



The Grapevine

March 2024

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

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Welcome New Master Gardener Trainees!

by Wendy Silverman & Susan Perry

The NRV Master Gardeners welcome our new trainees.

We hope you will find your classes interesting. They will be filled with helpful garden information that you can convey to the public.

As Master Gardeners, we have the chance to share what we know with the public and hopefully, raise their enthusiasm about everything 'growing' and 'gardening.'

We pass on useful, research-based information. Other times, we listen. When we do, we often get lucky and learn new stuff too.

In the end, hopefully we can help make our little corner of SW Virginia a little better for everyone. We're so glad you're going to join us in that effort.

We look forward to meeting each of you at a Master Gardener event.



Photo: Ruth Ann Whitener

Plant Sale Alert

by Beth Kirby

The 2024 NRVMGA plant sale is Saturday May 11, rain or shine, at the Government Center in Christiansburg, starting at 9am. As usual, we will have veggie plants, annuals, perennials, natives, and pollinators. We'd really like to expand our selection of annuals and natives this year.

Now that nicer weather has arrived, it's a good time to assess your own garden to see what needs to be thinned, divided, or moved. And when you do find these plants, please keep our plant sale in mind. We would love your donations and I have pots if you need some. We want to avoid any invasives so if unsure, please check <https://www.invasive.org/species/list.cfm?id=176>

If you are growing plants from seed, be sure to start early so there's time to pot them up, for large, well-rooted, healthy plants. We'd appreciate anyone who'd like to start annuals or natives from seed. Both need to be started soon. Besides other annuals, we will be having a 'Basil Bar' this year, with at least 10 varieties of basil that can be mixed and matched. I can provide cell packs, flats, soil, and seeds to anyone who needs them.

As many of you may remember, we have developed a great database of plants for the sale. However, to keep it up-to-date, we need to know ASAP what you are planning to grow so we can put together the info sheets for each plant. Please contact me this week, if you haven't already, to let me know what you will be growing for the sale.

And we'd also love your help during the week before the sale. We have a number of tasks to be done to get ready for the sale, hold the sale, and then clean-up. We will start collecting plants at the spring potluck on Tuesday May 7, and will be working 9am - 5pm Wednesday - Friday. Saturday, we will work from 6am - 4pm. It really takes an army of volunteers to get this done. If you can help, please call or email me.

And More

by Gwen Ewing

Our plant sale has evolved to also include a garden-focused yard sale. We are asking for garden-related items you no longer want or need: shovels, hoses, trowels, rakes, hoes, gloves, clay/ceramic pots, baskets, lawn equipment, trimmers, blowers, lawnmowers, yard wagons, outdoor furniture, garden signs (like "Gardeners Know the Best Dirt"), garden books, garden magazines, wreaths, sundials, windchimes, birdhouses, garden flags, shepherds crooks, solar lights, figurines, and any other items you can think of that would be of interest to gardeners.

You can bring your items to the VCE Multipurpose Room anytime between the May potluck through May 10th.

Please phone or email me if you have any questions.

Book Club Calendar (from Ashley Johnson)

Master Gardener
Book Club

February 25 (Sun)

5:30 - 7pm

Best of author Doug Tallamy
(*Nature's Best Hope & Bringing Nature Home*)

Moon Hollow Brewing, Blacksburg

May 19 (Sun)

TBD

Braiding Sweetgrass
by Robin Wall Kimmerer

TBD, Floyd

August 25 (Sun)

3:30 - 5pm

Best of author Lisa Mason Ziegler
(*Cool Flowers, Vegetables Love Flowers,*
The Cut Flower Handbook)

New River Vineyard, Dublin

November 17 (Sun)

TBD

Uprooted
by Page Dickey

Location TBD

Developing Calendar for 2024 (from Sarah Smiley)

Thought it may be useful for you all to see the developing calendar of events of 2024:

April:

13 - NRVMA hosting meeting of VMGA in Christiansburg.

Note: This meeting is open to all MGs, not just association members. If you don't know about the VMGA and are interested in it, now is your opportunity! Please let us know if you'd like to come, as there is a lunch being served and we need to have a number to estimate costs.

May:

7 - MG graduation (at MCC)

10 - MG plant sale pre-sale for MCC employees

11 - plant sale (at MCC)

June:

17-23 - Pollinator Week

Early Bloomers and Common Names

by Erica Jones

For years I have tried to have something blooming in the yard in each month of the year. Seeming as we just got promoted to zone 7 from 6b (no, I don't believe them), this should be easy; or at least easier, right?

This year has been no sweat so far for January and February. My batch of pansies snuggled under the February snows we got, so they are doing pretty well. Getting a cover of snow on the ground before the temperature drops is great. In my more vigorous past, I have thrown clear plastic over flowers, spinach, kale, and lettuce in February. Stay tuned for the dreaded months of November and December, though, if I can find anything blooming.



