

GRAPEVINE



New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

July/August 2015

Summer in the NRV



Montgomery Museum Garden. Photo by Kelli Scott

Master Gardeners are doing lots of wonderful volunteering this summer around the NRV. Our volunteers are making a difference in our community every day! Here are just a few of the things you all have been up to:

- **Vermicomposting workshops** by Marianne Paginton! Marianne's workshop at the Blacksburg Library was attended by 33 people. She also did workshops at the NRV Fair and at a kids camp in Christiansburg.
- **Pearisburg Farmer's Market**, a new Giles project, monthly kids activities with Darlene Smith and Debbie Leet
- Many of you assisted with **Master Gardener College** Transportation, workshops, and more. A big shout out to everyone and all the interns who helped and Keith Mileski, Wendy Silverman, Stan Stanley, & Larry Meadors for their tireless work on shuttling.
- **Rain barrel workshops** by Stan Stanley at NRV Fair and more to come in Giles and Bland.
- **Share the Spare** booth at Christiansburg & Blacksburg Farmer's Markets led by Lynn Brammer is going strong.
- **Montgomery Museum Garden** tours for kids of a variety of ages led by Beth Umberger.
- **Fairview Home in Dublin** with Sarah Smiley is having a bountiful harvest all summer long.
- **Summit Place**, an assisted living facility in Rich Creek, will be having its grand opening with a lovely courtyard designed by Gwen Douglas and Debbie Leet.
- **Our Master Gardener Help Desk** volunteers Javad Torebinejad and Dave Orcutt have been busy doing site visits all over the place this summer, sharing unbiased research-based advice and promoting Master Gardeners.

In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer. ~ Albert Camus

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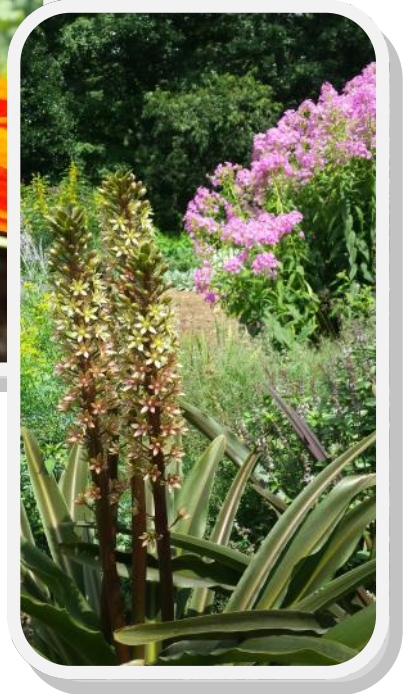


Montgomery Museum Garden. Photo by Kelli Scott

Montgomery Museum Garden, Christiansburg, July 2015 Project Lead: Beth Umberger MG, photos by Kelli Scott, Extension Agent



It's a cruel season
that makes you
get ready for bed
while it's light out.
~Bill Watterson



Trees and Their Roles in the Landscape: Living Beings

by Annie Pearce, MG Intern '15

This Baobab tree (right) stands at a road intersection/bus stop near the border of Zimbabwe and South Africa. It produces edible fruit (thought by some to be the next “superfood”) and is visually massive and magnificent. In this context, it also provides shade and shelter for people waiting for the bus. It is part of the Baobab national forest in South Africa. I drove fifteen hours from the coast to see this forest and meet trees like this one.



This tree (left) is an example from northern Costa Rica showing how powerful a tree’s root system is in stabilizing soil. Despite extensive erosion that is undermining the tree itself, it remains standing and is stabilizing the remainder of the bank. As the bank continues to erode, eventually the tree will fall and take a large part of the bank with it. However, its tenacity in surviving has benefitted not only the soil structure of the bank but also water quality and quite possibly also fauna who use the cavity beneath the tree as a home.

Here’s how NOT to preserve trees during construction. Although these trees may appear to be alive when the contractor drives off the site at the end of the project, it’s unlikely they’ll survive the soil compaction and root disturbance imposed on them during the construction process. Proper tree protection requires isolation of the tree at least as far out as the drip line of the canopy.



