

The Grapevine

March 2018

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

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End of Year Celebration

By Sharon Eifried

New River Valley Master Gardeners came together on November 16th to celebrate the successful completion of many projects and programs in 2017. Congratulations to all the interns who completed the many service hours that allowed them to transition from Intern to Master Gardener.

Our guest speaker was Lee Spiegel who brought everyone up to date on the progress of Pulaski Grow, an aquaponics farm and Youth Training Center. Pulaski Grow was a Community Grant recipient for 2017 and 2018.

Lisa Lloyd and Gwen Ewing took care of the raffle table. One free raffle ticket was given to everyone for a chance to win a "Garden Design" magazine. Attendees were able to buy additional raffle tickets for garden books, bulbs, a garden design calendar, or a candle lamp. Gwen Ewing, our Secretary and Historian, displayed a poster outlining the activities our members engaged in this year.

The Association conducted the Annual Meeting. The slate of officers for 2018 was announced and a call for additional nominations from the floor was conducted. Special recognition was given to Beth Kirby, Plant Sale Chairperson; Stan Stanley, Rain Barrel Sales Chairperson; and Donna Fern, Grant Committee Chairperson for their hard work on behalf of the Association.



Thank You to All our 2017 Donors

The members of the New River Valley Master Gardener Association would like to thank the many folks and businesses that made contributions and donations to the organization in 2017.

Because of the generosity of many, we were able to award thirteen community grants for a total of \$5,314.00! We also were able to award \$100.00 mini grants to two Master Gardeners. We send a big shout out and thank you to the many persons and businesses who donated plants and other items to the Association so that we could have a successful plant sale. Please see the list of vendors who generously donated in order that the plant sale could be so successful. Thank you all.

Because of the efforts of many, our 2017 May plant sale was very successful. We brought in approximately \$5,000.00 from plant sales. We would like to thank our plant sale chairperson, Beth Kirby, for her tireless efforts year round. In 2017, rain barrel workshops and sales netted us approximately \$1,593 in profit. We owe Stan Stanley a huge thank you for all his efforts in making that program a success. We also are grateful to Deanna Reid and Kelli Scott, our VCE angels, who orchestrated our use of the Montgomery County

Government Center, not only for the day of the plant sale, but for days ahead of time. Their rooms and halls were alive with plants for days! Thank you both for arriving at 5 AM and helping us until all was away and the building was shuttered at the end of the sale.

In August, Jerry Pike and Ray Kass of Higo Garden Bonsai surprised us with a generous donation of \$100. Thank you very much!

In September, Susan Lockwood and Stan Stanley donated \$100.00 from the sale of "V2T2," the rain barrel they created. Thank you Susan and Stan!

In October, the Friends of the Montgomery-Floyd Regional Library sent the NRV MGA a check for \$265.88. We are delighted that the FOL donate 5% of their NRV Garden Tour profit to the MGA. Master gardeners serve as a partner with the FOL by volunteering at scheduled gardens to provide information about garden structure, plant material, and environmentally sound horticulture practices as prescribed by the Virginia Cooperative Extension. We thank the FOL for sharing their profit with the Association. Thank you to all the master gardeners who work so hard on the day of the garden tour to provide 100% coverage at all the gardens on the tour. The Association is proud of our partnership with the FOL.

"We are grateful"

MEET V2T2

Susan Lockwood and Stan Stanley created a Star Wars character out of a rain barrel. After many hours of sketching, cutting, priming, and painting, the famous robot was renamed V2T2 and ready to make its debut in the juried Hahn Horticulture "Simply Elemental" showcase in August 2016.

The sale resulted in a \$100 donation by the two Master Gardeners to the NRV MGA.



Vendor Donations to NRVGMA Plant Sale 2017

- Corrine's Antique Store, Christiansburg
- Crow's Nest Greenhouses, Brookfield Rd, Blacksburg
 - Curt Laub, "Dahlia Guy," Blacksburg
- Food Lion in Christiansburg and Radford
- Glenhaven Greenhouses, Broadway
- Green Market Greenhouses, Pembroke
 - Horticulture Club, Virginia Tech
- Kroger in Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Radford/Fairlawn
- Lowe's in Christiansburg and Radford/Fairlawn
 - NatureScapes, Blacksburg
 - Northside Flower Shop, Radford
 - Ornamental Plants Class, VT
- Potts Creek Landscape Co & Nursery, Blacksburg
 - Rural King, Radford/Fairlawn
 - T A Produce, Dublin
 - Thyme to Grow Greenhouse, Dublin
 - Tractor Supply Co, Pulaski
- True Value/Northwest Hardware in Dublin and Christiansburg
 - Vaughn's Nursery, Dublin
 - Wade's in Dublin
- Walmart in Christiansburg, Dublin, Radford/Fairlawn
 - Wood Thrush Native Plant Nursery, Floyd

Devil's Marblyard - Out and About with Charles

By Erica Jones, 18 JAN 2018

The Devil's Marblyard is in the National Forest near Buchanan, not far from the James River. The parking for the trail head is on route 781, aka Petites Gap Road, and has room for only about four automobiles. A visit has been on my to-do list now for a while after hearing a description of someone trying to ride their horse up there. (Hint - you would have to be crazy to try that).

