



The Grapevine

August 2012

New River Valley Master Gardeners Association

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

The Grapevine welcomes news, articles, questions, editorials, and comments. *The Grapevine* is published monthly and provided to all active members of the NRV MGA. Non-members may subscribe for \$15/yr. Please submit all items to the Newsletter Editor **by the 25th** in order to be included in next month's issue.

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Carol Eggleston Profile

Master Gardener Since: 2003

Current MG Activities: VICCC – it has been very rewarding watching the 2-3 year olds interest in the garden they have grown and also as they begin to harvest and eat the sugar snap peas from their garden...they often pick them during recess for snacks; and helping Warm Hearth residents have access to herbs they grow themselves.

Background: I grew up in Michigan where I talked my parents into letting me grow my first garden and was so disappointed when my mom told me we couldn't eat the corn I grew—it was for cows or something!; went to Rollins College in Florida; transferred to University of Georgia where I received my BS and MS degrees in housing.

Occupation: Currently, I have my own business as a Shaklee Independent distributor. I was sold on the company when their Joint Health Complex “healed” my knees from creaking and aching after physical activities like gardening and running. I like helping others become healthier naturally.

Retired from VT as Director of Information Resource Management, 2002 –I basically worked with various offices at VT to help them automate their business processes; also worked on security.

Favorite MG Training Class & Why: Loved Alex Niemiera's class on trees.... He made me look at more than the tree leaves...now I appreciate the bark and winter interest.

Gardening History: I'm basically a perennial gardener; have done limited vegetable gardening in the past; currently have raspberries and blueberries; love my variety of Japanese maples and daylily collection. I love hostas as well.

Interests and Hobbies: I'm always looking for a new activity – I love quilting, stained glass making, and all kinds of needlework. I'm an avid golfer playing at Blacksburg Country Club; enjoy playing in the Blue Ridge League (7 area courses) as well as the Roanoke Valley WGA events such as City-County tournament. I also do weight training both at Foley Fitness in Christiansburg and at The Weight Club as well as Pilates and yoga.

Favorite Plants: Japanese maples, Oplopanax “Bears Claw” and Poncirus trail “flying dragon” and I love encouraging Asarum caudatum “Wild Ginger” to be a ground cover since it's now very invasive.

Recent Additions to my Garden: Stevia and curry plant.

I wish I knew more about: I love doing research on a variety of topics; have found lots of good information on the internet.

Blueberries in Your Home Garden

By: Barbara Robinson

If I could only grow one food plant in my garden I'd probably pick blueberries. I spend very little time on their care, they have no significant pests, they are very tasty, aren't fussy about being picked on a regular schedule, and I can even stand up to pick them. The only downsides are they take a few years to start bearing and you have to cover them to keep the birds away.

So when I read that Joel Shuman from Sinking Creek Farm in Newport was going to talk about blueberries at the noon Hahn gardening talks, I decided there was probably more I could learn about them even though I've grown them for 30 years. Indeed, it was very interesting, and what follows is taken from his talk with a few editorial additions based on my experience.

There are more than 200 species of blueberries which grow from the tropics to the far north. The ones we want to grow are the Northern Highbush (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) the most popular commercial blueberry, and perhaps Rabbiteyes (*V. Ashei*). Other species such as the Lowbush, Half-highs and Southern Highbush are not likely to do well in our conditions. I had a friend who bought 100 "blueberries" from a mail-order nursery and they all died the first winter because they were an unsuitable variety, so it's a good idea to pay attention to that if you're not buying locally.

Joel recommends Earliblue, Duke, Spartan and BlueJay for early berries; BlueRay, BlueCrop, and Chandler for mid-season; and Darrow for late berries. You will get better crops if you plant more than one variety.

You can see native blueberries at Mount Rogers and Pandapas Pond, but you're not likely to be able to successfully transplant them, if you could find a place where that's legal!

Rabbiteye blueberries are usually grown south of us, but they can be used to extend the season here if you're willing to suffer crop losses from late spring frosts. They are very large plants and produce berries that taste a little different from highbush berries. Joel recommends Premier, Powderblue, and Tifblue.

These plants like acid soil with a pH of 4.5 to 5.2. The soil should be well-drained sandy loam and plants are best grown with a southern or southwestern exposure. Stay away from frost pockets. Plants will grow in the shade, but sun is much better. Joel says they lose crops to frost fairly frequently, but I've only lost one crop in over 30 years. I haven't worried about the soil pH either, but I live where the soil is normally more acidic than you may have in the Montgomery County area. Joel sprinkles pelleted sulphur on his soil twice a year, using 2

pounds per 100 square feet per 1 pH unit to keep the pH down. Rabbiteye plants affect the pH around their roots so you don't have to worry about pH so much with them.

