

The Grapevine

December 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.

Officers

President – Connie Lawson 674-6127 conniel@vt.edu
Vice president – Ini Beckman – 552-2873
inibeckman@yahoo.com
Secretary – Rosemarie Sawdon – 540-953-0379
sawdon@msn.com
Treasurer – Bob Lockwood-639-5982
svlockwood@aol.com
At large – Erica Jones—544-7359 emjones@vt.edu
At large – Lynn Brammer – 449- 6621
lbrammer@vt.edu
At large – Donna Fern—336-380-5242
vaferr3@gmail.com
Past president – Gwen Ewing – 382-9566
ewinggr@vt.edu

Communications

Website: <http://civic.bev.net/nrvmga>
Erica Jones: Webmaster and Listserv Administrator
(emjones@vt.edu)
Printed/Mailed Newsletter - Lynn Brammer
lbrammer@vt.edu

Membership and Directory – Evelyn Melia
meliano@comcast.net
Newsletter Editor – Carol Moates
745-4782 cymoates@gmail.com

VCE Master Gardener Program

Wendy Silverman, Coordinator 382-5790

Contact Us:

NRVMGA

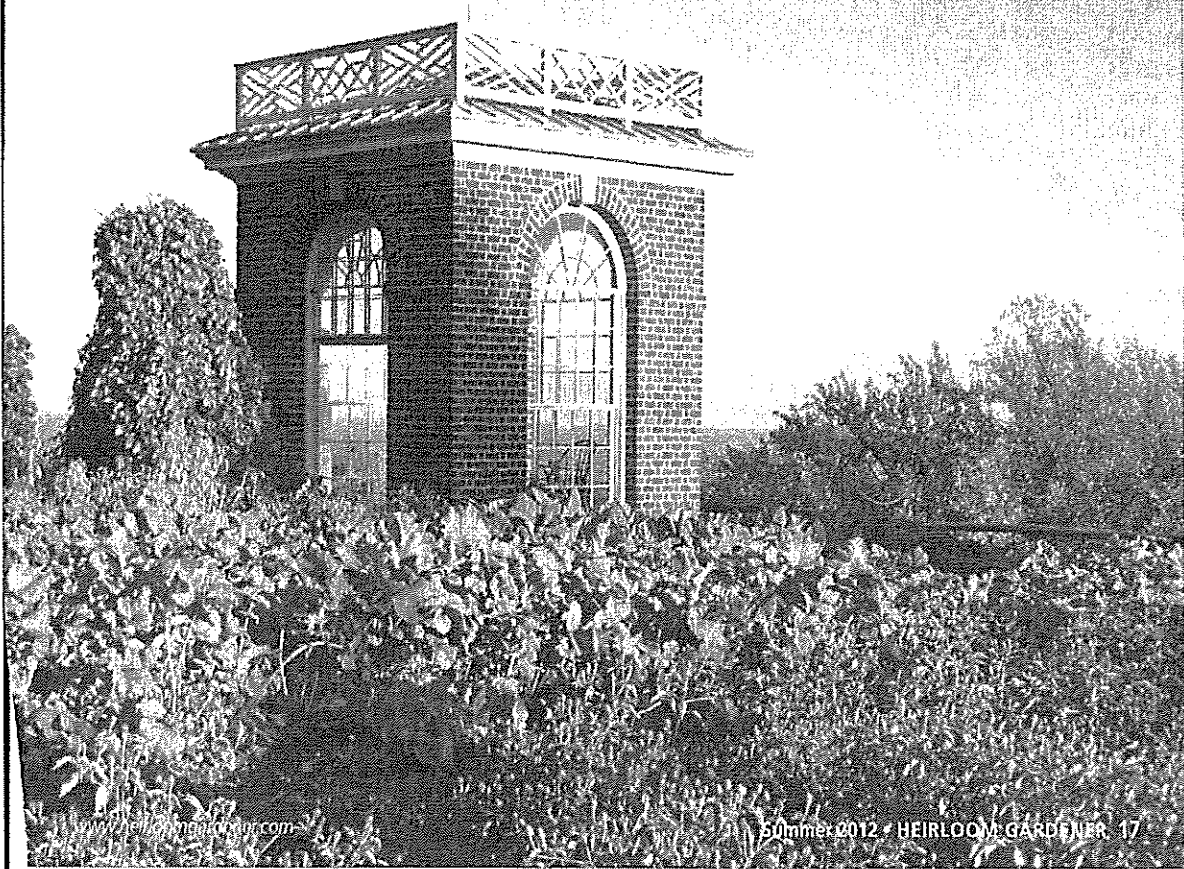
NRV MGA Website:
<http://civic.bev.net/nrvmga/>
(Membership Dues, Grants and General
Correspondence) 755 Roanoke St.,
Suite G, Christiansburg, VA 24073
Listserv: nrvmga@listserv.bburg.bev.net

