



# The VMGA Report

vmga.net

July/August 2018

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## In This Issue

- Message from the President
- Endowment
- MG College 2018
- Education
- Giant Hogweed
- Tree Liability and Risk
- Calendar

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## In her own words....

Wanda Gerard, Suffolk, President

Summer greetings!

Thank you for being an Extension Master Gardener (EMG) and a member of the Virginia Master Gardener Association (VMGA). At this time of year in your gardens you are perhaps doing a lot, not a lot, because of the sun, or somewhere in between! This probably applies to our volunteer efforts as much as our personal lives because it's a time when we take a break to go on vacation, visit family, etc. Each garden we maintain, teach in or harvest from for local food banks is a plus for our communities and those who reside there. Classes, workshops, farmer's markets, and the many other worthwhile projects round out our volunteering and promote the overall EMG program in Virginia. I hope that as you read this newsletter you will learn of another Master Gardener project or program that makes you ponder 'could it work in our unit?' Since we need education hours, maybe the newsletter will be a place to go to in search of awesome seminars across the state, including our own VMGA event in late September. Please take some time out to enjoy the many bounties of summer -- the harvest and sharing it with friends and family and the flowers that attract pollinators and nature into the garden. Relax and recharge when the temperatures tell you just to enjoy the AC. Be safe and happy gardening.

Wanda

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## MG COORDINATOR ENDOWMENT FUND

### Special Giving Opportunity

**An anonymous friend to the Virginia Master Gardener Extension program will generously match every dollar donated, through December 31, 2018, to the VMGA Coordinator Endowment fund, up to a total of \$25,000.**

It's easy! To make your donation online click **here**.

Or **click here** to make your donation by mail.

Pledge \$50 for 5 months and you've done a good thing!

Be sure you include a note on the memo line of your check indicating that your gift is for the VMGA Coordinator Endowment Fund or Fund 886119.

As of 1-Apr-18 Fund balance / Market value \$399,411. Goal: \$1,000,000

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.

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## MG College 2018

Wanda Gerard, Suffolk

Representing forty units, approximately 250 Virginia Extension Master Gardeners (EMGs) attended this year's Master Gardener College. Several Extension agents and/or MG Coordinators also participated. If there were an award for the person who traveled the farthest, it would go to Lisa Sanderson, former Extension agent to Henrico County, before moving to North Carolina and then on to Florida where she is now the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent and Master Gardener Coordinator for Sumter County. As always, certificates and pins were awarded at the Thursday night Milestone Award Ceremony, with many more headed back to the units for presentation there. The Virginia Master Gardener Coordinator's office and the advisory team can be applauded for a job well done. We would be remiss if we didn't recognize all the time donated by the Master Gardeners of the New River Valley unit for their awesome abilities to chauffeur everyone around during the entire conference period. A blend of new and repeat speakers gave us a not-so-rushed feeling during the entire conference. We learned about trees, children's gardens, medicinal shade gardening, vegetable gardening, leadership, Zen composting, program skills, and more. What we learned from each other was probably equal to that of some of our talented speakers! After hearing that the VMGA annual meetings on Saturday night were b-o-r-i-n-g, it was decided that a condensed version of what the Association is doing would be done. Success! The get-acquainted BINGO game and the dessert reception with live entertainment allowed one to mingle and meet other Master Gardeners. Perhaps you were there on Sunday morning when D2 (dining facility) had no power. Never a dull moment. Other than the dining facility glitch on Sunday, the day was great with top notch keynote speakers and the awesome BBQ picnic lunch. I talk about Master Gardener College all year long and hope you do too. Any conversation where it is promoted is a chance to encourage someone to attend. The classes, the comradery, the break from the home life, even the trek to Blacksburg, are things I put on my calendar as soon as I hear the dates for the next year..... Speaking of next year, it won't be held at Tech in Blacksburg, nor will it be held in June. Stay tuned for that information to be provided to us as soon as all the preliminary details are locked down.

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## Education

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the VMGA 2018 Educational Event, being held on Saturday, September 29, 9:00-4:00. **"Bats, Birds and Bugs: Gardening on the Wilder Side"** is going to answer all those questions you didn't know you had about things that happen in your garden! The Holiday Lake 4-H Center in Appomattox will be the location for this event – not the state park!

This event will enlighten you on bats, birds, wildflowers, advance morphology of insects, and some unusual habits or doings of creatures in your backyard. This sounds very interesting. Erica Jones, our Education Committee Chair, has lined up five individuals with a passion for these topics. Bonnie Miles, certified naturalist, will introduce us to "bats". Ian Caton, owner of Wood Thrush Native Plants, will share information on some of the Rare and Unusual Wildflowers of the Appalachians. (Psst – he'll also be selling plants!!!!) Teta Kain, from

Deadline for Sept/Oct issue:

August 25, 2018

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

Peggy Fox,  
VMGA Newsletter Editor  
Newport News unit  
[peggyfox@hotmail.com](mailto:peggyfox@hotmail.com)

Friends of Dragon Run, will tell us just what is in our backyard! Next, Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger, former VMGA Education Committee chair, will share her passion for birding in the backyard. Finally, VT's Eric Day, will be talking bugs... advanced level. Ooh, ahh, ooh! This jammed packed day sounds like it is going to be fun.

