



The Grapevine

June 2022

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

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Wendy Words

Congratulations to the 2022 NRV Master Gardener training class! On May 5th, seven Master Gardener Trainees became Master Gardener Interns, and one Master Gardener became active again by retaking the course. Congratulations to you all and once you earn your fifty hours, you will become fully certified.

Notes from the Coordinator:

Please read my emails. They are full of information, especially the weekly updates. We get many requests to be at events and I can't agree we will be there if we don't have enough volunteers. My emails are the most efficient way to get the information to you. It doesn't do any good if you don't read them. Thanks!

Please consider volunteering for Share the Spare Blacksburg. We have lots of days to fill and very few people have volunteered so far. Signup Genius for Share the Spare is in the weekly update.

Master Gardener College is on campus this year. The next time it will be on campus will be in 2025. Next year it will be in Richmond and in 2024, it will be on-line. Please look at the schedule and register if you would like to attend.

Want to learn about the new invasive pest, the Spotted Lanternfly? Theresa Dellinger from the Virginia Tech Insect lab will be teaching us everything we need to know about this invasive pest so we are ready to handle client questions when it arrives in the NRV. We should see it here in the few years, if not this year. The date & time of Theresa's talk will be in one of my future emails, just to make sure you are reading them. HA!!!

Have a great summer and volunteer when you can!



L to R: Wendy Silverman, Karen Parker, Cindy Lubin, Julie Miller, Pat Rodgers, Ree Richardson, Noah Morris, Rona Vrooman, and Susan Disalvo (became a Master Gardener again).

Photo: Lynn Brammer

Highlights from the NRVGMA Plant Sale May 7, 2022 by Beth Kirby

Another successful sale is in the books for 2022. This year's sale was, by far, the largest we have had -- thanks to all the generous Master Gardeners who donated plants from their gardens. Combined with the Rain Barrel proceeds, the sale brought in over \$8000 to support our Community Grants Program. Good job, everyone!

Due to the predicted rain, we moved the sale from the front lawn to the entrance parking lot. The location change was very popular with the early morning volunteers—they got one more hour sleep. We were able to spread the plants out better, keep the houseplants inside where they were better protected, and keep the large amount of yard sale items dry. This will probably be our permanent venue from now on.

We tried something new this year and had MGs start annuals from seed for the sale. While it gave us a better supply of annuals than we have had in the past few years, it still wasn't quite enough to meet demand. Learning how to grow plants from seed was a new experience for some volunteers. It is very easy but labor intensive. I am hoping that we can continue to encourage volunteers to step up and try their green thumbs at a new project.

Thanks to all the volunteers who came out to help Wednesday through Saturday. It is a lot of work to get the sale together and we couldn't do it without many hours of volunteer work prior to the day of the sale.

Now that the sale is over, the work does not end. Cleaning up the soaking signs, sorting pricing sticks, counting pots, and planning on our next digging adventure are all in the works. If you have an interest in the planning for next year's sale, please let me know. We will be having a large perennial dig in the near future that can serve as a source of plants for years to come.

Have a great summer!

Beth



Photo: Lynn Martin

An Ocean of Calamine Lotion, Some Goats, and A Man in a Hazmat Suit

by Ashley Johnson

My dad introduced me to a lot of music from the 1950s and I'm so thankful. The rhythms and the lyrics made it such a fun time in the music industry. I often quote lyrics or break out into a verse of a song from the '50s that leaves my husband totally puzzled. I guess his parents didn't play their music at the same volume as my dad or perhaps growing up in a bigger home is the culprit but, nevertheless, Dave is not very familiar with '50s musicians. It wasn't until we were moving to Kansas City in 2015 that he was introduced to Fats Domino -- because I was "going to Kansas City, Kansas City here I come" and I sang it as we drove west.

I've always liked several of "The Coasters" hits, but the one I've quoted most in the last year was "Poison Ivy," as we have found it popping up in every direction at our new home. It was climbing across our shed, tangled in azalea and hydrangea, weaving its way along the fence ... I could go on and on. Everywhere, just everywhere. If you aren't familiar with the song, now's the time you should google it. It's really catchy. Much like the rash associated with this native but irritating plant.

In hopes of avoiding dousing our entire property with chemicals and also not contracting a chronic case of poison ivy needing an ocean of calamine lotion, I set out searching for solutions. Two local businesses came to my rescue.

