



The VMGA Report

The Voice for Virginia Master Gardeners

<https://vmga.net/wordpress/>

July/August 2023

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From the President Georgi Hall, Loudoun County

President's Letter

It is hard to believe we are starting a new VMGA fiscal year and my second year as President. Thank you to our Board, Unit Representatives and VMGA members for all your support over the last year. I am excited about the new year. We are planning to have more in-person meetings with opportunities to renew acquaintances, meet new members and share ideas in person. Our August meeting will be hosted by Loudoun County Master Gardener Association on August 12 at Claude Moore Recreation & Community Center, 46105 Loudoun Park Lane, Sterling, VA 20164. The meeting will be hybrid. The lunch order form is included in this newsletter. You will be receiving additional information soon. Our October meeting will be hosted by Southside Master Gardeners Association on October 14th. We are looking for units to host our February and April 2024 bimonthly meetings. If your unit is interested, contact our Vice President, Nelda Purcell at vice-president@vmga.net.

We have just completed the 2023 VCE Master Gardener College in Blacksburg, VA. This year's Steward program was Tree Steward. The 150 Master Gardeners and guests who attended the event learned valuable information to share with their units from the great speakers. It was nice to be able to see all our friends from across the state. Thanks to Kathleen Reed, Devon Johnson, the EMG State Office Team, members of the 2023 EMGC Advisory Team and other helpers for all their planning and work. VMGA was one of the sponsors of the event. A letter of appreciation from Kathleen Reed and the Office of the Extension Master Gardener State Coordinator team for VMGA's sponsorship is included in this issue.

The Virginia State Fair is September 22 – October 1st at the Meadow Event Park, 13191 Dawn Blvd., Doswell, VA 23047 in Caroline County. The primary education topic for this year's VMGA's booth is Beneficials and Invasives. We need Master Gardeners to staff our Master Gardener State Fair Booth. It takes many Master Gardeners to carry out and make this ten-day event a success. See more information about the benefits of volunteering at the state Fair in this newsletter. Contact Christy Brennan, State Fair Chair ctb47@comcast.net if your unit is interested in volunteering.

Thank You,

Georgi Hall
VMGA President – president@vmga.net

2023 VMGA BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

August 12th—Claude Moore Recreation & Community Center, 46105 Loudoun Park Lane, Sterling

October 9th—Hosted by Southside Master Gardeners Association

December 9th— Host Unit Needed! Bring VMGA members to your area for the bi-monthly meeting. Contact Nice President Nelda Purcell at vicepresident@vmga.net for more information.

VMGA Officers

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VMGA Membership has its advantages:

- ◆ Unit Support
- ◆ Scholarships
- ◆ Newsletter
- ◆ Advanced Training
- ◆ Discount Event Fees
- ◆ Membership Directory
- ◆ Statewide Networking

From the Editor

Deadline for Sept/Oct issue:

August 28

We would love to feature your unit's announcements, events or articles in the next issue. Articles can be about a favorite plant, tree, project, book review, or other topic of interest. This will encourage involvement around the state, getting more involved.

Please send to:

VMGA Newsletter Editor
newsletter@vmga.net

CALENDAR

July 20th at 10:30 am - webinar with VT School for Plant & Environment Sciences professor, Dr. Josh Kardos. The talk will introduce hydroponics, discuss the pros and cons, describe various systems used and crops grown, highlight the industry, and describe how you can grow hydroponically at home.

July 22nd from 9am to noon, at the historic Virginia Tech Hampton Roads AREC Demonstration Gardens, 1444 Diamond Springs Road, Virginia Beach. The Virginia Beach Master Gardeners and the Virginia Tech Hampton Roads AREC are following through on a pre-COVID idea to have garden open houses at the AREC demonstration gardens to bring in visitors and raise awareness of the demo gardens and AREC. The first garden open house is in the form of a Garden Party. An invitation was issued to "Put on your best garden hat & shoes and join us for a stroll in the gardens. Enjoy refreshments and talk with the Master Gardener volunteers as you explore 28 different gardens and arboretums."

August 12th at 10am—VMGA Bimonthly Board Meeting - Claude Moore Recreation & Community Center, 46105 Loudoun Park Lane, Sterling

August 18th at 10am webinar with Lori Chamberlin, the Forest Health Manager for the Virginia Department of Forestry. This Virginia forest health update will cover the most common pests and diseases in Virginia's forests. This presentation will teach participants how to identify forest health disturbance agents, and how to prevent damage. Registration link coming soon.

