

VMGA REPORT



www.vmga.net

The VMGA Report, published bi-monthly, since 1995.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Bill Scott, Prince William

The next Board meeting will be on February 11th in Prince William. I encourage as many of the members who can to attend the Board meetings and to participate in them if you have input or questions for the Board of Directors.

We still need a candidate for Treasurer to complete the slate of officers for the 2012 – 2014 term. Additional help with the newsletter (*Editor's note: a new editor*) is needed and participation in education from around the state is always welcome. Finally, we have a few small committees to staff (see p. 6). There are always opportunities to volunteer if you want to actively participate in VMGA! Please consider volunteering your time to maintaining VMGA as a strong link between Virginia Cooperative Extension and all Virginia Master Gardeners.

Don't forget the 2012 MG Day at VSU in February and the 25th Anniversary of Master Gardener College at Virginia Tech in June.

I look forward to meeting and working with all of our membership in the coming months. If you have any

State MG Coordinator Liaison Report

By Dave Close, VCE State MG Coordinator

1. Electronic version of Home, Grounds and Animals PMG should be available online by the first week of January with printed copies available by end of January.
2. The second training for Volunteer Management System (VMS) was held at Bedford County Ext. office in mid-October. Hopefully a third will be offered sometime during the third week of January. Additional MG units will be recruited to come online with the system.
3. The 2012 International MG Conference was a success. Forty VCE MG volunteers attended which

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questions or issues I can be reached at my home number, 703 791-2646 or by email: wjscott2@verizon.net.

Hope to see you in Prince William!
Bill Scott

NEXT VMGA BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING
Saturday, February 11, 2012
10:00-2:00
Prince William County
Location to be announced

- qualified VA in the top 10 states to attend. Just under 50 people attended the session on Smart Yard Care.
4. MG College Advisory Team met Nov. 7 to continue planning for the 25th Annual MG College. A logo design contest (open til Jan. 8) was announced before Thanksgiving. Some minor changes to college will be made in an attempt to continue improving the quality of the experience for attendees. A promo video will be launched in January.
5. Fall issue of *In Season* will be available online. Please

Please see *Liaison* on page 4

MG College 2012 Logo Contest

By Dave Close

Greetings Everyone!

I would like to announce a contest to design the logo for our **25th Annual Master Gardener College**, which is scheduled for **June 19-24, 2012**. The winning logo will be showcased in all the MG College promotional material including the MG College program. It will also be used on a t-shirt available for sale to conference participants and a commemorative lapel pin that all conference participants will receive for registering. Please submit your design electronically to me (dclose@vt.edu) no later than **January 8**. Even if you have a concept that might need to be cleaned up or tweaked, please go ahead and submit your idea. Here are the contest parameters:

- 1) Contest is open from now until Sunday, January 8
- 2) Things to consider:
 - a. Suitable for 8.5x11 print
 - b. Will transfer nicely to a t-shirt
 - c. Will transfer nicely to a lapel pin (size not to exceed 1 inch)
- 3) This is our 25th Annual MG College
- 4) The theme this year is Tree Stewardship
- 5) Full color

Have fun creating your design!

Hooray For Conifers: Beyond Garden Sentinels

By George Graine, Fairfax County Master Gardeners

THE GRAINETHUMB

Horticulture is growing plants well but design is arranging them well.

Richard L. Bitner in "Designing with Conifers"

If conifers are the most diverse and interesting trees and shrubs in the world, then why are they so underused in our home landscapes? Why is designing with conifers such an oddity? The Grainethumb hopes you will find answers and a reasonable explanation to these questions as you read on. We should recognize that conifers can be the mainstay in the landscape during the growing season as well as all twelve months of the year. Conifers do provide a continuity that would otherwise be difficult to achieve using the limitations of other plant material because the conifer family of plants has practically unlimited design potential.

We often give consideration to the composition and design of borders, island beds, containers and more. It is not horticultural heresy to consider conifers in a mixed garden! Conifers will provide structure and interest throughout the year and without extensive maintenance because they are hardy. They are like a work of art without human

manipulation unless you desire to train plants into ornamental shapes as topiary art or creating miniature living art bonsai trees and shrubs. The versatility of conifers will help balance and enhance the overall effect of good design. Remember, after the perennial blooms have faded and the seed capsules are left, what else is there to look at for the remainder of the year. If you get the feeling that something is missing then consider conifers as the link to a more gratifying garden. Be creative as conifers provide exceptional design possibilities.