Charles arranged a trip there on New Year's Eve; he thought it seemed like a good thing to do in cold (high in the 20's) weather. The trail up is about 1 mile long. The trail provides a lesson in erosion control and what happens when you do not keep up your water bars. You have to get off the trail and crash through a short span of underbrush to climb out into the boulder field.

What was interesting was the thermotropic reaction of the leaves of the rhododendron. Darwin discussed leaf movement in his book "The Power of Movement in Plants". Leaves move for the intensity and direction of sunlight, water content, and in this case, temperature. Many plants react to hot weather by moving leaves to a more vertical position so they receive less sunlight - this is an example of thermotropic leaf movement.

In cold weather, rhododendron leaves curl and droop. When we see leaves behaving like this, we often think that is it a water supply problem. In winter weather, with temperatures below freezing, poor rhododendron leaves will freeze and thaw every day.

Well folks, leaf curling in rhododendrons is probably not a water problem, as we have been led to believe. Another old wives tale down the drain! The leaf stomata are not open on these leaves during cold weather, and rhododendron leaves have a heavy waxy cuticle anyway. Leaves will curl when the ground is not frozen and water supplies are sufficient, if air temperature drops enough. Leaves will also curl if cut from the plant and placed in cold air; they will uncurl when it warms.

So why do they curl? Author Erik Tallak Nilsen suggests that it might just be a quirk of rhododendron genetics or it might be a result of photo-inhibition. Photo-inhibition is a light-induced reduction in the photosynthetic ability of a plant. Native rhododendron habitat in the winter does not have the leaf canopy above it, like it does in the summer.



There is an area of horticultural research that involves studying what happens to the products of photosynthesis. One theory related to rhododendrons is that too much photosynthesis can damage certain cell membranes during cold weather, so the leaves arrange themselves to receive less sunlight.

By the time the two humans and one dog stumbled back down the trail to the parking lot at 3 pm the air temperatures had risen enough to uncurl the lower elevation residents.

Charles is obviously better dressed than his human. Note those rhodo leaves in the foreground: very skinny and hanging plumb vertical.

See: <http://www.arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1990-50-1-why-do-rhododendron-leaves-curl.pdf>

SHARE THE SPARE

By Lynn Brammer

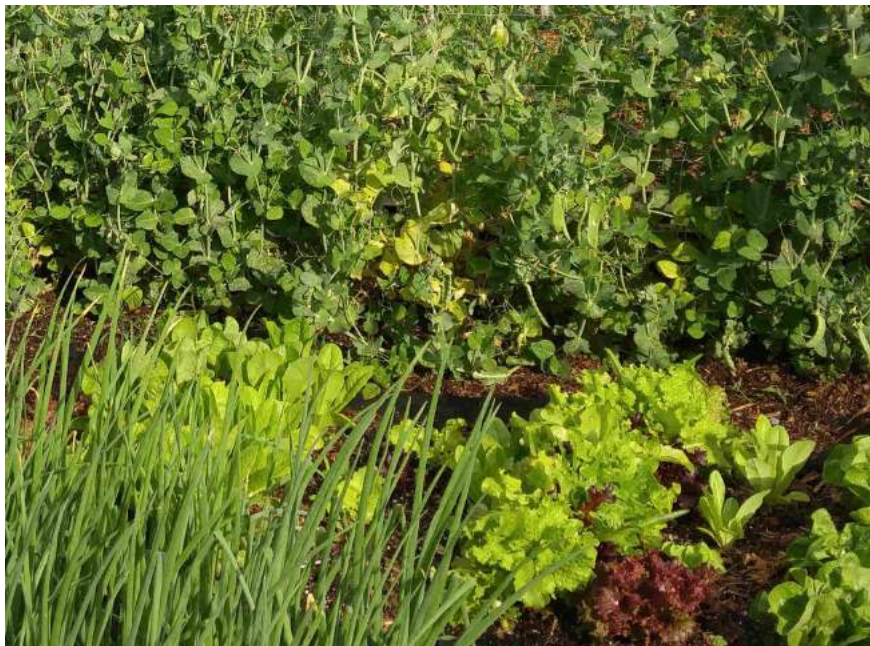
Share the Spare will celebrate its eighth season in 2018. Together, we have collected literally tons of produce for donation to those in need of healthy options. Our booths at local farmers' markets (Blacksburg and Floyd) have served as a tremendous way to connect with our community. As we host our table, we also serve as a plant clinic as well as PR for sharing with the patrons of the markets all that Master Gardeners do for the NRV. We show off our projects list, inform folks of our grants program, and solicit new trainees. There is a wonderful sense of pride in making the patrons of these markets aware of all that Cooperative Extension offers to the public. We will continue this project and hope to "grow" an even larger presence locally with the help of our membership (you!).