NEWS AND NOTES FROM VCE LIAISON

Kathleen Reed, EMG Program State Coordinator

For updates, be sure to check out the Bi-weekly Update at <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/biweekly-update/>

NEWSWORTHY NOTES FROM NOTABLE NEWSLETTERS

The VMGA Report is always looking for submissions from EMGs, Unit Representatives, VMGA Committee Chairs, VCE Agents, and VCE Program Associates. The next deadline for the VMGA Newsletter is **August 28**. What can you submit? All the news that's fit to print! Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

Training recaps. Tell us your takeaways!

Highlights of your successes in programming, lessons learned, photos of volunteers in action

Upcoming events offered by your unit

Book reviews

Plant or garden spotlights.

Photos of your plants

Recipes using produce from your garden or a farmer's market

Garden-related poems and other creative writing

Be sure to include your name and unit name. Submit your content by email to newsletter@vmga.net.

Why Master Gardeners Should Volunteer at the State Fair of Virginia

The 2023 State Fair of VA will take place September 22 – October 1 at the Meadow Event Park, 13191 Dawn Blvd., Doswell, VA 23047 in Caroline County. We need Master Gardeners to staff our Master Gardener State Fair Booth. It takes many Master Gardeners to carry out and make this ten-day event a success.

The theme for this year's fair is Beneficials and Invasives. Below is a history of our booth and some reasons why Master Gardeners should volunteer at the State Fair.

The Hanover Master Gardeners started a relationship with the Virginia State Fair almost 40 years ago when it was held in Richmond, VA. At that time, the Hanover Master Gardeners set up a plant clinic to provide resources and information to fair visitors at the Horticulture gardens. The State Fair of Virginia has the Largest Outdoor Educational Classroom in Virginia, where area students and schools visit the fair on a field trip to explore different topics in Agriculture and life sciences. The Master Gardener Booth has participated in the State Fair educational classroom tour for over 20 years. During that time, the Virginia Master Gardener Association (VMGA) has generously supported the Master Gardener booth by making this an annual line item in the VMGA budget to support the education effort.

Requirements for the Master Gardener booth to be a part of the educational tour are to provide hands-on demonstrations for the students in addition to the plant clinic. In the past a theme was selected to focus the educational and hands-on demonstrations at the booth. The State MG Coordinators office has provided free materials and handouts to support this educational effort.

The relationship between the State Fair and Master Gardeners has been strengthened through networking and volunteering to help at the fair through the Hanover Master Gardeners working with the Fair Horticulture superintendent supporting horticulture demonstrations and planting the State Fair gardens. The Henrico and Hanover Master Gardeners also have provided a team of qualified judges for the horticulture and plant exhibitors. These relations resulted in the State Fair of Virginia becoming a strong supporter and advocate of the Virginia Master Gardener Program to the General Assembly, when the General Assembly was questioning support and future funding of the Master Gardener program.



Participation in the State Fair booth provides an opportunity for many Master Gardener groups to come together for a statewide education event. VA Governors and state legislators have visited the Master Gardener booth. This has provided a perfect opportunity to educate and advertise our program to legislators and consumers.

The Master Gardener booth is always a hit with teachers who stop by the booth for hands-on demonstrations and lesson plans. The State Fair attracts a diverse audience, who stop by the MG booth to see what's going on or ask questions. Master Gardeners who staff the booth, get involved and like to perform the demonstrations, provide education to the public and play Stump the Master Gardener with questions (many fair goers who did not have a question often make their way back to the MG booth because they thought of a question).

In most years, the recorded contacts have been between 5000-6000 (the pandemic and threats of severe weather reduced the total number of contacts in recent years).

Participation in the State Fair shows the strength and diversity of Virginia Cooperative Extension and the Master Gardener Program. This allows the Master Gardeners to provide education resources and outreach to a diverse audience and allows Master Gardeners to network with other Master Gardener units while having fun.

Some Master Gardener units plan for annual participation at the State Fair, and we try to fit in as many Master Gardener units and volunteers as we can to staff the booth.

Overall, the State Fair provides a wonderful event that is focused on horticulture, which allows many different Master Gardeners a chance to network and volunteer during a statewide event that educates the public and promotes the Virginia Master Gardener Program.

If you have questions or would like to volunteer, contact Christy Brennan ctb47@comcast.net.



2023 Memorial Scholarship Fund Recipients By Helen Lake

Now in our 11th year of awarding local high school students a \$1,500.00 scholarship, the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association (NSVMGA) Scholarship Committee recently selected five high school students from the counties of Clarke, Frederick and Shenandoah, as the 2023 recipients of the Association's Memorial Fund.

Scholarship Committee representatives from each of the counties personally awarded the scholarships at the respective high schools. Recipients included: **Addison Plummer**, who will attend Virginia Tech and major in Veterinary Science. She graduated from Clarke County High School with a GPA of 4.07. Cathy Dickey presented Addison with an Award Certificate.