Leucojum: Unsplash/Natalia Gusakova



Galanthus: Erica Jones

One year, in the fall, I planted what I thought were 'Snow Drops' (bulbs) for some early spring bloom. Well, they were totally not early! A better common name for them would be 'Snow Flakes' – or Leucojum. There are two species: one has the common name of summer snowflake; the other is called spring snowflake. This should be a clue to blooming time. The flowers have more visible green than the other snowdrop. At this point, these ladies are barely poking their foliage up in my yard.

So, I tried again with the bulb catalogs and lo and behold I got some Galanthus, which has some 20 species. These hardy souls starting blooming in my 6b – 7 yard in very early February. They dodged the cold weather and snow very nicely and are now blooming. Google

claims they have tepals, not petals or sepals. Tepals are what you have when you can not tell if the big flower parts are petals or sepals. Oh fine.

And of course, hellebore. They do have varieties that face upwards so you don't have to crawl in the dirt to get photos. They actually reseed vigorously for me. And mine are extremely deer resistant. Rah! (As is the 'jasmine' at right.) A lot of the common names contain the word 'rose' – like Lenten Rose or Christmas Rose. Not



Winter Jasmine: Erica Jones



Hellebore: Erica Jones

sure why.

And yes, some hellebore do not totally nod down. Not sure this is a straight stinking hellebore, but it has some similarities. They should have a red rim around the flower; this one has red on the interior of the flower (which is hard to see). Wikipedia mentions "leaves on the flower stem." And no, it does not smell bad -- but my nose is SHOT, so sniff at your peril.



Stinking Hellebore: Erica Jones

Early Spring by Ruth Ann Whitener



A Year in Review by Wendy Silverman

Looking Back... The beginning of the year is a great time to look back on what we accomplished in 2023. Here are the data I report annually.

Total Number of NRV MG Volunteers: 97

Giles: 6
 Pulaski: 10
 Montgomery: 69
 Floyd: 7
 Radford: 3
 Other: 2 from Craig County

Total Number of New River Valley Association Members: 78

TOTAL Contacts for the NRV (ALL): 23,552 direct 21,503 indirect

County	Direct Contacts			Indirect Contacts		
	Better Impact	Contact Sheets, Wendy, Help Desk	Total	Better Impact	Facebook, Phone, Email, Newsletter	Total
Bland	8	0	8	0	0	0
Craig	18	44	62	138	0	138
Floyd	866	336	1,202	268	0	268
Giles	486	165	651	0	0	0
Montgomery	15,041	2,791	17,805	11,170	9,640	20,810
Pulaski	2,874	925	3,799	238	0	238
Radford	3	1	4	0	0	0
Other Locations	1	0	1	15	0	15

Note: Master Gardener Volunteers enter their contacts in the Better Impact system. Better Impact does not offer demographic data. Demographic data that was collected can be found in the data sheets provided to ANR Agents in the NRV.

NRVMGA Facebook Page (People seeing content): **9,508** (numbers were recorded in contact sheets)

National Volunteer Value/Hour: \$31.80 Virginia Volunteer Value/Hour: \$32.59

County	Hours	National Value	Virginia Value
Bland	13	\$413.40	\$423.67
Craig	107	\$3,402.60	\$3,487.13
Floyd	415	\$13,197.00	\$13,524.85
Giles	178	\$5,660.40	\$5,801.02
Montgomery	7,704	\$244,987.20	\$251,073.36
Pulaski	937	\$29,796.60	\$30,536.83
Radford	18	\$527.40	\$586.62
Other	121	\$3,847.80	\$3,943.39

Fundraising - Spring Plant Sale

Date: May, 13, 2023
Location: Montgomery County Government Center
Amount of \$9,721.24

Fundraising – Rain Barrel Workshops

March 29th in Pulaski, April 29th in Montgomery, and several individual workshops in Pulaski at Stan Stanley's house. We sold a total of 32 rain barrels in 2023.
Amount of \$2,710.00

Grant Summary

A more detailed list will be found in the 2023 End of The Year Data Folder or later in this newsletter.

Grantees apply in 2023 and money is awarded to them in January 2024.

Master Gardener Volunteer Refresher!

by

Meredith Hoggatt (ANR Agent) & Wendy Silverman (MG Coordinator)

- **What counts as a contact?**
 - A contact must include a significant exchange of educational information or resources. This does NOT include that of a business-related nature, such as responses to inquiries about the time and place of events; client referrals to another office or program; confirmation of a registration for a program, etc.
- **What is the difference between a direct contact and an indirect contact?**
 - **Direct Contact**- Face-to-face interaction with clientele where there is an exchange of educational information.
 - **Indirect Contact**- Other means of exchange of educational information (ex: email, phone, newsletters, educational social media posts, etc.)
- **What counts as service hours versus educational hours?**
 - **Service hours** - Time spent on any approved service project (called activities in Better Impact). *Anything in **Blue** on the weekly updates count as service hours.*
 - **Education hours** - Any educational talks, books, podcasts etc. must be approved by either Wendy or Meredith. *Anything marked in **Green** in the weekly updates.* At least 4 of the 8 required hours must be from in-person educational meetings, zoom talks, or webinars. The other 4 can come from reading. If you have fulfilled your continuing ed hours and would like some more webinars or reading that is fine. You can count those too. Eight is the minimum requirement, but you can always do more.
- **How many hours do I need each year?**
 - **New Trainees:** 60 educational hours (done with our training) and 50 hours of service.
 - **Existing Master Gardeners:** 8 hours of education and 20 hours of service.

