a type that smells like chocolate?
A. Rose B. Geranium C. Cosmos D. Phlox
9. Which of these trees has white bark?
A. Maple B. Ash C. Cherry D. Birch
10. Which of these always has green leaves?
A. Camellia B. Holly C. Smoke Bush D. Berberis



VMGA Report

The VMGA Report is the bimonthly newsletter of the Virginia Master Gardener Association.

Submissions should be received by the 1st of January, March, May, July, September, and November. Send inquiries and submissions to:

Dawn Meyerriecks,
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General Announcements

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Please help us keep your listing current. When you have changes to your e-mail address, street address, zip code, phone number or name, please forward these changes to the Membership Chair, Mary Ann Kincaid. She can be reached at maryann.kincaid@verizon.net OR 1549 Beechwood Cove, Virginia Beach, VA 23464.

Answers to Gardening Quiz: 1: D; 2: A; 3: D; 4: A; 5: C; 6: C; 7: D; 8: C; 9: D; 10: A

About the Virginia Master Gardener Association....

The Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc. is a statewide association of Master Gardeners and Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) employees whose mission is to foster communication, education and fellowship among Master Gardeners, and to give support and input to the state leaders of our VCE effort. We are a non-profit educational organization as described by section 501(3)(c) of the US tax code.

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