From Frederick County: **Brooklyn Davis** will attend Virginia Tech and major in Agribusiness. She graduated from James Wood High School with a GPA of 4.09. Tammi Loving presented Brooklyn with an Award Certificate. **Hunter Legge** will also attend Virginia Tech and will major in Food Science and Technology, and minor in Agribusiness. He graduated from Sherando High School with a GPA of 3.90. He received his Award Certificate from Helen Lake.

From Shenandoah County: **Raea Nicole Crabill** will attend Bridgewater College and major in Equine/Veterinary Science. She graduated from Strasburg High School with a GPA of 4.03. **Samuel "Braden" Stern** will attend Virginia Tech and major in Agribusiness. He graduated with a GPA of 4.0. Belinda Palmer presented Raea and Braden with their Award Certificates.

The scholarship recipients have been invited to attend the July 16th NSVMGA Membership Meeting at the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester to speak about their goals and selected fields of study. On behalf of our entire membership, we congratulate these five recipients of the NSVMGA Memorial Scholarship fund!



SCHOLARSHIPS

FROM THE SOIL UP – GPMGA Soil Team’s First Workshop



Katrina preparing her exhibit of cover crops.

Last summer five GPMGA volunteers got together for lunch one day to discuss our common interests in various aspects of soil conservation and soil building. After a while we decided to plan an event to share our special soil-related interests with the larger gardening community. This became our fall, 2022 workshop entitled “From the Soil Up” that we presented at the Powhatan County Library in October, 2022, and then again at the Goochland Public Library in March, 2023. Word got around, and the Charlotte County Master Gardener Association invited us to repeat our presentation as a public event in their county. By that time our team had grown to nine volunteers, and we all started to be pretty familiar with each other’s specialties.

The “From the Soil Up” program began with an overview of regenerative gardening. We chose the word regenerative rather than sustainable because it implies making things better rather than just keeping them the same. This overview included information about environmental concerns, a challenge to personal gardening philosophy and consideration of some gardening techniques not included in the upcoming exhibits. Then came a brief explanation of each of the exhibits awaiting the participants at the end of the talk: *Hügelkultur*, the *Jadam* process, cover crops (green manure), ground covers (green mulch), organic tea fertilizer, compost, and no-till gardening,

Then, the most wonderful part of the event was the hour after the Powerpoint presentations when participants were able to talk with each of our presenters at a related exhibit that provided more information, examples and demonstrations. These were wonderful conversations, and our community is to be congratulated for posing great questions and challenges to our volunteers.

This first event came together like the pieces of a simple puzzle. Each of the volunteers brought a special interest to the table, and those pieces complimented each other to make a coherent picture. Now our challenge is to find the right pieces for our next adventure. We are considering several options, and since we get a lot of questions about soil tests, that will probably be our starter. That will give us an opportunity not only to explain how the process works, but also to talk about natural and environmentally friendly considerations in finding the best ways to amend their soil. And, perhaps best of all, it will challenge us to do some substantive research in order to explain how each of the primary nutrients works in relation to roots, soil and soil organisms. Look for Act II in October.



Dudley showing an easy way to make your own organic tea fertilizer.



Audrey demonstrating the development of compost through three stages.

You can find a brief description of each of the “From the Soil Up” exhibits/demonstrations in Act I and more photos on our Webpage: <https://www.hopeftg.org/from-the-soil-up>

This soils program is part of GPMGA’s “HOPE from the Garden” Initiative. Visit the HOPE Webpage at <https://www.hopeftg.org> to find out other parts of the initiative, and to find a checklist that you can use in your own garden.

Language and EMG Culture

Pat Lust, Goochland Powhatan EMG Volunteer
Originally submitted in December 2022

As I engaged with another EMG unit last week in a session about leadership, we wandered a bit into organizational culture, and I am still thinking about that conversation. It reflected one of the many issues and perspectives unearthed by the recent EMG research project, “Happy EMG Volunteers and Thriving EMG Units,” – one that bears further consideration by our units and by individual volunteers. So, let me start with this little essay, and maybe we can get a good conversation going. That’s my challenge to you.

The organizational culture issue in our recent conversation involved our choice of language. It’s still amazing to me that the language we use can affect so much else about what we do and how we do it. The older I get, the more I understand this, but I do remember an old friend who used to respond in uncomfortable situations with, “well, language is a tool.” She knew.

In my early years as a EMG volunteer I often heard us referred to as “unpaid staff.” I didn’t like that, but I never gave it too much thought until one day when an agent referred to the volunteers in her unit as a bunch of “mini-mes.” That hit me like a ton of bricks. Aside from the arrogance of it, her total devaluation of the knowledge, skills and abilities that volunteers bring to an organization like EMG, represented by her choice of language, was such a colossal insult. We were not entry-level employees waiting to be molded in her image.