Don't delay [register here](#), deadline is September 11<sup>th</sup>. Cost is \$40.00 for VMGA members and \$50.00 for non-VMGA members. A buffet lunch is included in the price. After registering if you find out you cannot attend, please find someone to take your spot because there are no refunds.

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## Giant Hogweed

Peggy Fox, Newport News

Since mid-June, news reports have been published about a highly toxic weed found in Virginia and how serious exposure to all of its parts can be.

Click here for Identification guidance and precautions:

**VT News**

**NY State Dept of Environmental Conservation**



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## The Grainethumb

George Graine, Fairfax

### **TREES: YOUR LIABILITY AND TREE RISK ASSESSMENT**

"A stricken tree, a living thing, so beautiful, so dignified, so admirable in its potential longevity, is, next to man, perhaps the most touching of wounded objects." ---Edna Ferber



No doubt if you live in a house you may have a love-hate relationship with trees. You probably also know some of the pros and cons of your trees because you are involved with them daily in your own landscapes, through your neighbor's experience as well as weather conditions. The Grainethumb attended a class at the 2018 Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener College conference in June on the campus of Virginia Tech. Here Dr. P. Eric Wiseman, Associate Professor of Urban Forestry in the Virginia Tech Dept. of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation discussed landscape tree liability and some of the basic practices of risk assessment that we should take into consideration before we regret an untoward event.

As an aside to Dr. Wiseman's presentation, we need to recognize that property owners should know their rights (the law) before a squabble ensues over who is at fault, you or your neighbor, over a tree problem. There is a long legal history concerning the development of a new Virginia tree law that came about in 2007. In the main, our legal system is based on what is often referred to as "common law." These are the laws which came over from England before America was

founded. Quoting from lawyer Benny Kass (Washington Post – 11/3/12), who provides a layman’s explanation of the new law. “Under the common law, the land owner owed no duty to those outside his property to correct natural conditions on the property – even though these conditions might present a hazard to outsiders. My home was my castle and I was the master of that property.” The 1939 Virginia law changed dramatically in 2007 when the Supreme Court of Virginia made a ruling regarding tree liability and damage. The Court held that when a neighbor’s tree causes harm or poses an imminent danger of harm to an adjoining property, the tree owner ‘may be held responsible’ for the harm.

We know that tree roots and branches have no regard for straight line boundaries of a property line. Without getting into a contentious rancor of fault and associated insurance considerations, homeowners can sue to force a neighbor to cut back branches, tree roots and even require the tree to be taken out. Why not do the neighborly thing and work out the differences and perhaps share the expense when a cost is involved. The reason for the change that overturned the 1939 law is because much of Virginia has changed. The old law was fine when we were a rural state; however, now we have erected houses that are close to one another, townhouse growth, condominiums, business parks and shopping centers all the while losing farmland. The Court recognized that the old law “is unsuited to modern urban and suburban life.”

How can we recognize tree liability and assess tree risk, that is, how to identify and manage hazardous conditions in our trees? There is abundant literature about this subject and for more detailed information about tree hazards you should consult your homeowner insurance representative. An excellent “tip sheet” from Backyard Woods “Identify and Manage Hazardous Defects in Your Trees” is a publication that discusses how to prevent personal injury and property damage. This is a modified version of the publication “How to Recognize Hazardous Defects in Trees” NA-FR-01-96, Radnor, PA: USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, 19 pp. This publication is also available at <http://www.na.fs.fed.us>.

Credit Dr. Wiseman’s presentation because most of the highlights noted below should be considered by homeowners who have trees on their property as well as having some knowledge about neighboring trees. To begin, the definition of tree risk is the probability of an event involving trees that have undesired consequences for affected individuals. The probability of risk could be assessed as being anywhere from a low risk to extremely high. Failure risk exists when tree parts are likely to break or fail and likely harm people, property or activities. A tree that poses an unreasonable risk of failure, impact and harm is called a “hazardous tree.” Note that these are legal concepts used in tree risk management that are interrelated.

Duty of Care: The legal obligation to exercise “reasonable care” in protecting others from possible harm.

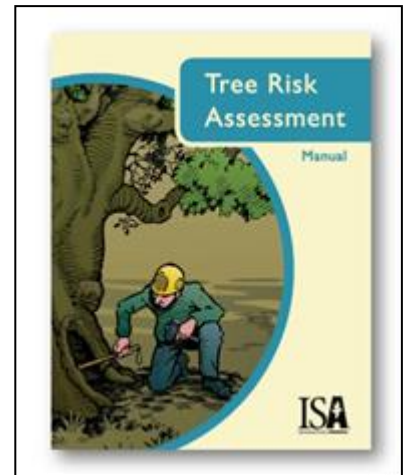
Standard of Care: The expected behavior of a “reasonably prudent” person in exercising their duty of care.