Trees and Their Roles in the Landscape: Living Beings, continued

Right is an example of trees being used as a living fence in an agricultural area of Costa Rica. The trees are growing very closely together and are connected with wire fencing to span the spaces between them.

Some trees are kept in this fashion using pollarding or coppicing techniques. These methods involve cutting back new growth from trees each year, which stimulates new growth while producing biomass for useful purposes. In permaculture, this biomass is left to biodegrade and enhance the soil in a method called “chop and drop”.



These trees (left; below) are part of a park in downtown Sydney, Australia that connects two neighborhoods beneath an elevated highway. Historically, the addition of elevated highways in established cities has been extremely divisive to urban neighborhoods. Sydney took a different approach in creating an amenity that benefitted surrounding neighborhoods and provides green space beneath the freeway. The trees also improve urban air quality by absorbing pollutants.



About the author: In addition to being a newly minted Master Gardener, Annie is a Principal Faculty member at the Myers-Lawson School of Construction at Virginia Tech.

July Meeting: A Visit to Debra Graff's Garden



Debra, left, and her sister, Brenda

every day. This food is her medicine. Debra and her sister Brenda harvest abundant crops of food twelve months a year by using simple tools, small garden beds, trellises and unheated cold frames.

Our own MGA member, Debra Graff is the writer, owner, and creative mind behind abundantminigardens.com. Our July monthly meeting was a chance to see first hand Debra's Abundant Mini Garden, right here in Christiansburg, VA

Debra has a degree in organic agriculture, and she has been a Master Gardener volunteer. She has trained new Master Gardeners about vegetable gardening, and she has taught organic gardening at a local college. She puts her heart, soul and knowledge into growing her own food, trying new plant varieties and she is also the author of: [The Abundant Mini Garden's Guide to Vertical Vegetable Gardening](#), an online venue to teach others about gardening in a tiny space.

Debra is passionate about growing most of her own vegetables because she uses 12 servings of fresh, organic vegetables and fruits for her health



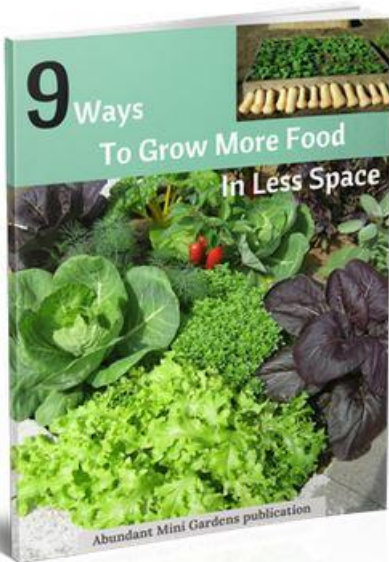
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Debra, built raised beds with concrete blocks at the level one can sit at, and she can reach across the bed from one side and then move to the opposite side to reach back across the bed to plant, weed and harvest. She showed us the trellis with tomato plants and another trellis with watermelons; even the location of the trellis to the sun was also a discussion topic. Inside the greenhouse were starts of sweet potatoes and she gave slips of sweet potatoes to those who were interested. Strawberries are ripe, and there was lots of information to share, but the sky was darkening, so we went on to the back yard which now has more raised beds. There was some discussion on making the beds, the liner, and soil used and more discussion on row covers, and the different thicknesses.

Goose berries were tasted, espalier apples were awed over, and blueberries were sneaked out to taste. My hat is off to Debra and Brenda who are practicing what they teaching and they are harvesting much more than food.

Thanks to both Debra and Brenda for inviting us to see extreme gardening first hand. Visit Debra and Brenda online at <http://abundantminigardens.com>

Respectfully submitted, Gwen Ewing MG



Out and about with NRVMGGA: June Meeting, Article by Erica Jones MG, photos by Susan Lockwood MG

June Meeting: A Visit to Riverstone Farm in Floyd



Riverstone farm in Floyd was where we had our June NRVMGGA meeting. It is a bit of a drive for us far flung types, but was totally worth the trip.