Most often when one thinks about conifers what usually comes to mind is the color green. In fact, conifers have a much broader palette. They are readily available in powdery-blue, silvery-gray, gold, of course green but in many shades and even variegated green-yellow and green-white. Some conifers have an added feature of changing color in winter. They could appear as coppery-gold, bronze or with purplish foliage. Picking the right color will harmonize with the color of flowers. The versatility of conifers can also be measured by the many shapes from which to choose including spires, spiky,

Please see *Graine Thumb* on page 7

The Garden Wonk*: Genetically Modified Seeds

By Becky Phillips and Carol Ivory, Loudoun County
<http://www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org/>

(Editor's note: article taken from Loudoun County MG newsletter *The Trumpetvine*, Winter 2011-2012 Volume VIII, Issue 1)

* The Garden Wonk: This is the first of a series of articles on more technical topics

Heirloom seeds: Most heirloom seeds come from a strain of plants that is over 50 years old. The plants are usually open-pollinated varieties. This type of plant will produce fertile seed and will produce the same plant year after year. Heirloom does not mean organic, but an heirloom seed may fall under an organic classification if it meets the standards. **Organic seeds:** The USDA organic label upholds the rigorous guidelines of the National Standard for Organic Agriculture. If a seed falls outside the standard, it cannot bear an organic label. Under these guidelines, a seed must come from produce grown in soil free of unapproved fertilizers and unapproved pesticides. The seed must be natural and without genetic

modification. **Conventional seeds:** Most people use conventional garden seeds. This is the type of seed that you'll find in nearly all stores near the garden tools. If you don't see an heirloom or an organic label, the seed packet contains conventional seeds. Conventional seeds are likely to come from plants that were treated with synthetic pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers. Some seeds are not certified organic because the process of certification is very expensive and exacting but they are not treated with any chemicals. So it is important to read carefully and understand what you are buying. In the United States most commercial farmers are using **genetically modified (GM) seeds.** A GMO (genetically modified organism) is the result of a laboratory process of taking genes from one species and inserting them into another in an attempt to obtain a desired trait or characteristic, hence they are also known as transgenic organisms. This process was made possible through the discovery of DNA and the creation of the first recombinant bacteria in 1973. This process may be called either Genetic Engineering (GE) or Genetic

Please see *GMOs* on page 4

Topiary: New Think For Living Art

By George Graine, Fairfax County Master Gardeners

THE GRAINE THUMB

...the art of topiary is not the controlling of plants, but a collaboration with them, pruner and plant working together.
 ---Jake Hobson

A remarkable book, *The Art of Creative Pruning: Inventive Ideas for Training and Shaping Trees and Shrubs* by Jake Hobson (Timber Press, 2011) reads like a conversation with the author. Words do not do justice to the spectacular color photos that abound in quality, quantity and uniqueness due to how the subject matter is treated. Line drawing illustrations show how to develop plant material into an object d'arte using various cutting techniques although this is not a textbook on pruning. As a bonus, this book doubles as a fantastic coffee table book.

Unlike other books about topiary, Hobson's approach to design is really out of the ordinary. Kitschy birds and beasts, seasonal specialties and other popular (classic?) cuts usually seen for sale at garden centers are out. Instead, vision an unconventional view of

pruning by substituting lovely to look at and thought provoking shapes. Imagine if you will, tumbling cubes, tipsy wedding cakes, bumbly hedges and sophisticated sculptured trees. Surely this is a far cry from everything you may have seen in other books on topiary.

Here's the real deal on how you can make something out of nothing. Compare your plant to a block of granite or wood. One stares at nothing but your creative juices soon realize the possibility of transforming a plant into a very special shape. A good way to explain how to approach a plant is to think in terms of a free form using a naturalistic approach to pruning. Bear in mind how this creation will blend into your existing landscape unless your idea is to have a stand-alone magnificent natural sculpture to serve as a plants that have been clipped into previously unimaginable forms. Thinking globally, it is interesting to note the key difference between the East and West approach to topiary design. Whereas the East aims to manipulate and enhance the natural state of plant

Please see *Topiary* on page 4

Liaison from page 1

make sure it gets distributed throughout your entire unit.

