



The Grapevine

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter



Photo by Ruth Ann Whitener

“My garden is my favorite teacher.”

~Betsy Cañas Garmon

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Lavender..... 2
 Pulaski YMCA 4
 2017 MG Training Class 4
 Ants & Peony Buds..... 5
 From the Coordinator’s Desk 6
 SELU Garden 7
 12 Secrets to Spectacular
 Tomatoes 8
 Plant Sale A Success..... 9
 Olin’s Planter..... 10

UPCOMING NRVMGA EDUCATION EVENTS

- Ogburn’s Garden Tour—July 30
- Stonewood Botanical Garden—August 13
- Outdoor Lighting at Steve Hale’s—September 9

LAVENDER: RELAX... STOP & SMELL THE FLOWERS

By Susan Perry, NRV Master Gardener

Ask yourself, "Is there anything better than lavender?" Imagine the scent, the color ... simply perfection. Lavender is romantic, it looks and smells beautiful, and it's healing.

Lavender is a good choice for perennial gardens in Virginia, and under the right conditions, can be quite easy to grow. And we have a fabulous local grower nearby who I recently had the opportunity to visit. You can learn a lot about lavender by visiting Mystic River Lavender in Riner.

A handful of NRV Master Gardeners recently visited and although I didn't count, owners Janice and Keith Mileski easily have more than 1000 plants growing there.

der plant first came from. Other places lavender grows well are Colorado, Texas, the Pacific NW, and New Mexico. Lavender thrives in hot, sunny locations in a variety of soils, as long as they are well drained. You can amend clay soils by creating a mounded 6" deep layer of "dirty rock". Avoid using sand or gravel as an amendment because they can actually cause drainage problems.

Two kinds of lavender that are grown at Mystic River Lavender are *lavandula angustifolia* (commonly known as English lavender) and *lavandula x intermedia* (known as lavandin), a hybrid of *lavandula angustifolia* and *lavandula latifolia*. Lavandins are usually larger

"Is there anything better than lavender?"



Learning from the Master. Photo by Sharon Eifried

plants that bloom only once in the late summer. Different cultivars of English lavender and lavandins produce flowers ranging from light blue to dark purple, as well as pink and white. If you visit Mystic River Lavender, you will see multiple varieties of blue/purple lavender, along with several varieties of white lavender.

Choose English lavender plants that have been propagated from cuttings, rather than from seed, in order to insure consistent size and color, bloom time, and other characteristics. Typically, English lavender cultivars range from 12 – 30" tall and 18 – 24" wide. Since lavandins are sterile, they can only be propagated from cuttings and are often much taller than English lavender. They are usually 18 – 36" tall and 24 – 36" side. When planting lavender, space plants far enough apart to allow good air circulation, based on the mature size of the cultivar.

Besides producing beautiful, fragrant flowers, lavender can be dried in bunches or used to make various products by extracting essential oils or using dried blossoms. Annual maintenance of established lavender is average and lavender has few pest or disease problems. An added benefit for Janice is that deer seem uninterested in lavender. Once established, lavender is extremely drought tolerant. According to Janice, she only waters lavender plants during the first year, and then sparingly.

Lavender flourishes in Mediterranean climates, so any attempts to grow lavender in SW Virginia should attempt to replicate that climate. When selecting a location, think "Mediterranean climate" because that is where the laven-



Bees on Lavender. Photo by Gwen Douglas



Janice explaining different lavender cutting tools

Photo by Sharon Eifried

When growing lavender plants in SW Virginia, be sure to use stone mulch – wood mulch will cause the plants to remain too moist to survive. Just be sure to keep mulch away from the crown of the plant. Too much moisture will result in plant decline and may make the plant succumb to soil disease or root rot.



Field of Lavender. Photo by Gwen Douglas

The best time to harvest lavender is between 9am – noon (early morning after the dew has dried), once a few of the flower buds have opened. For drying, try to cut stems as long as possible, bundling 50 – 75 stems with rubber bands so that you can hang them to dry in a cool, dark place with good airflow.



Where to cut lavender. Photo by Sharon Eifried

Janice and Keith dry their lavender in their garage, with the windows covered, and fans and a dehumidifier running. Larger bundles may mold, so you can always carefully combine smaller dried bundles to make one larger dried bundle. Or, simply enjoy a bouquet of fresh lavender.

After your primary harvest, there may be a second, smaller late summer flowering in

some varieties. A second harvest can be combined with annual pruning, once plants are established. Removing any flowers that occur during this time will help insure more prolific flowering next year.

