

The Grapevine

March 2019

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Wendy Words	2
We Need Plants!	2
Garden Visits	3
Hydroponics	4
Houseplants	6
Roses	7
Tall Perennials	8
Norwegian Gardens .	10
March Madness	11
Meadow Looks	12
Seed History	14
Starting Seeds	16
Education Day	17

Early Spring Potluck

by Susan Perry

On February 28th, Master Gardeners welcomed a new class of trainees at a potluck dinner. After eight weeks of in-depth classes, our trainees will become interns. To successfully complete the program, they must complete 50 volunteer hours by year-end. To assist them, there was a project fair before the potluck.

Lisa Lloyd welcomed everyone, introduced the Board, and thanked the Members at Large for the centerpieces. She also described the garden planner project and requested photos. Wendy reviewed a number of projects and discussed those needing project leaders. She also discussed future educational conferences and MG College. There was a review of educational events, opportunities, and grants, as well as upcoming volunteer opportunities. Lynn Brammer described Share the Spare and Beth Kirby spoke about the upcoming Plant Sale on May 11.

We had good food, good conversation, & a whole lot of fun!



WENDY WORDS

By Wendy Silverman

Coordinator's Message

Welcome 2019 Master Gardener Training Class!

In just a few days we will begin the 2019 Master Gardener Training. We have a fabulous group of trainees this year. Lynn Brammer and I just finished all of the trainee interviews and I am pleased to announce that we have 18 trainees from Floyd, Pulaski and Montgomery Counties, and Radford City. We did not get anyone from Giles this year, but one trainee grew up in Giles County. We will do an extra push in Giles next year and hope to get a few from there in 2020. Lynn assisted with the interviews because she is helping facilitate the training class (taking Alan Bame's position). Thank you Lynn for all of your help!

We also have Rosemary Hartmann returning to the Master Gardener program after leaving it in 2005. She will be taking the training course as well to get her back up to speed. Welcome back Rosemary!

We have some dates open to moderate training class. If you decide to be a moderator, please be prepared to speak for a few minutes on the Master Gardener Projects you have been involved in. To sign up, click on the sign-up genius link here!

[2019 Training Class Moderators](#)

Thanks!

GOT PLANTS?

GOT A FRIEND WITH PLANTS?

That's the way it is with a Master Gardener—seeking out the new and unusual—especially this time of year. Not only are we looking for ourselves, but finding some real eye-catchers for the Plant Sale.

The NRVMGGA Plant sale will be held on May 11 at the MC Government Center. Most of our plants come from donations from our own Master Gardeners. We also are fortunate to get donations from area nurseries, but those donations are dwindling. So, we need to step up our ability to find, propagate, or divide our own selections.

We encourage our Master Gardeners to seek out new sources of plants: maybe a neighbor with an unusual collection; worked at a garden on the Garden Tour; developed a friendship with a garden owner in another area (preferably zone 6b)? Most gardeners are happy to share their plants. They know some plants need to be divided regularly to make them thrive. Some are happy to get that little encouragement to get started in the garden renovation.

For the sale, we prefer well-established plants in pots. If you need pots, please contact me. Remember, if you are reusing pots, they need to be cleaned and sanitized.

If you have any questions, please contact me and we can strategize your plant "shopping". The Plant Sale will be here in no time and we want to make this one the best yet.

Beth Kirby, Plant Sale Chairman
nrvmgplantsale@hotmail.com

Why Do We Visit Other Peoples' Gardens?

By Robert McDuffie

Some of us will gladly travel halfway around the world to see what a Kiwi (a person from New Zealand) does with his/her garden. Why's that? For me, I just love to see how other people have designed their gardens. Often it involves beautiful plants that I can't grow because they'll freeze in Blacksburg. It's like the forbidden fruit. It's there and *I want that!*

But there are other reasons too. For one, it's a great chance to borrow ideas. You might see a new combination of colors, or a unique way to handle a steep slope, or a myriad of other things that are different. Different. Unusual. Exotic. The ideas are there for the picking--grab them!

Many people simply like to travel to see beautiful things. If you're a gardener, those beautiful things involve plants. And it's never a requirement that you have to identify every plant by its Latin name. You can enjoy a garden just because it looks good. Nothing's wrong with that. You can enjoy music without having to spout out the key, meter, and performer.

On a deeper level, gardens give us insight into other cultures. Garden designs don't grow in a vacuum. They are influenced by architecture, visual arts, climate and even politics. Design ideas can cross borders and sprout anew. The fact that Americans are enamored with ornamental grasses, for example, isn't because a designer thought it'd be a good idea. It's more like this: a German landscape architect moved to Baltimore and brought the notion of using grasses from Germany where they had done exactly that for ages. Add to that a German nurseryman just north of Baltimore who loved growing ornamental grasses and *voilà!* or better, *achtung!* Behold, the New American Garden—grasses and perennials en masse.