Virginia Cooperative Extension – Montgomery County Office

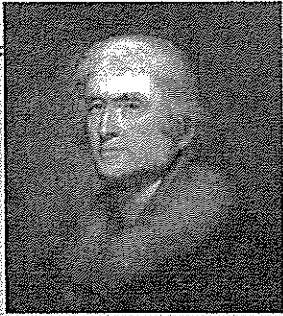
Website: www.ext.vt.edu
(MG Coordinator and Timesheets)
755 Roanoke Street, Suite G,
Christiansburg, VA 24073
(540) 382-5790 Fax: (540) 382-5729



Jefferson IN THE *Garden* by ANDREW WEIDMAN



A TALE OF OUR THIRD PRESIDENT'S LOVE AFFAIR WITH PLANTS



WE ALL KNOW something about about Thomas Jefferson. He was the third president of the United States, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and an ambassador to France... for starters. His accomplishments read like a to-do list for political greatness. But studying his life reveals a fascinating, complex and complicated man. We know Jefferson was a "Founding Father," but who was Thomas Jefferson the man?

Thomas Jefferson was a "Gardener." Why the capital "G"? Well, because he gardened just like he did everything else in his life... with flair.

True to a gardener's spirit, Jefferson found contentment and refuge when he spent time in the garden, putting his hands in the soil and savoring his plants. His garden at Monticello, near Charlottesville, Virginia, included extensive flower beds, and 80-foot-wide vegetable plots that stretched for a thousand feet across the mountain top. Jefferson was an early riser, and throughout his retirement years he always got to the garden early in the morning. His grandchildren would later fondly recall spending time with him planting huge numbers of tulips and other flowering bulbs, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the next spring's spectacular display.

If Jefferson couldn't be in his own garden, he

found ways to get his garden fix wherever he happened to be. When diplomatic talks with Great Britain broke down after the American Revolution, he spent several weeks touring English pleasure gardens with none other than John Adams. When duty required him to live in Philadelphia, he grew pots of Italian upland rice on the windowsills of his townhouse. As ambassador to France, he traveled the French countryside extensively, studying the local crops and farming practices. Surprisingly, he never actually planted a garden at the White House.

the Seedsmen

Most gardeners tend to trade and collect plants and seeds, often going to great lengths to acquire a particular specimen. Jefferson was no different. The Italian rice he grew while in Philadelphia came from seed he personally smuggled in from Italy when he was United States Minister Plenipotentiary in France (this was a capital offense and he risked an international incident). He also shipped olive plants and seeds home to Georgia and South Carolina from France (legally, this time), had a vineyard of French wine grapes (though he never grew them successfully), as well as sugar maple trees planted at Monticello,



ABOVE: Baskets of Tennis Ball Lettuce.

RIGHT: The Vegetable Garden Pavilion with arbor beans and Texas Bird Peppers in the foreground.





all in hopes of establishing American industries of grain, oil, wine, and sugar that didn't require slavery or dependence on foreign supplies. When he commissioned Lewis and Clark to explore the Missouri River, he specifically requested they collect seeds from Indian crops and any other potentially valuable crops they encountered. He even had Lewis trained in botany before setting out for the unexplored West.

Jefferson gathered most of his plants through a surprisingly large network of seed and plant traders on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. He traded seeds with Washington, Madison, early American botanist Benjamin Smith Barton, and Philadelphia nurseryman Bernard McMahon, as well as French associates such as Madame de Lesse, and botanist Andre Thouin, to name just a few. Boxes of seeds arrived at and departed from Monticello at a steady pace. Some of these boxes took at least a year to reach their destination, if they arrived at all. Jefferson once wrote a letter of apology to one of his overseas friends, after he received word that a box of plant roots he had sent to France had been found in an American warehouse three years after it had been sent! (Four to six weeks' delivery for seeds doesn't seem so long now, does it?)