Let's challenge ourselves to expand this program to be even bigger and better in 2018. As you are planning your vegetable garden this spring, please consider planting an extra row or a few extra plants with the goal of donating to our cause. And remember it is not a "give it to Share the Spare challenge", but give it to whomever you know needs it. Whether your neighbor or church, we want to grow a healthier community that understands the value and benefit of eating locally-grown produce. Please also reserve a few of your Saturdays to assist the booth that is in your vicinity.

Please share any ideas on ways we can continue to make sure everyone knows how easy it is to be a part of the "grow local, eat local" mission...or how we can expand our mission in any other manner.

I have a power point presentation I would be happy to present to any group that would be interested in seeing in more detail our role in serving our community through "Share the Spare". Thanks for your continuing support of this Master Gardener project!

Lynn Brammer at lbrammer@vt.edu or 540 449-6621.



Yetis, No – Poinsettia Trees, Yes - in Nepal

Second article written by your intrepid international New River Valley Master Gardener reporter, Sarah Smiley, from her current post in Bangkok, Thailand

Before I arrive in a new country, especially if it is for work travel, I aim to have some basic background information as it makes for good conversation starters. When preparing to travel to Kathmandu, Nepal for work meetings, I learned the following:



The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal is a land-locked central Himalayan country in South Asia. It has a population of 26.4 million and borders China in the north and India to the south, east, and west. It has a diverse geography composed of three main regions: fertile plains, subalpine forested hills,

mountains - eight of the world's ten tallest mountains, including Mount Everest, the highest point on Earth. Kathmandu is the nation's capital and largest city. The history of the country dates back at least 11,000 years and it is the rumored territory of the Yeti (Abominable Snowman). The Silk Road went through Kathmandu. Did you know that Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, The Buddha, was born in southern Nepal?

So given all this history and information, I was prepared to immerse myself in the culture and then I see this.

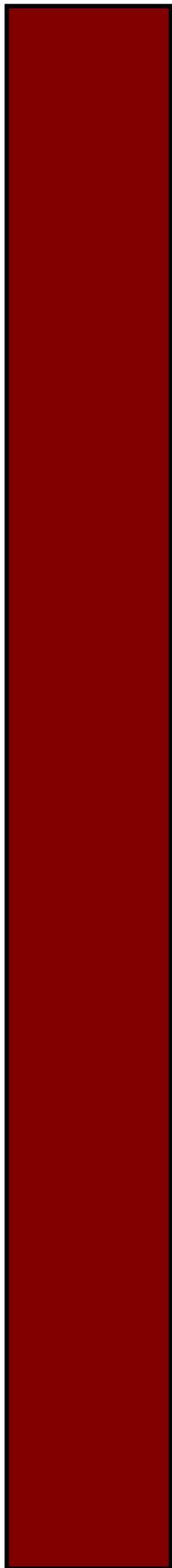
Is that a Poinsettia TREE? What is it doing in Kathmandu? Is it native? How is it growing that large? As Master Gardeners, you know how the questions go and - as you would understand - most of my questions for the next few days revolved around solving the mystery of the Poinsettia trees in Kathmandu.



In my first discussion with my Nepal colleague, I pulled him aside after a meeting and asked him if he could help me with a few questions. He said, "Is this about the Yetis? Foreigners always want to talk about the Yetis." I said, "No, why would I care about Yetis when there is a huge Poinsettia tree outside of this office? I have questions about that."

My colleague was bemused by my curiosity, but it was better than talking about Yetis, so I learned that the Poinsettia (*Euphorbia pulcherrima*) most commonly known as Lalupati or Lalupate in Nepali, meaning (red-leaf star incense), is one of two national flowers in Nepal (the other flower will also be mentioned in this article!). The flower is believed to bring good fortune, is often used in wedding ceremonies and is the favored flower of the Hindu goddess, Kali. Since the most popular colors for the plant is red, one of the five main colors in Buddhism, it is often used in Buddhist ceremonies.

Common Name: Poinsettia
Scientific Name: *Euphorbia pulcherrima*
Nepali Name: Lalupate
Size: up to 4m in height (about 13 feet)





Lalupate is an introduced species brought to Nepal from abroad but has since been planted widely around Kathmandu and Pokhara. This is the only zone in Nepal that can support the species.

The species is indeed native to central America, indigenous species in Mexico. Interestingly enough, it is not considered poisonous (as it is in the US) and can be found in almost every yard and park in Kathmandu and Pokhara. It is a very hardy species and is tolerant of a surprising variation in temperatures and soil conditions, thus contributing to its size. Also, of contribution has to be soil in this zone washing down from the Himalayan mountains.

The other national flower, the official flower, is the Laligurans (*Rhododendron arboreum*) - the Nepali variation of the rhododendron flower.

While rhododendrons can be found all over the world, and in our mountains and on the Blueridge Parkway, Nepali laligurans are unique for their immense size and distribution across the Himalayan foothills. Laligurans can grow up to 30m (98 ft!) tall and will often cover entire mountainsides with its flowers when it blooms from late February to April.