So do Kiwis like to have a bunch of American gardeners tromping through their backyards? Absolutely. They want us to come. Those who enjoy gardening and spending time outdoors making things look nice and tidy, love to have someone say, "Your yard looks great!" It also may be an economic necessity. Gardening and plant collecting can be an expensive hobby. So they charge a little to get in, serve tea or lunch, talk about Hobbits, and everyone's happy.

At least I am. I'm a garden junky, no doubt. Worse than that, I like to bring thirty other people along with me to see other folks' gardens and share the experience together.

But the good news is that we don't have to travel halfway around the world to see wonderful gardens. There are many great places within half a day's drive. Historic Garden Week in Virginia happens around the end of April. You can wander all over the Commonwealth and discover fantastic gardens.

But then, who doesn't want to see New Zealand, meet a Kiwi, and look for Hobbits along the way?

Robert McDuffie, ASLA, is a Landscape Architect, Emeritus Professor of Horticulture at Virginia Tech.

A Crash Course in Hydroponics

by Erica Jones

Ferrum College Professor, Tim Durham, is offering seminars on his hydroponic greenhouse. I got in on the fourth one he has done this year. I would encourage you to take advantage of educational opportunities like this, even if they involve a bit of driving.



Ferrum is a tiny private college specializing in students who might not fit in at a large university. Ferrum prides itself in taking advantage of its very rural location. Yes, you will need a GPS to get there, but it is worth the drive!

The seminar consisted of a morning talk about hydroponics in general. We received a PowerPoint handout and charts on fertilizers. After lunch in the student cafeteria, we moved to the greenhouse.

Tim grew up on a vegetable farm on Long Island, so he knew about vegetable production, but had no experience with hydroponics before he received a grant from

the tobacco industry. The grant was to build and outfit his 25' x 30' greenhouse, which is double layer poly with solid (transparent) sides and propane heat.

During the seminar, Dr. Durham described the process of growing lettuce. Briefly the nine week head lettuce cycle goes like this:

1. Germinate seeds in rock wool cubes. One sheet of rock wool is partitioned into approximately 2 inch cubes – you pull these apart and inset into the holes drilled in the growing tray. Plants are large enough to transplant at 2 – 3 weeks.
2. You can put multiple seeds per cube if you are willing to thin. You definitely do not want to crowd the lettuce.
3. Insert seedlings into the holes in the trays and attach water hoses
4. Grow (with or without extra light)
5. After about seven weeks of growing, harvest with a sharp knife at the base so that the leaves stay together.
6. Clean the trays. Knock the roots and rock wool out of the trays and scrub the trays with Clorox bleach. The rock wool is discarded and the roots go outside into compost piles. (Some thought has gone into having animals - horses? cattle? – consume the roots, but he admitted that delivery would be a real problem).
7. Trays not occupied with lettuce do not have hoses attached to the nutrient cycling system.
8. To keep a steady supply of lettuce, you need to keep germinating seeds every one-two weeks.
9. If too mature, lettuce gets bitter, even though it is still pretty and leafy.



Rock wool, scored for one plant/hole.

Dr. Durham purchased his hydroponic set-up as a complete unit (actually, two units) from Crop King. It consists of raised benches with a 2 degree slope, tongue and groove trays predrilled with holes, tubing to "feed" the trays and a pump to move the liquid fertilizer to the trays. He had to buy his own storage tank for the liquid solution.

The trays are about 10' long x 8" wide x 4" deep and are tongue and groove with the adjoining tray. Square 2" x 2" holes are predrilled, making for proper spacing for romaine and bib lettuce. The benches are about 4' tall. This is commercial grower type stuff; one was 10' x 30'.

He grows enough lettuce in the greenhouse to supply about half the cafeteria's needs. Extra lettuce goes to the local food banks. He does not grow lettuce over the summer (temperatures are too high; no students). He has experimented with supplemental light to see if he can shorten the time to harvest (it does). Supplemental light also changed the look of the leaves, particularly on the romaine - the leaves get more puckers or bubbles.

The weekly hours required to maintain and harvest are minimal. What takes time is cleaning benches (trays) in-between crops.

In the afternoon session we cut, harvested and packed lettuce; took pH and soluble salt readings and replenished the fertilizer solution. We were all required to wash our hands before handling anything; Dr. Durham admitted that he should probably have visitors wear booties. He looked into getting the products labeled as "organic" but decided all the extra hoops he would have to jump through (especially for fertilizers) were just not worth it.

There has not been a problem with white flies or scale in the greenhouse, but there has been a very mild aphid problem. Some problems he has had are:



All photos courtesy of Erica Jones.