2024 Grant Recipients

by Judy Rea

The NRV MGA Grant Committee would like to recognize the 2024 grant recipients.
Congratulations!

Project	Amount Funded	Recipient
Growing Up Cub Scouts Day Camp	\$500	Lisa Bass & Ashley Johnson
Pulaski City 4H Adopt a Spot	\$150	Chris Lichty & Steve Hale
Montgomery County Gov CTR Raised Beds Demo Garden	\$800	Meredith Hoggatt
Smithfield Plantation Garden & Landscape Beautification & Education Initiative	\$1,856	Michael Hudson & David McEwen
Plenty! Farm Let's Grow Porch Pantry Program	\$500	Angie Vitale & Elizabeth Bryant
Display cases at the Hale Pollinator and Children's Garden	\$432	Hugh Osmus & Polly Ashelman
The Montgomery Museum of Art and History: waterline extension	\$1,260	Timothy Guthrie, Beth Umberger, & Gwen Ewing
Southpaw Gardening Classes and Seed Share	\$40	Riley DeHority & Erin Mckelvy
The VCOM Community Garden	\$400	Dr. Fred Rawlins, Dr. Dixie Tooke-Rawlins, John Lucas, & Ishan Perera
Nellies Cave Arboretum Wildflower Restoration	\$300	Chris Brumback & Hazel Beeler
Isaac Walton League of America NRV Pollinator Garden	\$900	Mike Brosius & Meghan Dove
The June Bug Center for Arts and Education Native Garden	\$200	Katie Hunter
VT Adult Day Services Horticulture Therapy	\$600	Mel Flaherty & Debbie Roberts
The Great Little Park on Main	\$1,010	Ashley Johnson
PCYC Community Garden Sustainability Project	\$1,700	Katie Thompson & Beth Kirby

We would also like to recognize the Board members who are hanging up their "Grant Committee" hats and to express our heartfelt **THANKS** for their dedication and hard work. A big **WELCOME** to our incoming members: Ed Blackford, Sue Mellen, & Deni Dillon. The current members (Beth Umberger, Karen Parker, Kay Hunnings, and Judy Rea) look forward to working with you.

From the President

by Sarah Smiley

We are getting 2024 started with some new ideas. Last year, given feedback received from members, we made improving social opportunities a priority in our efforts. Our annual plant sale is always a highlight for MGs working together and meeting each other. Ashley Johnson started a book club. We held Board meetings before educational meetings, to allow members to join those meetings too.

We are taking this a step further this year with improving teamwork to meet set goals. Our theme for 2024 is: **"Making Great Ideas Bloom"** - so we are looking for big ideas this year. I have created some goals and priorities but I will need your help to accomplish them (teamwork)! I expect this list of goals to grow, so as always, your ideas are welcomed.

Priority - Sharing Our MG Work:

A core goal is ensuring the success and continuation of the NRVMG program and the Association - and the main driver of that is ensuring people want to become members and retain their membership. Getting people interested in becoming MGs means educating them on what we are doing and how we are working in the communities.

Getting the word out includes utilizing our social media platforms. Last year, my personal goal was to get our Facebook (FB) followers to 1,000. We are a bit shy of that goal. This year, I shared my goal of getting the FB feed to 1,500 followers with the Board.

Photos and stories of our projects elicit not only the most "likes" and shares, but it helps us better inform the community of who we are, what we are doing, and how our work is of benefit to them (and hopefully, they will want to be part of our work). More photos and stories of projects are needed. I know folks get busy with their work and do not want to stop to take photos, but anything you can submit will be greatly appreciated.

Don't think of this as bragging (unless you want to brag, then please do as our projects are great). Sharing what you are doing on your projects actually benefits the continuation of this program. Wendy Silverman shares project statistics of what we are doing with folks in Extension, but this doesn't help us encourage future members. Who knows besides us and our immediate project participants what we work we are doing? We need to engrain the practice of sharing what we are doing with the wider community.

President Request - Goal 1 - at least once this year, send me/Ashley Johnson/Lynn Brammer or Wendy a photo and a few sentences about your project or work for FB and the NRVMG website. Like and follow our FB page and posts if you are on FB. We are trying for 1500 followers!

Priorities for 2024 MG Work

At the January Board kick-off meeting, we agreed on two main priorities/focus areas for this year: helping address food insecurity and supporting pollinators. In order to grow vegetables, and everything else, pollinators are needed – so this logically leads us to supporting pollinators.

As many of our projects already support these priorities, this is a great opportunity to work together to align and elevate our work and have some measurable goals.