Also interesting to note, while we are often warned in Virginia of how poisonous our variety (*Rhododendron maximum*) is to people and animals, these rhododendrons have many different kinds of medicinal properties, mostly beneficial, but with side effects. Nepali children will often eat the laligurans flowers because they are sweet, sour and are packed with Vitamin C. However, when too many flowers are consumed the flower can become intoxicating.

Bees that harvest pollen exclusively from these plants will often produce honey that is a natural laxative and hallucinogenic. I was wondering why I saw "Laligurans Honey" promoted everywhere in Kathmandu, and I have seen it sold, at quite a markup, here in Bangkok. I asked and was told that the honey has "wonderous properties and helps to open your third eye". Everyone focused on the hallucinogenic rather than the laxative properties. This is yet another important reason to be educated about what you consume!



Despite the toxicity, ayurvedic doctors (and if you are not familiar with Ayurveda medicine, a system of traditional Hindu medicine, it is worth a web search) will often utilize the leaves and juice of the bark of the Laligurans. The bark juice is used to treat jaundice, diabetes, liver disorders, and intestinal worms, and a paste of the leaves is applied to the forehead to relieve headaches.

One of the great things about travel is finding commonalities with your home, but with an interesting twist. Maybe we'll find Yetis next time.

CARE OF ORCHIDS

By Sharon Eifreid



At Master Gardener College 2017, I was fortunate to attend a presentation about the "Tips and Tricks" of caring for orchids given by Art Chadwick of Chadwick & Son in Richmond. The presentation covered the care of several different types of orchids and the idiosyncrasies of each.

For this discussion, I will focus on the information Mr. Chadwick provided about the care of the Phalaenopsis or Moth Orchid. This is the type orchid I see in the grocery store and usually buy for my home. I bet you did not know that this orchid blooms for approximately 3 months from January through May? Of course not, because we see these orchids blooming in the store year-round! Well, it seems that this orchid can be forced to bloom anytime.

The Phalaenopsis requires indirect light — either shade or early morning/late day sun. Mr. Chadwick recommends a potting medium of sphagnum moss in clay or plastic pots. To pot, soak sphagnum moss in water for 24 hours and then stuff in around the roots. The ideal air temperature is 65 to 90 degrees F. If the leaves are warm to touch the plant is being exposed to too much sun. You can judge the correct light exposure over time by looking at the color of the leaves. Dark green foliage means not enough light and pale green foliage means too much light. Medium green is the perfect color! You can encourage spiking by exposing the plant to 50 degree temperatures at night for three weeks in the fall.

Water when the medium is almost dry, once or twice a week. Water thoroughly, keeping damp all the time. The temperature of the water should be about 65 degrees. Avoid getting water in the crown.

Cut off the stem after the blooms die. Use fertilizer sparingly because orchid roots are sensitive. Weak solutions applied several times a month are usually sufficient. You can use one teaspoon of Epson salts in one gallon of water to feed your plants. To prevent buds from falling off the plant, strive for at least 50% humidity year round.



My Phalaenopsis had a great year in 2017 and I have no idea how that happened! Essentially, I set it aside and ignored it after it finished blooming. I must have put it in the right place, with indirect light. I watered it faithfully every week and it re-bloomed. Not only did it re-bloom, but it birthed a beautiful baby! (See photo) Now that the orchid is finished blooming, I will snip off the baby and plant it in wet sphagnum moss in a clay pot. I will choose the smallest pot that will fit the roots and pack the moss around them. I will put the plant back in its "right place" with indirect sun, water it once or twice a week, and then I will just have to wait. Stay tuned!

If you live in the Richmond area you can board your orchid at Chadwick's for \$2.00 per month! Out- of-bloom orchids are boarded under greenhouse conditions until they re-bloom. To learn more about orchids, the care of orchids and Chadwick's, visit: <http://www.chadwickorchids.com/>

Some Suggestions on Selecting Seeds to Start

By Erica Jones

Growing bedding plants from seed requires that you keep your eye on the moisture and light levels but most importantly, that you start with quality seeds. One large commercial seed supplier says, "High quality seeds are the center of modern agriculture..." So, some things you need to look for, when buying seed packets:

SEED PACKET INFORMATION

A seed packet should have either weight or number of seeds on the packet; field crop seeds will discuss percentage of weed seed and detritus, how long it will take to get the first harvest from time of sowing, how long before the last average frost date to sow, and any particular requirements for that species to germinate. Vegetable seed packets should state a germination rate (taken soon after the seeds were harvested) and date of harvest. The seed packet should have a short discussion on growth characteristics of that particular variety. If the description, for instance, states "beets, purple, harvest all year" and says nothing about disease resistance, water needs, fruit size, plant height, when to plant, days to picking you might want to go somewhere else.

