

# VMGA REPORT

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 1

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## Letter from the Editor

As I am sure all you are aware, Tom Bolt had an unfortunate fall while recovering from hip surgery. To enable Tom to rest more and work less, I volunteered to write a letter from the editor in place of the usual President's Letter for this issue of the newsletter. First of all let me say that in truth I am an editor in training. This fall when I received a letter mentioning the need for an editor, I contacted Tom Bolt. He suggested that I contact Peggy Fox, long time editor of the VMGA Report. Peggy encouraged me to try the editorship and she also generously agreed to oversee my work for two issues. So, if this issue of the newsletter and the next has an unfamiliar layout, it is due to the absence of Peggy's practiced hand.

Moving from the topic of editorship to upcoming events, I would like to encourage everyone to attend the next bi-monthly meeting Saturday, December 14, 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM in Alexandria, Virginia. The address and a map are located on the VMGA website calendar of events. I hope to be there and would be glad if you would introduce yourself to me and tell me about your unit.

Finally, I would like to encourage all units to ask for volunteers or nominate individuals to serve as reporters on the newsletter committee. The duties of the reporter would be to submit to the editor an article spotlighting their unit. This could be done quarterly or on an assigned basis which ever works best for all units. The information submitted could include current or past activities, geographical information on the unit or nearby attractions. Anything to help newsletter readers "get to know you" better would be appreciated. I am personally interested in learning about each unit in Virginia and I am sure others are as well.

Photographs are always welcome additions to newsletters, as they bring life to any written article that they accompany. An excellent example of this is The Master Gardener's Association of the Central Rappahannock Area which often sells decorated grapevine trees. The picture on their website instantly made me want to either buy one of these trees or try my hand at making one of my own. The MGACRA website is filled with examples of workshops and festivals in which they are involved. If we are aware of the activities of neighboring units, we can support them with our involvement. Let's use a section of our newsletter to spotlight the unique and very busy units across the state.

-editor in training, Jan Worthy

Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener's Association

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## VMGA Coordinator Liaison Report

At our recent meeting, we had some communication training, an update on the VMS, updates on policy, and talked about public value. MG College planning is going well. Felder Rushing is scheduled to give the Sunday morning keynote address. The dates for MG College are June 25 to June 29. The VMS changeover is going well. We have a user's guide that is available on-line and we also have three administrator audio training modules available for listening. In our office we are currently hiring two student workers, one for the MG Newsletter, *In Season* and the other a webmaster. We are interviewing the week of Oct 23 and should have the new folks in the office during November. The iPad contest is open for submissions. The deadline for submissions is November 27. Please contact Dave or John for more information. Our Fall Edition of *In Season* is now available and has been posted on the MG Website and also sent out via the VMS. In the International Master Gardener Conference Search for Excellence, Bedford placed third with their Horticultural Therapy program. What a great program and a great honor. We also had 15 people from Virginia who attended the conference. Finally, the statewide MG Project Presentation is going well. We have over 40 projects that were submitted and we are now working on scripting the presentation.

# The Grainethumb: A New Approach to Landscaping

George Graine, Master Gardener College Advisory Team

*All gardens are a form of autobiography.* ---Robert Dash

When the Grainethumb first sat down to pen his impressions about a new landscape book, he never expected to find how much fun this experience would become. Ask yourself a question: Can a horticultural guide be so laugh-out-loud funny that people stare at you in the dentist's office waiting room? Full disclosure, this happened to your garden communicator. The must read title of a new landscape book will surely grab your attention. *Kiss My Aster* is the title and the important sub-title is *A Graphic Guide to Creating a Fantastic Yard Totally Tailored to You* (Storey Publishing, 2012). Indeed, how can a sobering topic about how to landscape give you the giggles? Read on and you will find out how this book has that effect. In fact, you will probably not want the book to end and you may even hope for a sequel.

KMA may change your life and attitude towards gardening. It is a unique book that "permits" and actually suggests that you skip to other pages that help to flesh out points being introduced. This approach becomes an interactive guide to help the reader through some of the intricacies of landscaping. Do other landscape texts allow this kind of freedom of expression? Most often you are obliged to read chapter by chapter in a regimented sequence. KMA is a pleasant departure from such a mundane and pedantic approach on how to garden or as the Grainethumb likes to put it – yardabout. The joy of reading KMA is fostered by the easy going conversational and highly readable style. This should not be confused with (heaven forbid) a forced editorial format. In fact, it is probably fair to say that KMA thrives on an irreverent style.