Because lavender flowers on new growth, Janice prefers pruning at the end of August or early September. She recommends pruning approximately one third of the top of the plant, never



Lesson from Keith, the chemist. Photo by Sharon Eifried

below 1" above old wood. This will stimulate growth, keep the plant from becoming too open and woody, and will help insure more prolific flowering next year.

With a little effort, in a few years you'll be able to enjoy the scent of your own, home-grown lavender.

HISTORY OF MYSTIC RIVER

Keith and Janice Mileski, former New River Valley Master Gardeners, started Mystic River Lavender in Riner in 2008.

With Keith's chemistry background and Janice's interest in the benefits of lavender, the couple began planting and creating herbal body care products, soaps, and even dog care products.



A lesson in the field. Photo by Sharon Eifried



Walk of Lavender. Photo by Sharon Eifried

EXPERIENCES AT THE PULASKI YMCA

By Linda Davis, MG Intern

I have been helping Sharon Eifried with the Children's Garden at the YMCA in Pulaski this spring. My first visit there in early April we planted seeds with the children. They made vegetable markers out of wooden spoons and painted them to mark where the carrot, radish, snap pea and lettuce seeds are planted. They have learned to use a rain barrel to water the seeds, filling plastic jugs and carrying the water to the raised beds.

During my second visit in late May, we helped the children plant pepper, squash and cucumber plants in the other raised bed. The children pulled the radishes that were ready and tasted them. We usually have from 8 to 10 children, that choose to garden from a larger group. Over half of them are boys, some saying they help with gardens at home.

By my third visit in early June, the snap pea plants were really growing. We noticed the children have picked and eaten the snap peas, so we know they are enjoying them! The lettuce is doing well, so we helped them cut some to be eaten later. Then we helped the children plant marigolds in the raised bed with the pepper, cucumber and squash plants. Some of them find worms when digging and some see ladybugs, so they learn that they are beneficial. Sharon prepared a handout about squash bugs, their eggs and the nymph stage and taught them how to squash the eggs,

when they see them on the underside of the squash plant leaves.



Photo by Sharon Eifried, MG

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Pulaski YMCA Children's Garden

This project at the Pulaski YMCA engages pre-school and school-age children in learning about plants and gardening. Seeds, vegetables, annuals, and perennials are planted and cared for in raised beds and garden beds by the children. Plants are present that call on the senses of touch, smell, and sight. Experiences in the garden are balanced with classroom projects that teach children about how plants grow, what they need to live, and the roles and importance of pollinators. There are many opportunities for Master Gardeners to share their knowledge with the children and YMCA members who are interested in learning more about gardening.



Learning about planting.
Photo by Sharon Eifried, MG

We both have learned the difficulties in keeping the children organized, so they take turns digging, planting and harvesting. However, we feel they have greatly benefited from the experiences in the garden.

2017 MASTER GARDENER TRAINING CLASS

By Deanna Reid, NRV Master Gardener Coordinator



Photo by Kelli Scott, Agriculture Agent

This year's New River Valley Master Gardener Training Class was a success! Nineteen trainees met each week from March until May at the Hahn Garden Pavilion to learn about photosynthesis, propagation, and all things horticulture. The class enjoyed guest lectures from

Virginia Tech faculty and staff,

Extension Agents, Master Gardeners, and local horticultural professionals. The Trainees became Master Gardener Interns at the Spring Celebration Potluck in May and are currently busily working on getting all of their volunteer hours!

ANTS & PEONY BUDS

By Sharon Eifried, MG

The peony is a plant that produces a most beautiful blossom. It is well known that peonies come in many varieties and if happy may bloom for over 100 years. Happiness for the peony means lots of sun, with perhaps a little shade during the hottest part of the day, and well-drained soil. Peonies rarely bloom the first year, but once they start blooming the peony usually produces abundant, sometimes fragrant, gorgeous flowers.

The question is: Does the peony bud need ants to open? The answer is, emphatically, no!



Photo by Ruth Ann Whitener

The question is: Does the peony bud need ants to open?



Photo by Kelli Scott, Agriculture Agent

The ants do discourage pests that visit the buds, but the buds will open even if there are no ants.

However, there is a very special relationship that exists between the ant and the peony bud. Ants take advantage of the peonies. Ants ravenously feed on the nectar that is present on developing buds. This nectar consists of sugar, water and amino acids and provides a feast for the ants.

The end result of this special relationship is happy ants and bygone peony pests!