SEED GERMINATION

Almost all vegetable seeds will germinate at 75 F but some, like spinach, will have reduced percentage germination. Some seeds (usually flowers) are very intolerant of exposure to light while germinating and some very much NEED that light to germinate. Seeds, as a rule, do need a fairly even moisture level to germinate. Some seeds, like parsley, will germinate faster if soaked for up to 24 hours before sowing. Vegetables germinate best in full sun (at least 6 hours of direct sunlight), while flower seeds are much less straight forward; some species can grow in total shade while some flourish in hot, dry desert-like soil. To test germination rate on old seeds, wet a paper towel, put in a plastic bag (but do not exclude all the air), and put in a warm spot. You want to check germination – if you get mold that's fine!

SEED STORAGE/AGE in relation to GERMINATION

Seeds stored in low humidity and low temperature will continue to germinate fairly well given their inherent storage life, which depends on the species. Storage conditions should be less than 100 units; units are calculated by adding temperature and relative humidity. It is difficult to control how well the seed was stored before you get them, but seeds from a reputable seller should arrive at maximum germination. Parsnip and salsify seed have a shelf life of about 6 months; parsley and onion are good for twelve. Pepper, corn, okra and leek are good for two. Tomato seed, Swiss chard, and squash can germinate after four years of < 100 storage. Lettuce is rumored to go six years but my storage conditions must shorten this shelf life for me.

A NOTE ON SPECIALTY SEEDS

Organic vs not-organic seed depends on your preferences. The selection of organic seed varieties is more limited than non-organic. The real benefit might be in supporting an organic farmer, rather than in reducing your actual intake of pesticides. Beans and corn seed are sometimes sold as "treated", and the treatment applied allows for planting seeds in cooler soil than normal. The treatment retards diseases that flourish in cooler soil.

See: <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/seed-and-seed-quality>
<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1999/4-2-1999/veggielife.html>

Our Master Gardener College Experience at Virginia Tech **By Gwen Douglas, with Darlene Smith**

Virginia Tech hosts Virginia's Extension Master Gardener college here each summer.

Last year, Darlene and I both applied for the scholarship that is offered by our New River Valley chapter, and the Association decided we would split the funds so that we would each have the benefit of attending, with some assistance for our tuition. We had experienced this three-day event the prior year, as moderators or drivers, and decided to go "all-in" in 2017 to immerse ourselves in this fun learning opportunity. The program includes two full days of classes, with field



trips in the area, a welcome reception and a closing party at the end. Visitors from out of town stay in the dorms, meals are available for everyone, and transportation is well-coordinated, both on and off campus.

We both agreed, the best part is meeting the other attendees. Master Gardeners come to Virginia Tech from all over the state, and it is like summer camp for plant geeks. Whenever there's a break between the classes, we found ourselves meeting and greeting many friendly people, sharing our garden stories, and learning about our different zones and experiences. The programs are taught by professors and experienced MGs, and cover a wide range of topics, from ornamentals to soil analysis, forestry and vegetables, and conservation and pest and disease management. The course schedule is too extensive to list here, and it varies each year.

Darlene especially enjoyed hearing the presentation by Dr. David Gibby, who founded the Master Gardener Program in 1972 in Seattle, Washington. I had two favorite programs - soil reclamation and moss gardens.

We both urge anyone interested in attending Master Gardener College to apply early and select the classes that interest you as soon as possible, because we found that they fill up quickly. The program is held in Torgersen Hall, with a large auditorium and many classrooms available. They have book sales, receptions with drinks and snacks, and garden-related items for sale.

To see a video about 2018 MG College:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwbm51DeNSQ>

Dates: June 21 to 24, 2018. Registration information available soon!

Keeping Busy during the Winter OR, How to Maintain Your Sanity When You Can't Garden

By Susan Perry

Every winter, we gardeners are faced with the same dilemma – what to do during the cold months when one can't garden? The experts suggest cleaning your tools, planning changes to your garden, looking through the notebook you meticulously kept (HA!!), forcing bulbs, or cultivating houseplants & herbs indoors. For the really ambitious, you can even build yourself one of those cool-looking garden "center's" – the neat workbench advertised in the garden magazine, where you can hang tools from pegboard hooks, store your pots, and repot plants endlessly without worrying about getting anything too dirty.

Sure, you can do any or all of those things. But me – well, this year I'm taking the road less traveled. You won't find me doing any of those things this year, despite all my good intentions. Instead, I've decided to nurture my inner gardener. Day spas & pedicures, nail polish & massage – that's the life! I'll be slathering myself with moisturizer, taking long hot soaks in a darkened room with soothing music and scented candles, and having my tired muscles massaged by a ubiquitous hunk with strong hands and dark curly hair named Tomasso. Perhaps there will be some sipping of margaritas, too

Here's the way I look at it: I push myself every year, from spring through fall, to perfect my garden. I'm digging, kneeling, weeding, bending, & breaking nails. I'm developing calluses, getting sunburned (despite my best intentions), and generally working up a sweat – all for gardening. Well now it's time to take a little time for me!

