

**History of the
Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc. (VMGA)**

1988 - 1993

Compiled from minutes and historical records by

Karen L. Sacasky

A Seed is Planted

1988. The first Advanced Master Gardener Training was offered at the Virginia Tech Campus, Blacksburg, Va. It was also the year that brought the first rumblings for organizing a state Master Gardener association to conduct statewide activities. At the request of a group of Extension agents and Master Gardeners, the State Advisory Board started investigating the possibility of a state association to provide unity and funding in support of statewide consumer horticulture programs. A letter was sent out in November asking the Master Gardeners' opinion about forming a state association and the response to the query was overwhelmingly positive.

1989. A meeting held on January 26 and chaired by Dr. Diane Relf was attended by 21 Extension Agents with Master Gardener Programs and sixteen Master Gardeners representing every region of the state. With 800 active Master Gardeners across Virginia, it was agreed that growth in the program had created opportunities that were difficult to take advantage of without some type of formal statewide organization. Several examples were a permanent presence at the Virginia State Fair, organization of horticulture educational events and establishment of clear state guidelines for the program.

The participants in the meeting were enthusiastic and excited about a new level of activity in their program. A steering committee consisting of the current members of the State Master Gardener Advisory Board and one Extension Agent from each of the 5 Extension Districts with Master Gardener Programs was established. The committee was charged with investigating a state association and submitting its initial report by December 1, 1989. The first meeting was set for March 17, 1989, on the Virginia State campus in Petersburg and the second meeting was scheduled to occur during Agri-Tech week in July at Virginia Tech. A third meeting was tentatively planned for the fall. Via the Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter, active Master Gardeners were urged to attend one of the scheduled meetings or contact their representative to voice their views on what form and function a state association should take.

At the March 17 meeting, Advisory Board Chairman Reggie Vaughan (Hanover) reminded the members of the Board of the important task ahead of them. The steering committee was especially concerned that a state association be formed in an equitable and representative

manner, and that its structure not impinge on the independence of the local Master Gardener programs.

Subcommittees were formed to investigate membership, structure and goals. Subcommittees presented their findings to the Board and other Master Gardeners sitting in on the Board's quarterly meeting at Virginia Tech on July 13. The subcommittee on structure of a state Master Gardener association, chaired by Mayer Littman (Arlington), submitted their proposal. Included in the proposed structure were conditions for elections and officers including first and second vice presidents, a historian and executive assistant. A minimum of 3 meetings per year were set and Robert's Rules, Revised, would govern meetings. An executive board made up of officers, chairs of standing committees and the Extension advisor were to be responsible for the day to day business of the association. Standing committees proposed were Nominating, Publications (including a newsletter), Public Relations, Program, Fund Raising, and Finance. It was felt that the role of VCE Liaison to the association would be filled by the current Master Gardener Coordinator, Mr. Dave McKissick. The fiscal year was to begin October 1.

The Membership Committee chaired by Bob Jordan (Chesterfield) submitted criteria for membership in the state association. Several types of membership put forth were Member in Good Standing, Charter Member, Provisional Member, Lifetime Member, Ex Officio Member, Associate Member and Honorary Member. It was recommended that horticultural businesses, Extension personnel and people or organizations that make significant contributions to the Master Gardener Program be eligible for other non-voting classes of membership.

The Finance Subcommittee, chaired by Diane Morris (Virginia Beach) recommended that the Association rely primarily on dues for its financing. The subcommittee advised the Board to keep dues at a minimum since many Master Gardeners belong to a number of other organizations.

By the end of the July meeting, a framework had been established and it was hoped that bylaws could be submitted and approved at the next meeting in September. By that time, they felt the Articles of Incorporation should have been filed and approved.