The vegetable production part of the farm is located in some 12 acres bottom lands along the Little River. The soil down there looks nice enough to eat! Besides the vegetables they grow lamb, eggs, and have a few steers. There are six large hoop houses, one heated greenhouse, an equipment and processing shed, housing, and they just started local retail sales on the property for themselves and other local producers.

Our guide Clem said the farm started out trying to sell produce to local restaurants but now most of their vegetables (all organic as far as I know) are shipped wholesale to large, more southern metropolitan areas.

As to deciding what to grow he commented that you have to see WHAT grows on your location, and how difficult they are to produce. As an example, they can produce lettuce all summer; but the year they tried to grow swiss chard was a flop (spots on the leaves). That really brought the point home, as I usually think of swiss chard as something anyone can grow. This winter they tried growing Fava beans but the beans did not set seed very well (they also were extremely green but Clem was not sure those two facts are related). Parsnips apparently are persnickety to grow.

Their main crops are basically greens, tomatoes and herbs. Other veggies that grow well for them are direct seeded, not thinned carrots, beets, turnips and radishes. The tomatoes are mostly grown in the hoop houses "tomatoes do not like getting wet". Since shipping is a major expense, they try hard to have a full truck, which means tweaking what you grow to ripen at a certain time.



Cleanliness is a major issue for them as that cuts down on washing before shipping. Most (all?) of their head lettuce was grown in plastic mulch with holes punched in it. When the first crop is done, it is pulled up, and the plastic mulch does its second crop for the year. At this point they simply punch new holes in the plastic and drop the new plants in the holes. They have a pulled-behind-the-tractor planting "cart" which also has a water tank on it for watering those holes. Beets and carrots are washed in a rotating drum.

All the vegetables that I saw were grown in mounded beds whether direct seeded or grown as transplants in plastic mulch. They grow their own transplants (although Clem did say they bought some grafted tomato plants this year). Seed for later summer planting of lettuce is chilled in the cooler before planting to increase germination percentage. Some of the hoop house tomatoes were planted in the ground and some were growing in very simple containers (read, black plastic bags parked side by side).

Water is supplied by a well and pumped out of the Little River. Plants were kept well watered and well fertilized. Hoop house plants are fed soluble fertilizer in the water system.

They have three full time employees (equipment, head planter, and livestock person). They basically double their employees in the summer to help with planting and picking.

Erica Jones, president/ NRVMGGA

Photo Album of June visit to Riverstone Farms, by Stan Stanley MG



Making Plants Using Seeds

Article by Erica Jones MG, NRVMA President

Growing plants in your garden via putting seeds directly in the ground is starting to look like an endangered species, given the recent trends of being able to buy corn plants at stores. Yikes. In the seed vein though, there are some things that can make you more successful and less frustrated.

1. Row covers. This is a moderately delicate fabric in different weights that, well, covers rows. The weights correspond with light transmission and heat retention. I use the lightest weight cover to cover rows of seeds I plant directly in the soil. This helps tremendously to keep the water down in the soil, which is what seeds need. To some extent it will also keep insects from munching on the new sprouts. Row covers also reduce the seeds being impacted and moved from rain and watering systems. I just lay the fabric on the ground for seed starting.
2. Some seeds do better with a boost before they go into the ground. One easy thing to do with larger seeds is to soak them so they can get the water in before they go out in the real world. This will both speed up the germination time and probably germination percent.
3. Some families of plants depend fairly heavily on organisms in the soil to help them obtain nutrients. Much of the legume family has a symbiotic relationship with *Rizobia* which supply the roots in nitrogen. A soil inoculant can be purchased (usually a black powder) and added along with some water before planting.
4. Some of the larger, harder seeds also like to be abused some before planting. Okra is an example of a plant that benefits from notching the seed coat so water enters easier which significantly reduces the germination time.
5. Some seeds like beans really like warmer soil to germinate. If the soil is cold enough they will just rot. And some seeds really like cooler soils to germinate; like spinach. It takes longer to come up when cool, but you get a significantly better germination percent.
6. Some seeds are tricky to transplant once germinated as plants. I wonder if squash falls in this category even though squash plants are common.
7. Some seeds are just plain easy to get to germinate and grow – like nasturtium.