How important were these trades to Jefferson? To put them in perspective, he once asked James Monroe to deliver a box of seeds to friends in France while on

a diplomatic trip. Monroe's mission was to offer to buy New Orleans from Napoleon Bonaparte for \$15 million. Instead, Bonaparte offered Monroe the entire Louisiana territory for the same money. This diplomatic trip doubled the size of the United States, and a box of seeds went along for the ride.

the Reader and Writer

Jefferson's other great love was books and reading, and you can no doubt guess one of his favorite topics. Jefferson read constantly, always searching for new and better ways to garden. He relied heavily on such books as Bernard McMahon's *The American Gardener's Calendar* (1806), America's most comprehensive book on gardening published in the first half of the 19th century.

When Jefferson wasn't reading about gardening, he was surely writing about it. His *Garden Book* (still available today) contains an incredibly detailed record of his gardens from 1771 to 1824. He recorded when crops were seeded, when they were harvested, what crops failed, what crops excelled, and even such obscure tidbits as how many gallons of "mobby" (an alcoholic drink similar to hard cider) can be expected

BELOW: Jefferson successfully cultivated French Artichokes at Monticello.



Jefferson wrote many letters to friends and acquaintances, discussing crop rotations, or some new experimental plow, requesting seeds or offering seeds, or any other gardening or farming topic.

the Philosopher

Any friend of a gardener knows how you can rattle on about plants, but for Jefferson this was more than just conversation. He believed that America could only be successful if it pursued an agrarian way of life. Jefferson said it best when he wrote, "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever God had a chosen people."

In his opinion, every man, and by extension America, should be self-sufficient, growing and producing all that was necessary in life. All of his research and experimentation was to benefit not just himself, but America at large. He joined every agricultural society he could find, and helped to start the Albemarle Agricultural Society in his native Virginia, in order to spread knowledge of farming and gardening as widely as possible.

the Inventioner

If there was one thing that could catch Jefferson's fancy, it was an innovative new gadget or technique. One of his most ingenious devices was a little notebook of extremely thin ivory wafers, bound together with a pin, which he used to record notes in the garden as he worked. Each night after he transferred the notes to his *Garden Book*, he could erase the notes from the ivory plates, leaving it blank for the next day.



Photo: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, Monticello, Charlottesville, VA. Photograph by Mary Farmer

Jefferson once wrote: "The plow is to the farmer what the wand is to the sorcerer. Its effect is really like sorcery." We owe him a debt of gratitude for inventing or promoting several important tools and practices still in use today. The smoothly curving moldboard of a plow—so familiar that we take it for granted—was his design, mathematically calculated to reduce drag in the soil. Jefferson did not invent the moldboard, just what he thought was a more efficient shape for one. He read Jethro Tull's writings on mechanical seed drills and had the plans modified, increasing the efficiency of planting grain fields immensely. When his son-in-law, Thomas Mann Randolph, devised a method of plowing with the contour of the land to limit soil erosion, it was Jefferson who told friends and agricultural societies how it was done. Every new invention caught his attention, from Scottish threshing machines to Eli Whitney's new cotton gin.

the Master Gardener

We might even call Jefferson "America's first Master Gardener." He used Monticello as an experiment station and demonstration garden after his retirement from public office, though the idea of a demonstration garden may not have been intentional. Jefferson had many visitors at Monticello who came simply to see the former president and often found him in the garden. His vegetable beds were laid out in a grid work of different plots, each dedicated to comparative trials of different vegetables from across the globe. Jefferson grew it all: beans, peas, lettuces, cabbages, squash, tomatoes, Indian maize, artichokes, carrots, salsify, sorrel, parsnips, celery, and radishes, just to name a few.

www.heirloomgardener.com

He also delighted in fruits: gooseberries from England and from Lewis and Clark's expedition; currants, raspberries, Alpine strawberries, dessert apples like Esopus Spitzenburg and Newtown Pippin, and cider apples like Taliaferro (pronounced "Tolliver," now extinct), French and American grapes, figs, cherries, 35 different named peaches, and uncultured seedling peaches. Jefferson (thus) has grown a lot of peaches—both for fresh eating and for mobby production. He wrote about planting hedgerows of seedling peaches between fields to make a fruiting type of fencing. He also distributed huge amounts of peach pits among his slaves, to be planted among their dwellings and cottages so they could have fresh peaches as well.