Priority – Let's Help Address Food Insecurity:

Meredith Hoggatt informed us that a study on food insecurity in our area was recently completed, and the findings are shocking. There is truly a need in our communities for fresh food/any food. Extension is promoting a "Grow a Row" idea to encourage the public to grow additional food to donate to food banks/food programs in their communities to address food insecurity.

Participating in the "Grow a Row" idea will earn you MG project hours. The idea is to grow and donate the additional produce to a food bank/for community use. We need to work with Meredith and Wendy to see how to qualify the growing and donating, as I know some of our members live in apartments and may have smaller gardening areas/growing in pots. We could even encourage people at the plant sale to buy one more food plant and donate the produce to the community (like Lynn Brammer's Share the Spare project).

President Request - Goal 2: have at least 50% of our Board members and general members participate in the "Grow a Row" program and report how much they donated to the community for statistics gathered by Wendy and Meredith.

Kay Hunnings provided a 2023-2024 NRV Thrive Food PDF that lists a wide variety of food banks throughout our counties that may be very close to you and appreciate your produce donations. If you did not receive the email with this information, please let me know.

Priority – Let's Support Pollinators

Pollinator week is June 17-23. Many of our programs support pollinators. What if we had at least 3 projects in each of our counties highlighted for this week (and Erica's project in Craig County) in a flyer developed and shared with the public? If MGs want to lead tours of their projects, we could have that option listed and times available.

President Request - Goal 3: at least 8 MG projects highlighted and at least 2 other partners' gardens highlighted for this week. I shared this idea through email to members and I greatly appreciate the response and support for this idea. I am developing a list and have four MG projects on it so far. If your project is already open to the public or if you have any ideas for collaboration, I'd love to hear from you.

One MG put me in touch with the Friends of Peak Creek in Pulaski (thank you, Carol!) and they would like to have their two gardens in Pulaski also listed, as these gardens were developed through grants provided by NRVMGGA! They have even asked me to come to speak to their March meeting to see how we can work together.

What other grant recipients could we highlight and possibly improve collaboration? A lot of us could use extra help on our projects – what if we could join forces with other partners who could help us too?

I am looking forward to hearing from you, to our work this year, and to Making Great Ideas Bloom!

Sarah

Just for Fun ... Wacky, But Not a Pun

by Susan Perry

I saw this picture and couldn't help myself!



Photo: Rona Vrooman

#1:

Rona calls this Wendy's seed wall.
Right now, it's out in the hall.
By the potluck, all stacked
On shelves in the back
Of the MG Office, y'all.

#2:

There once was a gardener named Wendy,
Well-known to all training attendees.
She really likes seeds,
Which some projects need.
So call her – but please be quite friendly!

#3:

Our coordinator Wendy has seeds.
A seed wall for all project needs.
If you haven't taken any yet,
Don't worry if you forget.
On shelves all summer – indeed!

Bad Dog (or ... Whoops!)

by Erica Jones

A MG buddy and I took on a once-a-month after-school garden club this year for kindergarten through third grade. Admittedly a tough age for me to teach; mostly, just not enough practice. We were most worried about the winter months – as in, “So what WILL we do?” The school has four outdoor planting areas, so we figured we had the growing season covered. But winter?

My buddy came up with the idea of making pine cone feeders for the wild birds – stuffing pine cones with peanut butter and bird seed. Well, the peanut butter idea got tossed quickly. I suggested ‘sun butter’ – that is, ground up sunflower seeds. (They could pay me to promote the stuff - it is very adaptable, not animal but vegetable, and tasty.) We got a collection of leftover vegetable seeds from Wendy (definitely very aged) and thought we could mix them in with the usual sunflower seeds and cracked corn (and have a lesson on seeds and how different they look).

So, I did a field test to see how seeds smaller than sunflowers would stick and my first pick was Wendys’ dreaded (and Ashley’s beloved) okra (of which we have a fair bit of seed). I globbed the sun butter on a pine cone, sprinkled it with the okra seeds (one package does not go very far with this big of a seed) and put it outside (loose !!) on the bird feeder.

When my spouse, Paige, & I got back from our trip to town, Paige the pound hound piled out of the car and vanished. Nothing unusual about that; you gotta check for intruders. Well, not this time. Spouse said something about ‘eating’ and I bolted back outside to nab Paige from what I feared might be rotting deer parts. No, not parts. Paige was dissecting the pine cone which had expeditiously landed on the ground. Crunch! Chomp! How did it end up on the ground? Squirrel? Birds?? Wind??? So, my field test of the sun butter substitute was sort of a success but obviously the cones will need to be attached more firmly to a non-dog-edible surface. AND will my yard be awash in volunteer okra plants next spring? I sort of doubt it, but stay tuned.

I think this approach to seed delivery has some potential scientific study possibilities. Will cantaloupe seeds be more popular than okra? What about radish seeds?

Sunflowers are grown commercially (for seed) in the both North and South Dakota, as well as in Minnesota, Texas, Nebraska, and Kansas to name the top six. North Dakota produces 46 times more sunflower seeds than Kansas (which I thought was a serious sunflower state). Must be pretty out west in those relatively dry states in the summer!