Why clutter my mind or my day with an endless list of garden-related chores? Instead, as my tight shoulder muscles are kneaded oh so slowly, I'll let my mind empty of all thoughts of the garden. Perhaps I'll even day-dream that I'm visiting warm climes, say Hawaii or Key West or Mexico. I can see myself on the beach, sipping tropical drinks and munching on healthy snacks brought to my by that hovering hunk, Tomasso. In the background is the lilting sound of someone strumming a guitar. I can smell the tropical flowers

Well, it's all a dream – let's just say I have a good imagination -- but one I can easily create at my home in Blacksburg, on that snowy day when I sink into despair that winter will never end. Fill the tub, draw the shades, light the candles, turn up the heat, put on a CD, and ask my husband Tom to bring me a margarita

tropical paradise, here I come!



MEET TRACY POUZAR, NEW MASTER GARDENER

I was not born with a green thumb; that went to my older sister. But for some reason when I moved from Richmond to Giles County, I had the desire to grow stuff. Part of it could have come from the fact that I purchased a property that was owned by a former Master Gardener and it was absolutely beautiful. There were over 27 butterfly bushes, complete with a butterfly garden, a vegetable garden ready for me to plant, bulbs everywhere, 7 apple trees, and too many perennials to list. The other part came from a Master Gardener who introduced herself to me and gave me a couple tomato plants, bell pepper plants, Jade green bean seeds and told me about the Master Gardener program. I was sold.

I have to admit, that first day in class I was a little intimidated. We were given an experiment with measurements and we had to find a partner and I couldn't remember what greenhouse the plants were in and I didn't have a way to measure the plants, and how was I going to present my results, and, and and, well you get the point. But I just took a deep breath and remembered why I was doing it. Because I loved to watch things turn from seeds to food in my belly!

It turned out that our class was really fun.

We laughed a lot, ate good food and learned more than I could fit in my brain.

While I love to grow food, I also learned a lot about flowers, landscaping, grass, erosion, pesticides and the list goes on. I was anxious to get out in the world and volunteer, it was like I just wanted to explode there was so much to do.

I delved into volunteering in the office, sorting seeds, getting the kits ready for the plant clinics, and updating the website calendar. I made my way around volunteering at all

the places we were required to volunteer at and I landed in my favorite. I LOVE Share the Spare. There is something about getting fresh and most of the time organic food in the hands of people who need it the most. It seemed to suit me because I wasn't afraid to ask for donations. The Floyd Share the Spare was just starting out and needed volunteers. While I wasn't able to make it all the time due to health issues, when I could make it, I did what I could to build relationships with the other vendors and offer our seeds for the occasional donation from the shoppers.

The other thing that the class did, was give me a love for flowers that I didn't really have before. I was lucky enough to get to take a trip to Paris and London this summer. As we were touring the cities, I found myself gravitating to the gardens and flower beds. I even took pictures. I never take pictures of flower beds. I recognized a lot of the flowers but couldn't recall their names. I looked at them and admired the time and skill it took to keep them so beautiful.

Our class still gets together on a regular basis and I get excited when I see them out volunteering. I have a friend who applied to the program this year and my daughter asks me for help with her plants. I'm not sure how this accountant from Richmond changed so much in such a short amount of time, but I have. When I visited by daughter in PA, she had to stop me from trimming back the bushes in front of her apartment building. I also have to stop myself from thinning out her neighbor's hosta plants as I walk her dog. This was only my first year and it was great. There is so much more to do and learn and so many other people to meet. The program is really what you make of it and I intend to make a lot of it!

"Sis can I PLEASE borrow the green thumb?"

In Case You Were Wondering The Winners Are:

2018 NRV MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION COMMUNITY GRANTS		
Grant Recipient	Project Description	Funded Amount
American Heritage Girls Troop VA2345, Pearisburg Public Library, Giles County	Youth group to plan and install a shade garden while learning fundamentals of gardening. Theme gardens to relate to literature studied.	\$300
Belle Heth Elementary School, Radford	Addition of greenhouse to outdoor lab to integrate gardening and environmental issues into science and math lessons. Includes vertical lettuce farming.	\$650
Floyd County High School	Supplies for teaching and VA certification of students for Integrated Pest Management (IPM).	\$635
Friends of Peak Creek, Inc., Pulaski	Establish pollinator garden for education in public area.	\$325
Giles Community Garden	Foundation for donated greenhouse for year-round production of crops for student lessons and donations to community partners.	\$300
Giles County High School	Construction of raised beds to be used in agriculture programs at GCHS.	\$650
Micah's Garden, Blacksburg	Purchase of materials to renovate raised beds used for community gardening and education.	\$250
Plenty! Floyd	Plants, seeds, soil and soil amendments to continue and expand established program at Willis Elementary School.	\$300
Pulaski 4-H, Bedding Plants for Programs	Purchase bedding plants for use at three elementary school 4-H programs and several established community garden projects.	\$500
Pulaski 4-H, Dublin Elementary School	Construct raised beds for new Dublin Elementary School 4-H program in spring 2018.	\$450
Pulaski Grow	Purchase materials for program participants to build new drip irrigation system for raised beds.	\$400
Smithfield Plantation, Blacksburg	Support of signage for educating public at well visited garden spots.	\$264
YMCA of Pulaski County	Support of program for children to learn basic gardening and conservation.	\$290
Total		\$5,314

Travels with Charles

By Erica Jones

Charles has been out and about this year, but has seen some “no dogs allowed” signs, much to his disappointment. (The Great Smokies National Park has only one trail on which canines are allowed). And his camera got lost and took a while to replace - so my apologies about lack of photos.