KMA brings yarding about down from a sophisticated science (chemicals, soils, cations, etc.) to an easy understanding of gardening as a process that can be readily mastered and is also a joy. One of the politically operant words these days is "bold." Surely KMA fits the sub-title. You will not find typical landscape coffee table pretty color photos in this book as none exist. Horrors! Instead, KMA has multitudes of hand-drawn illustrations of plants and charts and of course text. The book makes the subject of landscaping perfectly understandable without using a lot of unnecessary hortie jargon.

It is easy to sum up KMA. The author does not adhere to the typical landscape school of design. In fact, bless her heart, she goes her own independent way and to heck with what others may think or say. That is what creating a fantastic yard totally tailored to you is all about. This is also a breath of fresh air for anyone who likes to collect plants. It is perfectly all right to design an asymmetrical garden yet still maintain some semblance of balance. Remember the old adage that goes like this: Is your garden looking tired or are you tired of looking at your garden? If you are having a bad day, pick up KMA, flip to any page and your moodiness will be modified faster than (fill in whatever).

## State Coordinator Endowment Update

Have you ever noticed a pin on a fellow Master Gardener's lanyard – a blue diamond shape with a dogwood flower on it? That person is recognized as a donor to VMGA's State Coordinator Endowment, and anyone can receive one of the pins by making a donation as described below. The pins are one way we thank donors, but further acknowledgments now need to be developed.

### Giving Levels

There are giving levels for all donations. Redbud donors have contributed as much as \$249. The Dogwood pins symbolize that there has been a donation made of an amount between \$250 and \$499. Silverbell represents donations from \$500 to \$999 and Bald Cypress for \$1,000 to \$4,999. From \$5,000 to \$9,999, donations are in the Southern Magnolia level, and the mighty White Oak represents the generosity of donors of \$10,000 and above.

We have donors who are in higher donation categories, and they need appropriate acknowledgment. The Silverbell and Bald Cypress pins are currently in production, but the Endowment Committee is looking for some volunteers to join the committee in finding Virginia artists whose work reflects the giving levels above the Dogwood. Email [Pat@TheReillyGroup.net](mailto:Pat@TheReillyGroup.net) if you're interested!

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## Fall Migration Spectacle

Robyn Puffenbarger, Central Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners



The first Sunday in October, my husband and I were on a morning drive and happened around a corner just a few miles from our home in Bridgewater (Rockingham Co.). To our delight, the spectacle of fall migration was in full display with 2,000-5,000 tree swallows just waking up from the nights roost on a soybean field. The birds are stunning with ice white underbellies and iridescent blue-green backs. Hearing one is fun, a chip and chirp of thousands was delightful.

Their flying is an aerial, acrobatic dance as they take insects on the wing so no soy beans for these high flyers! The antics on display as they squabbled over the perfect soy perch with the field shining gold in the morning sun was for us, another

reminder of how we love the interaction of birds with plants.

Our yard in Bridgewater is just 1/3 of an acre. The house pre-dates 1900 and the yard in 2002 was typical, two large dogwoods, seven good sized conifers, and lots of lawn. Our mission started out as get the dated and over-grown landscaping out; we did have yews the size of cars blocking most windows! Now we have taken on a more thoughtful addition of native plants and layers to our canopy to entice spring and fall bird migrants down from the sky, as well as to make at home the resident birds. We are avid birders and our rules are any bird in the yard or seen from the yard 'counts' on the yard list that resets every January 1. We are at 71 species for 2013 including flyovers like bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, and great-egret. We also have nesting birds including: American robin, northern cardinal, Carolina chickadee, and cedar waxwing.