Sunflowers: Unsplash/Todd Trapani

ANR Goals for 2024 & How YOU Can Help

by Meredith Hoggatt (ANR Agent)

As the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) extension agent, I realize that my goals for programming may not directly impact you as a Master Gardener, but I do believe there is potential for a great deal of overlap. That is why I thought it would be helpful to share my goals for the year.

1. Increase Grazing Efficiency for Livestock Producers

This may be the least applicable to the Master Gardeners, but I feel it's important to discuss nonetheless. You're a Master Gardener, you don't mind continuing education, right?! This year I plan to be more active on the Graze300 team, a group focused on helping farmers better utilize their pasture forage. Through practices such as stockpiling and adaptive rotational grazing, producers can provide better forage for their livestock, improve soil health and forage yield, decrease weeds, and more. I plan to create a video series addressing some of the perceived barriers (cost, physical inability, increased time/work load) identified in the recent study conducted by the Graze300 team and sociology professors at Virginia Tech, "Social Science Research on Factors Influencing Farmer's Attitudes Toward the Adoption of Rotational Grazing in Virginia."

I also plan to host more pasture walks in Montgomery County, highlighting producers who have successfully implemented these practices and illustrating how attainable and beneficial these methods can be.

2. Increase Soil Health Awareness

Soil health is the foundation of all horticultural and agricultural production. In caring for the soil, we ensure continued production and sustainability for the future. Whether it is in a terracotta pot or expanding acres in a field, a soil's health and integrity remain crucial. I have increased my involvement with 4theSoil (<https://www.4thesoil.org/>), a collaborative organization comprised of VCE and the Virginia Soil Health Coalition. We are working to create a statewide "Soil Your Undies" Campaign, hopefully with the help of the Master Gardeners. I proposed that we, 4theSoil, contact Ed Olsen, the new Consumer Horticulture Specialist and Extension Master Gardener Program Director and see if the Master Gardeners would be interested in helping us coordinate such a campaign. If you've never heard of "Soil Your Undies," I encourage you to read about the concept here: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/oregon/soil-your-undies-challenge>. It's a fun way to involve a plethora of folks from kids at school to producers in the field! And with a name like that, it definitely grabs your attention!

I am also excited to use our raised beds outside of the Montgomery County Government Center to help increase awareness of soil health by providing programming utilizing the raised beds, as well as installing a sign next to them where we can change out the educational information displayed.

I'd also like to focus on regenerative agriculture, highlighting incorporating regenerative ag practices where producers can, while acknowledging that there may be monetary, physical, or even some mental barriers for largescale change. I truly

believe that small, incremental change can result in large impacts.

3. Aid in Addressing Food Insecurity

In conducting our Situation Analysis for the county, we found that food insecurity is the number one issue on the minds of Montgomery County citizens. Montgomery County has the highest rate of person in poverty (21%) compared to the surrounding counties of Pulaski (14%), Floyd (12.3%), and Giles (12%). Many people are shocked at this fact, solely thinking of Blacksburg professionals and forgetting the rural communities (Shawsville, Elliston, and Riner), as well as the number of students on campus struggling with food insecurity. In an effort to aid in addressing food insecurity, our extension office has developed the goal of establishing a Free Food Pantry in Eastern Montgomery, a community in need. We are hoping to develop interdisciplinary programs involving youth, producers, and hopefully the Master Gardeners to help grow and maintain inventory in the local food pantries.

We hope to expand this idea of lending support to our community by extending an invitation to Montgomery County citizens to “Plant A Row” to donate to local food kitchens and pantries. We hope to partner with you all as Master Gardeners to organize this campaign and see how we can make a difference!

I am also planning to hold at least one Bucket Garden Workshop (maybe two, one in English and one in Spanish). I will demonstrate how you can grow your own food in 5-gallon buckets, a much more affordable and accessible option for container gardening. This workshop will allow participants to prepare their buckets and leave with soil and a few vegetable plants to start their own garden at home. This is especially geared towards renters who do not have a gardening space.

I will continue working with NRV Thrive and the Community Foundation of the New River Valley to see how the community can network, share resources, and increase our impact in the community.

4. Increase Engagement with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)

I believe it is imperative to connect children to their food. My goal for this year is to increase my engagement with MCPS system through the classroom and eventually through the cafeteria. I plan to partner with Shawn Jadrnicek (Roanoke ANR) to create a “Train the Teacher Series: Planning, Establishing, and Maintaining a School Garden” curriculum. This will be a self-paced virtual program, to be mindful of teachers’ time and energy, with a one or two-day, in-person workshop to provide foundational knowledge for teachers interested in establishing or maintaining a school garden. I also plan to involve the schools in the “Soil Your Undies” campaign. In an effort to support our local producers, I aim to speak with the supervisor of the school nutritional program to see about the possibility of getting local beef, produce, or fruit served at the schools.