1. Power outages can occur. This means plants will wilt pretty quickly as there is no water and roots are hanging in the air.
2. Supply lines can get clogged.
3. Algae can grow and clog lines. The presence of algae takes the most time when cleaning trays.
4. Trays and hoses can spring leaks.
5. Screening is needed for the ventilation system in order to keep bugs out. Fans will run pretty much anytime the sun is shining.
6. Some nutrients are significantly less available for plants when the pH is very low or very high. Therefore, the pH of the fertilizer solution and pH of the water supply needs to be monitored carefully.

Tips:

- Now is a good time to direct seed cool season crops.
- Fertilize blueberries before bud break.
- Fertilize established asparagus by the end of March.

Houseplants

By Lisa Lloyd

I remember one of my weekend chores growing up was to water my mom's houseplants. We had only a few around the house – a snake plant, philodendron, African violet. There was even a little cactus garden in our laundry room in what was a recycled aquarium. I do credit my passion for all things “plant” to my mom!

Research shows that trends run in cycles. That seems to be the case for houseplants too. While I've always grown them wherever I have lived (too many, my husband might say!), it appears that the Millennial generation (birth years 1980's – early 2000's) are bringing a resurgence to green in living spaces. In addition, there is scientific knowledge available that substantiates the health benefits of sharing your living space with plants.

As we've learned, during photosynthesis plants absorb the carbon dioxide we place in the air and in turn release oxygen we can use to breathe. What you may not be aware of: at night when photosynthesis stops, plants reverse their process and absorb oxygen and release carbon dioxide. There are a few special plants that continue to recycle the carbon dioxide we place in the air and release oxygen. Plants like orchids, succulents and epiphytic bromeliads are beneficial to place in your bedroom to keep the oxygen flowing while you sleep.

Plants are also a natural humidifier for your home. Through transpiration, they can help decrease the incidence of dry skin, colds, sore throats, and dry coughs. Higher humidity levels in our homes are also conducive for decreased survival and transmission of the flu virus (as we're in the midst of the flu season now, go find a few houseplants for your home!)

NASA has done a substantial amount of research on air quality in sealed environments. Not surprising – plants played a pivotal role! Plant leaves and roots are used in removing trace levels of toxic vapors from inside tightly sealed buildings. Low levels of chemicals such as carbon monoxide and formaldehyde can be removed from the environment from plant leaves alone.

Based on the NASA Clean Air Study of 1989, the top plants for removing pollu-

tants in the air are: Dwarf Date Palm (*Phoenix roebelinii*), Boston Fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*), Kimberly Queen Fern (*Nephrolepis obiliterata*), Spider Plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*), Chinese Evergreen (*Aglaomema modestum*), Bamboo Palm (*Chamaedorea seifrizii*), Weeping Fig (*Ficus benjamina*), Devil's Ivy (i.e. Pothos), (*Epipremnum aureum*), Flamingo Lily (*Anthurium andraeanum*), Lilyturf (Liriope spicate), Broadleaf Lady Palm (*Rhapis excelsa*), Barberton Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii*), Cornstalk Dracaena (*Dracaena fragrans* "Massangeana"), English Ivy (*Hedera helix*), Variegated Snake Plant (*Sansevieria trifasciata* 'Laurentii'), Red-Edged Dracaena (*Dracaena marginata*), Peace Lily (*Spathiphyllum* 'Mauna Lao'), and Florist's Chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*).

Just like service dogs, plants provide therapy to humans too. Model, author, entrepreneur, and eco-activist Summer Rayne Oakes has gained notoriety for filling her Brooklyn 1,200-square-foot apartment with over 670 plants. In an interview, she commented, “I think that the only way I've really been able to survive New York is by surrounding myself with plants.” Researchers in the United Kingdom found that people who live around nature feel much happier than those that don't. From personal experience, I find that caring for my houseplants especially during the winter, lifts my mood in a way similar to when I'm outside in my garden in the summer.

So, spread the love for indoor gardening. The next time you have a friend move into a new home or your niece moves into her first apartment, give them the gift of health and happiness: a beautiful houseplant!



Chinese Evergreen.
Courtesy of Lisa Lloyd.

Roses, Roses Everywhere – But From Where And Why?

By Sarah Smiley

Valentine's Day passed and roses were everywhere. The connection between roses and love can be traced back to Aphrodite in Greece or Venus in Rome: the goddesses of love. The idea of actually cutting and selling flowers as an industry was developed in England in the late 19th Century. Do you ever walk into a store and wonder how a dozen fresh roses can cost less than \$20? I thought I'd look into the rose industry a bit and found some interesting facts, and as Henry David Thoreau would say, "Truths and roses have thorns about them".



Washington Post image - Cargo plane being unloaded in Miami carrying 1.1 million roses from Colombia

Until 1991, a majority of roses sold in the US came from California and a dozen roses would cost around \$150. Since 1991, California production has decreased by 95% - and Colombia is now the main US supplier of roses and a dozen roses costs less than \$20. And guess what company buys the most roses? If you guessed Walmart, you are correct.

