



# The Grapevine

## Snow can help – or harm – the garden

**A thick blanket of snow can be good for the garden, or it can cause harm.**

If temperatures are going to be cold, we might as well have snow.

You might think that snow has nothing to do with gardening — that once a white blanket drops over the landscape, all garden activity and thoughts of gardening cease.

Not so: Your gardening activity might cease, my gardening activity might cease, but some things still go on garden-wise.

### Snowy benefits

Snow is a terrific insulator, and the ground never freezes during winters when snow falls early and deep, and stays. Plant stems go dormant in fall, not to awaken until spring, but roots grow whenever temperatures are not too cold, which may be the case under snow even in the dead of winter.

Earthworms and soil microbes also keep at work as long as the soil doesn't get too cold. And a snowy blanket makes it easy to dig carrots, leeks, parsnips stored right where they grew.

Snow also keeps perennials and newly planted trees firmly anchored in the ground. Insulated soil stays reliably cool or cold; bare soil, in contrast, experiences wider swings in temperatures and the periodic freezing and thawing heaves poorly rooted plants up and out of the ground.

Winter winds can dry out the evergreen

leaves of perennials such as coral bells and dianthus. Once dormant and nestled beneath a few inches or more of snow, these plants are kept quiet and moist.

### Snowy mischief

Snow does bring some mischief. Lettuce tolerates temperatures below freezing just fine, but its leaves turn to mush when covered by that same moist blanket appreciated by coral bells and dianthus.

Snow also exacerbates problems with animals. With less on which to nibble at ground level, deer turn their attention to fat buds on apple trees and crisp leaves on rhododendrons. Mice become free to scoot about within a snowy realm, protected from the searching, hungry eyes of hawks and cats, and the nose of my dog. Given free rein, rodents will gnaw at young bark, even chomp on those tender carrots awaiting harvest from soft ground.

A thick blanket of snow gives rabbits a leg up to reach branches they could not previously reach. Once a foot and a half of snow falls, rabbits can chomp away on young stems that were over 2 feet off the ground in summer.

Snow does bring one more potential problem – with evergreens. These plants have a hard enough time drawing water from frozen soil. That trouble is compounded when sunlight reflected off snow sucks even more moisture from leaves.

Jan-Feb 2010

**Monday, March 1, 2010, 6:30pm**—Executive Board Meeting. Barry Robinson's office in Montgomery County Cooperative Extension office

**Monday, March 15, 2010 - 6:30 P.M.** at the Montg Co Govt center Janice Mileski will present a program about Vermin Composting. She will bring her containers and show us how to start a Vermin Compost.

(cont'd on page 3)

## President's Corner

Our New River Valley MG Association Executive Board is blooming with good ideas and energetic people! I thank them all for agreeing to serve.

You must come to our executive board meetings, all are welcome and to the monthly meetings. We need you to charge right in and help us get the School Grant Project off the ground for 2010, we will be creating the criteria and getting the advertisements out in the next few months and plan on awarding the money in the Fall for the next school year.

Please jump in and join us on this project.

What's your dream garden, what landscape project are you working on, do you have questions? Ask them in the newsletter and we'll ask others to respond to you. One of mine is, I need directions to make the penny covered gazing ball made from an old bowling ball, if anyone has the directions or weblink for the directions, send them to [ewinggf@vt.edu](mailto:ewinggf@vt.edu).

Thinking ahead to Spring and our annual silent auction, we will need co-

ordinators and auction items, be thinking of what you can make, dig up and bring.

*Happy Thawing,  
Gwen Ewing  
President*



### 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, 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 of each month for inclusion in the next month's issue.

#### Officers

Gwen Ewing, President ([ewinggf@vt.edu](mailto:ewinggf@vt.edu))  
 Connie Lawson, Vice President ([conniel@vt.edu](mailto:conniel@vt.edu))  
 Erica Jones, Treasurer ([emjones@vt.edu](mailto:emjones@vt.edu))  
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 Keith Mileski, Member-at-Large ([imileski1@verizon.net](mailto:imileski1@verizon.net))  
 TBD, Trainee Member-at-Large  
 Don Rude, Past President ([dwr@vt.edu](mailto:dwr@vt.edu))

#### VCE Master Gardener Program

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#### Communications

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#### NRVMGA

NRV MGA Website: <http://civic.bev.net/nrvmga>  
 (Membership Dues, Grants and General Correspondence)  
 P.O. Box 747, Blacksburg, VA 24063  
 Listserv: [nrvmga@listserv.bburg.bev.net](mailto:nrvmga@listserv.bburg.bev.net)