And some seeds can be really difficult to start outside. I decided to take a seed company's advice about tall cutting ageratum on "don't plant these outside", and this is the earliest I have ever had them start to flower. Really small seeds can be difficult to keep in place while germinating outside.

This spring I reversed things and tried starting a seed inside which I never thought worth the bother. Okra really likes warm, warm soil, and can be slow to germinate. The big seeds are easy to handle. But after reading an article, I notched, soaked, and planted in (yikes) containers, and then moved into the garden about two weeks late in mid June. Maybe I will even get a decent okra crop this year (it is marginal up here in the highlands at 2300'; I think due to nights cooling off but not sure).



One last comment – try something new! I had some annual poppy seeds which like cool soil to germinate. So I scattered the seeds in hopefully bare places in late March and enjoyed the results starting early June.

Simply Elemental: An Outdoor Art Adventure

On August 1, 2015 at the Hahn Horticulture Garden on the campus of Virginia Tech, an open house will celebrate the one of a kind collection of works by regional artists. Thoughtfully placed pieces chosen for their impact in a natural setting will be throughout the garden from August 1 until September 30.

There will be a delightful mix of art chosen for the unique spirit, whether realistic or fantastical. The viewer will see visual puns, pieces that evoke surprise or an emotional response as well as pieces where the natural use of items found in nature make you stop and look again.

Diversity will be the key for this show. From water ornaments used to catch the onlookers eye for a surprising closer look to an interactive display involving weaving of natures own materials. Follow the paths through the garden to spot the creatures that are a bit out of place but yet so creative and lovely to behold.



Hahn Horticulture Garden, 200 Garden Lane, Virginia Tech campus, Blacksburg Virginia.

Submitted by Lynn Brammer MG



Looking for Volunteer Hours? There are many new and existing projects that need you!

Reminder to our new MG interns and our seasoned veterans!

We have many great new projects as well as some existing projects that could use your help and extra hands! If you have a project that you would like to have featured in the Grapevine, contact NRV Master Gardener Coordinator Leslie Mathews at lesliem2@vt.edu.

Existing Projects that could use your help:

- Children's Garden at Pulaski YMCA
- Pulaski Farmer's Market Plant Clinic

New Projects:

- Christiansburg Farmer's Market Share the Spare Booth
<https://www.facebook.com/ChristiansburgFarmersMarket>
- Pearisburg Farmer's Market Plant Clinic Booth and kids' activities
<https://www.facebook.com/pearisburgcommunitymarket>

Project Highlight: It's raining, it's pouring...Rain Barrels, that is!

Our resident rain barrel expert, Stan Stanley, is doing rain barrel workshops all around the NRV, including in Giles and Bland!

Recent and upcoming workshops include:

2015 Master Gardener College

NRV Fair

Montgomery County Fair

Wednesday, August 5, Pearisburg

Tuesday, August 18, Bland

If you are interested in having Stan do a workshop in your community, please contact Leslie Mathews, NRV Master Gardener Coordinator, at lesliem2@vt.edu to set it up.



A beautiful hand painted rain barrel done by Lara Miller, MG Intern, for the spring plant sale

Gardening Events In & Around the New River Valley

AUGUST

- 7-8 Newport Fair
- 15 East Mont. Tomato Fest
- 20 NRVMGA Meeting at Gov. Center
- 22 Montgomery Museum Heritage Day

SEPTEMBER

- 8 Youth Volunteer Training at Gov. Center
- 17 NRVMGA Field Trip, Mountain Lake Conservancy
- 19 Floyd Livestock & County Fair

OCTOBER

- 19 NRVMGA Red Sun Farm site visit
- 24 Pearisburg Farmer's Market Fall Festival

NOVEMBER

- 19 NRVMGA General Meeting at Gov. Center

Event Highlight:

Youth Volunteer Training Educational Seminar with Michelle Dickerson
September 8 at 9:30 AM. If you work with youth, please attend!
Contact Leslie Mathews with questions at lesliem2@vt.edu

Upcoming NRVMGA Meetings:

Pruning How-tos by Barry Robinson
Thursday, August 20 at 6pm - gov't center

Mountain Lake Conservancy field trip - Thursday, Sept. 17 at 6pm

Red Sun Farm site visit - Monday, Oct. 19 at 6pm

November general meeting (Grant presentation) - Thursday, Nov. 19 - gov't center



MG Gwen Douglas shares: "Flower Power"... Yes, I know I'm telling my age with that phrase ! I think I had a sticker on my VW Bug...