If you are wondering what the year 1991 has to do with anything, this was the year the U.S. passed the Andean Trade Preference Act. This was an attempt to disrupt the Colombian drug cartels, slow the flow of drugs in the U.S., and encourage legitimate (and safer) economic growth in the region. Tariffs were reduced or eliminated on a number of imports from the region and funding was provided to industries that provided alternative employment to the cocaine trade – rose production being one of them.

Americans will gift about 200 million roses (from Colombia) over the Valentine season. Over the course of a year, Colombia will send 4 billion roses to the U.S. The production process is so smooth and efficient that roses from Colombia will reach the U.S. East Coast ahead of a similar shipment coming from California.

California currently produces around 30 million roses each year and the remaining growers are creating niche markets for weddings and other high-end celebrations. Rather than the mass produced roses (the red, long stemmed, no scent, durable variety – usually known as "Freedom Rose"), these growers are working with universities and research centers to create new cut rose varieties as well as improving the production process. An example of this is Pajarosa Floral (www.pajarosa.com), who often provides the roses and arrangements for White House events.

If you receive roses for Valentine's Day – given that we are in Virginia, those flowers have traveled a long way to reach you – let's keep them alive as long as possible. Here are some tips for improving longevity:

- As soon as you get the flowers, cut half an inch off the bottom of each stem under warm running water to keep air pockets from getting into the stem and hindering water uptake.
- Do not clean foliage off any higher than the water level in the vase.
- Keep your roses in a cool area with low air circulation.
- Provide frequent fresh water changes



Ready for Valentine's Day - image from "iheartthemart.com"

TALL PERENNIALS: Larger-than-Life Plants for Gardens of All Sizes

By Roger Turner, Timber Press

Book Review by Hazel Beeler, MG

This is an interesting book, written by a professional landscape designer, clearly devoted to the subject. Part I describes the features of tall perennials and ways to best use them in the garden. Part II is devoted to different categories of tall perennials. There are many attractive photographs.

What is a tall perennial? The author defines it as any herbaceous perennial that reaches 5 feet or more. (He originally intended to make the cutoff height shorter, but realized it would make the book too long.) Such plants have a dramatic effect in the garden, and the first chapters explain how they can best be used. Tall perennials are best grown in clumps at least as wide as the plants are tall. Gardeners are limited by climate and other conditions such as shade or moisture, and plant selection also depends on the effect desired. The plants for "a jungle effect" will be very different from those of a classic English border (which he notes is a lot of work).

For the best effect, tall perennials must be integrated into the garden structure, not stuck randomly here and there. Plants grouped together should flower at the same time, their flowers must exhibit some contrast in color, and they should have the same requirements in terms of light and moisture. The gardener may choose to plant a bed of "hot" colors—red, yellow, orange—versus "cool" ones but the two should not be mixed.

Plants should also be grouped by what I call similarity of origin: horticultural plants (bred and selected by humans) versus wild ones (those that look like they've been dug up from their natural habitat). Turner argues that the two categories should not be planted together. One should also avoid using too many similar plants, such as grasses or variegated plants. He advises using plants whose foliage has textural contrast.

In Chapter Two, Turner addresses designing the border. The border must be at least three plants deep, about six feet. If the border is narrower, the gardener should choose tall perennials with interesting foliage. The author discusses ideal spacing and notes that tall perennials should be planted in clumps, not singly, then describes the process of designing the border. I can appreciate the effort of "doing it right", but I'm a "stick things in the ground and see what happens" gardener, and my "borders" are exemplars of chaos and disorder.

Most of Turner's book is devoted to Part II, the directory of tall perennials, arranged in author-defined categories. Within each category, the genera are listed in alphabetical order, with a brief paragraph about each genus and a longer section for each qualifying species: origin, size, flowering time, flower color, preferred conditions, hardiness, usefulness for flower arrangement, propagation and impact. This is followed by a description of the plant's overall appearance and brief descriptions of cultivated varieties. Like gardening books written and published in Britain, this one features many plants from zones 7 and higher, which would not be hardy here in southwest Virginia.

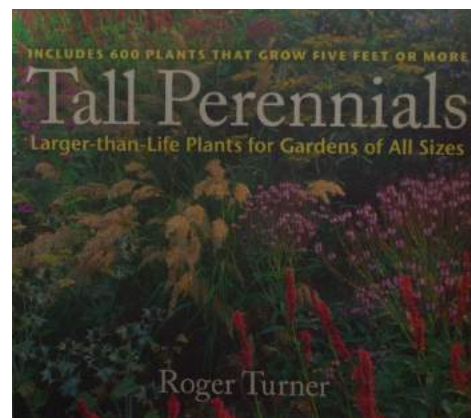
The categories are listed as: architectural perennials, attention-grabbers with strong forms, bold foliage color, or spiky leaves, such as thistles and thistle-like plants, and mulleins. The list continues with foliage plants and ferns, which either lack flowers or are grown primarily for the texture, color or shape of their foliage: aralia, mugwort, *Colocasia* (which we call "elephant's ears"), royal fern, inedible species of rhubarb, and elder. A chapter on umbellifers (plants in the carrot family that could be described as looking like Queen Anne's lace on steroids) follows: angelica, hemlock, fennel, and hogweed. These plants look similar, and some are very poisonous. Ornamental grasses (and grass-like plants) need no introduction; they include the ubiquitous pampas-grass, papyrus, rushes, *Miscanthus*, and cattails.