When Jefferson's flowerbeds were filled to bursting, and still insufficient for his desires, he designed a long, winding path across the lawn at Monticello. He lined this path with extensive beds of flowers on both sides, which he described as "belles of the day." Each bed enjoyed a short period of glorious bloom before fading into the next. Jefferson loved to collect flowers from around the world: carnations, tulips, primrose, pinks, Sweet Williams, bell flowers, white poppies, African marigolds. It's no wonder he was always looking for more garden space!

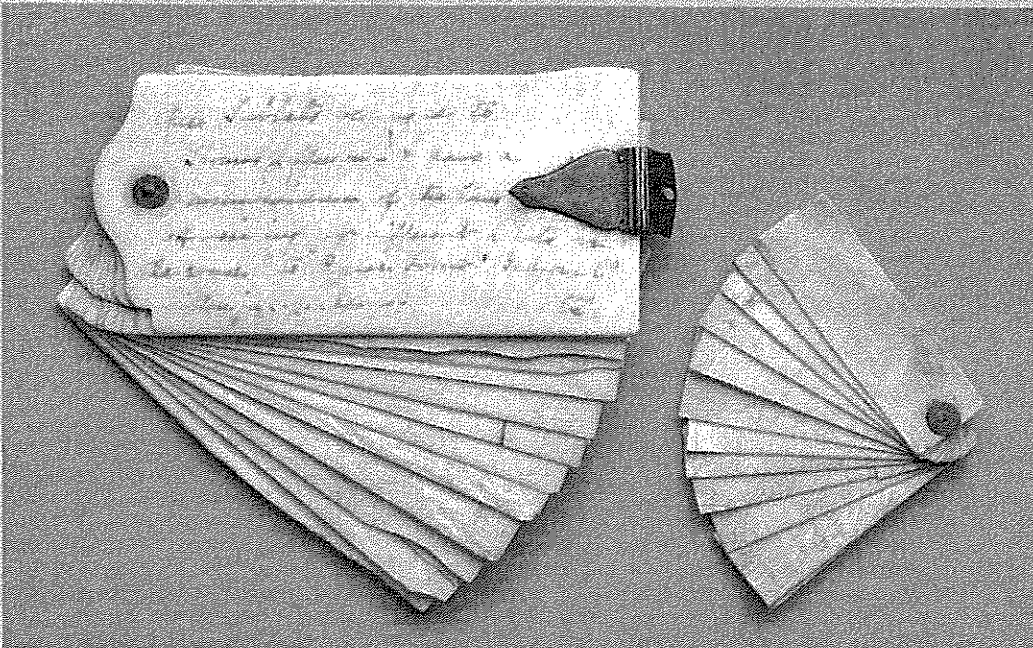
Jefferson's gardening also extended indoors and across the "back side of the calendar" (from late fall through earliest spring). His private quarters at Monticello consisted of a small bedroom and wardrobe, a sitting room, and (no surprise) a library and a glassed-in loggia greenhouse. The greenhouse was supposedly heated from the house, "supposedly" because there were many times when Jefferson's bedroom temperature dropped into the low 40s at night, and plants inside the greenhouse froze.

Outside, in the garden, Jefferson made good use of frames or "boxes" and stone walls to extend the growing

ABOVE:
Spring tulip display.
Jefferson's "Belles of the Day" in the flower borders along Monticello's West front.



ABOVE: Thomas Jefferson refined the design of the moldboard plow to provide least resistance.
BELOW: While gardening, Jefferson kept notes on extremely thin ivory tablets held together with pins, which he later transferred to his Garden Book.





season. He maintained many such beds for starting seeds of cherries, almonds, tender flowers, lettuces and other winter greens, artichokes, and many others. His figs and other tender fruits were positioned against the south-facing stone terrace wall that supported the gardens, so they would benefit from the sun's warming rays. He managed to grow just about any plant that would grow in Virginia.

the Slaveholder

There is an uncomfortable aspect to Jefferson's story in the garden, however. To say that he alone accomplished all of Monticello's glory would be grossly unfair to the ones who he relied upon most—his slaves. For all of his high-minded ideals of personal freedoms and simple agrarian living, Jefferson remained a slaveholding Virginia Planter of large estate all his life. Monticello's massive, terraced garden was created using slave labor. This required moving many tons of soil that had to be shoveled and hauled by hand, by slaves using shovels, picks, and hand carts. When that had been completed, Jefferson had a 10-foot-high fence of palings installed around the gardens to protect the crops inside.