5. Increase Support of Local Agriculture

I am currently developing a Montgomery County Agritourism Directory and Local Food Directory to feature Montgomery County agriculture and make local foods more easily accessible. If you know of anyone that provides agritourism services or farmers who sell their products direct-to-consumer, please have them contact me.

I will also begin working on a Farmer Profiles series, highlighting farmers who produce

quality products while remaining environmentally conscious and implementing sustainable practices. Frequently, agriculture is only featured when producers are mismanaging their operations, leaving a negative impression on the public. We have so many wonderful farmers who are producing our food, while also focusing on best management practices. It's time we recognize them.

If you would like to help with any of the above-mentioned programs (Bucket Gardening Workshop, "Soil Your Undies" Campaign, Free Food Pantry, etc.), let me know! I would appreciate the help and the opportunity to better serve our community. Thank you all for the time and energy you give back to Montgomery County! I truly appreciate you all!

Winter Seed Sowing

by Rona Vrooman

More than 25 people braved the rain and participated in the Winter Seed Sowing workshop held at the Floyd County library on February 10. Master gardeners Elizabeth Bryant, Becky Howell, Amie Slate, and Rona Vrooman encouraged participants and answered questions.



Photos: Rona Vrooman



The Grapevine Bulletin Board

The new 2024 NRVMGGA Board.....

President: Sarah Smiley

Vice President: Ashley Johnson

Secretary: Morgan St. Laurent

Treasurer: Beth Kirby

Members at Large:

Luralee Cornwell

Donna Cunningham

Karen Parker

Kay Hunnings (2023 MAL Class Liaison until 2024 class graduates)

Congratulations!!! Thank you to all of the NRVMGGA members who voted and to the outgoing Board members for their service.

Living with a Girdle is No Fun (Ask Your Trees)

by Emma Patterson

Those of us ladies of a certain age remember life with girdles with more nausea than nostalgia. The tightness, the twisting, the torture - yikes! But what if a girdle is on a tree or a shrub? Then the girdle isn't just tight, it could be life threatening.

The University of Minnesota Extension defines girdling as "damage all the way around the trunk" of a tree or shrub. The bark "has been chewed or stripped off. That means the flow of nutrients and water to the tree has been interrupted due to the damage."¹ Simply put, if the damage extends deeper than the bark to internal layers of the tree or shrub, or if less than 25% of the bark around the tree remains, the tree is likely to die within a short period of time without help. Girdling stops nutrients from traveling down into a tree or shrub's roots, especially after the "plant has utilized carbohydrate reserves in roots for growth in the spring and before it sends reserves back down to roots in the fall." So, girdling is especially damaging to the tree or shrub in late summer or early fall.

Some trees and shrubs are difficult to girdle. Picking the right woody plant may be helpful to ensuring its survival. Girdling generally does not harm seedlings and saplings, trees with undulating bark, and species that can readily resprout from roots. For species that resprout easily, such as eucalyptus or black locust, girdling may actually trigger resprouting.

So, if you notice signs of girdling – what can be done to reverse it and prevent further damage? First, as with many gardening problems, identify the source. It may be hungry rabbits, deer, or beetles. Beetles "will bore through the bark and feed on the xylem and phloem in all directions." Then treating the beetle infestation is the solution. For furry pests with teeth, one option is to wrap burlap around the base of a tree to discourage chewing the tree. Another is to set up a chicken wire fence around the tree, to a height or depth that will deter rabbits or deer; be sure to leave enough circumference for future tree growth. Water the tree or shrub consistently and apply fertilizer to encourage new sprouts. For shrubs, trim as much of the damage as possible so it can re-sprout.



Planned Girdling of invasive trees.

Source: <https://woodyinvasives.org/management/girdling/>

¹<https://extension.umn.edu/news/what-does-girdle-mean-tree>

²<https://weedcut.ipm.ucanr.edu/management-practices/girdling/#qsc.tab=0>

³<https://weedcut.ipm.ucanr.edu/management-practices/girdling/#qsc.tab=0>

⁴<https://www.thetreecareguide.com/how-to-save-a-girdled-tree/>

⁵<https://www.russelltreeexperts.com/arbor-ed/2019/3/12/watch-out-for-girdled-trees>

The problem may also stem from a forgetful or uninformed property owner. The restrictive items below can unintentionally girdle shrubs, tree trunks, or branches:

- Guy wires used to straighten a sapling at planting
- Bird feeder hooks
- Swings attached with rope, wire, or chain
- Nylon twine on a root ball left in place after planting
- Zip lines
- Christmas lights installed and never removed
- Ribbon
- Tree identification tags attached at the nursery

Simply removing the item can often help the tree recover.

Weed-wacking and mowing grass too close to the tree trunk can also cause girdling. Finally, incorrect planting and mulching practices can also result in root girdling, where the tree's own roots are girdling it to death.