This caught my eye while walking to Torgersen Hall on campus during MG College. These pink petunias growing out of tiny gaps in the brick pavers must have seeded themselves at the base of this lamp pole last year! The flowering baskets hanging from the top of the pole were completely different from these spontaneous, colorful blooms at the base. How often do we see similar random plantings such as this? The life force in a seed always impresses me.

Grants News

NRVMGA just finished awarding our “community” garden grants. The grants for 2015 are listed below. In past years we only gave these out every other year but recently we switched to an every year system. Admittedly that means that smaller amounts are given, but we thought the publicity would serve us better doing it every year.

If you are a member of NRVMGA (remember; some folks are master gardeners without belonging to NRVMGA) you are eligible for what we call “Mini Grants”. These are good for amounts up to \$100 (or less). The same criteria apply with the same basic application process. With all our grants we like to emphasize education. If you want to do some landscaping for a garden, you had better figure out how to include some education in the process if you want NRVMGA to grant you the money. Our website has a page - <http://civic.bev.net/nrvmga/grant/GrantApplication.htm> on hints for writing a grant application.

Follows is a list of our Community Grants for 2015 for a total of \$3567.00 We try to get these finalized early in the year so the grantee can start planning. BUT NRVMGA still needs a “liaison” for some of these grants. Being a liaison can consist of two visits a year up to digging vigorously in the soil on a regular basis. NRVMGA has found in the past that some groups have many good intentions but for assorted reasons do not get around to actually spending the money where they said they would. Also, photographs are very nice (be sure to get waivers if you have pictures of identifiable children).

If you want to apply for a mini grant and need some help/ideas; OR want some hours and are interested in being a liaison please feel free to contact anyone on the grant committee – Steve Hale, Sharon Eifried, Sherry Walker, Maureen Fallon, and Donna Fern. Contact Donna Fern vafern3@gmail.com for more information.

Pulaski 4-H Programs	Purchase of bedding plants and potting mix for gardening programs at three elementary schools, community garden, and workshops	\$550
Radford City Schools	Plants and soil to aid new Agriculture Program in Radford City Schools; Plans include vegetable and fruit gardens.	\$400
MarketKids, Blacksburg	Potting soil and starter plants for gardening and marketing program for 6-12 year olds	\$250
Fairview Home, Dublin	Funds for two raised vegetable beds and an herb garden for residents of financial need with intellectual, mental, and physical challenges	\$422
Plenty, Floyd	Materials for four raised beds at Willis Elementary School for curriculum integrated gardening program	\$275
Pulaski YMCA Gardens	Plants, labels, soil, compost, and supplies for children's gardens and classroom activities at the Child Development Center	\$437
Radford University, Selu Conservancy	Funds to purchase water storage tanks and compost for student volunteer-run garden; Educational speakers hosted and produce given to local meals program.	\$400
Harding Elementary, Blacksburg	Supplies to build additional raised beds at the elementary school as part of a community garden with VT involvement	\$350
Juvenile Detention Home, Christiansburg	Funds for topsoil, peat moss, fertilizer, and four solar-powered vent openers for use in projects teaching horticulture and business skills	\$483

MINUTES BOARD NRVMGA DATE

Meeting was called to order at 5:30 pm by Erica Jones, President. In attendance: Erica, Bob and Susan Lockwood, Evelyn Melia, Nina Templeton, Sharon Eifried, Beth Kirby. Minutes from April Board meeting were approved.