In West Virginia Charles checked out acres and acres of one very common forest type - “early succession.” We were in Twin Falls State Park which is probably best known for its golf course - not for hiking. Here, the most common forest ecosystem is made up of monocrop stands of tulip poplar. Known as tulip poplar by natives of states north of Virginia, this tree is also known as yellow poplar or tulip magnolia and as *Liriodendron tulipifera* to scientific types. USDA reports that some stands of forest which started life as pasture can be very close to 100% tulip poplar. Tulip poplar is very prolific with seed production (although fairly low germination) and rapid growth, which explains the monocrops. Years ago I heard real estate agents talk about a property with “old pasture.” What they were really talking about was a solid stand of 20 year old trees.

Oftentimes, when you visit woodlands grown up from pastures on the drier southern and western slopes you do not see the tulip poplar, but instead see a lot of pines. Pitch, Table Mountain, Virginia and Jack are some of the common varieties. White pine can also be found, but it is not as drought tolerant. The reason is that pines are more fire resistant - thicker bark that has flame retardant in it - than tulip poplar - so the pines tend to survive. However, many woodlands, both publically- and privately-owned, are protected from forest fires - this is when you get the acres of monocrop of tulip poplar

According to John Seiler’s presentation at Virginia Master Gardener Association’s Education Day, yellow poplar (called tulip poplar by some in honor of its light greenish yellow tulip shaped flower structure) is the most common (single) species of tree in Virginia forests. If you follow Charles on the ridges and particularly south slopes of this park, you will see mountains (pun intended) of them. If you are hiking in the winter, a good way to do tree ID on this species is to note the very straight trunks with almost no lower limbs. The bark is very mid-range - medium to darker brown in the more mature trees, with a medium amount of interlacing furrowing with rounded ridges but not extremely thick. And they grow in large herds. Given enough time, they get pretty tall for an East Coast tree.

Spring and summer ID of tulip poplar is much easier with the unique shape of leaves and unique (for a tree!) shape of the flowers. The leaves will flutter in a very light breeze. USDA claims that the flowers on one 20 year old tree will produce enough nectar to make four pounds of honey. Those flowers mature into massive amounts of seed, which will blow everywhere in a good wind.

Well, Charles got tired of looking at mountain tops and monocrops, so we descended downhill at Twin Falls towards the falls. After some downhill,

we noticed a trickle of a creek, then more creek, then an evergreen tree appeared – *Tsuga canadensis* (hemlock). Hemlocks like damp, well-drained soil (they are not bald cypress!) partly because of their shallow root systems. Hemlocks come in two species on the East Coast- these were Canadian, not Carolina (which has a limited natural distribution). Hemlocks tend to grow in mixed stands with deciduous trees such as maple and oak, and with white pines. In the understory you will see species such as the *Ericae* Rhododendron.

Unlike the aggressive “spread seeds everywhere” approach of tulip poplar, hemlocks come along later in forest progression. They are very shade tolerant as youngsters and take a “wait and see” attitude. Foresters have found 100-year old trees with trunks one inch in diameter. If the hemlocks can just keep inching along, maybe a sun-lit gap will appear! They also like to inhabit north and east slopes which are wetter and cooler than the warm, dry southern slopes where their buddies, tulip poplars and pines are panting along.

At Twin Falls we saw hemlocks ranging in size from the 12 inch tall patiently waiting hemlocks to moderate sized trees making their way in the mixed stands, but the big ones had all succumbed to adelgid. Hopefully, the moderate sized ones can outwit the adelgids and encourage that wonderful heavy, cool shade for the trout swimming in the creek below. As an aside, the two falls were very pretty even if not of spectacular height. They were very close together, although on separate creeks, comingling just below the falls.

Both tulip poplars and hemlocks make good yard trees if you are willing to keep the adelgids at bay and you have the space for the poplar. They both are symmetrical in shape and are fairly quick growing. Tulip poplars will keep more of their lower branches when open grown.



Take an opportunity to stop by the Hahn Gardens to meet the new Master Gardener Trainees. They will be there most (not all) Tuesday and Thursdays between March 1–May 8.