The author separates out plants with flower spikes due to their distinctive form. Many will be familiar: acanthus, cohosh, delphiniums, foxgloves, red-hot-poker, and loosestrife. Likewise for daisy flowers: Helium, perennial sunflowers, Shasta daisies, and coneflowers.

Other tall perennials are listed by their blooming time. Early (May and June) includes goat's beard, wild indigo, spurge, iris, and Solomon's seal. Midseason (July) includes yarrow, monk's hood, hollyhocks, mallows, and bluebells, *Coreopsis*, meadowsweet, daylilies, sages, and meadow rue. Here he includes, of all things, pokeweed, which I have never regarded as anything but a vicious weed that's almost impossible to eradicate.

Turner notes that many tall perennials bloom in late summer (from August onwards), and many are richly colored: asters, cannas, Joe-Pye weed, goldenrod, ironweed.

This book would be a useful reference for gardeners who want to add variety to the categories of plants in their gardens.



Byparken: A Gardener's Delight in the Center of Bergen

By Sharon Eifreid

On a trip to Norway, I was happy to spend two days in the coastal city of Bergen. After meandering through the interesting historical area of Bergen and the lively Fish Market, I ventured around the corner and down the block and found a very small, but beautiful garden. I am thankful for my curiosity because I was in need of some relaxation, but was not expecting to find an oasis of gorgeous flowers in the middle of the second largest city in Norway.

In the center of the park is Lake Lille Lungegardsvannet which is a natural, 5 acre, octagonal lake with a large decorative fountain in the center. At one time the lake was connected to the nearby bay, but over time the strait and land were filled in and the shoreline straightened and made into an octagon shape. Today, the Lake is surrounded by inviting benches, trees, shrubs and flowers. It is fun to watch both locals and tourists stroll the promenade and feed the many birds, ducks and geese.



However, the most beautiful section of the park for me was the extended green area west of the lake where I found a lovely gazebo and multiple areas of gorgeous blooming flowers. The month was July and the roses, dahlias and many other flowers were fantastic. The garden is very inviting and immaculately maintained. Some areas are planted in a mass of one type of plant, such as the rose garden. The border around the gazebo is planted with a myriad of different types of gorgeous blooming plants. The Byparken is definitely worth a visit.



All photos courtesy of Sharon Eifreid.



March Madness

By Susan Perry

Every March, my husband Tom loses all reason. He's an avid college basketball fan whose idea of heaven is watching his beloved Maryland Terrapins secure a spot in the NCAA tournament, and then proceed to win as many games as possible in the tournament. He devotes his weekends during March to watching as much college basketball as possible. During broadcasts of Maryland games, Tom can be found wearing his "Fear the Turtle" T shirt and his Terps hat, and yelling "FTT" (Fear the Turtle).

As the month progresses, the intensity heightens. In 2002, when Maryland won its first NCAA championship ever, you'd have thought someone discovered a cure for a rare disease. The weekend before the NCAA tournament starts, each conference plays a weekend tournament for conference champ. One year, Maryland won the ACC championship in three unexpected upset wins in the last few minutes of each game – nail biters all. Let's just say it truly is a sight to behold. I simply plan for March to be a basketball-o-rama at our house and try to find a peaceful corner for myself.

I, on the other hand, spend March feeling spring is just around the corner. Our warmer days motivate me to start planning garden changes, and thinking about my spring garden cleanup. My intellect tells me we may get snow for another 6 weeks – it's inevitable and happens most years – and so I try not to get too excited. But every year, the same feelings hit me and I know it will be torture to wait till May to really dig-in to my garden. Like Tom, I get my own version of March Madness. After all, didn't someone say madness was doing the same thing over and over but expecting a different result? Apparently, we've both lost all reason, as evidenced by the garden catalogs, library books on gardening, the sports page, and the NCAA schedule strewn about our house.

This year, I've decided to try to cure my March Madness – knowing that we have several weeks of warm weather in store, I've decided to try moving those perennials in my garden that are destined for new locations. Usually, I wait until May but I decided this year that by May it may be 80 degrees, and unless something truly unusual happens, my transplants will be able to survive any April snows. So instead of trying to fit all the transplanting and new planting in two weeks – oh, my aching back – I'm extending my gardening time by months and giving all my transplants a head start on the heat and drought. I'm hoping by June, my plants will be full and lush with no sign of transplanting.