A Sprout Breaks Ground

1990. The Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc. becomes a reality! After much study and work carried on with a great deal of enthusiasm, a meeting was held on February 9, 1990, in the Hanover County Courthouse and all attending were witness to the birth of the state association. A group of Master Gardeners and Extension personnel elected an interim Board of Directors. In the excitement that followed, 13 attendees joined and paid their dues on the spot. The first annual meeting was set to be held at the 1990 Master Gardener Advanced Training in Blacksburg in June. The Directors represented every region of Virginia and most were long time Master Gardeners and Advisory Board members. They were: 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).

In addition to the election, the purpose of the meeting was to provide interested MGs with an opportunity to comment on the formation of a state association and to critique the proposed bylaws. And that they did! The entire afternoon was spent discussing the bylaws "line-by-line". Membership categories were boiled down to Active, Provisional and Associate with the dues being set at \$10.00 annually. Active, voting membership was limited to individuals who successfully completed the Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program, fulfilled their volunteer service requirements, and paid the \$10 annual dues. A free Provisional membership was granted for one year to each Master Gardener upon graduation from training. Upon completion of "Payback" time, each will be eligible for active, voting membership. Associate membership applied to an employee of VT, VSU or VCE who was working with the Master Gardener Program or with an office which plans to start a program within one year of the employee's application for membership.

Questions were asked about how the state association would affect local programs. Those questions were addressed in the 1990 Winter Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter and quoted as follow:

"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 requires MGs to become members of the state association or is a connection mandated between the state association and local groups of MGs. The Board favored this arrangement for several reasons. First, it was felt that Master Gardeners and their agents know best what type of programs fit their communities and secondly, the Board realized that some MGs prefer to focus their volunteer work at the community level, while others are interested in finding a broader field for their activities. 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."

Master Gardener Coordinator, David McKissick, via the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter*, announced the formation of the Association and welcomed Master Gardeners to join and make nominations for leadership positions.

The Articles of Incorporation of the Virginia Master Gardener Association, Inc. are dated March 6, 1990 and the State Corporation Commission accepted the Association as a Virginia Corporation and issued a Certificate of Incorporation on March 26, 1990. The incorporators were: Aileen Bartlett, James B. Crute, Hank Haines, Beryl Lemmon, Cen Waters, David McKissack, Mayer Littman, David Lowry, Diane Morris, Reggie Vaughan, Rita Voke, and Elizabeth Montgomery. The Registered Office was listed as: Horticulture Department, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA. The Association is registered as a non-profit organization organized exclusively for educational, scientific and charitable purposes.

The first annual meeting of the Association took place in June during the Master Gardener Advanced Training. Mayer Littman, Chairman of the Nominating Committee submitted a slate

of Officers, who were elected to serve for two years. They were: President, Reggie Vaughan (Hanover); Vice President, Diane Morris (Virginia Beach); Secretary, Monty Kier (Hanover); and Treasurer, James Crute (Henrico). Committee Chairs selected were: Finance, Evelyn Parker (Hanover); Nominating, Mayer Littman (Arlington); Fund Raising, Andrew Gerachis (Loudoun); State Conference, Gene Lewallen (Chesapeake) and Program, Hank Haines (Albemarle). At this time the Association had \$2,140 in their treasury which represented \$10 membership fees from 214 members.

Several programs were discussed for development by the Association. They were: The Virginia State Fair, where the Association anticipates sponsoring a booth where MGs will present demonstrations of horticultural topics; and NASA tomato seeds. A quantity of seeds which have orbited earth was made available for growing by Master Gardeners. Reports of their performance would be reported to NASA. Other projects mentioned were preservation of wildflowers in Virginia, the dissemination of dogwood anthracnose information, and the production of t-shirts with the Association logo on them for sale to Association members.

The Advisory Council met in Charlottesville in August. The members attending were to develop ideas into 4 or 5 major topics, form committees, and make assignments.

The first brochure of VMGA, Inc. was issued with the following as the stated mission: To foster communication and education among those involved in gardening.