Plants will survive temperatures of -20 degrees F in midwinter, but fully opened flower buds can only take 30 degrees. If frost threatens, you can use overhead sprinklers to keep the temperature up. This might be particularly important if you hope to get a rabbiteye crop.

Plant 2-3 year old plants (1 gallon size) in spring or fall. You can plant them as close as 2 feet apart, but most people prefer 4-5 ft with 8-10 ft between rows. The further apart, the easier they are to pick and mow around them, in my experience, but the more netting you need to cover them. Be careful not to plant them too deep, about an inch below ground level.

Mulch with a 2-4 inch bed of pine bark or needles out to the drip line. (I've always wanted to do this, but never got around to it, so I mow the grass/weeds occasionally. Just be sure not to do this when the berries are getting close to ripe, or you'll have pieces of grass all over the berries that's just about impossible to wash off.) Tillage is not recommended since blueberries have very shallow roots. Joel uses a weed eater, and I do too.

Wait until the first leaflets reach full size, then fertilize with a small handful of 10-10-10 per bush (90 pounds/acre). Azalea fertilizers are good to help keep the soil acid. Prune severely. Unfortunately you need to cut off the fruit buds for the first two years.

Year 3 you can pick your first crop. Eventually you'll average 8 lbs per plant, for 25-30 years. My 30-year old bushes don't seem to be showing any signs of failing yet. Water 2 inches per week during fruit development and prune the plants every winter.

Blueberries fruit on one year old wood, and will bear well for about 3 years. So you need to first cut out dead wood and canes less than 1/4 inch in diameter. You want a nice open bush. Then cut canes that are over 4 years old down at the ground, leaving 6-10 canes per bush. You should expect to cut off about a third of the bush every year to keep the canes young and productive.

People try all sorts of scare tactics to keep the birds away from ripe fruit. Some will work for a while, but eventually they all fail. Birds can make a significant dent in your crop, so I'd suggest you plan on covering your plants when the berries start to ripen. After a few years of struggling with netting sticking to the plants, we built a frame with a permanent wire net roof. Now we just string the plastic netting around the sides when we need it, a much simpler job.

Blueberries aren't particularly easy to propagate in my experience. I'd suggest you just buy more plants if you want more. Joel says they can be propagated using dormant 1 year-old shoots, pencil thick. This is easier than using softwood cuttings, though softwood works more rapidly. Put your propagation bed outside in full sun with good drainage, using 8 inch beds with a 1:1 mix of peat and coarse sand. Rooting hormone isn't useful, but you'll need an overhead mist system.

Joel finished with a demonstration on pruning, the aspect of growing blueberries I've found most difficult to carry out. It's easy to just let your bushes keep growing, but difficult to fix once the years catch up with you! If you have any doubts about pruning, I'd suggest you consult multiple extension resources on the internet. Happy Growing!

Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library

Creative Container Flower Planting with Master Gardeners — Participants brought a container or used one provided by the library to decorate and plant an annual or a house plant. They chose a container and decorated it with markers, stickers, and Duck tape. Master Gardeners from Virginia Tech and Wendy Silverman helped the gardeners add gravel and soil, and then plant the plant they chose. They finished by watering and writing the plant's name on a Popsicle stick to add to the container. Wendy Silverman is a Master Gardener as well as a part of the Minds Wide Open program. Diane Relf grew the plants with the Montgomery County Juvenile Detention Center and the Minds Wide Open program. *Linda B. Spivey Programs Coordinator, Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library, Christiansburg, VA 24073* ■



Squash Recipes

By: Fern Dumont

Zucchini Pie

2 cups zucchini
3/4 c. Bisquick
1/4 t. salt
1/4 t. pepper
1/2 t. sage
3/4 c. shredded cheddar cheese
2 beaten eggs
1/4 c. oil
Mix all ingredients well. Spray pie pan. Bake 375* 30 min.

Squash Casserole

6 large squash
1 medium onion-chopped
1-8oz. sour cream
2 cans of cream of chicken soup
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
3 large carrots (sliced)
1 box chicken stuffing(follow directions on box)
Cook squash, onion, carrots in microwave until done; drain; mix sour cream, chicken soup and cheese.
Spray a 9x13 pan with pam. Put stuffing (after making) in the bottom of pan. Then spread the squash mixture over the stuffing. Bake 350* 30-40 min. until a little brown on top!

I hope they will be enjoyed as much as we have enjoyed them.

