



The VMGA Report

A Voice for Virginia Master Gardeners
vmga.net

Mar/Apr 2020

Volume 25, Number 5

VMGA Officers

President-
Wanda Gerard, Suffolk

Vice President-
Leslie Paulson,
Prince William County

Secretary-
Nelda Purcell,
Franklin County

Treasurer-
Georgianna Hall,
Loudoun County

In This Issue

- Message from the President
- Spotlight: Louisa County
- Save the Dates
- Endowment News
- AAS Trials
- In the news...
- MG College Scholarships
- Seed Swap 2020
- The Grainethumb
- Winter Interest
- Calendar
- 12 Months of Bloom

Editor-
Peggy Fox, Newport News
With assistance from-
Lynn Hamm,
Western Tidewater

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Virginia Master Gardener Association is to foster communication, education and fellowship among Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteers.

From the President

Happy (almost) spring!

The days are getting longer as the winter season comes to an end. As I write this, the blanket of snow that fell on my garden just two nights ago, is melting. I enjoy seeing the garden in winter as much as I do in the other seasons of the year. Soon we'll be focusing a bit more seriously on all the garden tasks (personally and within our MG units) that waited patiently for our attention during these winter months. Our Master Gardener efforts to reach the citizens of our state with good gardening information is steadfast whether it's about lawn care, native plants, growing vegetables or another valuable topic. Why not plan to document (photograph) these efforts as they come back to life as winter ceases and spring arrives? The before and after pictures can really complement a garden's story.

The seed for having a state master gardener association that was planted many years ago has grown into a strong organization during our 30 years - and it will continue to grow in the years ahead. Our membership numbers are good – but they can *grow* a bit. We've held educational events to expand our gardening knowledge. We've supported MG College both financially and by offering scholarships. Our unit reps continue to share information so we all can learn and *grow* from experiences or lessons learned. Our goal to start an endowment that funds the State MG Coordinator position *grows* each year through our fundraising efforts and generous donations. If you have photographs from those early years, please share them with one of the VMGA board members. Our historical story could be a little stronger with some pictures!

As winter ends, I hope you've recharged those internal batteries and learned some new gardening information to share with others. If possible, 1) please join me in supporting VT Giving Day on March 18-19th - details on that can be found in this newsletter, and 2) plan to attend our bimonthly meeting in April hosted by the Louisa County Master Gardener Association.

Wanda

Got an upcoming event to publicize?

Submit your unit announcements to the State MG Coordinator for inclusion in the Bi-Weekly EMG Update
<https://www.mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/biweekly-submission/>

AND

also to our **VMGA Calendar of Events** in care of:
Calendar@vmga.net

Submissions via email should include:

- The title of your event
- The date of your event
- A sentence describing your event
- The location of your event
- A link or attachment providing additional information

In the news:

Has your unit or the members of your unit been featured in your local newspaper? Let us know! Send links to:
peggyfox@hotmail.com

VMGA Meeting April 11, 2020

Louisa County Office Building

1 Woolfolk Ave

Louisa VA 23093

Join us for VMGA news and education on Orchids

<https://www.louisacvmg.org/>



Louisa County Master Gardeners

Contributed by Tina Chalecki

Louisa County MGA is 40 members strong gaining 6-8 new members annually from our training classes.

Since 2008, we have worked closely with our 4H agent at our elementary schools planting spring and fall vegetables with 2nd graders. In that inaugural year, six raised beds were built, and the harvest served in the school's cafeteria with special credit given to the 2nd graders for their hard work and success with growing a portion of the food eaten by the students. When the principals of other schools in the county heard of their success, they soon asked for their own school garden program.

Seniors visiting the Betty J. Queen Intergenerational Center as part of the adult day care program are provided monthly classes on a wide array of topics, such as flower arranging and propagation. These sessions are always very popular.

We also conduct a well-attended, free lecture series on Saturdays during the month of March called Backyard Gardening. Our speakers include local experts and some of our own Master Gardener volunteers. We've recently had the good fortune of gaining a trainee from one of these lectures.