Goals were: 1. To enhance and supplement the Consumer Horticulture programs in Extension, teaching, and research of VPI and SU and Virginia State University; 2. To extend Master Gardeners' knowledge of and interests in horticulture and related activities; 3. To disseminate to Virginia citizens, information on horticultural practices and techniques in accordance with standards approved by the Cooperative Extension Services of VPI & SU and Virginia State University; 4. And to provide opportunities for its members to meet and associate with others who have similar horticultural interests. Annual dues were listed as \$10.00 for Active and Associate members. Recommended Optional Sponsorships were also listed in the membership application as: Bronze \$100-599, Silver \$600-999, Gold \$1000-2999, and Platinum \$3000-up.

The first bank account was set up with Signet Bank of Richmond, VA.

The very young Association started supporting the Virginia Tech, VCE, production of the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter* by paying the printing costs of the Summer/Fall edition. This was necessitated by state budget cuts to Extension.

A VMGA membership form was included with the Summer/Fall 1990 issue of the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter*.

T-shirts with the state Master Gardener logo were created and were being sold; the Association helped plan the 1991 Master Gardener Advanced Training; a subcommittee was investigating how the state association might run a state convention in 1992; the Board was investigating how members might contribute to the state MG newsletter by writing and publishing future newsletters; and members were organizing a unique fund raising project.

The Seedling Suffers Growing Pains

1991. Michael Allred becomes the first Patron supporter. VMGA continues to support the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter*.

The June 15 Annual Meeting required the appointment of three new officers due to the resignation of Reggie Vaughan, Diane Morris and Monty Kier. Each of these officers had started a business venture that took more time than anticipated and did not feel they could give the state association their best efforts.

Jim Crute shouldered the huge responsibility left to him during the meetings at Advanced Training chairing meetings and organizing new officer selection. John Keller (Gloucester), James Riffe (Fauquier) and Wilma Paceley (Stafford) agreed to act as President, Vice President and Secretary, respectively, until regular elections held in the winter 1992. Jim Crute (Henrico) continued as Treasurer.

Extension is reorganizing because of budget shortfalls. The association is also reorganizing and is planning "field days". VMGA, in cooperation with local Master Gardener units and their agents, will organize education field days for MGs. The field days did not substitute for the basic MG Training conducted by local Extension Agents and their MG volunteers, nor did it replace the Advanced MG Training held at Blacksburg. The plan was to address topics not normally covered by the basic Master Gardener course. Field day planned for September 1991, was to be held in the Albemarle County Office Building, Charlottesville. : "Cultivating the Electronic Grapevine: How to Use Your Extension Office Computer to Obtain Horticulture Information, Publications, and Other Resources" was presented by Charlie Goodman, Albemarle County Extension Agent; and "Tips on Preparing and giving Public Presentations and Using Visual Aids" was presented by Angela Neilan, VPI & SU. Planned for November 1991 was a trip to the American Horticultural Society River Farm in Alexandria with "Composting: Back to Basics" to be offered by Joe Keyser, Director of Programs AHS and a tour of the Farm with talks on individual plant families. March 1992 would bring "Ornamental Shrubs and Trees: I.D., Problems and Solutions" with Dr. Bonnie Appleton and Dr. Jeff Derr VPI& SU. This session would take place at the Hampton Roads Experiment Station in Hampton Roads. Paul Kulp of Fairfax County was the Education Committee Chair planning these great opportunities for Master Gardeners to increase their knowledge.

The Fund Raising Committee chaired by Andrew Gerachis (Loudoun County) was in the process of developing a catalog of horticultural products -- tools, books, and other supplies which would be offered at a discount to Association members. The current list of products included Felco tools, books and some bulk garden supplies.

The membership proposed developing MG Program Standards to aspire toward a set level of quality; to participate in research by offering sites, assistance, and funding; and to help local units by promoting the program, offering advice, providing leadership, providing seed money, sponsoring statewide community projects and fund raising activities.

Also discussed during that annual meeting: a statewide talent inventory, compiling membership records on Tech's computer, sharing the best unit programs, and networking among MG units liaisons with commercial establishments, group purchasing plans, scholarships for educational research, and awards program, membership cards, pins, etc.