Negligence: Failure to exercise “reasonable care” resulting in harm that was foreseeable.

Liability: Legal responsibility for the consequences of harm that result from negligence.

Many of us have a somewhat general understanding about how and why our trees fail. Some of the reasons are “technical” and some more obvious. A lot has to do with “load.” For example, ice, snow and rain add mass and exert external load on tree parts. Likewise, wind intensifies external load and we also need to consider

how moisture may decrease soil strength and adhesion of roots to soil particles. Dr. Wiseman went into considerable detail to show that in many instances these kinds of problems are probably beyond our limited comprehension. Putting this another way, does the untrained person truly understand tree defects, loading and how trees respond? When is it advisable to call in a tree expert, one who is not only licensed and insured but also holds membership in professional tree societies? As a note of caution, "membership" is not sufficient! At the least, a tree risk assessor should be an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist. Ideally, the assessor should hold the ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification. The fact remains that evaluating trees for hazardous defects is a complex process. Obviously this indicates more than a person who "specializes" in cutting down dead trees and/or removing dead and crossing limbs. Even then one should make sure that the company being hired is licensed and insured before they work on your property. The tree section in a yellow pages telephone book often indicates those companies that have membership in arboriculture organizations. You can also go online and search for tree service. Of course this does not guarantee individual competence but it does provide a clue regarding their concern about the profession of tree care.



Some of the tree defects that Dr. Wiseman discussed are obvious and some not so. He noted seven specific problems including dead trees (and just top and branches), decayed wood, cracks, cankers, weak branch unions, poor tree architecture and root problems. Of course some of these problems are "curable" and some not so. As noted above, that is when it is advisable to seek professional guidance and/or it may be necessary to take needed precautions. Tree defects and their associated response growth is not something that happens in an instant. In fact, trees can respond in a positive manner. For example, if a limb is removed "properly," the tree responds, over time, by producing "woundwood."

The second half of Dr. Wiseman's presentation was concerned with tree risk assessment. If you are thinking about your trees and feel something is not quite right, then by all means call in a professional arborist. This is when the apt expression – better to be safe than sorry comes into play. The first step is to assess the target. This means people, property or activities that could be injured, damaged or disrupted by tree failure. What is the likelihood of tree impact and consequence of an impact? Next, assess the site conditions. By observing, this should provide an insight as to the stability and tree exposure to loads (noted above) from wind and precipitation which can lead to the likelihood of tree failure. The third step in understanding tree risk assessment is to consider the tree health, structure and once again loads. Trees fall when mechanical stress exceeds wood strength or root anchorage. This is the likelihood of tree failure. By now you should have gotten the point that tree failure is based on risk assessment and this is probably not a time for the less knowledgeable homeowner's DIY assessment. Professionals in the field of arboriculture should be proficient in knowing how to evaluate and rate tree risk. A properly trained person can then determine the likelihood of failure and impact and then note the consequences of failure anywhere from negligible to severe and anything between the two extremes.

Lastly, Dr. Wiseman noted how to understand tree risk mitigation. This means how to reduce tree risk to a reasonable, that is, acceptable level such that the residual risk is tolerable by the tree owner. He referred to target focused options

and tree focused options. For target focused options you can move the target, for example, picnic table and benches or fortify the target of an automobile by a carport or another substantial structure, or restrict activity for example under a tree that may be suspect. For tree focused options often the most obvious solution is to prune branches or when appropriate cable or brace the tree. As a last resort removing the tree may be disproportionate to the type or severity of the risk. Tree removal is expensive and then you have now lost a landscape asset – your tree. Also consider performing plant health care by spraying pesticides, inoculating (medicating) the tree and fertilizing to improve tree vitality and response growth.

This is a lot of information to consume and it should be carefully considered. If we are to continue to enjoy the benefits that trees provide our neighborhoods, then surely we want to have a safe environment and also be able to enjoy the wildlife.

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## Calendar

### **August 11**

VMGA Bi-monthly Board Meeting  
10am – 2pm  
W & L Law School, East Denny Circle  
Lexington, VA 24450 [map](#)

Hosted by Rockbridge MGs

### **September 15**

VA Beach MG Fall Gardening Festival  
HRAREC, 1444 Diamond Springs Rd. – Virginia Beach, VA

### **September 9**

**Go Green Expo** – 10 Year Anniversary of Hampton Roads Green Education Event  
– Newport News EMGs

### **September 29**

**VMGA Educational Event:** Bats, Birds and Bugs: Gardening on the Wilder Side  
Holiday Lake 4H Center

### **October 13**

VMGA Bimonthly Meeting, Hosted by Central Rappahannock

### **December 8, 2018**

VMGA Bimonthly Meeting, Hosted by Suffolk