As much as Jefferson enjoyed working in the garden, there were no doubt many drudge jobs which he left for his slaves, such as tilling, weeding, spreading manure and hand-picking pests. Many detailed jobs were also passed on to the skilled hands of his slave Wormley Hughes, like sowing valuable, rare seeds and packaging up boxes of seeds and plants for shipment. Wormley's final task for Jefferson was to dig his master's grave in 1826. Jefferson's Farm Book, which contains records for Monticello's slave population, lists several skilled gardeners such as Old George, Goliath, Gardener John, and Tom Shackletor.

There was another surprising way in which Jefferson relied on his slaves in the garden. He bought much of his produce from them when his own garden lay dormant, or when office called him away from Monticello. Like many Southern slaveholders, Jefferson allowed his slaves to keep gardens of their own, which they maintained on Sundays and evenings after they had been released from the fields, and according to oral tradition, often working by "the light of bacon fat burning in a skillet." These plots would have been found near their homes. Records kept by Jefferson and members of his family show many different purchases of produce from at least 45 slaves; from cucumbers in January, potatoes and apples in March, and up to 100 cabbages at once! These sales must have been substantial income for the slaves as records show that one

slave, a Monticello blacksmith, had enough funds to buy a gold watch and tutoring for his son.

As big as the Monticello gardens were, they weren't set up for mass production. Jefferson treated them as a laboratory and as a demonstration garden for his many vegetable trials and experiments. He wanted to find the best variety of each type of vegetable, fruit, and flower more than he wanted to stock his larder. Whatever the garden produced was usually consumed in season by Jefferson and his guests, along with the staple crops bought from his slaves.

Still, Jefferson was undeniably an incredible man, a giant of his times, in the garden as well as in the political arena. His legacy lives on in land-grant universities, Master Gardener programs, and anywhere that gardeners share tips, techniques, and plants. His vision of happiness found in the garden lives on in every gardener's backyard.

Any gardener can appreciate Jefferson's sentiment when he described himself as "but a young gardener," always learning something new in the garden. Even in the last year of his life, at 83, he was still collecting seeds. That winter he had read about a farmer in Ohio who had grown a massive, 3-foot-long cucumber, and immediately wrote to the former Ohio governor to ask for some seeds, which he then shared with his gardening friends.

ANDREW WEIDMAN is a freelance garden writer in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. He is a Penn State Master Gardener and a member of the Back Yard Fruit Growers.

The author would like to thank Monticello (www.monticello.org) for their invaluable assistance and photographs.

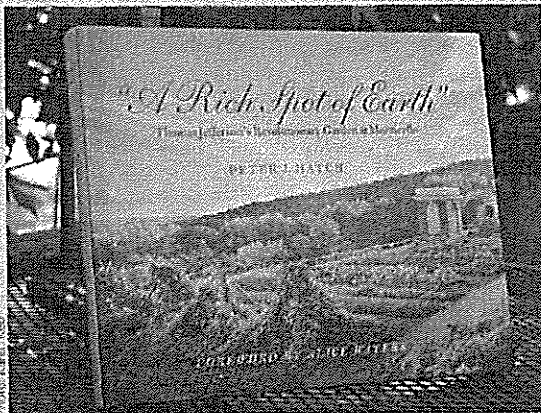
FASCINATING READS ON JEFFERSON

The Garden & Farm Books, by Thomas Jefferson (Fulcrum)

Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation, by Andrew Wulf (Knopf)

The Jefferson Hour (free podcasts)—www.jeffersonhour.com
Twinleaf Journal Online—www.monticello.org

For more information about the people, both enslaved and free, who worked at the Monticello plantation, go to www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery



BOOK REVIEW:

A Rich Spot of Earth

The newest book detailing Thomas Jefferson's extensive gardens at Monticello is *A Rich Spot of Earth* by Peter J. Hatch (Yale University Press, 2012), the Director of Gardens and Grounds at Monticello since 1977, where he's responsible for the maintenance, interpretation, and restoration of its 2,400-acre landscape. This beautiful, comprehensive and interesting gem of a book is full of photographs of the forest of plants and historic artifacts that gardening and history buffs will both appreciate. It's also good for garden inspiration and planning since there's so much to be learned from Jefferson's immaculate gardens. No publication has so thoroughly deconstructed the layers of Jefferson's unique vegetable garden and his lasting influence on American culinary and garden history. www.monticello.org, \$35

www.heirloomgardener.com

Summer 2012 • HEIRLOOM GARDENER 21

The above article was published in the Summer issue of Heirloom Gardener which is put out by Jere and Emilee Gettle who own and run Bakers Creek Seeds. I was given permission by their publisher to run this as a holiday gift to this group and also granted permission by the author, Andrew Weidman. He is also a Master Gardener through Penn State and has asked if we would share our Grapevines with him which I readily agreed. We owe these folks a big thank you for this wonderful article!