The term “unpaid staff” is not common in my unit any more, and it may be gone all together from EMG. I hope so. First, “unpaid” has the sound of not being valued or of being undervalued, and second the term “staff” may imply support-level personnel. We know from the research mentioned above that too many of our volunteers actually do undervalue their own worth as EMG volunteers. Can changing the language help us see our own value more clearly?

The same research shows that 75% of us are retired professionals who bring a vast array of knowledge, skills and abilities and a ton of useful experience to the EMG program. All this should be valued, not ignored or undervalued.

Another friend of mine suggested better nomenclature for us:

Job Description: Gardening Educator

Pay Grade: Volunteer

Wow! That really changes the perspective on our value. Considering ourselves to be “educators” puts us on the front lines of the action rather than just being support staff. Also, by definition an educator is a leader. That really raises the value and status of who we are and what we do. Referring to ourselves overtly as “volunteers” focuses on our generosity and the value of generosity rather than the lesser value of “unpaid.”

These are just words. For some the choice of words may not matter so much. For our unit, the deliberate and frequent use of the word “volunteer” seems to be making a positive difference. And, there will be more about the idea of gardening educators in the next phase of the EMG research project.

So, how do you describe yourselves in your EMG unit? If you’d like to send me your responses, I’ll summarize them and offer the report to the next newsletter. Or, you may like to write a separate response or continuation to the conversation for the next newsletter. You can reach me at lustpd@longwood.edu.

NOTE: The research report, “Happy EMG Volunteers and Thriving EMG Units,” is available at <https://mastergardener.ext.vt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Happy-EMGs-8-8.pdf>

INTERNATIONAL MASTER GARDENER COLLEGE 2023

Diane Kean: This was my first "In Person" IMGC and hopefully will not be my last!

The Johnson County EMGs did an outstanding job organizing this conference. They will be a hard act to follow for any other state.

I began my week with a two-day, overnight tour of Kansas. Not long after leaving Overland Park we drove through the Flint Hills Region of Kansas with hills and prairies of the open plains. Our bus took us first to Wichita and the Sedgwick County Extension Office where we were toured around their many different demonstration gardens and arboretum. After our tour (much appreciated after sitting a couple of hours on the bus) they served us the box lunches we had pre-ordered (part of the tour cost).

From there we went to Botanica, a Community Garden in Wichita where we toured on our own in order to see those areas which most interested us. I headed to the fountain garden, and then on to the Shakespeare Garden and made stops of other gardens in between.

After Botanica, we traveled to the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains in Hesston, KS. There, we were given a short talk on the history of the garden which was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Dyck and is now under Hesston College. We ended the day by driving to the recently renovated Community Center in McPherson where we had dinner and toured the 1928 building. From there we went to our motel for a welcome rest.

The next day we went to the Maxwell Wildlife Refuge in Canton. We rode trolleys out to the middle of a prairie and their herd of Bison. We were given time to walk through the prairie and see all of the native wildflowers in bloom. You had to take care not to step on one of them as they were everywhere! Our last stop of the day was the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. The Preserve has 11,000 acres of some of the last remaining never plowed prairie. The preserve is owned by the Land Conservancy and operated by the National Park Service. We were on our own to tour the brand-new Visitors Center, the Historic Barn where we had our lunch, and the original home and of course the prairie trails.

From there (Northern Chase County) we returned to Overland Park (Johnson County) for the conference.

Leslie Paulson: This was my second in person IMGC, and third counting our Virtual College in 2021. This time my husband signed up for classes as well. So remember that for the next in person International Conference. Flying out of Reagan National, ugh, and landing in Kansas City's very new airport was great. Sorry, but Reagan, Terminal A is ancient and slow. By the time we got to the baggage claim in Kansas, a short walk, our luggage was waiting.

The first day we did the self-guided driving tour to six private gardens. The first couple had a lot of shrubs pruned as I saw in Italy and England. Striking, but I enjoyed more when one owner planted the utility easement with many natives. So did the pollinators. Several of the gardens had beautiful artwork. Each owner had their own style. On Sunday, I visited Lenora Larsen's home in Paoli. That got my attention when choosing as my mother was a Larsen and my father's last name was Paolucci. Destiny. Lenora and husband bought 27 acres in the 80s and planted every tree, shrub and plant themselves. Lenora plants all perennials and shrubs from seed. A patient lady for sure. She weeds the meadow very early each spring so we really saw no weeds and she believes in mulch. I saw many plants we see in Virginia. This included a Big Leaf Magnolia, Persimmon and Paw Paw.



The speakers we had for the main part of the conference were very good. As at our own MG College this year, several speakers hit on the fact that they recommend and have natives but did not feel conclusively that non-natives were bad pollinators as well. Interesting, but we all have our opinions.