The Association agreed to continue to pay the printing costs for the Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter for the coming year and agreed to sending the newsletter to all 1500 MGs in Virginia. 29 Counties are now offering MG Training.

Eight meetings are planned for the coming year to be held on weekdays and Saturdays in different locations. Four of the meetings would be business meetings and the other four educational sessions. Three - "Field Days" and one - Advanced Training at VT.

As of June 30, 1991, the treasury had a balance of \$2,184.89 from dues, interest, and the sale of sweatshirts and t-shirts.

A membership list was developed.

Cen Waters was awarded a life membership in the Association for submitting the winning logo for the Virginia Master Gardeners.

Kay Parrott (Hanover) was charged with investigating the feasibility of VMGA sponsoring a Virginia State MG Conference. She sent out a survey and respondents indicated a preference for the conference to be separate from Advanced Training in Blacksburg, to be in a central area of the state and to be held no earlier than the fall of 1992. Virginia Master Gardeners once met at state conventions, the last such gathering was held in 1988 in Virginia Beach. Since members were busy organizing the Association, little time had been available for sponsoring another convention. However, MGs felt the time was right to explore that possibility.

Summer also brought a VMGA trial gardener program designed to evaluate new cultivars of interest to homeowners. MGs around the state were given a packet of Pepo Seeds "Little-leaf" cucumber to grow.

Hank Haines suggested his Program Committee be renamed the Communications Committee and offered to work with David McKissack in producing the state newsletter. Since VMGA started picking up printing costs for the *Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter*, published by the Department of Horticulture, Office of Consumer Horticulture, MGs felt that the Association should have more information in that publication covering local MG programs, unit activities, successful projects and good garden gossip. In other words "If we pay for it, we want our own two cents in it" and "Taxation (funding) without representation is tyranny". Hank's first column appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of the newsletter.

A Little Fertilizer Required

1992. Master Gardeners get political! Governor Wilder's budget cuts to consumer horticulture place a strain on the program. Master Gardeners were asked by VT personnel to write to their

legislators. Many phone calls and hundreds of letters later it appeared that MGs had won some of the much needed Extension dollars back. Certainly a variety of people all over the Commonwealth of Virginia learned in living color what the Master Gardener Program is all about. Alice Nicolson and many of the troops from Northern Virginia distributed packets of seeds among the legislators in Richmond during the height of the budget controversy. Notes attached to seed packets read, "Our community reaps a better environment", "Virginia Master Gardeners sow seeds of knowledge", "have a heart, support full funding for our Cooperative Extension Service", etc.

David McKissack leaves the MG Coordinator's position.

The Annual Meeting was held in June at Advanced Training, VT, Blacksburg. Officers elected for the two year term were President, John Keller (Gloucester); Vice President, Jim Riffe (Fauquier); Secretary, Wilma Paceley (Stafford); and Treasurer, George Simpson (Gloucester).

Jim Riffe and the Executive committee reworked the Association bylaws during the year and they were accepted by the membership.

The Treasury now has a balance of \$4,030.12

Communications were proving to be a problem and Advisory Board members were encouraged to be more diligent in disseminating information to their local units

The Association decided to pursue a 501(c) (3) status.

Lifetime membership was approved by the Board and will be presented to the annual meeting in 1993 for a vote. The proposed fee was set at \$100.00.

The Board decided to create a Corresponding Secretary position to assist the President and Pauline Simmons (Gloucester) was appointed to that position.

Planning was proceeding for the State Master Gardener Convention scheduled for Richmond in October 1993.

The Board discussed a class for hobbyists who would pay more for the MG Training Course, but wouldn't be required to pay back any volunteer hours. This idea was abandoned.

VMGA sponsored Advanced Training fees were set at \$10.00 for active, provisional, patron and associate members and \$20 for non-members. However, the extra \$10 could be used to cover membership.

