



# The Grapevine

March 2012

## New River Valley Master Gardeners Association

### ***New River Valley Master Gardeners***

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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**MINUTES OF NRV MASTER GARDENER  
BOARD MEETING  
FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2012**

Wendy said they were working on the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Master Gardener College program and were hoping for about 300 attendees. June 19-24, 2012. There will be a trade show under a big tent and vendors are needed.

Wendy also mentioned that the database for volunteer hours is now up and running, and that everyone will be notified by email with completion by February 10<sup>th</sup>.

Gwen suggested a \$50 memorial donation in memory of Ann Youston which was approved.

Upcoming meetings:

March 12 Ex Com Board meeting

March 15 General Meeting - Connie's house 6:00pm

Lawn Establishment with Jon Vest

April 9<sup>th</sup> Ex Com Board meeting

April 19 General Meeting - Plant Clinic Training with Jon Vest

There also will be a program with Forestry Professor, John Seiler, which will be an informative walk through Stadium Woods. Spring date to be announced.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:40pm.

Submitted by: Rosemarie Sawdon

**Plant Sale May 5<sup>th</sup> Fundraiser**

**By: Gwen Ewing**

Our fundraiser will be a plant sale on Saturday, May 5th 10AM-4PM at the Montgomery County Government Office Building, Roanoke Street, Christiansburg. Since this is our main source of revenue to support our organization and the grants program, we are asking for participation by all members.

I'll need help coordinating the plant sale, asking nurseries for donations, picking up donations, or even starting seeds, (do you have a greenhouse?), you can even dig up plants from your garden. I also need help pricing plants, and staffing the sale. Please let me know when you can assist. This is our first plant sale. I need all the help I can get.

Please email Gwen Ewing what plant(s) from your garden you will be donating to the sale.

Please label w/ plant name, color, grow height, sun, or shade, a picture of what it will look like.

Gwen's email is [recycle.compost@gmail.com](mailto:recycle.compost@gmail.com).

**Help with the New Volunteer Management System is on the way!**

**By: Wendy Silverman**

You are invited to attend the Master Gardener Training on April 3 from 6:00 to 9:30 at 3080 Ferguson Hall to learn all about the new Volunteer Management System. It will be a great time to meet the trainees, share your Master Gardener experiences, and learn how to use the new system!

Quinoa & Spinach Salad

By: Rosemarie Sawdon

3/4 cup quinoa, cooked in 1-1/2 cups water (cook approx. 10 minutes or until water is absorbed).

Fluff with a fork.

Heat extra virgin olive oil add 1/2 cup sweet diced onion, 1-1/2 cups diced pepper (bell, red, yellow, orange) any kind of pepper, and sauté until soft about 5 minutes.

Add 1 pound fresh spinach leaves, 1 can of cannellini beans (rinsed & drained). Cook until spinach is wilted (about 5 minutes). Then, add 2 large cloves of pressed or minced garlic, crushed red pepper flakes to taste as well as salt & pepper.

Stir to combine cooked quinoa with spinach mixture.

Sprinkle with balsamic or apple cider vinegar before serving for additional flavor (not necessary).

As a side dish serves approx. 6. Takes about 1/2 hour to prepare & cook.

## **Starting Seeds Indoors**

**By: Erica Jones**

Starting plants (flowers and veggies) indoors from seed has two big advantages - it is way cheaper than buying, and majorly expands your horizons on what you can grow. You can also recycle a lot of those pesky (plastic) cell packs that require major washing before recycling (although washing before reusing is preferable), and sometimes you can practice that elusive "sustainability" by saving your own seeds and using them. And, if you have a germination disaster, you will have time to try again. The disadvantages are 1) it takes some space that is heated and fairly indestructible (think dripping water and stray potting media), and 2) it takes some equipment. Time is a toss-up.

### **Materials**

"Bottom heat" is very nice for germinating seeds. This can be supplied by your water heater, or purchased heat pads or heater cables (both need to have thermostats) which are buried in the planting media. Bottom heat will speed up germination times tremendously.

My preferred media for the initial germination is vermiculite. It is clean (seed, varmint & microbe free), and drains well but retains some water. Straight vermiculite can be purchased in bushel volume if you look around some. As an aside, vermiculite makes a fabulous additive to homemade potting mixes.

A good light source is the biggest problem for most people (those of us sans greenhouse), since seedlings need lots of good bright light to not get leggy. But, light does not have to be fancy. The easiest set up I have used is a four foot fluorescent "shoplight" (the more generous the reflector the better), one warm white 40w bulb, and one cool white 40w'er. Either suspend the fixture over the plants, or build a simple rack to suspend the light from. Surround that by aluminum foil to reflect those watts back over the plants. A 24 hour timer is handy to turn lights on and off. In any case, you absolutely need to be able to adjust the height of the fixture as the seedlings grow. Window sills can be used, but often do not supply enough light, are too cool, and do not remotely supply bottom heat. Figure out some way to label your plants. This will avoid having, for example, way too many hot peppers and not enough bells in August. One easy way is to use popsicle sticks you can buy in packages.