Going for the green: Olympic swimmer Natalie Coughlin could medal in gardening

By Claire Thompson



Natalie Coughlin at the 2011 Santa Clara Invitational. (Photo by JD Lasica/Socialmedia.biz.)
It turns out Michael Phelps isn't the only Olympic athlete who likes his greens. His fellow Team USA swimmer, Natalie Coughlin (who, with 12 medals, shares the record for most decorated

American female Olympian), also has a passion for plant life. But she's into growing it, not smoking it. A self-described urban farmer, Coughlin raises fruits, vegetables, and chickens in her backyard in Lafayette, Calif.

Indeed, if the urban gardening movement had an advertising budget, Coughlin would be its ideal poster child, promoting homegrown kale and tomatoes as the secret ingredients for Olympic strength. (Forget what you've heard about Yorkshire pudding, fast food, and mountains of sushi.)

It's not surprising Coughlin counts her 100-some cookbooks among her favorite possessions; her crops offer a rainbow of ingredients to choose from. "I attempted to grow edamame this year, but animals kept eating it," she told Food & Wine. "I grow kale, figs, tomatillos, Eureka lemons, eggplant. Padrón peppers are one of my favorites."



Coughlin's interest in growing things started with an elderly neighbor whose garden she played in as a kid. "I still have the colander that she used to make potpourri from her roses," Coughlin told Sierramagazine. "A lot of people in my life have had backyard gardens so when I was looking to buy a home, that was one of the requirements. I think it was just a desire to learn more about the seasons and about where food comes from."

She also cites Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and Barbara **Kingsolver's** *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* as influencing her decision to grow her own food. Coughlin eats mostly vegetarian (let me repeat that: Olympic athlete. Mostly vegetarian.) and says that "factory-farmed eggs and chickens are some of the filthiest things out there," although she admits a weakness for hot dogs.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Coughlin became the first U.S. woman to medal six times in a single games. She only qualified for one event in London — the 4×100 freestyle relay — but snagged a bronze medal in it. At 29, Coughlin may not see another Olympics, which would give her plenty of time to devote to her garden and the five chickens she keeps. She's thinking of tackling beekeeping next.

Coughlin also surfs, appeared in the 2012 *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, and competed on *Dancing with the Stars*. But we think urban-farm poster child/advocate would be her best post-Olympics career choice.

<http://grist.org/food/going-for-the-green-olympic-swimmer-natalie-coughlin-could-medal-in-gardening/>

Pulaski 4-H Community Project

By: Steve Hale



These are students in the Pulaski County 2012 4-H Community Garden Project. This program runs from May until October with two hours of work time each week from nine students and five supervising adults. The Virginia Cooperative Extension 4-H Vegetable Garden Handbook serves as a guide for all our work. Students have prepared the soil, planted seeds and plants, and learned how to use various garden tools to tend the space. I have volunteered in this project for three years and really enjoy the time with 4-H youth. It is late July and we are harvesting veggies right and left. This is such a good learning experience and a joy to facilitate.

Global Buckets Project and Follow-Up

Sent from: Diane Relf

In the spring of 2011, the Eastmont Garden Club received a \$300 grant from the Montgomery County Master Gardener Association for testing Global Buckets in this region. Global Buckets are designed for continuous watering from a self-contained reservoir to produce higher yield with less water <www.globalbuckets.org>. In support of the grant, Dave Angle collected over 100-5 gallon paint buckets from local contractors to recycle in this project. With help from Harvey and Marie Goodwin, 20 sets of buckets were drilled, prepared for planting, and given to individuals who had signed up as testers during the spring Garden Day. At the end of the season results were mixed. Some love the buckets and have built more of their own. Others are not too happy. Some reported deer damage, others had blight problems and some forgot to water but a number are growing plants in the summer of 2012 with greater success. A brochure was prepared and distributed through the local library and exhibits were made at the 2011 and

2012 Garden Day at Meadowbrook Community Center in Shawsville, as well as their annual Tomato Fest.

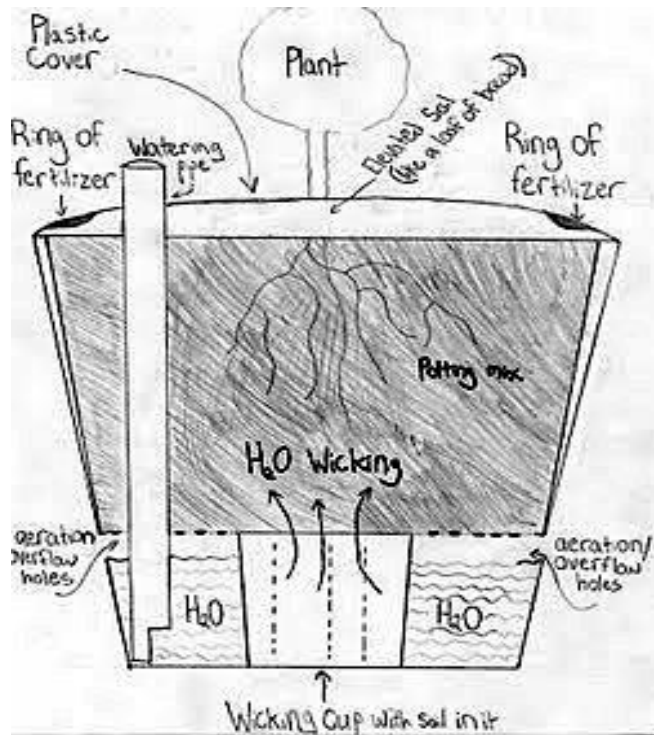
Follow-up: Six of the Global built by a VT Graduate student and the automatic watering system she built to go with them was given to PLENTY, the volunteer food bank and community garden in Floyd to be set up as a demonstration and to share food with participants in the program.