When a tree is girdled and has severe bark damage, this procedure may restore the flow of water and nutrients from the canopy to the roots:

1. Collect scion wood. These are "new growth" twigs about a thumb-size in diameter and 2 to 3 inches longer than the wound (mark the top part of the twigs to identify the flow or direction).
2. Clean the wound by removing any loose bark. Use a sharp and clean knife if necessary.
3. Trim one side of the twigs so they will lie flat on the tree trunk.
4. Trim each end of the twigs into a wedge shape.
5. Make two parallel cuts in the bark above and below the wound (in line with each other), you are creating flaps that the twigs (bridges) will be inserted under.
6. With the topside up, lift the flaps and place the bridge under them.
7. Cover the graft connections with a grafting compound or wax to preserve moisture and protect the grafts from infestation and disease.



Photo: Susan Perry

Girdling can mean the end of a tree or shrub's life, but it doesn't have to. First identify the source of the problem, which may suggest a feasible solution. By looking at ways to prevent girdling – through tree selection, deterring wildlife, avoiding restrictive items, and improving landscape practices – damage can often be forestalled or turned around. Then, living with a girdle will be less painful – for the tree and you.

⁶<https://www.thetreecareguide.com/how-to-save-a-girdled-tree/>

Potluck Pix



2024 Trainees (some not pictured)

Michelle Alon, Sharon Babiniau, Adam Burke, Baby Ram Saroja Chadalavada, Charlene Flick, Jessica Gutter, Sarah Jones, Dana Kadiri, Katie Kecorius, Amanda Kelly, Penny Livesay, Ted Livesay, Helen Lyman, Bob Miller, Melissa Neal, Pat Norris, Doratheia Rottkamp, Angela Scott, Susan Sweet, Aaron Whiteman

Indoor Lettuce

by Erica Jones

I got the idea to try some indoor fall lettuce this year. My spouse was complaining that we were producing more kilowatts on the solar panels than we were getting paid for (true during the summer, but not so much lately!) so I thought – I know what to do with THAT.

I've got wood shelves in the basement for starting seeds in the spring, and collecting junk the rest of the year. They are shelves with places to hang the 4' LED fixtures above them. I started out with florescent tubes (and agonized over warm, cool, and daylight -- I'm not going there now). Have not really figured out the LED colors either but found some 'white' light bulb replacements to go in the 4' two bulb fixtures I had. Florescent bulbs do eventually get pretty tired – they start turning black at the ends and start getting dim.

My clearance on the shelves is not great – think about how tall bedding plants get. So, kale was out. What about lettuce? Why not? I used seeds of some sort of leaf lettuce variety.

The container part was a bit more of a challenge. Then I got the idea on using one of the sturdier trays for holding bedding plants, lining it with row cover (Tyvek would work but I was out of that), and filling with dirt.

I wrap my shelves in aluminum foil, something I started when I was stuck with 32-watt, instead of 40-watt fluorescent bulbs.

When you are growing indoor vegetables, more light is better, right? Well, I think maybe not. Lettuce is a short-day season vegetable, remember???. When I finally went in and cut some lettuce; it looked suspiciously like they were trying to bolt. And to boot, they TASTED like they were trying to bolt. Blast!

After some thought, I noted three things that may be the culprits:

- 1) the lettuce was on the top shelf in a heated basement.
- 2) I had the light timer set on 14 hours.
- 3) the location on the shelves made it hard to keep my lettuce watered (see #1).

So, I moved them down a level, battled with the timer (if anyone knows of an easy to use electrical 110 V timer, I am all ears), and made the resolution to be more consistent with the water. I used real garden dirt which has pros and cons but there it is. I sterilized the soil in the microwave before using it. I am going to keep trying here and see if the next cutting tastes better. I was afraid to use 'potting mix' as the stuff does not have the water retention that clay does. Potting mix gets pretty hydrophobic when it gets really dry. I did not want to battle with that on the wood shelves.

While we are on the topic of lettuce, a MG mentioned "Kratky hydroponics." Well, it might be an easier way to grow lettuce indoors than dirt. The most common plants are lettuce, greens, and tomatoes. The Kratky method is a "passive hydroponic technique" – that is, there is no pump moving the water around; each container is a stand-alone environment.



Photo: Erica Jones

Airport Acres Garden & Greenspace: Growing Neighborhood Connections

by Bob Miller, MG Trainee

Blacksburg's historic Airport Acres neighborhood, developed by James Pandapas in the early 1940's, has tucked away between the neighborhood and airport a section of forest and farmland. The fields were once planted in corn, but in the early 1990's became fallow. Generations of children have played and explored the fields and forest, and evidence of tree houses and forest forts remain. Trails have provided the neighborhood an informal park for years.

The forest evolved from a barren landscape into woods with native trees including black walnut, tulip poplar, and holly. We've added white pine, loblolly pine, Norway spruce, and dawn redwood. Wildlife sightings include pileated woodpeckers, red fox, barred owls, and cooper's hawks, among others.