### **Steps**

**Germinate.** This takes some warmth, a lot of moisture, and some small shallow containers (1" is good) which drain well. Yogurt cups shorted to 1- 1½" with holes drilled in the bottom will hold some 5-25 seeds. Cover containers with clear plastic or loosely enclose in plastic bag.

Do not mix species in the containers. Seeds will germinate at different rates.

**Grow.** Start with the light bulbs as close to the seedlings as you can get them for about 18 hours/day. Transplant when the true leaves appear (you remember cotyledon?) into individual containers. This takes a lady's touch (as in 4<sup>th</sup> graders tend to be too rough). I only hold the transplants by the leaves.

The stems are too easy to bruise, smash, etc. etc. If you are crunched for space some things do OK 2 to a cell pack cell. Keep lights about 1" from tops of leaves.

Fertilize regularly, repot as needed when rootbound. Too small is better than too big a container as long as you keep it watered. Save up an assortment of different sized cell packs. The older the plants get, the more they can tolerate getting too dry. Seedlings never do tolerate too wet for any length of time though.

#### Wrinkles

There are some seeds that play by different rules and have different preferences. These are – no light (cover well with paper or aluminum foil), light (I put these under lights for part day but keep the plastic on), much cooler (think peas and spinach), soaking for 12 hours (parsley and any big hard coated seed), and there are some seeds that do not transplant well. A lot of these fellows I start 2-3 weeks before average last frost date – any of the squash family and zinnias for example. Some tiny seeds like lobelia and are almost impossible to transplant individually – these get moved in small clumps. And a few seeds germinate better if “pre-chilled” – as in place in container + media, and put that in your refrigerator. And lastly (honest), some seeds do not store at all. Parsnip is one example – 6 months is pushing it. Others go for years if kept cool/cold and dry.

Any decent supplier will print these wrinkles on the seed packet.

References: “Park’s Success With Seeds” Ann Reilly 1978

#### Stadium Woods Talk Reminder

By: Lynn Brammer

A reminder for those that might want to hear John Seiler speak about Stadium Woods in the comfort of the great outdoors. There will be a NRVMGGA tour of the sight on April 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm. Please join us at the Karr Activity Center at

### **BECOME A MASTER FINANCIAL EDUCATION VOLUNTEER!!**

The Virginia Cooperative Extension is currently recruiting future Master Financial Education Volunteers to participate in a 4-week training program in April 2012 to help teach financial literacy throughout the New River Valley.

Modeled after the popular Master Gardener Program, The Virginia Cooperative Extension of Floyd and Montgomery County is proud to offer the Master Financial Education Volunteer program in April 2012.

The Master Financial Education Volunteer (MFEV) program is an in-depth 24-module training program designed to train volunteers on topics such as savings and investments, managing credit, debt management, making a spending plan, and much, much more.

Volunteers will be given 20 hours of training on topics relevant to the problems in their community. These tools will allow the Master Financial Educators to improve the financial capability of those in the community through classroom session, 1-on-1 mentoring, and established Virginia Cooperative Extension programs such as our certified post-bankruptcy financial management course.

By volunteering you will be given the opportunity to learn a wide breath of information to properly train you in the area of financial literacy so that you can go out into the community and help those struggling to make ends meets. You will be provided with various financially-based volunteer

opportunities to participate in once your training has been completed.

Don't worry if you have little experience or knowledge in the field of finance, you will be taught by experienced Virginia Cooperative Extension agents who will ease you through a program designed to teach you the fundamental basics necessary to help improve the financial health of Virginians.

By graciously volunteering your time to become a Master Financial Education Volunteer you will become a vital part in the fight against poverty in the New River Valley.

Classes will be held on Tuesdays in April (4/3/12, 4/10/12, 4/17/12, and 4/24/12) from 12noon-5pm at the VCE Office at the Montgomery County Government Building in Christiansburg. The cost is \$30.

Please contact the VCE office in Floyd at 540-745-9307 or email [VCEMasterVolunteersFM@gmail.com](mailto:VCEMasterVolunteersFM@gmail.com) to register for this class and for many more future financial literacy volunteer opportunities!!!

## **UNUSUAL ROOT CROPS**

**By: Hazel Beeler**

When Michael, my husband, and I cook a venison roast (from garden-raiding deer shot on the property), we like to cook vegetables right in the roasting pan with the meat. When the cooking time is almost up, we chop and add homegrown potatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, parsnips, celeriac and root parsley. The vegetables and meat cook together and swap flavors for about half an hour, with sublime results. So, are you just growing the same old potatoes, carrots, onions and garlic? Add some other root crops! Parsnips, celeriac and root parsley are no harder to grow than carrots or regular parsley, store well, and taste great.