The presence of the ants do present a challenge to those wishing to cut the buds to bring indoors. One recommendation to rid the bud of ants is to gently dip the bud in a bucket of water. Others recommend just cutting the peonies and placing the stems in a bucket of water. Place the bucket in a cool place and the ants will eventually march away after they finish their feasting. If you want a peony bud to open after cutting, cut the stem when the bud is soft as a marshmallow. If you cut before this, the bud will probably not open.

As you enjoy your peonies blooming in spring and early summer, think about the special relationship in nature between the ant and the peony bud. Also, know that the peony is the state flower of Indiana, the floral symbol of China, and an international symbol of good fortune.

FROM THE COORDINATOR'S DESK

By Deanna Reid, NRV Master Gardener Coordinator



As usual, the New River Valley Master Gardeners have been busy! This, in turn, has kept me busy!

In April, I had the chance to attend the National Extension Conference on Volunteerism in Asheville, North Carolina. The conference was a great experience and I learned a lot! I attended a tour of the North Carolina Arboretum, which was just beginning to wake up for Spring. I also attended sessions on Engaging Volunteers in Learning, Podcasting, Documentation, and more. In addition to learning, I was able to connect with State and Local Master Gardener Coordinators from all over the United States and I got to enjoy some delicious Asheville food.

The rest of April and May were a blur! We finished the 2017 Master Gardener Training Class, which was a success. I had so much fun getting to know this year's Interns and know that they will be a wonderful addition to the NRV Master Gardeners!



Photo by Barbara Leshyn



Photo by Sharon Eifried, MG

I would like to give special recognition to Association members Allen Bame and Judith Jones. Allen and Judith were integral in the planning and execution of the Training Class. Thank you both for your support and help!

As my time in the NRV Master Gardener Coordinator role comes to a close, I want you all to know that I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to work with the Virginia Cooperative Extension and with the New River Valley Master Gardeners. It has been such a pleasure watching the NRV Master Gardener program grow and flourish and I know that it will continue to do so.

This community is a much better place because of all of the ways the Master Gardeners are involved in improving it. Please keep doing all that you do!

- Deanna Reid

SELU GARDEN AND SERVICE CLUB

Articles and Photos by Sharon Eifried, MG

On April 1, 2017, New River Valley Master Gardeners were treated to an afternoon learning about the Selu Garden and Service Club. Master gardeners also toured the garden which is located on a 6,000 square foot piece of property located at Radford University's Selu Conservancy. The gathering was hosted by Ryley Harris, a senior RU student majoring in environmental biology and Kaylee Caroline, a student at Tidewater Community College. Kaylee is an aspiring organic farmer and a permaculture expert who works on New Earth Farm in Pungo, Virginia.

The club began in April 2014 when club members and volunteers built an eight foot tall deer fence, established a garden and began producing and donating fresh food to local outreach centers. As an example, the Radford-Fairlawn Daily Bread has received approximately 400 pounds of produce from the club over the last several years. The club

members are students from many different academic backgrounds working together to grow food efficiently using a few different intensive gardening methods.



Ryley states that the Club's current project involves "integrating sustainable gardening approaches into our 6,000 square foot garden. Among these methods includes the practice of intensive agriculture, which has an end goal to maximize crop yield per unit area per unit of time. We also utilize swale-contour gardening in order to maximize the amount of water available to our crops."



Kaylee shared her passion for the practice of permaculture. She explained the process of creating swales that can reduce soil erosion and enrich the soil. At the Selu garden, swales have been created following the contour lines of the land. The swale is a ditch that gathers water from rain. The water then seeps into the soil for the benefit of surround-

ing plants.

About thirty-five students belong to the Selu Garden and Service Club with about seven students participating regularly. Ryley sees the club as a way for RU students to give back to their community and to learn new skills.

If you would like to visit the Garden and see the swales, contact Ryley at Rharris13x@radford.edu. He would welcome your visit, questions, and comments.

TWELVE SECRETS TO SPECTACULAR TOMATOES

By Susan Perry, New River Valley Master Gardener

With the threat of frost almost past, it's time to start thinking about tomatoes. The average last frost day is around May 15th, but it may vary based on your specific location. A good general guide can be found in Virginia Cooperative Extension Publication 426-331.