From now on, it looks like there will be only one of us suffering from March Madness. While Tom is watching basketball and yelling, "FTT", I'll be out in the backyard, away from it all, getting an early start on my annual quest for the perfect garden.



All things Maryland PLUS Terp-A-Hoke (center).

The New Perennial Movement: Beauty in the Meadow

By Sharon Eifried, MG

Paul Westervelt from Saunders Brothers, Inc. presented "The New Perennial Movement and Why It Matters" at the Hahn Horticultural Garden recently. Paul describes this style of planting as one that evokes feeling with tall and short, solid and lacy, and native and non-native plants arranged in a stylized manner. The design creates multi-season interest, provides wildlife habitats and reminds me of a lovely meadow. Paul stated that the design is useful in both municipal landscapes and residential gardens. Two high profile examples of the planting style are:

The High Line Gardens in New York City <https://www.thehighline.org/gardens/>

The Lurie Garden in the Millennium Gardens in Chicago <https://www.lurigarden.org/2017/09/15/scaling-public-garden-to-for-an-intimate-space/>

Paul explained that plants should be adaptable: it is not so much about the specific plants, but how the plants are combined to look natural and full, as if every space in the garden were occupied by a plant. He advised not only focusing on blooms, but also on foliage, fall color, and form. The goal is to achieve beauty, texture, interest, and change throughout the year. Ideally, the tall summer plants become winter bird feeders. The garden can actually look good until March, even if the plants are dead!

One example shared by Paul was the hollow stem Jo Pye Weed plant that can become an ideal site for nesting for some bees and wasps. In this case, the stems had fallen over, the dead blooms had dropped off, and the hollow stem exposed.

If you visit the Hahn Garden, you will see the beauty of the Jo Pye Weed growing along the pond's edge. (See photo). You can also see a mass of lovely perennials growing in the meadows at the Hahn.



Hahn Gardens. Courtesy of Sharon Eifried.



*River Farm Gardens.
Courtesy of Sharon Eifried.*

I am also reminded of the meadow at the River Farm Gardens, the headquarters of the American Horticultural Society, in Alexandria, Virginia. (See photo here and write up in the December 2018 issue of the Grapevine.)

Some books recommended by Paul are:

- ◆ Dream Plants for the Natural Garden by Henk Gerritson and Piet Oudolf
- ◆ Designing with Plants by Piet Oudolf and Noel Kingsbury
- ◆ Planting: A New Perspective by Piet Oudolf and Noel Kingsbury
- ◆ Sowing Beauty by James Hitchmough

Web sites related to the New Perennial Movement, with lovely pictures and related information:

<https://www.finegardening.com/article/27-perennials-with-long-lasting-appeal>

<http://www.rhonestreetgardens.com/2018/04/musings-oudolf-new-perennial-movement.html>

Plants that Paul recommends are listed below:

Agastache 'Purple Haze' (giant hyssop)
Agastache nepetoides (yellow giant hyssop)
Eryngium yuccifolium (rattlesnake master)
Echinacea pallida (pale purple coneflower)
Inula 'Sonnenspeer'
Monarda bradburiana (eastern bee balm)
Pycnanthemum sp (mountain mint)
Sanguisorba cvs (burnet)
Schizachyrium scoparium (little blue stem)
Silphium sp (rosinweed)
Sporobolus heterolepis (prairie dropseed)
Veronia 'Iron Butterfly' and 'Southern Cross' (ironweed)
Veronicastrum cvs (Culver's root)



*Hahn Gardens.
Courtesy of Sharon Eifried.*

The Plant Historian: Seeds, Seeds, Seeds

by Kathleen Jones

My sister, who likes to create "theme" gifts, this year centered my Christmas present on gardening. She crocheted a garden hat, found a coloring book of flowers, and added a succulent in a cute pot. She also gathered a collection of seed catalogs, reading for cold snowy winter days. I love looking at plant catalogs, as I guess every gardener does. They inspire, even if my gardens are much too small to accommodate the plants I'd like to add. And they are just fun to read.

The Christmas gift was just one source of inspiration for this article. The second came from some research I've been doing for the Black House. The curators would like to create an exhibit about "gardening culture" in Blacksburg. As one foundation for the exhibit, they are using a collection of tools and seed catalogs and assorted turn-of-the-twentieth-century gardening publications provided by Master Gardener Diane Relf. The samples that Diane provided can help determine what Blacksburg gardens might have looked like, what gardeners could have planted, what they could have used when tending their gardens, and in what ways gardening was a part of community life at the time.