- Tubing fed into a holding container.
- Used toilet tank float, since evaporative cooler floats are not readily available in this humid area, though could have ordered via Lowes' and had delivered.
- System uses equalized water level technique (per Global buckets video)



3 tomato plants, with bamboo trellis. Original tomato on right. The two others were transplanted only 2 weeks ago, and have really taken off. Fruit too numerous to count.



(Another) Garden Tour

By: Erica Jones

This summer I got to go back to Acadia National Park (I will reluctantly spare you of my travel agent spiel); on the way back to the train station in Boston we stopped in the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens which is on yet another peninsula near Boothbay, south of Acadia. Boston is about three hours from Boothbay. The garden covers 258 acres, but a good chunk of that is in native woods (and rocks) overlooking the Back River. We could only give it 3 hours but that was enough time to give it a good, if not a little disorganized, look.

USDA says their zone is 5b (from <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>) using their zip code lookup; compared to my 6b in 24128 so it is not THAT different in theory; but given the lack of summer heat and the coastal fog/drizzle climate it was like being in another country. The pansies were still going full blast amidst a wide assortment of perennials. With the shorter growing season the usual blooming time for some perennials gets mushed together so we saw basically all of the summer perennials blooming all at once. Think daylilies, roses, delphiniums and phlox all going at once.



This section of the garden backs up onto natural woodlands. That part of the country is well known for the native rocks; and the rock work really added to the garden experience totally without looking staged or planted. And rocks WERE everywhere; around water features, used to walk on, tucked in between perennials; the “whale rock” which was already there in the ground; an original stone wall built for livestock which was also on the property, and one of my favorites was the meditation garden featuring natural and carved granite from different parts of Maine. Also, along the river trail was a really impressive long bank (natural wall) of rock, some 10’ high or more meandering through the woods

parallel to Back Creek covered in moss and small tough plants that could make a living on rock. Our Virginia rock just pales in visual and quantitative comparison to Maine rocks.

Their plant labels were superb. Labels had both names, family, origin and interestingly, year planted. Labels were readable and mostly enough of them, and usually they could be avoided when taking pictures if need be. Labels are very nice when you want to read them, but when they overpower the plants; well phooey.

Since it is a fairly new garden as these things go (opened in 2007) the one thing that was lacking was an assortment of gigantic older trees like you get at Longwood Garden. The flowers were so nice that it took me a while to realize that the trees were fairly young. It was not until I got to the "birch allée that I started looking up more than down.

The day we were there the garden was hosting a Maine Fairy House Festival. Needless to say lots of young ladies gussied up were in evidence; but we both thought the fun part was the area in the woods open to building your very own fairy house. When we went through many structures were already in evidence (think pine cones, birch bark, round rocks, pine needles, etc., etc.). If we had had more time I think we both would have stopped to play a little.

Their deer control for the wooded area (and wildflowers!) consisted of 8' small mesh plastic fence which was fairly unobtrusive, with swinging (not latched) gates. Apparently the deer have not figured out how to push the gates open. They did not confess to deer control techniques used for the planted part of the garden, alas.



Besides the plants, some fun things were man made. We hiked around the perimeter trail, and came on the Meditation Garden set in the existing woodlands. Never assume the best part has the most plants! Rocks were labeled as to area of (Maine) origin.

Another fun thing was the two wind-driven sculptures (which were very hard to take pictures of!). The design of these made for smooth, but not obviously wind driven movements which was fascinating to watch. My spouse pounced on the railing of a wood bridge to determine how the natural wood branches were spliced together. And tucked in between the natural rocks were carved stones/sculptures which often required a second look to realize they were sculpture, and one 6' "pinecone" made of recycled metal.



This garden visit left us relaxed and mellow. Some garden visits can leave you frustrated when maintenance or other issues overwhelm the garden, but here we just floated around. Certainly was worth the admission fee. Happy Trails!

Thought some snow and cold might be in order about now!



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