Paul Kulp, Education Chair, planned two education sessions for the fall. VMGA teamed up with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to present a program at the Richmond Courthouse. Principal speakers were Randy Shank, Chesapeake Bay Education Coordinator for VCE Division of Soil and Water Conservation and Bill Mills of the Alliance. October brought a program to Randolph Macon College in Ashland on Xeriscaping and writing grants.

Darlene Allen came on Board as the State Master Gardener Coordinator. Master Gardener Handbooks were selling for \$30 for MG Volunteers.

Ralph Byers, Director of Governmental Relations and Jerry Jones, Assistant Director, ANR, asked, via the newsletter, for MG help in securing the University's budget request for 1993-94. Here we go again!

Proposed Guidelines for the Virginia Master Gardener Program were submitted to the Board by Jim Riffe for their recommendations, suggestions and comments.

The Seedling Matures

1993. At a meeting in January, the Board decided to have business meetings every other month rather than quarterly.

In accordance with a request of VT personnel, Association members were writing and calling legislators to have funds restored to Extension.

The Virginia Master Gardener Newsletter went to a bi-monthly rather than a quarterly publication with VMGA still underwriting the printing costs.

The Association now had 290 members, with all new MGs being provisional members of the state Association.

The Urban Forestry Seminar planned in Lynchburg by VMGA and the Lynchburg Extension Service was canceled due to a blizzard and was rescheduled for May.

March included a VMGA sponsored training session at Hampton Roads Agricultural Experiment Station. Instruction was on identification and control of insects and diseases that attack both trees and shrubs; and the identification and control of weeds commonly found in gardens and landscapes. Speakers for the session were Dr. Bonnie Appleton, Extension Nursery Specialist; Dr. Jeffrey Derr, Extension Weed Specialist; and Dr. Peter Schultz, Extension Entomologist.

The March business meeting brought a request for goal setting for the next five years. I guess lengthy meetings must have been a problem, because the Board members agreed to limit lunch to 30 minutes and suggested that having it catered would require less time.

Planning for the VMGA State Conference was proceeding with members lining up speakers, vendors, MG projects, plants and seeds to exchange, interesting sites to visit, etc. The theme of the conference was decided to be "Cultivating, Conserving, and Caring - The Three Cs. Cultivating friendships and working relations with dedicated and able Master Gardeners; conserving our resources by engaging supportive experts and helpers close at hand; caring for Master Gardeners by attempting to meet their needs for information, entertainment, intellectual challenge and comfort." Jim Wilson from Victory Garden South and Richard Bir of North Carolina State University were confirmed speakers. Off site tours were planned for the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden and Virginia State University Research Projects.

Members of the Board are still working on a policy guide for the Master Gardener Program.

Some goals were set for the coming year. A projected 500 active members was a goal which would require 80% retention of active members, a gain of 100 provisional members and a gain of 120 members from previously graduated MGs. The Association found a need to establish and demonstrate the advantages and benefits for being in the State Association to be able to accomplish this goal. Unfortunately that goal was not reached in the next several years.

Suggested dates and places for Advisory Board meetings resulted in plans for holding meetings in Charlottesville, Williamsburg, Norfolk and Arlington in the coming fiscal year.

Dr. Bill Allen, Interim Director of Virginia Cooperative Extension wrote to VMGA President John Keller thanking the Association for their tireless efforts to help create an understanding and appreciation for what VCE and the MG Program.

Evelyn Parker, State Fair Chair, announced that the Virginia State Fair MG booth was staffed by 110 MGs from 13 counties working a total of 850.75 hours.

October still found VMGA working on 501(c)(3) status and worrying about group stagnation.

Questions were asked about why we need a local or state organization and whether the state organization needed to be an affiliate for the local organizations.

The October Virginia Master Gardener Conference had 47 attendees.

Discussion took place about having another statewide conference and it was decided to have one once a year with the next to be in Charlottesville in October 1994. It was pointed out that advanced training in Blacksburg and the state conference are distinctly different events. The Conference for all MGs will be run by VMGA and will be open to all MGs but not the general public. Better judgment must have taken hold of the Advisory Board because no further action was taken to have a statewide conference.