Fun Things to Do After a VMGA Meeting

By Erica Jones, VMGA Education Committee

Folks, you missed a fun meeting, and a fun area to visit, if you were not on the Eastern Shore of Virginia (ES) for the October 2017 Virginia Master Gardener Association (VMGA) meeting. VMGA meetings always attract newcomers, and the meetings welcome and inform both newcomers and regulars. This year Joe Kelly, President of the VMGA, accepted suggestions for the day's topic of discussion, which takes place after lunch. The formal meeting takes place in the morning. In October, the discussion was about ways to diversify membership beyond retired white women—and a scattering of men. Questions discussed included "Is your training held online, during the day, or evenings?"; "Do you promote MG while volunteering at an event that attracts non-whites?"; "This is what is so great about the state fair!!!" and others.

Both of the two Virginia counties on the ES - Accomack and Northampton - are very agriculturally-oriented. According to the 2012 state agriculture survey, these counties were ranked third and fifth for total agriculture receipts in the state. The climate and soil are conducive to growing a wide variety of crops. For example, years ago the ES produced train loads of strawberries. Now they grow a lot of grain and are shifting to tomatoes, nursery crops and other vegetables. When we were there in October, there were still fields with tomato plants, although most had been cleared. One of our hostesses commented that many fields of tomatoes bring insects.

Not to downplay the meeting, but there were lots of other things to do while we were there:

1. Our hosts organized a tour of Fisherman's Island immediately after the meeting. Access is fairly limited to this island, and severely limited during the shore bird nesting season. Fisherman's Island was inhabited by the US Army during WWII (and they missed spotting the German submarine that was in the area). There is still some army evidence - buried bunkers and pavement - but nature has done a good job moving back in since then.

Our (very knowledgeable) guide for this tour was a volunteer at the National Wildlife Refuge and a former Master Gardener. He had just supervised the semi-annual beach cleanup that morning with a net of two dump trucks of trash.

2. National Parks - Assateague Island National Seashore (AINS) is just below the Maryland border. While I was there, they were having their fall herd-check/round up (ponies that is), and entrance to the park was free. AINS has a wonderful loop that is accessible by car in the afternoons. This route provides access to short hikes which would normally be much longer hikes. I also swear I saw a Roe Deer but ID remains iffy.

Near Assateague, I found one of the better retail nurseries I've ever visited. They stocked post oaks - not a common nursery oak, but that oak has made someone very happy. Of course, they had camellias blooming; and did you know asparagus can be planted in the fall on the ES?

3. Eyre Hall. One of our meeting hostesses mentioned this place to me - otherwise I never would have gone. It is very briefly mentioned on the Internet but is apparently sort of open to the public for those in the know. The entrance is a 1.5 mile allée lined with *Juniperus virginiani* which was doubled up with an interior row of

crepe myrtle nearer to the house. The garden is of very formal design. Inside the brick and white wood perimeter wall are multiple planted beds with grassy interiors outlined with boxwoods. You can exit this walled garden and amble down a very wide path through the woods to one arm of the Cherrystone Inlet.

5. Boat rides to Tangier. Well, alas, this did not happen. These are easier to find during what must be considered more of the tourist season (ends early October).
6. Town of Cape Charles. Besides the great places to eat, you can admire the area where train cars were loaded onto barges to trundle across the bay in years past.

I could go on, but you get the point. Our VMGA meetings are held in some really fun places. If you have the time, think about combining two activities - picking up some of the scoop on what is happening state wide with some real fun tourist activities.

The Next VMGA meeting will be in Gloucester, hosted by Brent and Becky's Clubs, on Saturday, April 18th, at 10am. For details, contact Erica Jones at emjones@vt.edu.

MASTER GARDENER PHOTOS



Courtesy of Ruth Ann Whitener



Courtesy of Ruth Ann Whitener



Courtesy of Tracy Pouzar



Courtesy of Sharon Eifried

NEW MASTER GARDENER TRAINEES



MG Trainee Class of 2018 (L to R): Ben Schwarz, Yi-ling Shen, Douglas Mitchell, Fei Fu, John "Alan" Simpson, Carl "Mitch" Holcomb, Jane Sutton, Shirley Cline, Patricia "Trish" Poole, Kathleen Jones, Melissa Philen, Maria Cucinotta, Cynthia Creighton, Jama Mason, Rebecca "Becky" Howell (not pictured)



NRVMGA Executive Board

President: Sharon Eifried

Vice President: Lisa Lloyd

Secretary: Carol Cox

Treasurer: Darlene Smith

Members at Large

Dianne Blount

Olin Whitener

Ruth Ann Whitener

MG Coordinator:

Wendy Silverman, wssmastergardener@gmail.com

Website:

www.nrvmastergardeners.com

VCE Montgomery County Office:

540-382-5790

NEW ASSOCIATION BOARD & CHAIRS



Board Members & Committee Chairpersons (L to R):

Wendy Silverman, Gwen Ewing, Dianne Blount, Sharon Eifried, Beth Kirby, Ruth Ann Whitener, Olin Whitener, Lisa Lloyd, Carol Cox



A special thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue of the newsletter.
You know who you are!