In the early-2000's, homeowners approached the Virginia Tech Montgomery Executive Airport to discuss establishing a neighborhood garden in the area. The property is owned by the airport authority. The airport leadership liked the idea and thus was born the Airport Acres Greenspace and Garden (AAGG). First up for AAGG, which is completely volunteer, was laying out garden plots and tilling the soil. Because the area had been cultivated previously, there was little debris or hazards, and the soil was in excellent condition. Over time, the garden has been an abundant producer of vegetables! We even have a small apple orchard and berry patch.



AAGG has benefitted from the generosity of other gardeners and organizations. The Airport purchased a lovely garden shed and power tools. The Town of Blacksburg donated installation of a water line to the garden. Glade Road Growing donated heavy equipment, person-power, and fencing supplies to help build a beautiful new fence, completed in 2023! Highland Tree Care keeps us supplied with wood chips. A grant from Sustainable Blacksburg paid for a new garden gate. Virginia Tech Big Event volunteers are enthusiastic spring-time workers at the garden. Many residents have donated funds, time, and

energy for garden upkeep and improvement.

In a typical year, between eight and twelve households garden a plot in the Greenspace. Most gardeners are from Airport Acres, but some are from other areas of Blacksburg. Master Gardeners are invited to visit the garden, walk the meadow paths, and explore the forest trails. If you are walking or biking to the area, there are entrances at the ends of DeHart, Rose, and Fairview Avenues. If driving, go to the end of Rose Avenue, enter through the gate at the end of Rose, and park on the grass immediately inside the gate. Please drive slowly! This is a very kid friendly neighborhood!



All Photos: Bob Miller

If you'd like more information or a guided tour of the Airport Acres Garden and Greenspace, please contact me. I'd be happy to meet up with you!

VMGA Meeting

by

Erica Jones, VMGA Rep

The most recent meeting for the VMGA was via Zoom (some moaning about the nice weather was heard). Here are some happenings coming up:

- The next VMGA meeting will be on April 13 will be hosted by **US** (you have me to thank). Sarah and Ashley are working hard on arranging a speaker, lunch, and some extra activities, as noted.
- The Education Committee is arranging a Zoom on May 18th. The topic will be about restoring forests by Davis Burke of Ohio. See <https://holdenfg.org/blog/can-inoculated-soils-promote-healthy-urban-trees-preliminary-results/>). The committee is working on another speaker for the same day. And no, the date is not on the calendar on the VMGA.net yet.
- The annual VMGA meeting is usually held at 'college' but since college will be Zoomed, the annual meeting is scheduled for June 15th at Brent and Becky's Bulbs, located in Gloucester. For you non-Virginia natives, that is pronounced Glou-Ster (Google says Glaa -str; what do they know? but if you are in England, then maybe). An all-day meeting has been promised, 9 am to 4 pm. I went to Brent and Becky's years ago for the April meeting and it was pretty amazing. Not sure how much they will have blooming in their display gardens in June, but I betcha some fun stuff. I might go again this year.
- The VMGA meeting requested nominations for the Board for elections in June. I can forward any nominations.

At the meeting, moaning happened again about who gets to vote on motions. VMGA only allows the Board members to vote. That could be brought up at the annual meeting!

The VMGA fund to support the state office now has a million dollars of either promised or actual dollars in hand. This started when funding was withdrawn for supporting these (state) positions a while back.

A presentation was given by the person who puts on the VMGA display at the Virginia State Fair. She is admittedly tired of doing this every year and has been requesting help from other MG groups. She picks a 'theme' and does that for two years in a row. The displays are very good – if you have never been to the Virginia State Fair it is interesting. It is held in late September through early October at the Meadow Event Park in Caroline County, north of Richmond. Parking is free but requires some walking. I will plead the fifth on the rest of the fair.



BUCKET GARDENING WORKSHOP

Saturday, May 18th, 2024
10am- 12pm
Montgomery County Government Center
755 Roanoke St, Christiansburg, VA 24073
Multipurpose Room 1

**Do you live in an apartment? Are you renting?
Limited on yard space? Don't let that stop you
from growing your own produce!**

Join Montgomery County Extension as we show you how to grow produce in a 5-gallon bucket and teach you how to prepare your buckets for gardening! Participants will leave with a prepped bucket, two vegetable seedlings, and the knowledge of how to grow at home with limited space!

**Space is limited,
so register
TODAY!**

To Register:
Contact Meredith Hoggatt
540-382-5790
mhoggatt@vt.edu

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact the Montgomery County Extension during business hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. *TDD number is (800) 828-1120.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its 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, military status, or any other basis protected by law.



Photos: Ruth Ann Whitener



NRVMGA Executive Board

President: Sarah Smiley

Vice President: Ashley Johnson

Secretary: Morgan St. Laurent

Treasurer: Beth Kirby

Members at Large

Luralee Cornwell

Karen Parker

Donna Cunningham

Kay Hunnings (for 2023 class)

MG Coordinator: Wendy Silverman, wss@vt.edu

Website: www.nrvmastergardeners.com

VCE Montgomery County Office: 540-382-5790

Comments, questions, and submissions can be sent to Susan Perry