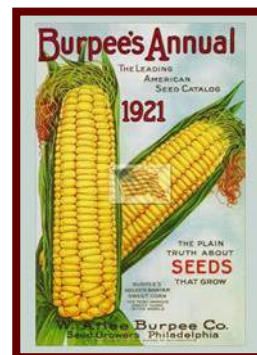
Like today's catalogs, the old seed catalogs in Diane's collection are beautifully crafted advertisements to attract the gardener's attention. Before the Sears, Roebuck Company created its mail order business with thick catalogs, seed companies were sending out catalog advertisements. (A catalog in the early twentieth century was akin to today's Amazon website. Families could find for sale everything from pots and pans to house plans.) The oldest catalog in Diane's collection was dated 1847, though most were printed from 1890 to 1920. But seed catalogs dated from much earlier. Of those produced ca. 1900, many were functional, black-and-white publications, while others contained beautifully colored prints of the plants for sale.

The exhibit at the Black House is scheduled to open late spring. As you wait, here are three websites devoted to the history of seed catalogs that might pique your interest.

The National Museum of American History Library, part of the Smithsonian Museum, has a collection of about 10,000 seed and nursery catalogs from 1830 to 1930. Many were donated by Mrs. David Burpee and represent the beginnings and growth of a nursery business Master Gardeners know well. The information-only website is: <http://www.sil.si.edu/DigitalCollections/SeedNurseryCatalogs/intro.htm> It will, however, lead readers to a lengthy bibliography of the American seed and nursery industry, and biographies of "seedsman and nurserymen."

National Geographic published an interesting article, "Selling Spring Dreams: The Evolution of Seed Catalogs," by Rebecca Rupp. It's available online at <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/people-and-culture/food/the-plate/2015/02/25/seed-catalogs/> Rupp traces seed catalogs back to the 18th century. Among the bits of information in the article:

"W. Atlee Burpee (the W stands for Washington) went into business as a teenager, publishing in 1876 his first catalog, a four-page, poultry-dominated folder called "Catalog of High Class Land and Water Fowls," with an understated black-and-white picture of ducks on the cover. Three years later the "Catalog" had become the "Farm Annual," and was increasingly vegetable."



But, if you want to poke around in the old catalogs and see what they looked like, from cover to cover, check out the "Seed and Nursery Catalog Collection" at the Biodiversity Heritage Library, <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/> where pdf's of thousands of seed catalogs and gardening publications are available to download. Here's a taste of this library's offerings:

The Nebraska Seed Company catalog from 1903 promised "Tested Vegetable Seeds" at "Honest Prices." The catalog was 52 pages aimed at commercial farmers. The Rubicon Half Long, for example, was described as a "distinct American carrot ...introduced a few years ago." "It has rapidly grown in popularity... [and] is a wonderfully heavy cropper" that would grow without becoming "sunburnt" and produce 40 tons of carrots to the acre.

The "Annual Seed Catalog" for 1895 from F. W. Ritter and Company of Dayton, Ohio aimed to attract the home gardener. The catalog offered tools, "Novelties and Specialties in Vegetables" including "New Bush Beans" and "Flowers New and Rare" like the "New Mammoth Verbena":

"A truly mammoth strain of Verbena that produces uniformly magnificent trusses, of which the individual flowers are all of unusual size, and which also embrace a wide range of colors. In fact, many are scarcely covered by a silver half dollar. Per pkt, 15c, two pkts for 25c. "

Along with product catalogs, Burpee produced advice pamphlets and growing guides. From "The Annual Flower Garden," published in 1920:

"There is nothing in this world more beautiful than flowers. Growing in the garden, or cut and placed in vases, they constitute one of the loveliest and most refining influences that change mere houses into bright and cheerful homes. All of us can have flowers, and with such little care and expense that it seems too bad that anyone should pass a summer without their company."

And Coryell Nursery published in 1925 "Tips for Beautifying the Home Grounds," a 10-page planting plan for the urban home garden, including a diagram layout. Coryell also sold the "quality stock" to be used to "establish these home grounds as separate and distinct from other home grounds." From p. 2 of "Tips":

Planning the Home Grounds

"The artistic effect of the beautiful homes so often admired is a result achieved only after much study of detail. The home which seemed to 'grow up' among its surroundings was planned by someone and so were its surroundings. . . . After marking out the beds and estimating number of shrubs wanted, make out your list of favorites and be sure to order early."

So, while you are pouring over today's seed catalogs, thinking about warmer weather, take a stroll back in time to see the marketing of an earlier generation.



Catalog covers could be colorful, especially from companies marketing flowering plants. (I found these two figures online, currently marketed as posters by Walmart!)

Now Is A Good Time to Start Seeds

By Susan Perry

Now is a great time to get a jump on growing cool season vegetables. Starting seeds indoors will mean you'll have seedlings ready to be transplanted outdoors in late March and April. Good candidates are lettuce, spinach, chard, broccoli, onions, leeks, and cabbage. If you haven't yet ordered your seeds this year, it's fine to use seeds leftover from last year. While seeds are best used in the year specified on the packet, most remain viable for several years, simply with some reduced germination as time passes.