**ABOUT VIRGINIA
MASTER GARDENERS
AND VIRGINIA
COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION (VCE)**

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 VCE, 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. VCE 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.

The local Farmer's Market has successfully drawn visitors to our table since 2012, when it first opened, from May through October. We are also present at a local herb farm during their Memorial Day open house, the Louisa County Agricultural Fair and the VCE Booth at the State Fair of Virginia. Near our VCE office, we built 3 raised beds and planted perennials and herbs for our demonstration gardens.

We are a small group but stay very busy throughout the county.

2020 VMGA BI-MONTHLY MEETINGS

June 25-28	Annual Meeting	33rd Annual MG College at Virginia Tech
August 8	Loudoun County	
October 10	Charlottesville	
December 12	Danville	



CALS Development
cals.giving@vt.edu
(540) 231-5546

State Master Gardener Coordinator Endowment

Endowment News

Submitted by: Jody Purches, Fundraising Committee Chair

VMGA received a very big compliment recently. Emily Wong, Associate Director of Development CALS, explained that most group endowment funds usually fail, but

we are doing it!

Whether you've given to the endowment directly or have helped with merchandise sales, thank you! We could not have come this far without you.

We're incredibly close to funding our endowment, but we aren't there yet and we're ready to push to get this done!

In celebration of VMGA's 30th Anniversary, we have established these fundraising goals:

\$30,000

by the end of MG College in June

and an additional

\$20,000

by the end of this calendar year

VMGA Website

Leslie Paulson,
Prince William

Please submit additions, corrections or report broken links to:

Leslie Paulson at:
ljp6651@comcast.net

Dave Banks
webmaster@vmga.net

VMGA

Membership has its advantages:

- Online modules
- Unit Support
- Scholarships
- Newsletter
- Advanced Training
- Discount event fees
- Membership Directory
- Statewide Networking

Deadline for submitting articles for the May/June issue: April 25, 2020

Please send to:
Peggy Fox,
VMGA Newsletter Editor
Newport News unit
peggyfox@hotmail.com

We announced these goals at the February 8th VMGA bi-monthly meeting and received our first contribution from Mary Hammel of Chesapeake.

Thank you, Mary!

Will you help us protect and preserve the Master Gardener Program from any unexpected budget cuts in the future? Do you want to help provide for the continued support we receive from the State Master Gardener Coordinator's Office today? If so, here are some ideas on how you can help:



Virginia Tech Giving Day - March 18-19, 2020

Virginia Tech GIVING DAY/MATCHING CHALLENGES! - <https://givingday.vt.edu/>

VT's Giving Day begins noon **March 18th** and goes through noon **March 19th**. We have a generous patron who is willing to match up to \$1000 of any donations received during Giving Day! If we successfully raise the \$1000, another generous donor is willing to match an additional \$2000 on Giving Day. That is the potential to raise \$6000 for the Operating Fund* in a 24-hour period!

*Operating Funds are used to support the Master Gardener program every day.

Check this out! Here's how the fund helps us all

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K7ZG1ITEZDsiGBJc5dAFpFOv9gwWqSfl/view>

Keep your eyes open for announcements from the State Coordinator's Office via email. Be sure to follow the State Facebook Page: **Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program**. Look for notifications throughout the day on how to contribute. And don't forget to SHARE with your family and friends!

SHARE! SHARE! SHARE!

MOBILE GIVING – text VCE to 41444. This is fun and easy!

ESTABLISH YOUR OWN MATCHING CHALLENGE – Any individual or group can establish their own matching challenge. If this is something you or your association are interesting in doing, please let me know.

EMPLOYER MATCHING – If our Endowment isn't a recipient of matching funds from your employer, ask to add it, then you can easily DOUBLE your impact.

AUTOMATIC PAYMENTS – This idea was shared with me recently. Have an amount taken out of your paycheck...an amount you won't miss but when added up over time makes one BIG gift.