6. Dr. Allen Grant, Dean CALS, held forum on Dec 9.

Items from that meeting:

-Currently up to 190 agents statewide; hope to be up to 220 agents by June 2012

-Search for Associate Director of ANR will soon begin

-CALS Internat'l Program Coordinator recently hired.

Dr. Jerzy Nowak agreed to take this part-time position

-CALS Strategic Plan (2012-2018) continuing to be developed. Goal for final plan to be in place: May 2012

-Ground breaking will begin in January for first of four research buildings for CALS. It will house lab and office space for FST and BSE.

Capital Campaign for VT concluded in June. Goal: \$1 billion;

\$1.11B actually raised. Goal for CALS: \$52.4M. This was exceeded by \$2M. Monies raised and pledged for the MG

Coordinator endowment counted toward the College's goal and is counted in the University's campaign -VA

Secretary of Education (Laura Fornash) recently released her agency's report on VCE. Go to:

<http://www.ext.vt.edu/secretary-of-education-report.html>

Topiary from page 3

material, the West (European) topiary involve man's order and control over nature and remove plants from their natural state. Another way to put this is the East approach to non-working with nature is producing or recreating a quintessential, idealized version of it. Of course, you are the master of the pruner so have at it any way you chose.

Think about nature as a collaborator or perhaps co-conspirator as you go about pruning a plant. The decisions you make about size, shape, texture and color should ultimately enhance your three-dimension works of living art. Your efforts may or may not have boundaries depending on your time and of course available space. Something else to

consider are the inevitable seasonal changes. Is this what some mean by the fourth dimension? In other words, one needs to really understand the growing habits of any plant that is going to undergo creative pruning.

Hobson says pruning "...relies on an inquisitive mind and a creative approach to lift it above the mundane and into something extraordinary." He also notes that one needs to "Find a balance between caution and confidence – work at a steady, determined pace but be prepared to stand back, assess and back track if need be." As carpenters tell us, measure twice and cut once but unlike the carpenter, know that you will be pruning for a long time on the same plant. Now go outside, experiment and get your creative juices flowing in order to produce your own garden art.

GMOs from page 3

Modification (GM); they are one and the same. Genetically modified seeds are patented by the corporation that developed them. Farmers cannot save these seeds; they must purchase new seeds every year or be in violation of the patent. Patents on the first Monsanto products to enter the marketplace will begin to expire in 2014. Although there have been attempts to increase nutritional benefits or productivity, the two main traits that have been added to date through genetic modification are herbicide tolerance and the ability of the plant to produce its own pesticide.

Roundup Ready® crops are the most widely used. These seeds have been genetically modified so that farmers can spray Roundup® agricultural herbicides for weed control from emergence through flowering. Seeds containing both Bt and herbicide resistance are called stacked trait seeds. In the corn market, Monsanto's triple-stack corn—which combines Roundup Ready 2 weed control technology with YieldGard Corn Borer and YieldGard Rootworm insect control—is the market leader in the United States.

In nature you can't cross a fish with a vegetable. Animals and plants have long been separate in evolution. But laboratory researchers have produced a "frost-resistant" tomato by splicing into its genetic code a gene that protects a flounder from the cold. The first transgenic plant is said to have been created in the early eighties when a gene from a bacterium was spliced into a petunia. Subsequently oilseed rape has had a bay tree gene spliced into it, to improve its oil, and a potato has been given a disease-resistant chicken gene. The first commercially grown genetically modified crop was a tomato called FlavrSavr that was modified to ripen without softening. Sale of FlavrSavr started in 1994, less than 20 years ago. In 1996 7.4% of the soybean acreage was planted in GM crops, by 2010 that had grown to 93%. In addition to soybeans, common GM crops include corn, tomatoes, rapeseed (canola), rice, sugar cane, sugar beets and Hawaiian papaya. To learn about the debates over the use of genetically modified seeds, conduct an internet search on GMO seeds.

Search For Excellence

It’s never too early to be thinking ahead about how your unit can display the fruits of its labor at MG College. The Search for Excellence program was implemented in 2006 in an effort to standardize the friendly competition among units and provide an avenue for international competition. Here are the basics of SFE application:

CRITERIA FOR QUALIFICATION

Project submissions must meet the following guidelines to qualify for SFE awards.