NRVMGA Board Meeting, June 4, 2015, VT Greenhouse Classroom, 5:30pm

Treasurer's Report: Sharon Eifried:

Plant sale proceeds: We took in \$3232.25 for plants, \$525.00 for rain barrels. Beth pointed out that the proceeds from the rain barrels was a bit skewed since the expense from the rain barrels was a last year's treasury expense. Expenses for plants/supplies \$131.90. So figuring in expense of rain barrels, the total plant sale profit this year was \$3526.55.

There is a question of who gets the membership forms. Sharon gets the money, Evelyn gets a copy and Leslie keeps a copy in the office. Lynn Brammer gets membership information also.

There has been a request for a donation from the state 4H Foundation. Since we support local programs through the grants, it was decided to not pursue further. Kelli Scott and Michelle Dickerson, the Montgomery County 4H Extension agent would be asked if we should reconsider at a later date.

Sharon asked if she should plan on redoing the budget since there would be an increase in expenditure for the honoraria offered to guest speakers. Not needed since the budget is only an estimate of expensed expected in the coming year.

OLD BUSINESS

Plant sale: Beth reported that the sale was a success—she would be sending out personalized thank-you notes to the donors. She will also be sending out a questionnaire to the membership/department leaders for suggestions/comments on what worked/what didn't this year.

There was some confusion about some plants that were obtained from Lisa Lipsey at the Hahn garden. The plants were purchased to round out some of the shrub assortment. It would have been helpful if there had been some sort of formal invoicing so we knew what was donated and what it should have been sold for. It was decided that we would not be purchasing any plants next year due to the confusion it caused this year.

Darlene Whichard is still missing her table she brought to the sale. It is a folding white plastic table, black handle that sticks up from the top. There was an unknown table when we were packing up, it was to be taken to the office. Will keep looking for it.

By-Laws: Susan, Evelyn and Maureen Fallon will be working on them this summer. Nina Templeton spoke about her Member at Large duties. Erica has asked that board members write a synopsis of their duties so they can be outlined in the By-Laws well.

Background checks: Leslie reported via email that 59 have been completed. Some members have had difficulty using the website. Call Leslie if you are having issues.

NEW BUSINESS

Stan Stanley has asked the association to pay for a load of pickle barrels he will be picking up from his source in Rocky Mount. Beth moved the association pay for barrels: seconded and approved.

Scholarships: Wendy has asked if we might use the scholarship fund to help fund an attendee to the Master Gardener College. Erica will talk with Wendy. Also, the \$102 that was received from the silent auction at the graduation dinner is still available. The board decided to hold off on putting it in the scholarship fund until we could determine its best use.

Susan discussed the upcoming general meeting at Riverstone Organic Farm in Floyd. Carpooling will be available from the Government Center at 5:15 pm. The meeting will start at 6. Members are invited to bring a picnic dinner to eat at the farm.

Red Sun Greenhouse tour is still on hold. She has a call in to the Mountain Lake Conservancy as possible meeting location. Also a pruning workshop is in the works.

Erica has a public garden that she is working on—might be a site for a future meeting.

July 9—Debra Graff's home at 6 pm is next general meeting.

Next board meeting? Do we need to have one in July? Decision on meeting pending needed discussions.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:19 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Kirby, Secretary

New River Valley Master Gardeners Association



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Find us on the web at www.civic.bev.net/nrvmga

The New River Valley Master Gardener Association is a nonprofit organization working in conjunction with the Montgomery County Virginia Cooperative Extension Office to bring horticultural education and enjoyment to people in the New River Valley.

As Master Gardeners we are committed to learning about gardening and communicating our knowledge of gardening to others. We direct our efforts to creating and maintaining an awareness of the need for intelligent stewardship of the environment.

Share your know-how and enthusiasm for gardening in the *Grapevine*!

All NRVMA members are welcome to contribute articles and other materials for publication in the *Grapevine*. We welcome project highlights, photos, book reviews, gardening tips, event announcements, stories on garden visits, how-tos, favorite recipes, and other garden-related items for publication in the *Grapevine*. And, remember, time spent researching and writing articles counts toward your Service Activity hours.

Please send your submissions for the *Grapevine* to Leslie Mathews at lesliem2@vt.edu.

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