PLEDGED OR DEFERRED GIFTS – A pledged gift is when you pledge a certain amount over a certain period. A deferred gift is a bequest.

Resources

Find out more here

[Extension Master Gardener website](#)

[VMGA.NET](#)

[VCE MG YouTube](#)

[State Office Blog](#)

[VCE—Facebook](#)

[Volunteer Management System](#)

[Online Learning Opportunities](#)

[VA EMG Bi-weekly Update](#)

[Marketing and Branding Resources](#)

If you are not familiar with our Endowment, please check out this information at www.vmga.net.

You will find a little history about our endowment here:

<http://vmga.net/endowmentFAQs.php>

You can read the endowment agreement here:

<http://vmga.net/PDF/Coordinator-Endowment-Agreement.pdf>

You can see the impact of the endowment on the MG program today here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1K7ZG1ITEZDsiGBJc5dAFpFOv9gwWqSfl/view>

If a donation to our Endowment doesn't fit in your plans right now, please consider other ways you can help:

Become an Advocate – If you believe in our Association and Endowment, help promote them. Advocates will visit MG units near them and tell them about the Association and the Endowment. Together we will develop promotional materials and resources to make the whole job easier.

Share your stories -- If you have a success story or impact statement about your program or a good quote from a beneficiary of your MG efforts, please consider sharing them. These statements can be included in the new donation form we are working on or in our Advocate program and materials.

Merchandise Sales – If you're at a VMGA meeting, I can always use a cashier. We'll be selling again at College this year, so I'll need a small sales team to get the job done.

Thank you for taking the time to consider how you can help us reach our goal to fund our Endowment. If you have any questions, please contact me at aha0304@hotmail.com.

Did you know?

Virginia is home to nine All-America Selections (AAS) trial gardens, cared for by EMGs and others. Wouldn't it be an amazing road trip to visit each and every one? You'll find them located in Richmond, Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Rapidan, Gloucester, Bedford, Blacksburg, Goochland, and Roanoke.

Check it out here: <http://all-americaelections.org/search-garden-displays/>

VMGA DIANE RELF MG COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Tonya Harper, Roanoke



Links to places of interest around the state:

Virginia Is For Lovers

Blandy Experimental Farm

Hahn Hort Garden

Norfolk Botanical Garden

Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden

Maymont

Williamsburg Botanical Garden

Meadowlark Botanical Gardens

Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU

I Love Gardens.com

Virginia Gardening

Greenspring Gardens

Southern Virginia Botanical Gardens, South Boston, VA

US National Arboretum

Are you planning to attend Master Gardener College in June? Remember there will be VMGA Scholarships again this year. The amount and number of awards will be determined later by the VMGA Executive Committee. Any Extension Master Gardener who plans to attend EMG College 2020 is eligible to be a recipient, except those who have been recipients in the past and 2020 interns. The nomination form must originate with unit agents or Master Gardener coordinators. However, it is appropriate for you to express your interest and provide details of your service to a nominator who makes the final decision about whose nomination will be forwarded to the VMGA Scholarship Committee. No more than 2 nominees per unit are allowed.

For guidelines and nomination forms, go to the VMGA website, www.VMGA.net, and select **Education Events** → MG College → MG College Scholarships → Click on *Nomination form*.

Submission window opens March 23, 2020. The deadline for nominations is the close of business on Monday, May 4, 2020. All nomination forms should be submitted via email to Tonya Harper, sunset67@ntelos.net or mailed to: 67 Misty Hills Lane, Troutville, VA 24175.

Notification of recipients will be made by Monday, May 25, 2020, to the all nominees, as well as agents/Master Gardeners coordinators who made the nomination.

For further information, you may contact the Scholarship Committee chairperson, Tonya Harper, at 540-966-2190, or sunset67@ntelos.net Other members of the committee are: Marilyn Riddle, Ted Munns, Cynthia Falconer, Jim Revell and Erica Jones.