Category — Must select and submit in only one category

- Youth
- Demonstration Garden
- Workshop or Presentation
- Community Service
- Innovative Project
- Research (Applied scientific methodology)
- Special Needs Audience (Senior, Disabled, Horticulture Therapy)

Simple to replicate

Practical

Original and creative

Compatible with Extension MG mission

Significant learning and impacts

Significant learning and change in attitude and practices are outcomes that Extension uses to evaluate the impact of their service and programs. Impacts from Extension Master Gardener projects should improve peoples’ lives. Explain how this project augmented learning, increased knowledge or changed practices to enhance quality of life. These impacts could be economical, environmental, educational, health, community-based, etc. SFE projects should be developed to reach the most people possible

January in the Garden

Excerpted from South Side MG newsletter

www.ssmga.org

January in the garden: Begin dividing daylilies and daffodils. Start seeds of cabbage, onions and hardy herbs under bright lights. Sow peas outdoors late this month. Set seed potatoes in a bright spot to encourage sprouting. Also late in the month, mow winter cover crops. Set out junipers, hollies and other evergreens. Clean and sharpen your tools. Compare prices in seed catalogs – and shop from regional sources likely to sell varieties suited to our area. It’s good exercise: when it’s too cold for gardening, try some weeding. Pull weeds whenever the ground is unfrozen but damp.

from the target audience. Impact numbers are not as significant if the target audience does not learn or utilize information. Make sure you ask participants how this information helped them and record this as an impact. Depending on the nature of the project the evaluations may be very informal (i.e. casually asking questions) or formal (i.e. pre-test/post-test). For example, evaluation questions that ask, “How do you plan to use this information?” or “Can you share specific information that you learned today?” can help show impact — especially if you can show that 70 percent of the participants plan to use fewer pesticides.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION

Projects will be rated on a 100 point scale. All applications are judged independently using the following criteria:

Simplicity of project (easy to replicate).....	10 points
Practicality, usefulness or relevance of project for situation.....	10 points
Originality or creativity	10 points
Consistent with Extension and MG mission	20 points
Clarity and completeness of project application ..	20 points
Did significant learning occur?	20 points
Number of people impacted	10 points
TOTAL.....	100 points

More details about SFE will be available in the coming months or you can contact Christy Brennan, Hanover, for more information. ctb47@comcast.net.

Great Backyard Bird Count

The 2012 GBBC will take place Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It’s free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS 2010–2012

President – Bill Scott, Prince William
 Vice President – Christy Brennan, Hanover
 Secretary – Peggy Fox, Newport News
 Treasurer – Jim Kincaid, VA Beach

VMGA COMMITTEES

Standing Committees

Newsletter – Peggy Fox, Newport News
 Membership – Anita Smith, Newport News
 Unit Support – Frank Reilly, Prince William
 Communications – Frank Reilly, Prince William
 Education – Barbara Geer, Prince George

Special Committees

State MG Coordinator Endowment – Vacant
 VA Green Industry Council – Dawn Lerch, Chesterfield
 P. Diane Relf Education Endowment – Margie Bassford,
 Loudoun

Finance – Vacant
 Fundraising – Ros Tharp, Gloucester
 State Fair – Christy Brennan, Hanover
 Audit –
 Nominating – Paul Campbell, VA Beach
 Search for Excellence – Christy Brennan, Hanover

Maymont Flower and Garden Show Feb 9–12

Volunteers are needed for the **The Maymont Flower & Garden Show**. The Show brings four days of indoor and outdoor gardening solutions, decorations and inspiration to the Greater Richmond Convention Center from **February 9 through February 12**. Expect vibrant rivers of color and fragrance, with a nod to Broadway and a bit of song and dance, as Virginia's most talented landscape professionals fill display gardens with a kaleidoscope of flora and fauna.

Please contact **Christy Brennan** ctb47@comcast.net to schedule your shift!