My husband John toured the Boulevard Brewery. Of course, he enjoyed that. I had him listen to Nancy Lawson, a native wildlife supporter, hoping he will get rid of some of our turf. I enjoyed a talk on Herbs in the Landscape from Sue Goetz and mixing of some herbs to bring home. I really enjoyed listening to Dr. Susan Pell from the National Botanical Garden. She talked about Anacardiaceae, the Sumac family. It includes cashews, mangoes, and poison ivy. All their fruit are considered drupes. We really need to invite her to speak in Blacksburg. John heard her speak to what Public Gardens have to offer Master Gardeners as well.

I enjoyed a class on Traditional Indigenous Backyard Gardens. There is much to learn here. Devon Mihesuah started my journey. As many of the speakers, there are books available they have written on the subject. I really enjoyed several keynote speakers. Abra Lee, author and historian spoke on her book: *Conquer the Soil: Legendary Stories in American Horticulture*. Who knew that Black women played such important roles in the early 1900s? Jim Richardson, National Geographic photojournalist, talked on Feeding Planet Earth. His photographs were amazing as well as the information and facts to go with them. One speaker was ill and gave her talk on zoom. Sara Dykman, *Bicycling with Butterflies*, rode 10,000 miles to follow the monarch's round trip. Truly an amazing woman. All the keynotes were good. Dan Hinkley, plant hunter from Washington spoke and was very entertaining. My husband and I went to his home overlooking the Puget Sound when we took a tour with Robert MacDuffie in 2014. Dan's yard is beautiful. Consider going sometime. And talking to EMGs from across the United States and from Canada and England was icing on the cake.

The next IMGCC will be hosted by Texas and will be virtual as they only have 2 years to plan. Sad but still am hoping for more wonderful speakers. 2025, August 25-28. Save the dates.

Leslie Paulson

Take Aways from IMGCC, 2023

The 2023 International Master Gardener Conference in Overland Park, KS was extremely well organized with, for the most part, outstanding speakers. My favorites were Jessica Walliser who presented *Science-Based Companion Planting Strategies for the Vegetable Garden* and Dr. Charles Rice (Nobel Peace Prize winner!) who presented *Challenges of Gardening in a Changing Climate*. In addition to 8 concurrent sessions, I also attended the add-on program on *Preserving the Future: Monarchs, Wetlands, and Prairies* where we ventured for a day outside of the city into the beautiful, nearby natural areas.

Jessica's talk was chocked full of useful information, including her descriptions of multiple plant communities that "play well together" and deter undesirable insects or attract good ones. I don't even have a vegetable garden but was scribbling down notes so fast you would've thought I had several acres of crops! I even waited in line for what seemed like forever to buy her most recent book. But, before getting up to the table, I learned that they had sold out. So, I resorted to buying copies online to share with all my veggie gardener friends!

I was mesmerized by Dr. Rice's presentation. He initially gave us shocking but not-so-surprising current information on the direction of climate change and, then, built a very solid case for the importance of the gardeners' role in addressing it. He told us that the average temperature in 1970 has increased by 1.8° F. That the North Atlantic is experiencing a heat wave with an increase of 4° F. And that there has been a 40% increase in extreme weather events over the last two decades. Now that he had our attention, he gave sound advice to gardeners on how to garden in this new and challenging environment. Much of his talk focused on the importance of nurturing the soil which, when healthy, has better water retention, promotes strong root growth, and is a thriving ecosystem essential to supporting life above ground. He discussed practices such as no-till gardening and the addition of organic material as ways to successfully garden and, at the same time, combat climate change.

Jane McKinley: The Prairie trip took us to the Baker University Wetlands, the home of MonarchWatch.org, and to a tall grass prairie. At the wetlands, I was surprised to see how many of the native plants to that region are native to Virginia, too. For example, the Cottonwood tree. In Kansas (*or was it Missouri?*) this tree is extremely aggressive, almost a weed. While the ones in Virginia are not a problem. Obviously, two different species but with the same common name. I was surprised to learn that Monarchs aren't really Endangered. When speaking with Chip Taylor, founder and director of Monarch Watch, he told me that

there was, basically, much internal scientific disagreement on whether or not to give this designation and that he was not in agreement with it. He said that the focus of this organization has recently shifted from Monarch education to the promotion of milkweed plants which are critical to the Monarch's recovery. The prairie was just that – *a prairie!* This is why I came! It was beautiful! I was surprised to learn that, like the Cottonwood, Eastern Red Cedar (another one native to both regions) is considered there almost a pest (at least in the prairie), whereas it's enjoyed in Virginia. The Red Cedar that was growing there was tremendous and had a lot of dead undergrowth that reached over your head. Not attractive.