SAVE THE DATES:

Submissions accepted: March 23-May 4

Recipient Notification: May 25

MG College: June 24- 28

EDUCATION

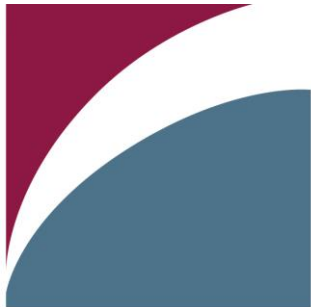
Kirk Barley, Central Shenandoah Valley MGs (Augusta and Rockingham Counties)

Thanks to everyone for the guidance provided during the February meeting. Based on your input, our committee's focus will be on delivering Educational support or events focused on EMG units and their members. To guide those efforts, I'm hoping to release a survey during March to identify unit educational needs and mapping them to see how to address those across the Commonwealth.

VMGA Speakers Bureau:

We are collecting the names of speakers, please contact Erica Jones with any nominations to emjones@vt.edu.

We're planning a meeting of the Education Committee at Master Gardener College, please save the thought until I lock in a date.



Virginia Cooperative Extension

Virginia Tech
Virginia State University
www.ext.vt.edu

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.

If you are interested in being part of the Education Committee, please contact me at OZisKTB@gmail.com and share your thoughts and goals.

SEED SWAP 2020: A HIT WITH LOCAL GARDENERS

Joan Pope, Central Rappahannock



On Saturday, January 25th gardeners, friends, acquaintances, and those who have only just started to develop their potting skills gathered at the Rower Building in Stafford for the 4th annual regional “Seed Swap.” Hosted by the Extension Master Gardeners (EMG) of the Central Rappahannock Area and the Virginia Cooperative Extension, this event honors and builds upon National Seed Swap Day. Seeds were one of the first commodities valued and traded by ancient civilizations, allowing farmers to expand and grow their gardens with new and improved diverse crops. National Seed Swap Day kicks off the new planting and growing season as gardeners gather at hundreds of locations throughout the nation to swap seeds, supplies, lessons learned, and lots of stories.

Audience learning about the complexities of pollinators from Brent Hunsinger



Book swap and children's activities



The Master Gardener Association of the Central Rappahannock Area (MGACRA) 2020 Seed Swap has continued to grow each year with even more events and

participants this year. The official tally is 231 participants and 51 volunteers. The seed swap tables with the overflowing indexed baskets of herb, vegetable, annuals, perennials and even tree seeds were the focal point. Throughout the day gardeners would bring in bags of seeds that were sorted by volunteers and added to the display, but not quite as fast as the existing supply was being harvested by gardeners collecting seeds to complement their garden. By the end of the day the shelves were very close to bare. Seed grazers asked repeatedly, “You mean this is all free?” How many can I have?” Answer: “Take as many as you can plant!” Many people came specifically for one or all three of the one-hour lectures by Karen Brace (“Ticks Suck!”), Brent Hunsinger (“Pollinators of Virginia”), and Tracy Blevins (“Seeds Decoded”). This year the talks were held in a separate area, away from the rest of the “swapping” hub-bub. This facilitated formal talks with better interactions between the presenters and the audience. Those paying attention learned that due to the lack of a deep winter freeze, this year is likely to have increased ticks infestations; pollinators and other components of a healthy ecosystem are more endangered by heat waves than cold snaps; and that different seeds need different preparations, planting depths, and temperature ranges to germinate...plus much more!

As in previous years there were also separate “leave what you want to get rid of and take what you want” areas for books, potted plants, cuttings, and garden supplies, and a plant clinic area with technical pamphlets, soil kits and free knowledge. New this year were two additions that proved to be very popular. Related gardening and environmental interest organizations were invited to participate. Displays, information tables, and representatives were available for those who wanted to learn more about Native Plants, the Gardens at Chatham, the Master Naturalist program, Iris Society, Hosta Society, Fredericksburg Parks and Recreation, and Downtown Greens. More fun than a barrel of gardeners at harvest time was the Children’s Activity Area. Kids, young and old, were able to build their own fairy gardens and make seed paintings. Children proudly walked around hugging their completed fairy gardens showing anyone who asked the treasure they had created. The more studious ones challenged themselves with plant and bug identification charts. Also, a big hit was the interactive Lego-built and eco-shed displays brought by the Tri-County/City Soil and Water Conservation District.