The first factor to consider is the average date of last spring frost in your area. A good place to find this for the New River Valley is from a document from Virginia Tech (https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-331/426-331_pdf.pdf). Using the average last frost date in conjunction with the Recommended Planting Dates chart, you can figure out when you will be able to plant your seedlings outdoors (let's call this the "set out date"). But you still need to figure out when to start seeds indoors.

Generally, the following are approximate timeframes to start your seeds:

- ◇ Onions & Leeks: start seeds 8 – 12 weeks before set out date calculated from the Recommended Planting Dates chart mentioned above.
- ◇ Lettuce, Spinach, & Chard: start seeds 5 – 6 weeks before set out date calculated from the Recommended Planting Dates chart mentioned above.
- ◇ Beets, Cabbage, & Broccoli: start seeds 4 – 6 weeks before set out date calculated from the Recommended Planting Dates chart mentioned above.

I normally start my seeds in a moist, soil-less medium and use a seed starting pad to heat the medium. Despite being cool season vegetables, all of the vegetables above require a soil temperature of at

least 35 degrees for germination, and the optimal soil temperature for all is between 40 – 70 degrees.

Once your seeds have germinated, it's important to give them what they need to keep them healthy: adequate light, water, and soil temperature. To insure healthy seedlings, it's best to grow them in a south-facing window. Insufficient light during late winter/early spring can result in spindly plants. One benefit of starting cool season vegetables indoors from seed is that seedlings can be left outdoors on sunny days when daytime temperatures are 40 degrees or above. This way, they will get a lot of light while enjoying gentle breezes and cool temps! Just be sure to bring them in every night so they don't freeze.

In addition to adequate light, it's important to insure that your growing medium stays evenly moist and that the minimum soil temperature is maintained. Once your seeds have germinated and developed a full set of leaves (do not count the immature cotyledon leaves), you can move them into a larger container when necessary.

To make sure you have a supply of seedlings for the various vegetables you want to grow, consider planting small batches of seeds every other week, known as succession planting. For example, plant 6 lettuce seeds in week one, 6 more in week three, and 6 more in week five. This way, you can have seedlings to plant every two weeks in March and April, giving you the opportunity to harvest lettuce in April and May. You can use succession planting when you start seeds indoors and then transplant the seedlings outside OR when you directly plant seed in your garden once the temperature warms up. If you succession plant all your seeds (lettuce, spinach, chard, etc.), you'll have veggies to harvest throughout the growing season.

EDUCATION DAY

Education Day is coming up for the Virginia Master Gardener Association. Here are the details available at this time.

Date: May 4, 2019, 9am - 4pm

Place: Virginia Western Community College, Whitman Auditorium
3100 Colonial Avenue, SW Roanoke
May 2019 is the 25th Anniversary of the Arboretum on campus
Easy to get to from I81, Route 460, and downtown Roanoke.
Parking is easy
Auditorium seats 100 so register early
Registration at 8:30am. Program begins at 9am.

Speakers: Clark BeCraft, Coordinator of Horticultural Department: Introduction
Lee Hipp, Founder of the Arboretum: History of the Arboretum
Robert McDuffie: Arboretum Design and Photography
Stephanie Huckenstein: Edibles in the Landscape
Holly Scoggins: 15 Fabulous Perennials

Lunch: Included with registration fee. Catered by Seasons & Occasions.

Tours: Following speakers, the Roanoke Master Gardener Association will provide guides for touring the arboretum.

Questions: If you have any questions, feel free to contact Erica Jones.

Checks payable to: **VMGA** Mail to: **VMGA c/o 1171 Happy Hollow Rd Newport VA 24128**

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ MG (home) group _____

VMGA (\$18) _____ non- VMGA (\$33) _____

Lunch choices: Vegetarian? Yes _____ No _____

No gluten? Yes _____ No _____ Lactose intolerant? _____

Will you be staying for the Arboretum tour? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been to a VMGA Education Day before? Yes _____ No _____

How many times? _____

MASTER GARDENER PHOTOS



Courtesy of Ruth Ann Whitener



Courtesy of Ruth Ann Whitener

NRVMGA Executive Board

President: Lisa Lloyd

Vice President: Liz Swinfin

Secretary: Carol Cox

Treasurer: Diane Blount

Members at Large

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Kathleen Jones

Olin Whitener

Ruth Ann Whitener

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Courtesy of Ruth Ann Whitener



Virginia Cooperative Extension
Virginia Tech • Virginia State University

Comments, questions, and submissions can be sent to co-editors: Sharon Eifried (seifried@towson.edu) or Susan Perry (susan_perry@peacenlove.org)

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