Two final notes. First, it may be my biased opinion, but I saw a common thread running through the conference. This thread, whether mentioned by a featured speaker or at the concurrent sessions, came down to planting natives, nurturing the soil, and wise water usage. Working with nature as opposed to it was a clear message.

My last note is in recognition of the wonderfully and successfully orchestrated conference. Everything from early and real-time communication to delicious meals (including a special one for this vegetarian), to recycling and sustainable practices, and stimulating sessions could not have been better. The Kansas City Master Gardener unit put on an event that will be a model for future international events. With almost 500 members, 430 of them worked on some aspect of the conference. Wherever I went, I met a member of this unit who had helped in some manner. It was inspiring!

Suzanne Hamilton: The International Master Gardener Conference in Overland Park, KS was such a positive event! It was so well-organized, the keynote speaker topics were relevant, and the speakers were engaging and informative. The conference began with a tour of private gardens that were quite varied, architecturally striking, and filled with memorable plantings. There was even a small garden for people with tiny spaces. The Trade Show was so much better than the usual ones, because it had such a variety of high-quality vendors. I probably spent more than I should, but I got gardening items and art.

My favorite part of this convention were the people, both the volunteers and the attendees. Great information came from the workshop speakers, but even more from those around me. The energy and inspiration generated by contact with other enthusiastic gardeners is what I cherish. It makes me rush home to try what I have learned in my own soil and to share that knowledge with others.

The best personal experience I had was on Monday's tour Preserving the Future: Monarchs, Wetlands and Prairies. We visited the first Monarch Watch WayStation at KU and visited the founder of Monarch Watch, Chip Taylor. We gathered around Chip in small groups, and he answered our questions. As everyone was leaving, I had the chance to go up to him and personally tell him that I took a class, Principles of Ecology, from him in 1971. He had started his teaching career at KU in 1969. Chip was a great instructor, and I could tell him so. It was rewarding to see him again after so many years.

I hope you all will consider going to either our Master Gardener College next year or attending the International Master Gardener College Conference in 2025. The dates are August 25-28 and it will be “a virtual experience of epic proportions”.

Collected by Leslie Paulson



Chestnut Tree Update from Master Gardener College

by Erica Jones
NRVMGA Master Gardener

We had a speaker this year talk about chestnut tree restoration efforts. Unfortunately, the scheduled speaker Carl Asher was not available but we still got a talk.

The chestnut blight arrived in the US in 1904 (or was first discovered anyway). The blight traveled some 24 miles a year. Pennsylvania was so desperate they tried to bulldoze a path across the state to try to restrain the blight from going south. By 1925 the blight was in the Blue Ridge Parkway; by 1950 the chestnut was 'functionally extinct'. On our last walk up in our backwoods, we could still find two trees growing from old roots in the ground. I did once see a big enough chestnut tree with blight that had a nut on it.

The leaves look a lot like chestnut oak. Chestnut leaves are 5-9" and 1 ½ - 3" - narrowly oblong long pointed. Chestnut oak leaves are described 4-8" long and 2-4" wide; and elliptical.

The leaves on a chinquapin (which have about disappeared in our woods; they also get the blight but live longer with it) have a similar shape, but overall smaller (3-6" long) than (both) chestnuts are. There are also groups trying to breed blight resistant chinquapins. Chinquapins have much smaller fruit than chestnuts and a smaller tree (for us, anyway) (I am not sure I saw many mature trees).

The Foundation folks are trying two breeding approaches to getting a blight resistant chestnut with fruits more like the American chestnut (than the less tasty but bigger Chinese chestnut). The other groups are also trying to find naturally resistant populations which, best I can tell, has not been successful.

One breeding approach is doing multiple back crosses, starting with a cross between the two species and then breeding those results back to the American chestnut. The foundation is offering for sale 4 generation back-cross seeds. The idea is that they hope to retain the blight resistance from the first cross, but they the multiple back crosses with the native chestnut should bring the results more like the American chestnut flavor. Since a tree requires eight years to mature and bear fruit, this is a slow process to get through four crosses. The American Chestnut Foundation is selling these crosses to people who join the foundation and give a respectable sized donation. Most of these trees have blight resistance, but obviously not all of them.

The second approach to producing a quantity of blight resistant trees is to produce them by genetic engineering. Originally it was thought that there were only three genes involved in blight resistance (in the Chinese tree); it is now known that it requires more genes than that

This approach used to produce a transgenic plant is to borrow a gene produced by some wheat varieties which will neutralize the oxalic acid produced by the fungus into water and hydrogen peroxide. Several other plants have this capability - like bananas and strawberries. So, the trees will still have the blight - the blight is not killed per say, just controlled. Given that this would be a genetically modified organism planted in the wild, USDA has been careful about approving planting trees for planting in the wild. Our speaker claimed approval MIGHT come as early as this year.