You can grow a winter's worth of each of these root vegetables in the same amount of space you'd devote to carrots. All three are members of the carrot family, and can be grown as you would grow carrots (i.e. plant early, as they prefer cool soil). Like carrots, their seeds require a very long germination time, and the seedlings grow slowly and dislike competition. If you plant carrots, parsnips and celeriac at the same time, the parsnips will probably emerge a week after the carrots, and the celeriac will take even longer. Once parsnips get established, their leafy crowns will tower above most weeds (unless you have a deer problem--deer really like parsnip tops), and their long roots make them very drought-tolerant. Celeriac and root parsley form smaller crowns and have to be kept weed-free.

If you eyeball a parsnip, it looks like a long, tapered, anemic carrot, lacking the bright orange pigment carotene. Properly thinned out, the plants can develop roots two-plus inches in diameter, and if you have deep soil, they can be a foot or more long. This makes them very hard to dig, but on the plus side, the plants are extremely drought-tolerant. They require the full growing season to reach diggable size. Although parsnips don't taste very much like carrots (they're sweeter), they can be used in the same way: soups, stews and roasts. A parsnip cooked with and mashed up with potatoes gives the potatoes extra flavor and adds a golden color that makes them look already buttered. And parsnips keep like rocks. My household used to have an ancient, cranky refrigerator that periodically froze all its contents solid. Two episodes of this nature would turn all our stored carrots to mush. Parsnips were completely unaffected, no matter how many times they were frozen.

Many summers ago, after we'd eaten a good meal of roast chicken, with all the standard vegetables cooked alongside, I asked Michael how the parsnips had tasted. "Fine," he said. "They were a *year old*," I told him.

Celeriac is a variety of celery that puts its energy into big roots instead of big leaves. When you dig your celeriac, you'll find out why it's not a very popular vegetable. The knobbly main roots, covered by hair-like secondary roots that cling to dirt like Velcro, are a mega pain in the butt to prepare. They have to be scrubbed off with a brush. But celeriac keeps very well, and it tastes wonderful, like the best, sweetest hearts of celery. It's well worth the aggravation. Grate the roots into salads, or chop them for soup or stew. Better still, the leaves are edible too. They are stronger tasting than supermarket celery and lack the succulent petioles, but added to a salad in small amounts, they really zing it up, and they can be dried to use as seasoning. I might add that regular leaf celery is hard to grow in southwestern Virginia (I've tried) and much of the United States, and celeriac is a good substitute. You'll also avoid the pesticides commonly used in growing commercial celery.

Root parsley, like celeriac, is a variant of a plant normally grown for its foliage. Root parsley is a flat-leaved parsley, more flavorful than the curly-leaved type. The roots look like smallish parsnips and don't have a very strong parsley flavor. But since you can eat the tops *and* the bottoms, you are getting two crops in a single space. The leaves dry well and make an excellent seasoning. If you (like us) lack a root cellar, you can store parsnips, celeriac and root parsley like we do: scrub the roots thoroughly, allow them to air-dry completely, and pack them into gallon-size ziplock bags. Crumple up half a sheet of newspaper and put it into the top of each bag before you seal it, to absorb excess moisture. Cram the bags into the bottom drawers of your refrigerator. Check the bags periodically, change the newspaper and remove any roots that have started to rot. We store carrots the same way, and we eat all four into the summer. They can last to July or August and beyond (unless we eat them all!). If you are fortunate enough to have a root cellar, parsnips, celeriac and root parsley should keep well under the same conditions that carrots do.

As you look over seed catalogs in the bleak days of February, consider parsnips, celeriac and/or root parsley for 2012. (You will probably have to mail order celeriac or root parsley seeds.) Root crops aren't glamorous and flashy like tomatoes or peppers, but they have their own special and delectable flavors.

## March Tasks

### The Whole Garden

- \*Look out for killing frosts, especially following a thaw, and mulch unprotected plants.
- \*If you don't know already, find out what the last spring frost date is in your area.
- \*Begin sowing those seeds that will need 8 to 10 weeks indoors before transplanting.
- \*Test and tune up gasoline powered equipment.

### Trees and Shrubs

- \*Continue removing snow from shrubs, especially evergreens.
- \*Continue pruning dormant trees.
- \*Renewal-prune shrubs flowering on new wood and shrubs grown for colorful stems.
- \*Don't prune spring-blooming shrubs, except to correct problems.
- \*Top dress roses and shrubs with well-rotted manure.
- \*Transplant young shrubs lacking well-established root systems before the buds swell.

\*Control overwintering pests with horticultural oil before the buds swell on trees, shrubs, and vines.

#### Flowers and Grasses

\*Keep off froze grass as much as possible.

\*Continue inspecting houseplants and plants overwintered indoors for pests and diseases.

\*Fertilize early flowering bulbs as they emerge.

#### Fruits and Vegetables

\*Continue sowing leek seeds indoors.

\*Sow seeds to start pepper plants.

\*Start cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower transplants.

\*Prune blueberries, currants, and fruit trees.

\*At the end of the month, or when the earth is crumbly, till the vegetable garden.



The sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent on it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the universe to do.  
Nature quote by Galileo