VMGA ELECTION OF EXECUTIVE OFFICERS 2012–2014

The nominees for the offices of VMGA President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer are as follows:

PRESIDENT: Tom Bolt, Norfolk
 VICE PRES: David Mims, Rockbridge
 SECRETARY: Mary Ann Kincaid, VA Beach
 TREASURER:

If you or someone you know is interested in being included in this slate of officer nominees, please contact **PAUL CAMPBELL**, Nominating Committee Chair
Panda91@cox.net

IN SYMPATHY

*Karen Sacasky, Hill City
 MGs, on the passing of
 her daughter, Kathryn,
 October 29, 2011 after
 a long battle with
 cancer.*

*Christy Brennan,
 Hanover, the sudden
 passing of her father in
 November.*

Graine Thumb from page 2

globes, weeping, cascading and ground covers to say nothing about size and texture with interesting foliage. Planted in the right place and by using the right plant you will be rewarded with minimal maintenance as noted above. Furthermore, conifers can handle drought and provide all-season interest. Most conifers do best in full sun and need good drainage although a few can tolerate and even prefer shadier spots.

For more on the conifer story see Richard L. Bitner's new book *Designing with Conifers: The Best Choices for Year-Round Interest in Your Garden* (Timber Press, 2011). Bitner will surely help solve the horticultural dilemma of why and how to use conifers. By the way, this author also wrote the excellent resource *Conifers for Gardens: An Illustrated Encyclopedia* (Timber Press, 2007) that is brimming with concise plant descriptions and cultural requirements for species and their cultivars. (See VMGA Report Nov/Dec 2007.) As Bitner says, "It's time to use conifers in more creative ways."

Hanover MG Calendar Sales

Hey fellow MGs! Hanover is selling a gorgeous IPM calendar which offers 16 months of full color photos, organic and chemical insect controls, gardening tips, vegetable planting guide, and weekly proactive pest control. What are you waiting for? Call Pattie Bland (804)751-4310 to place your order or send your request with payment of \$12.95 to:

Hanover County Extension Office
13224 Hanover Courthouse Rd, Suite 204
P O Box 9
Hanover, VA 23069

Gardening in the Northern Neck of Virginia: A Handbook for Responsible Gardeners (revised second edition) is now available. The handbook explains what you should know to be a successful gardener in the Northern Neck. Cost: \$10
<http://www.nnmg.org/>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS**JANUARY****19 Spring to Green Horticultural Symposium**

Danville, VA 24541

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

20-22 2012 Virginia Flower & Garden Expo

VA Beach Convention Center

www.vafgs.org

FEBRUARY**Jan 29-Feb 2 2012 Mid-Atlantic Horticulture Short Course**

Newport News, VA 23606

www.mahsc.org/program.php

9-12 Maymont Flower & Garden Show

The Greater Richmond Convention Center

<http://macevents.com/show.cfm/eventID/139>

8-10 Treading Lightly on the Land:**Winter Symposium and CVNLA Short Course**

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

www.lewisginter.org/events/event_detail.php?event_id=865

16 Piedmont Landscape Association 29th Annual Seminar

www.piedmontlandscape.org

25 Sparking Creativity in Your Garden

Culpeper, VA 22701

www.fourcountymastergardener.org/

25 MG Day at VSU**Focus on Food--From Field to Table**

Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA 23806

Registration opens Jan.2, 2012 & closes February 15, 2012

vmgaedu@rcn.com

FEBRUARY**25 Sparking Creativity in Your Garden**

Presented by Four-County Master Gardeners Culpeper, Madison, Orange, Rappahannock

Culpeper, VA 22701

www.fourcountymastergardener.org/

25 Birds, Bats, Bees, and Bugs: The Importance of Pollinators

8th Annual EcoSavvy Gardening Symposium

Green Spring Master Gardeners

MARCH**9 The Nature of Trees and other Related Thoughts**

12th Annual Roanoke Workshop

Roanoke, VA 24015

www.treesvirginia.org

24-25 Loudoun County Master Gardener Annual Gardening Symposium

Leesburg, VA

www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

31 Watershed to Water's Edge

Northern Neck Gardening Seminar

White Stone, VA

www.nnmg.org

MAY**1-4 Southern Region Master Gardener Conference, Natchez, Mississippi**

Earlybird registration deadline: Jan 15

<http://www.regonline.com/srmg>



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.

VMGA, Inc
Membership Chair
575 Crown Point Drive
Newport News, VA 23602

**A Voice for
Virginia Master Gardeners**

**Deadline for Mar/Apr newsletter:
February 20, 2012.
Please submit any
announcements
or articles of interest to be
included in the next
issue to
peggyfox@hotmail.com**