Researchers have studied tadpole survival in puddles lined with transgenic leaves; bumble bees and pollen, leaf decomposition, native plants growth rates when grown next to the trees, and other factors. Are the introduction risks worth it? I think so but....

The American Chestnut Foundation offices are in Asheville NC. With a \$300 donation, you will be mailed four seeds. For \$500 you will be mailed six seeds !!

A Penn State web site has a picture of what our woods looked like pre-blight with gorgeous straight trunks: <https://extension.psu.edu/from-the-woods-american-chestnut>.

Rhubarb
by Erica Jones
NRVMGA Master Gardener

Well, I think I have officially arrived as a ‘gardener.’ Or at least, I have figured out how to grow rhubarb - finally. Admittedly it has been a good rhubarb year here; but I am taking full credit for wising up.

My previous effort suffered from two problems - not enough fertilizer and not enough space. When my vegetable garden expanded into stepped beds on the slope, I slapped two purchases in the lower full sun part. The vegetables are closer to my main source of fertilizer than the flower bed is the laying hens. So, every spring I scrape out some chicken poop and dump it under the leaves of the rhubarb. Chicken (manure) rates the ‘highest NPK of any animal manures. Yes, you can burn plants with it but just keep little distance away - does wonder. Chicken manure rates N .5 - .9 %, P .4-.5% and K 1.2-1.7% according to Wikipedia.

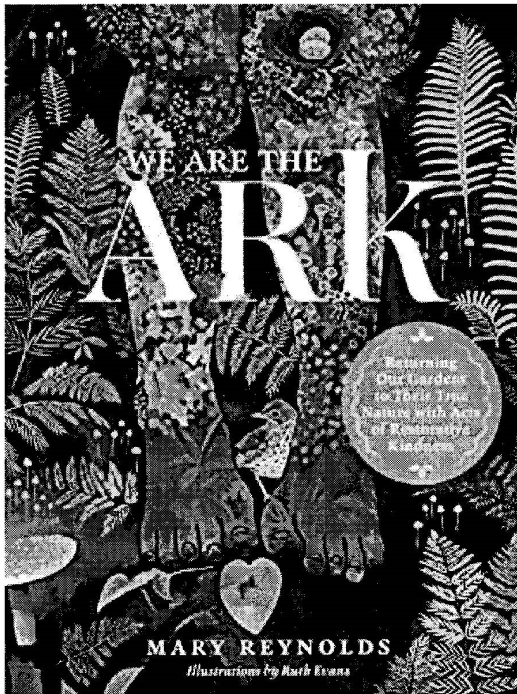
My other cultural approach is space (and weeds). I am up to four plants with all the elbow room they want, and little weed competition. Rhubarb is good at naturally keeping down weeds given their production of heavy shade under the plants. The leaves, when you cut them, make an amusing mulch.

As an aside, I spotted it on my trip to Iceland but it looked a little different. It is not native but introduced probably in 1880. Obviously, the climate there is like the ultimate rhubarb factory so the plants may have been just suffering from intense happiness. Gardeners in Iceland do not dead head plants religiously as we do, so the stuff spreads by seed.

Internet sources are vague as to species. As is the case with a lot of long-cultivated plants, the genetics can get mixed. Who cares except plant breeders?



We Are the ARK: Returning Our Gardens to Their True Nature Through Acts of Restorative Kindness
by Mary Reynolds



Reading is a favorite way of mine to spend time, particularly when it involves learning something new about gardening. Having read several of Doug Tallamy's books, his review comment on *We Are the Ark*, "Mary has seen the future of conservation. You may be surprised to learn that it is you!" sealed my interest, although yet another book shaming me for loving all the non-native plants in my garden set me a bit at defense! Regardless, when my local library sent out a brief on this new offering, I reserved and checked it out. Its premise immediately captured me, as did the whimsical illustrations that accompanied the text.

Reynolds, a self-described "reformed landscape designer" argues for a radical shift in how and why we garden. However, she writes in a way that imagines how we might try to devote at least part of our outdoor space and return it back to nature. While acknowledging that gardening is a creative act, and that creativity is vital to most gardeners, she advocates that one can be creative without harming other creatures. Reynolds refers to such a space as "an ARK for the Earth," the genre of garden that is a

kindness to the Earth, featuring native plants that provide for native animals, insects, and birds.

Not only are basics in ecology presented in an easily understandable way, but the practical "how" of making and sustaining an ARK provides steps for both small and drastic changes that undoubtedly will appeal to readers at varying points in their gardening journey. Reynolds includes plant choices, placement, and layering and offers suggestions for sharing what is learned with neighbors, other gardeners, and "influencers" who can expand this vision into the mainstream.