How can you have more birds? First, keep domesticated pets, especially cats, indoors or limit their use of your "bird area." Second is water. You do not need an expensive bird bath. Add a large, shallow plastic 'bowl' to your yard; one of the fake terra cotta bottoms for planters is perfect. Add some rocks so small birds feel safe checking out the depth, add water, keep it fresh by changing or adding water every 2-3 days and you are ready. Seed is not required and can be a mess. The third critical item is cover and heights. If you have a place where the canopy of your trees is tall, that is wonderful. Now, to bring your birds down to your level, add native shrubs that are not too tall: viburnums, Aronia, beauty-berry (*Callicarpa americana*). Viburnums are wonderful shrubs that come with a variety of heights, berries and habits. We have several species in our yard and got to see the cedar waxwing parents feeding the berries to their young this year. *Aronia melanocarpa* (Black Chokeberry) is another wonderful native and the suggested replacement for burning bush (*Euonymus*) which can be invasive. My last favorite is the beauty-berry; we have four, two white and two purple. In the fall, the leaf color next to the stunning berry crop in pearly white and lavender purple is one of our favorite sights. It is also very attractive to birds. Every fall a flock of 100's of American robins descend, sending our resident Northern mockingbird into apoplexy as the beauty-berries disappear. If you can have one bed where you put your leaves every year, you will save on the cost of mulch and begin to have more insects. Many of our native insects have larval stages that over-winter and grow in leaves. By having one 'deciduous area' where you let the leaves lie, you increase your insect population including fireflies! In all seasons, we see robins flicking over leaves to find tasty treats. In migration, we have brown thrashers and eastern towhee flinging and kicking leaves all over. Yes, it is a bit of work to put the leaves back when they creep out into the yard, but knowing our yard is more like a woodland that brings in birds makes it all worth while.

For more information on birds and native plants, check out these references:

Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Audubon Society for more about birds

Doug Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home* and website, <http://bringingnaturehome.net/native-gardening>

Virginia Native Plant Society, <http://www.vnps.org/>

National Geographic Field Guide to N. American Birds, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition – an excellent reference to identify the birds in your yard

Robyn completed her Master Gardener training in 2011 with the Central Shenandoah Valley unit. She is chairperson of the CSVMG Education Committee. In addition to her Master Gardener work, she is a Biology professor at Bridgewater College. Despite her busy schedule at Bridgewater College, she finds time to be an avid gardener and bird watcher.

# The Grainethumb: Garden Design With and Without Graph Paper

George Graine, Fairfax County Master Gardeners

*Months and days I've wasted doing some useless thing,—*

*how few the hours that have been well spent, viewing the flowers in spring!*

Fujiwara no Okikaze (about 910 A.D.)

Books on design have long held a fascination for gardeners. They may be similar from a text book approach and at the same time they can be decidedly different as to details. You will never be at a loss for a design book if you seek; a generalized approach; a formal design similar to Williamsburg; how to design a garden that uses less water; or making a species garden using conifers. A new design book has been published that has a first rule of gardening which is, *there are no rules!* Indeed, this provides the gardener with a lot of freedom; however, you need to be careful how you treat this unshackled approach to landscape design.

*The Layered Garden: Design Lessons for Year-Round Beauty from Brandywine Cottage* by David Culp with Adam Levine and fabulous color photos by Rob Cardillo (Timber Press, 2012) is the design book du jour. If you are looking for inspiration, teachable moments, and even some humor, you will find it between the covers of this book. The author employs an informal writing style which is like having a conversation with another gardener. In a full-throated explanation of what a layered garden is all about, you will quickly realize that landscape planning is definitely at the core. Our old friend, four-season gardening, is evident in this book that, by the way, can double as a coffee table book because of the more than 300 color photos. Something else that is unusual and may catch your eye is the combination of native and non-native species. The layered garden concept is fairly simple. Knowing how to put plants together by considering their habitat, succession, and yes, even dying is important. Recognizing the complexity on different levels such as bloom periods and seasons is a like having a dialogue with Mother Nature as you await the promise of tomorrow. Design police are not lurking about, so do not be constrained by scholastic-like solutions. Allow for your own artistic expression instead of planting with a paint-by-numbers approach.

The key to a layered garden is an artistic combination, almost puzzle-like, when you also consider form, color and texture. By combining plants in this manner and realizing the time interval of each plant, you can maximize the space set aside for the plantings. If this seems like a complex problem, just take a deep breath. Let your ideas marinate in your head and then pencil them in on paper and keep an eraser handy. Your ideas will evolve into a personal statement that should initially please you, and you will learn to appreciate your effort more than you thought possible. Now you should be able to strike the expression "Is your garden looking tired or are you tired of your garden?"

Consider plant collections such as hydrangea, helleborus, echinacea, heuchera, and Japanese maples just to name a few examples. All of these plant families are increasing and they can really make a statement. Who are you trying to please? If your answer is to please yourself, then you are on your way to a whole new gardening experience.