A big thank you to the seed swap co-leads Linda Kline and Karen Brace and the 50 plus EMG and MGACRA volunteers that made Seed Swap 2020 such a success. Thank you also to our sponsors: Home Depot, Tractor Supply and Lowes for donating the garden themed door prizes and Agora Downtown Coffee Shop & Roastery and Kotora Coffee of Fredericksburg for donating the coffee that helped to keep the volunteers and guests energized for the long day.

Finally, a reminder to put the last Saturday of January 2021 on your calendars for Seed Swap 2021!



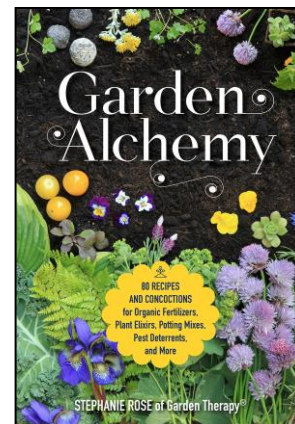
THE GRAINETHUMB

George Graine, Fairfax

GARDENING THE NATURAL WAY

“Alchemy – Medieval chemistry chiefly concerned with efforts to turn base metals into gold”

---Merriam-Webster’s Desk Dictionary



Readers, you are in for a genuine treat if you pick up a new book by the Garden Therapy blogger Stephanie Rose. Her book, “Garden Alchemy” (Cool Springs Press, 2020) will help remove some of the myths and mysteries about the how and why we do what should be done in order to have a healthier garden. The sub-title of this book is “80 Recipes and Concoctions for Organic Fertilizers, Plant Elixirs, Potting Mixes, Pest Deterrents, and More.”

For many years, in fact going back to at least the 60’s, a “prominent garden authority” posited that there were many household products that are the savior for whatever ails your gardening problems. Here are just a few products that were expected to help you to become a better gardener: antiseptic mouthwash, baby shampoo, dishwashing liquid, corn syrup and molasses. Were these ever put through any kind of rigorous research testing or could a scientific source be found? If you are thinking this appears to be like a snake oil pitchman selling some whatever, you are probably correct. Was it true then? Is it true today? Perhaps you may have heard about these cure-alls on radio or TV or you purchased books about these wonder products for use in the garden. If so, no doubt you had hope of solving some plant problem caused by pest or disease or something that was creating havoc in your garden. It is beyond time to put to rest that these “ingredients” will do miracles as advertised. Stephanie Rose clearly informs us about the natural way to garden. She takes a 180 degree turn from the absurd advice noted above.

“Garden Alchemy” is a no-nonsense book where you will learn how to minimize and manage plant pest and disease problems and controls. You will also find many garden truths through the use of easy to follow helpful guides for the DIY gardener. The point of this book is to help you grow a healthy garden. Doing so will transform your existing property into an oasis without much drudgery and expense. This book is a godsend for all gardeners, especially for those who want to garden naturally and minimize the use of chemical applications. There is not a single way to have a successful garden! Go to a community garden and you will find many divergent answers on how to garden. Can they all be right? Are they all successful? If you were to search the gardening literature, most likely you find conflicting studies. Try it. Pick a garden subject and then check it out on the internet. As an example, a frequent

topic for containerized plants is how does one deal with drainage? You may be surprised at the correct answer, yet many people do not follow the “rules.”