One of her introductory excerpts includes how her vision for the "ARK" came into being: "It wasn't the startled fox that grabbed my attention from the drawing board where I was daydreaming out the window at home. It was the pair of hares that were chasing the fox across the garden. Soon, I spotted a hedgehog scurrying along the hares' path but well tucked under the protection of the thick hawthorn hedge that edged the lawn in front of me. They disappeared into the wildness that was one-half of the land I was minding, taking refuge in an acre of self-willed land—a mix of thorny shrubs, brambles, grasses, and rushes to the west of my garden. Seeing as it was early winter and a bright mid-morning, I figured something must be amiss for the normally hidden, feral creatures to cross my path in such a manner, so I got up from my work and went outside to investigate. I followed the direction they were coming from and wandered up the end of my lane onto the quiet country road where I live in Ireland. Not so quiet today, however. Today a big yellow monster of destruction had landed. My neighbors had finally gotten planning permission to build a house, so they did what everyone does: they sent in a digger to clear out "the mess"

and make a garden without any thought for the multiple families who already called it home. I stood in absolute horror, forgetting to breathe. I had done this myself many times in many places over twenty years as a garden designer, carrying out similar unconscious devastation everywhere I worked. It was suddenly blindingly obvious to me that these creatures we are supposed to share our Earth with have fewer and fewer safe places left to go. Their habitats and foraging places are being torn out at a rapid rate. There is no sanctuary for them in our gardens, which we fill with purchased, pretty, non-native garden plants. Gardens are controlled and poisoned to the point of being a still life with no room at the inn for anything other than our own visions of how we want things to be. I went back inside and started researching the collapse of the natural world, learning very quickly that the biodiversity crisis is even more insidious and dangerous than the looming threat of climate collapse because it is not understood nor given attention. The web of life is being pushed to the edge, and we are unquestionably and indivisibly tethered to that web. Multiple species are now falling prey to extinction every single day. They are never coming back. This is the great forgetting. Knowing I couldn't take on the whole world, I tried not to get overwhelmed and instead put the kettle on and sat down at my kitchen table to think about what one person could do that would really make a difference to our current trajectory."

Thus, the idea for a grassroots movement called "We Are the ARK" (for Acts of Restorative Kindness to the Earth) was born. Reynolds' writing style is readable, convincing, and challenging, all in a good way. The big question for us gardeners is: who will embrace it? The alternative appears bleak.

Pamela McGraw, Loudoun County Extension Master Gardener



VCE Loudoun Master Gardeners Present Free Virtual Lecture Series



Nuisance or Nonsense: What's the Harm in Invasive Plants?

What is the difference between native, non-native and invasive plants? Why should I care about invasive plants - are they really a problem? Are there 'good' invasive plants? Joanne Royaltey will help us examine the differences between native, non-native, and invasive plants. She will discuss how best to manage invasive plants in Northern Virginia.

Joanne Royaltey is the Consumer Horticulture & Invasive Species Program Associate at VCE Frederick. Through her love of gardening, Joanne became an Extension Master Gardener in 2020. A native New Yorker, Joanne's called Northern Shenandoah Valley home since 1977. She is a 'community change agent' and spent years developing expertise in the healthcare and educational arena including helping to secure many millions of dollars to support initiatives that make our communities healthier places to live, work and thrive.

VCE Loudoun Master Gardeners:
loudouncountymastergardeners.org



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Joanne Royaltey

*Consumer Horticulture & Invasive
Species Program Associate*



**Thursday
July 13**

**Time
07:00 PM**

Event URL: tinyurl.com/es6v24rw
Password: LCPL

**Hosted by Loudoun County
Public Libraries**

In partnership with Loudoun County Public Library, this free public lecture series is supported by funding from the Loudoun County Master Gardener Association and the Stephen Dunbar Memorial Fund.

LIVE WEBINAR

VMGA Meeting— August 12th—Lunch Order
Please note this should be sent to Carolyn Snyder!

VMGA August 12, 2023 Lunch Order

Name: _____

Cellphone number : _____

Unit : _____

Welcome to Loudoun County, Virginia !

The following choices are available from Panera Bread:

Fuji Apple Salad = \$ 13 _____

Mediterranean Veggie sandwich= \$ 13 _____

Tuna Salad sandwich = \$ 13 _____

Roasted Turkey/Avocado BLT sandwich = \$ 17 _____

Each sandwich comes with a pickle, chips and a cookie. The salad comes with bread.

** Water will be provided. In the hopes of limiting plastic waste please bring a reusable container **

Please mark your choice & send a check payable to LCMGA by JULY 28, 2023

Carolyn Snyder > 519 North Street, Leesburg, Virginia 20176

703-507-0886 (Cell)