Virginia Cooperative Extension –Montgomery County Office

Year 2009 NRVMG		
Balances coming in 1/1/2009		
Checking	\$	2,838.34
Grants	\$	9,458.63
Income:	Total	\$ 5,890.06
Cash in	\$	100.00
Dues	\$	630.00
Library tour	\$	1,619.72
Silent auction	\$	246.00
Interest	\$	6.81
Expenses:	Total	727.45
Directory	\$	33.05
S. Va Ag Assoc	\$	100.00
Internet web site	\$	19.92
PO Box	\$	92.00
Social supplies stu	\$	34.13
Plant labels	\$	24.00
Donations/gifts paid out		
Speaker fee	\$	150.00
Memorials	\$	274.35
Donations in		
Ruritans	\$	200.00
Charlie Wallstreet	\$	160.00
Grants: awarded 2/1/10	Total	5100
River View	\$	20,000.00
YMCA	\$	600.00
YMCA	\$	1,000.00
Auburn Middle	\$	800.00
Jacksonville Cente	\$	700.00
As of 1/1/2010		
Balance checking	\$	3,050.89
Balance grants hol	\$	6,477.16

## Snow can help – or harm – the garden (cont'd)

The best way to avoid this problem is by not planting evergreens, especially broadleaf ones, where a broad expanse of open land to the south can bounce reflected sunlight on them. And mulch them well with wood chips or straw before the ground freezes so that it does not do so deeply (or hope for a deep, insulating blanket of snow).

### Beautiful snow

Mice, rabbits, deer, and desiccating evergreens notwithstanding, isn't a

snowy winter landscape nice to look at? Take a hodgepodge of plants, paths, and lawn and sitting areas, throw a snowy blanket down over everything, and what's left is a harmony in white.

Snow does drain what little color might be left in the winter landscape, yet more than mere whiteness remains. Line and form then dominate. Patterns are created by dark lines of fencing and tree limbs, and by bil-

lowing mounds of dense twigs. Each fresh snowfall lends yet another dimension as snowflakes pile up on every horizontal surface. Upper sides of tree limbs become painted in craggy swathes of white. Straight, white swathes line fence rails, and each fence post gets capped with a dot of white. Whatever evergreen greenery remains is all the more appreciated.

*By Lee Reich  
The Associated Press*

## Master Gardener Training Classes

2010 VCE Master Gardener Training Schedule - NRV Unit (session times are 6:30 to 9:30 pm unless otherwise noted)				
updated 1/28/10				
Date	Location	Topic	Presenter	Notes
Wed Feb 17	TBA	NRV Master Gardener Association Meeting	TBA	optional
Thurs Feb 18	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Soils	Jeannine Freyman, Soil Scientist USDA/NRCS	required
Tues Feb 23	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Plant Propagation	Dr. Roger Harris, Professor Department of Horticulture	required
Thurs Feb 25	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Plant Pathology	Dr. Anton Baudoin, Assoc Professor, Plant Pathology, Physiology and Weed Science	required
Tues March 2	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Annual Plants	Dr. Holly Scoggins, Assoc Professor of Horticulture Director, Hahn Horticulture Gardens at VT	required
Tues Mar 9	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Home Fruit	Doug Harris, ANR Extension Agent, Retired & Barry Robinson, ANR Extension Agent	required
Mon March 15	TBA	NRV Master Gardener Association Meeting	TBA	optional
Tues Mar 23	Peggy Lee Hahn Horticulture Pavilion	Soil and Water Conservation	Cynthia Hancock & Chris Barbour, Skyline Soil and Water Conservation District Technical Staff	required
Thurs Mar 25	102 Saunders Hall Note: this building is not handicap-accessible	Floral Design (optional lab - small fee)	Dr. Alan McDaniel, Associate Professor of Horticulture	optional
Tues Mar 30	Montgomery County Govt Center	4-H Youth Development	Michelle Dickerson, 4-H Extension Agent	required

## Editorial – What About Sustainability?

I have been grabbling with the idea of “sustainability” as it applies to gardens for a time now; so I jumped at the chance to listen to Cole Burrell’s recent seminar put on by the Hahn Horticulture Garden.