The first chapter in “Garden Alchemy” is all about soils and mulches. This is a superb starting point because you will learn through charts and photos what is the composition of your soil. Note that different parts of your property may have differing soil compositions. For sure the soil beneath a lawn is probably different from a raised bed, one for shrubs, etc. For \$10 you Virginia residents can have their soil tested by the Virginia Tech soils laboratory. Note that the laboratory can do a variety of tests; however, each test will cost an additional \$10. Most public libraries and Extension offices have soil test “kits” for this purpose. You collect the soil according to directions and mail the kit to Virginia Tech Soil Testing Lab. The tests are primarily concerned with soil nutrients and pH. Separate tests can be performed for organic matter and soluble salts at an additional cost, but often this is not going to be your problem. After reviewing the test results and explanations, turn to the first chapter in the book. Here you will find 13 different recipes for growing various plants or a lawn. As for mulches, the author provides an excellent chart that explains many different types of mulch including some that are available at no cost. She also notes which mulch is good and which ones to avoid.

Chapter 2 is all about propagation. Clearly, propagating plants from seeds, while at very low cost, is perhaps one of the most interesting garden activities; however, this can be a difficult and frustrating chore for growing plants. Help is on the way because many products are available to improve and speed up your rate of success. Again, the author provides many tips using text and photos to help the DIY gardener. Included in this chapter is information on how to create seed bombs, planting pots, seed tapes and even an interesting page on a natural rooting hormone that is quite novel.

The next two chapters take more of the mystery out of gardening. Clear explanations are provided on compost and fertilizers. In fact, at some full service garden centers you may see the name “Black Gold” on some bags. Note: This is not an endorsement. Gold...Good grief, are we going back to alchemy? To quote the author, “...composting is one of the most important activities you can do.” Amen to that. The reason for composting is to help build a superior soil. You already know that our red clayey type soil has sufficient nutrients but unfortunately it leaves much to be desired when it comes to good drainage. Once again, the author makes it easy to understand these topics through the use of recipes, charts and additional explanations. After reading this chapter, you will then comprehend how your garden efforts will benefit the garden when using these products judiciously. The last chapter is somewhat unique. It is about “Birds, Bees and Bugs.” Like some of the other chapters, this one also contains recipes for encouraging beneficial wildlife. Also included are ways to trap pests and how to use baits and herbal deterrents.

In summary, “Garden Alchemy” is a go-to text on how to garden naturally. To find answers to specific questions, you will find this book is well indexed. It will teach you and help you garden smarter and wiser. Taking the first step to a healthy garden will lead to healthy plants which in turn will lead to a happier you.

For some more interesting ideas, click on the Stephanie Rose web site, <https://gardentherapy.ca/>

Natives--*mostly!* For winter interest and supporting wildlife

Robyn Puffenbarger, Central Shenandoah Valley



Photo credit: Robert Thiemann



Photo credit: Bachkova Natalia / Shutterstock

As the spring season starts, most of us will be concentrating on seeds and new plants for summer. This year take on a new season and challenge yourself to consider plants for late fall and winter interest. Think about how exquisitely beautiful it is to see snow on your evergreens as inspiration. Winter is also the lean season for most animals, so adding plants that can support wildlife will bring added enjoyment to the colder months.

Across Virginia, many plants will add winter interest. As you think about winter, think about adding plants to the landscape that will act as cover as well as food. Varying the height of the plants and mixing in some evergreens will allow the fauna, especially birds, escape predators that will come by. Studies have shown winter roosts in evergreens can mitigate freezing winter temperatures for birds with the boughs acting as shelter and a wind break. Another idea is to leave a spot or two that are not manicured, like a brush pile or scrub area. These spots will bring the fauna to you. If you have bird nesting boxes, check them carefully as many now can double up as a winter roost box, you invert the entrance hole to make it lower on the box which helps retain heat for the birds inside. If you don't have a nest box in your yard, think about adding one to help nesting birds this spring and summer, then turn it into a roost for winter! Even in a small, suburban yard like mine at less than a third of an acre, our nest boxes attract Carolina Chickadees (*Poecile carolinensis*) and House Wrens (*Troglodytes aedon*).