Stock Photo

Here are twelve suggestions for success:

1. Select healthy, resistant plants. Some plants are labelled VFN, indicating resistance to *Verticillium* wilt, *Fusarium* wilt, and nematodes. Watch for new varieties that are also resistant to early and late blight, as well as selecting from those current varieties identified as resistant.
2. When buying tomatoes, keep in mind our growing season when checking the plant label for days to maturity. Many home gardeners select indeterminate varieties, which develop flowers and fruit until frost; others prefer determinate tomatoes, which have a compact growing period.
3. Harden tomato plants before planting. Many tomatoes are grown in greenhouse conditions until purchase. Planting them immediately is a shock from which many cannot recover. Hardening gradually accustoms the plant to the outdoors by putting it outside in full sun (and wind) for a few hours a day, increasing the time they stay out at night too, weather permitting.
4. Select a location with a minimum of 8 hours of sunlight.
5. Amend your soil with organic matter, and loosen an area larger than you need. Warm the soil with a piece of black plastic for the week prior to planting. Cool soil can slow growth.
6. Space tomato plants at least 2 - 3 feet apart. Many diseases affecting tomatoes spread from lack of air circulation or touching leaves. Using stakes, cages, or trellis will probably do more for disease control than almost anything else.
7. Before planting, remove any blossoms that have developed in the greenhouse to encourage better root system development. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it eliminates competition for crucial energy and nutrients during root development.
8. If your tomato plant is root-bound, gently tear the root ball apart from the bottom to encourage the root system to generate new roots that will spread away from the plant.
9. Plant the tomato with as much of the stem covered as you can, removing the lowest leaves. Roots will form along the entire length of the buried stem, resulting in a more vigorous and health plant. Add a narrow band of aluminum foil to protect from tomato cutworm.
10. Mulch your tomato plants for more consistent moisture and to reduce weeds. Organic mulches should be at least 2" deep. Several layers of newspaper or UV-resistant black plastic at least 6ml thick can also be used as mulch. Whichever you select, be sure none of it touches the plant. Use copper or other metal rings to discourage slugs and other insects that may be in the mulch from getting to the plant.
11. Provide consistent, even moisture to reduce blossom end rot. Applying 1 to 3 inches of water a week, depending on weather and plant size, is critical to getting water deep enough (5 to 6 inches) to promote vigorous growth. The water should be applied at one time so if possible, use drip irrigation, a soaker hose, or flooding since overhead watering can spread disease. Morning is the best time to water because any foliage that does get wet will have time to dry out. If it only rains ½ inch, it's a good idea to start watering to get the moisture deep enough to do some good.
12. Apply a starter fertilizer when you first plant and establish a sound fertilizer program to keep plants vigorous and productive.

With the right weather conditions and a little luck, these tips will help you grow a great tomato crop. For additional information, please check Publication 426-418 or www.ext.vt.edu.

NRVMGA ANNUAL PLANT SALE A SUCCESS!

By Deanna Reid, NRV Master Gardener Coordinator

Photos by Deanna Reid

The Annual New River Valley Master Gardener Association Spring Plant Sale was held on Saturday, May 13, 2017 on the Montgomery County Government Center lawn. Though rain threatened to soak the sale throughout the week leading up to the event, Saturday dawned without any drizzle and the sun even peeked out to say hello. The attendance and outcome of this year's sale was fantastic!



Master Gardeners busily set up for the sale

Proceeds from this fundraiser go back into the community in the form of NRV Master Gardener Association sponsored Community Horticulture Grants for local gardening projects. Organizations are encouraged to apply for grants each Fall for projects to be done the following Spring. Contact the NRVMGA for more information!



Jim Bronnenkant and Barbara Smith set up "Veggieland"



Wendy Silverman, Darlene Whichard, and Dianne Blount: the happy perennial sales team



Gwen Douglas and Lisa Lloyd with their Fairy Garden Table

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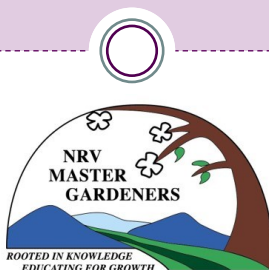
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Website:

www.nrvmastergardeners.com

**NEW RIVER VALLEY
MASTER GARDENERS**

The purpose of the New River Valley Master Gardener Association is to provide service to the community by promoting good horticultural practices in accordance with standards approved by the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and its Master Gardener Program, and to foster communication, education, and fellowship among its members.



Photos by Ruth Ann Whitener

Olin Whitener won this planter a few years ago at an NRV Master Gardener Association Potluck. He and his wife, Ruth Ann, enjoy its beauty every year! This year, it is especially lovely!