I wish each of you and your families the warmest wishes for the Holiday Season and the coming New Year! It has been very rewarding to work with you all as a group and individuals and I have been so pleased with the way *OUR* newsletter has grown and changed with the additions of articles and photos I have been sent from you. I look forward to 2013 and the continuing of your contributions that make our newsletter richer and more inclusive!

Carol Moates, Editor

It is that time of year again! Master Gardener Renewals for 2013.

Renewal Contracts, NRVMGGA Application, and a new VCE Volunteer form for the 2013 Master Gardener Year can be found at the NRVMGGA website, and in the VMS system under newsletters/documents. This year, there is a new form for all of us to fill out. It is called the Volunteer Application/Enrollment form Long Form VA-114. Every volunteer for Virginia Cooperative Extension needs to fill this form out. Luckily we don't need to do it every year--just a quick yearly update. All information will be kept strictly confidential and locked. The reason we need to fill this out is to keep us, our clients, and VT safe. We are not planning on doing background checks on everyone, but we may need to for certain projects. This form gives us enough info to form any possible background checks needed.

Other changes for the 2013 year are that we will be adding in a requirement that 10% of your required volunteer time needs to be in the form of a plant clinic or Master Gardener helpdesk. That means, 2 of your 20 required service hours must be used at a plant clinic (including Share the Spare, assisting one of the extension offices in a helpdesk fashion or at any of our plant clinics. This requirement will greatly help me fulfill the plant clinic request we get each year. Plant clinics are the major way we interact with the general public, and it is very sad when we don't have the help to do them. I hope that this change to the contract will help us fulfill this outreach effort.

I look forward to a fantastic 2013 Master Gardener Year!

Happy Holidays!

Wendy

VCE Master Gardener Continuation Contract 2013

Please read carefully, sign, and return to the Extension Office

As a Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener volunteer, **I will continue to:**

1. Share unbiased, research-based horticulture information approved by Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, or Virginia Cooperative Extension.
2. Refer questions on topics for which I have not received VCE Master Gardener training or do not have appropriate reference materials to the local Master Gardener Coordinator or designated individual.
3. Refer all questions regarding commercial crop production or pest control of such crops to the Extension Agriculture Agent.
4. Not use my VCE Master Gardener nametag, certificate, or title in direct or implied endorsement of any product or service.
5. Not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, color, ethnicity, national origin, disability, veteran status, age, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic circumstances.
6. Acknowledge that I have received explanation of the VCE / Virginia Tech liability coverage for volunteer staff members. I understand that any medical problem arising from volunteer work for VCE / VT is my responsibility, through my personal health care coverage. If injured while working for VCE / VT, I will file the injury with my personal insurance.
7. Understand that as a VCE-MG volunteer, I represent VCE & VT as a non-paid staff member, and must follow policies and criteria specified in the Virginia MG Handbook and other VCE documents.
8. Fulfill an annual commitment of 20 hours of volunteer service and 8 hours of continuing education training to remain an active Master Gardener after my initial intern year of a 57 hour training course and 50 hours of service. 10% of my service will be in the forms of plant clinics or the horticulture help desk.

(If, according to our previous year's records, you have not completed the necessary service and training hours, you will be contacted to discuss a plan to do so.)

Name (print) _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Home Phone _____

Address _____

Work Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Are you re-activating your membership? Yes _____ No _____ E-mail _____

If yes, when was your last year of active Membership? _____

Return by **21st of February of membership year to:**

VCE – Montgomery County Office
Master Gardener Program
755 Roanoke Street Suite 1G
Christiansburg VA 24073



Holiday Blessings to All from Our house to Yours!

**New River Valley
Master Gardener Association
755 Roanoke St., Suite G
Christiansburg, VA 24073**