photo credit: pixabay.com

In terms of winter plants, let's start small and work up. Some of the best winter plants are the ones that you leave standing: sunflower heads, goldenrods,

echinacea, Joe Pye weed to name a few. Resist the urge to remove “debris” in fall and enjoy the frost and ice on your stalks. The birds will enjoy the seeds and native insects will overwinter. According to the entomologist from the Virginia State Arboretum, leaving the stalks as long as you can into spring means the older foliage does not rot, making a home for the insects. In spring when the new vegetation comes out, break older stalks to 4-6 inch pieces and drop in place as mulch. This can also reseed interesting plants. Two native ferns are evergreen, giving a lovely look to the winter garden ebony spleenwort (*Asplenium platyneuron*) and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*). Two other low growing, non-natives that I really enjoy for my winter garden are hellebores and winter aconite (*Eranthus hyemalis*). Winter aconite is a bulb that is the very first yellow bloom. When you see bees buzzing in December to early March, these are most likely the non-native, but possibly wild honeybees as the native bees typically do not break dormancy in the cold months. I love having some early flowers for those days the bees are active, even if it takes some non-natives to do it!

The next height I think of is the middle, those shrubs or small trees that build in some height and real density for cover. Here, the natives really shine including American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), witch hazel (*Hamamelis* sp.), viburnums and black chokecherry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) to name a few. There is really nothing like seeing the spidery, delicate flower of a witch hazel in winter to break the monotony of the cold. Add a flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), Northern bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*) and staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*). Staghorn sumac makes an maroon colored seed head that is highly visible in late fall. Many of the plants in this list also have berries that might last well into winter depending on what visitors you have to your yard. I have a Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) that will often try to defend our beautyberry supply, but when a flock of 100's of American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) or Cedar Waxwings (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) visit, the poor mockingbird just cannot keep up! Another interesting winter view includes plants with interesting bark or color like the red- or yellow osier dogwoods (*Cornus* sp.) for their colored stems. These twig dogwoods are well-mannered in their height, but they can spread aggressively side to side if they like the spot you put them in.

Finally, it is time for some height! Depending on your location, these suggestions might grow quickly and fill in fast, or go more slowly. Many of these choices can reach significant heights so make sure the location works for your home, power lines, etc. For height, think of hollies (*Ilex*), and Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). You can also add deciduous hollies like winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), just make sure to have a cluster of females for the berries, and a male for the pollination. another mid-size evergreen we love at our home is the dwarf Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*). At my house in the Shenandoah Valley, the two dwarf cedars are growing extremely slowly and in winter, they are the most interesting purple color, going green in spring. I love looking at bark in the winter, and the flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) next door and white pine (*Pinus strobus*) in my yard all have bark with gorgeous color and texture.

Since we bought our house in 2002, we started a slow change to our 1/3 of an acre.

The amount of lawn is much reduced, we put leaves in some places instead of bark mulch, and while we put in spots for fruit and vegetable production for us, we made some patches for wildlife. We have seen mammals including opossum, racoon, skunk, chipmunks, fox and gray squirrels. We are putting in more native plants. Even though we live in a suburban neighborhood, we seem to have a fantastic habitat for wildlife with sixty plus species of birds visiting our yard annually. If you are interested in more about ecosystems and native plants, read **Bringing Nature Home**, by Doug Tallamy, and check out the Virginia Native Plant Society (<https://vnps.org>). Another great resource is the Virginia Working Landscapes group which does a monthly, online newsletter. Find it here: (<https://www.vaworkinglandscapes.org/>)

Editor's note: Another resource for making your landscape wildlife friendly, go to: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants>

Calendar 2020

March

- 7 [2020 Horticulture Extravaganza York County](#)
- 18-19 [VT Giving Day 2020](#)
- 20 [Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium](#)
- 21 [Annual Gardening Symposium, Loudoun County](#)
- 21 [CNU Gardening Symposium, Newport News](#)