What is the layering concept about if it is not just numbers of plants and their diverse nature? Of course, our other garden mantra expression, "right plant, right place," is important to consider, but there is much more to the layered garden. You need to site plant material from groundcovers to trees in order to enhance not only the natural beauty of the plants, but also to excite your own senses in whatever space you set aside for their own show. Done correctly, you will have a garden to enjoy for many years yet to come. As an aside, *The Layered Garden* gets you into a thinking mood and makes you wonder why this and not why that. If you desire a new plant or one that is new to you, do not fret. You are now your own designer-collector. Surely, you can find a place to manage your collection impulse. After stepping through the many and varied gardens included in the book, note that the last forty percent of the book includes a vast array of "signature plants through the seasons" that serve to enhance the layered garden concept. These plants are the author's favorites and of course, you may have some very different ideas.

*continued on page 5*

**Garden Design With and Without Graph Paper continued from page 4**

A joy of the layered garden is that it allows you to be flexible and to make changes. If you see a new plant introduction and like it, buy it. Find a special spot in the garden or pass along some other plant and replace it with your new “trophy” plant. You might think of this as garden editing and a way to keep the garden fresh and interesting. The author makes a number of excellent points about establishing a new garden. The Grainthumb adds enhancing an existing garden and even making a major change if by an unfortunate circumstance, for example, your shade garden has become a sun garden or vice versa.

1. What do you really expect from a garden?
2. What really excites you?
3. What do you think is beautiful?
4. How much work are you willing to do to keep it that way?
5. What is the dollar cost to make a garden that you desire?

Throughout the book, you will read nuggets of Q & A-like information, that is, many tips on how to create various types of gardens and also coping strategies regarding drought, deer, disease, pests, and plant maintenance. *The Layered Garden* is a must read and definitely a gift book for another gardener as it contains many necessary attributes. It is an inspirational read and you will enjoy the “conversation.” Plantaholics rejoice for you have found a true soul mate.

**Endowment Update continued from page 2****Prince George Master Gardener Association**

Some of those donors are local Master Gardener associations as well as individuals. The Endowment recently received a donation from the Prince George Master Gardener Association of \$2,000. VMGA is extremely grateful for this donation as Prince George is one of the smaller units in the State. Other associations have been generous as well. To see all of the donors to the Endowment, who have chosen to be acknowledged, go to [www.hort.vt.edu/mastergardener](http://www.hort.vt.edu/mastergardener) and click on “The Master Gardener Program” and “Coordinator Endowment.” If you do not see your donation listed, please contact John Freeborn at [jfreeborn@vt.edu](mailto:jfreeborn@vt.edu).

Donations are best made directly to the Virginia Tech Foundation using the form found at <http://vmga.net/Endowment/endormentform2012.pdf>. Options are available to make a pledge and the Foundation will send you reminders. While cash donations are best, there are many other ways to defer your gift that may result in tax benefits to you. Ben Grove, Assistant Director of Development, is VMGA's resource and welcomes your questions. Ben can be reached at [Ben.Grove@vt.edu](mailto:Ben.Grove@vt.edu) or his office phone, 540-231-7640. Gifts may be made in honor of someone and in memory of a departed friend or loved one.

**Resources**

In addition to Tech's Development Office, other resources are available. A member of the Endowment Committee will visit your unit or association meeting, and there is a presentation linked from <http://vmga.net/endorment.htm>. If you'd like paper copies of the form for contributions, or a brochure about the Endowment, please contact me at the email address, above.

And many thanks to all of you who have supported this important initiative of VMGA!

Just About Half Way There!

Cash	\$238,278
Outstanding pledges	\$5,600
Estate commitments	\$190,000
Interest earned	\$11,852
Total	\$445,730



Deb Straw  
VMGA Membership Chair  
249 Snapps Mill Road  
Spout Springs, VA 24593

### VMGA

**A Voice for Virginia Master Gardeners**

Deadline for January/February newsletter: December 13, 2013  
Please submit any announcements or articles to be included in the next issue to:

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

### ABOUT THE VIRGINIA MASTER GARDENERS AND VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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

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

### VMGA Bi-Monthly Board Meeting

Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia

Arlington, // Alexandria

**When:** Saturday, December 14, 10 a.m.—1 p.m.

**Where:** Lee Center

1108 Jefferson Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

For more details see [vmga.net/meetings.htm](http://vmga.net/meetings.htm)

### 2014 Master Gardener College

**June 25—June 29**



### Calendar of Events

If you wish to have your event published in future newsletters, please send to [jancwva52@gmail.com](mailto:jancwva52@gmail.com)



### Newsletter Submission Deadline

The deadline for submission of articles for the January/February newsletter is Friday, December 13. This is a busy season, so submit your articles and announcements by this date.



# Happy Thanksgiving