His first definition of sustainability included the idea of “do no harm.” Being a literal type I had to assume that he did not mean the harm we regularly do to weeds or our backs, but harm to the local environment. His definitions of sustainability also included these ideas: gardens should reduce erosion, pesticide use, water runoff, and the plants in the garden should be suited to the site. This makes (obvious?) sense, and I suspect most people try to do this. But he also had some other criteria which I think are tougher to meet in most gardens. The way I interpreted these were:

1. *Do not import any carbons.* Well, if you grow you own mulch you are in business; but a lot of garden areas just don’t have a big enough supply of leaves, tree bark, or wheat fields to use, so this is not going to be possible. Besides, I always thought raking up leaves is robbing mulch from one place to apply to another.
2. *Gardens are succession.* Yes, I know we are only on this planet for a short time, but I am putting a lot of effort out to prevent my gardens from turning into mature woodlands.
3. *Use native plants.* I was talking to a serious native plant person once; asked her “what is a native plant, really?”, and she told me she had just spent 2 days at a seminar arguing about just that. If there is no good definition of it, it is going to be hard to do. Reduce CO2 output from mower usage. I like this idea, but it pretty much means no lawn.

Mind you, I have nothing against Mr. Burrell (he gave a fine spiel and I like his books), but I do have some problems with the use of the word. Interestingly, in his seminar, Mr. Burrell stated that the ASLA (American Society of Landscape Architects) covered some 200 pages trying to pin down the idea of sustainability. I propose that we drop the word, and go back to terms such as “reduce erosion,” “reduce water usage,” and “reduce energy usage” for clarity and simplicity.

*Erica Jones*



MG'ers and friends,

Brent and Beckys' Bulbs (located in our very own Virginia) has a fund raising program for not-for-profit groups like our NRVMG association. I have signed NRVMG up for their spring/summer bulbs program. We get 25% of the sales income (only!) when you start at <http://www.bloominbucks.com/> (note the NO "G"!!!), and select "New River Valley..." from the drop down list. You can order directly from them without us getting the 25%.

In the spring they sell dahlias, elephant ears, various types of gladiolas (there are other varieties besides the standard spikes), Caladium, Callas, naked ladies, crocosmia and lots of others.

Prices (each) go down (for you) the larger the quantity. A fair number of these are hardy in Roanoke, and a few are hardy in zone 6 to boot.

I have downloaded the catalog (66 pages, and color, so is a moderate size download) and order by phone (and mention NRVMG please), but you can order directly from the web site too starting at [www.bloominbucks.com](http://www.bloominbucks.com) . You can contact me at [em-jones@vt.edu](mailto:em-jones@vt.edu) for help if you need it.

Plan on spiffing up your garden this year! I have had fabulous luck with dahlias, crocosmia and callas. Dahlias, in particular seem foolproof and come in a fabulous range of sizes, colors and flower forms. I will also discuss winter storage (really pretty easy) if you need some help.

Brent and Beckys' have an excellent reputation (you can do look at their rating posted on Dave's Garden site at <http://davesgarden.com/products/gwd/c/18/>).

*Erica Jones*

# GOD AND ST. FRANCIS DISCUSSING LAWNS

# TIMESHEETS

GOD: Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

ST. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it-sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No Sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away. Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, Sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

ST. FRANCIS: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough. I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have they scheduled for us tonight?"

ST. CATHERINE: "Dumb and Dumber", Lord. It's a really stupid movie about.....

GOD: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.

We would like to remind everyone that when reporting hours it is important to use the *New River Valley Master Gardener Timesheet*. This form can be downloaded onto your computer from the NRV MGA website. If you have Excel software you can fill out the form on your computer, and the software will automatically compute the totals for you. The form can then be emailed directly to us. If you do not have the software, you can print off the PDF form, fill it out, and mail it to the office. If neither of these options works for you, let me know, and I will mail you copies of the form. I have attached copies of both the Excel and PDF versions of the timesheet. They can also be downloaded by following this link:

<http://civic.bev.net/nrvmga/timesheet/timesheet.htm>

If you are still having difficulty accessing or using these forms, please contact me so that I can assist you in finding a workable solution.

Many thanks to those of you who have submitted your hours during the busy holiday season. If anyone still has a timesheet to submit, please get it to us by the end of this week at the latest. This information is **vital** to the continued support of the MG program, so please do your part by making sure that your volunteer effort is counted.

Thanks,  
Ellen

Ellen Stewart  
Master Gardener Coordinator  
Montgomery County Cooperative Extension  
540 382 5790



*Submit Articles to  
the Grapevine  
Anytime!*



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Master Gardener Association  
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