April

- 17-19 [Williamsburg Garden Symposium](#)
- 18-25 [Historic Garden Week](#)

June

- 25-28 [33rd Annual MG College, VT Campus](#)

August

- 9-12 [GardenComm Conference, Williamsburg, VA](#)

2021

- Sept 13-17 [International Master Gardener Conference, Norfolk](#)

Planning for a year filled with blooms

Erica Jones, New River Valley

I am sure a good number of people have pondered this before, but I came across my Jasmine blooming in January, during a serious warm spell, and was reminded of the 12-months-of-blossoms approach to gardening.

This Jasmine, *Jasminum nudiflorum*, is a viney, aggressively growing mound that used to be marginally hardy in my back yard until the last five years or so. It has bright, yellow, well-formed trumpet shaped blossoms with no fragrance. I would recommend planting it with careful consideration, as you have to really yank it up when it layers vigorously. We also stumbled on an old standby yesterday. One lone, ratty-looking blossom on a forsythia in a sunny, sheltered spot of a neighbor's yard. Hey, it almost counts.

February has been rough in years past, but with warm spells I can have crocus and dandelions. Then when retailers came out with steady and affordable supplies of helleborus, I thought I'd died and went to heaven making the 12-month challenge a good bit easier. The Missouri Botanical Garden online makes the comment that "the time of blooming can vary 'considerably' based on that year's weather. *Helleborus niger*, *odoratus* and *argutifolius* are perhaps the earliest of this genus with *orientalis* being later; plant breeding has confused the demarcations a bit."

December can be almost as hard as January, but my witch hazel saves the day here. But remember, here again there are a lot of species and hybrids and they too can vary bloom time if put off by a cold snap. If you try to count the berries on Ilex or Nandina that is cheating, the 'blossom' is too old.

Novembers can be tricky too. We had a record-breaking cold November here and a lot of the wildflowers that usually hang around that late packed up and left. So, plan and plant carefully.

Blooming season really should be carefully considered when picking landscaping plants. If you are worried about pollinators, aim toward the season edges. If you want cut flowers, don't forget that funny gap just past spring bulbs. If you want consistency, there is a good reason that annuals have been so popular before this anti-annual slur campaign started. I will admit, if there was some way we could communicate with plant breeders and growers that shorter is not always better, their reputation might improve. I saw a quote the other day – 'if annuals get any shorter, they are going to disappear'. Growing annuals from seed can counter a lot of the too-short problem.

From the Kitchen

Carrot Cake
(www.BettyCrocker.com)
Wanda Gerrard, Suffolk

Cake



1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
1 cup vegetable oil
3 eggs
2 cups Gold Medal™ all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon salt
3 cups shredded carrots (5 medium)
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Cream Cheese Frosting

1 package (8 oz) cream cheese, softened
1/4 cup butter or margarine, softened
2 to 3 teaspoons milk
1 teaspoon vanilla
4 cups powdered sugar
Nutmeg, if desired

Heat oven to 350°F. Grease bottom and sides of one 13x9-inch pan or two 8-inch or 9-inch round pans with shortening; lightly flour. In large bowl, beat granulated sugar, oil and eggs with electric mixer on low speed about 30 seconds or until blended. Add flour, cinnamon, baking soda, 1 teaspoon vanilla and the salt; beat on low speed 1 minute. Stir in carrots and nuts. Pour into pan(s).

Bake 13x9-inch pan 40 to 45 minutes, round pans 30 to 35 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool rectangle in pan on cooling rack. Cool rounds 10 minutes; remove from pans to cooling rack. Cool completely, about 1 hour.

In medium bowl, beat cream cheese, butter, milk and vanilla with electric mixer on low speed until smooth. Gradually beat in powdered sugar, 1 cup at a time, on low speed until smooth and spreadable. Frost 13x9-inch cake or fill and frost round layers with frosting. Sprinkle nutmeg on frosted cake, if desired. Store in refrigerator.