The first, **Virginia Poison Ivy Removal**, (vapoisonivyremoval.com) was the best solution for the established garden beds. Chris, the owner, decked out in PPE and making COVID precautions look lax, evaluated the property and dug out all poison ivy *by hand*. He followed the roots as far as he could, bagged the plants (leaves, vines, roots and all), and disposed of it. He offers permanent removal without the use of a single chemical and with minimal disturbance to the surrounding plants. After the initial removal, which lasted a couple days at our house and resulted in hundreds of poison ivy plants being removed, he comes back every couple months and removes any new poison ivy growth. I'm so thankful for people who are willing to dig poison ivy plants out by hand!



Chasing poison ivy through an established perennial garden bed

All photos: Ashley Johnson

Chris showing a relatively small poison ivy plant (only a few leaves above ground) with a massive underground root system. This is why spraying some sort of weed killer is nothing better than a temporary way to remove a few poison ivy leaves.



The second business in our quest for a poison ivy free yard is **Blue Ridge Goatscaping, LLC** (search on Facebook or call 540-835-4282). Zeke Reed, one of our NRV Master Gardener Interns, owns Blue Ridge Goatscaping. He came by to look at the front road bank of our property and said it was a perfect candidate for some goatscaping (you know, landscaping with goats). It is a horrible combination of invasive English ivy, climbing up my beautiful old trees and miscanthus (Chinese Silver Grass) from a neighboring property that is spreading anywhere it can, along with a few other things trying to grow in the mess. Normally, I would just get started pulling and digging, but there are also poison ivy plants mixed in every foot or so — enough to keep me out of the area entirely! Since I want the poison ivy, English ivy, and miscanthus all removed, this was a perfect project for hungry goats! Zeke fenced off the area with temporary, solar powered, electric grid fencing and then brought over 7 adult goats, 2 babies, and 4 sheep. They immediately got to work. Interestingly, they ate all the poison ivy first. I'm honestly glad they like it, since I do not. Then the animals moved on to the other available plants. In two weeks, the road bank was cleared off and ready for us to move on with a design using native plants that will: look nice, not give us a blistery rash, and offer some benefit to our area wildlife.

Another fun perk of renting animals in the spring time is baby animals. One goat, Paisley, arrived at our house looking quite rotund. She was due to give birth any day (actually, a bit overdue) and last Sunday morning in our front yard, her precious baby arrived. My (human) kids instantly fell in love with the new "kid" in our yard and got to get some snuggles in when Zeke came to load them up and move them on to their next job. It really was easy and entertaining to have rental goats and sheep. Sitting on our front porch and watching them eat the problem plants was such a better solution than trying to avoid poison ivy while removing all the other stuff ourselves.

The poison ivy problem on this property didn't happen overnight and the solution isn't instant but I'm very thankful for both of these locally owned businesses making it possible to fight the battle in different ways for different areas, avoid using chemicals in the process and help us move toward complete eradication in the future.



Goats inside the fence & ready to work



My youngest kiddo with Paisley's new kid



BEFORE



AFTER: The goats & sheep gave us a wonderful head start on transforming this area.

Carrots

by Annette Perry

Recently, I watched the presentation by eOrganic about breeding carrots. Not that I plan to breed carrots, but I hoped to learn some new information about carrots ... and I did!

Orange carrots are the only color I've noticed in the grocery store. However, now that I know about the super nutrient values of other colors of carrots, I am going to start searching for purple, red, and especially yellow carrots. Yellow carrots are high in the very valuable eye supplement lutein.

The highly colored carrots are also rich in anthocyanins, which have anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, antibiotic, and other healthful benefits.

Luckily, I recently received an heirloom seed catalog (Baker Creek), which contained seeds for all the colored carrots. Here are a few photos from the catalog:



Share the Spare

by Lynn Brammer

Share the Spare began in 2010 and has grown to be a steady presence at the Blacksburg Farmers Market in the high produce production months of the summer.

Beginning June 4th through the better part of the summer, we will again have our canopy out and celebrate the generosity of our neighbors and farmers who allow us to place locally grown, usually pesticide-free, nutrient-rich fruits, herbs, and vegetables on the tables of those in our community who are in dire need of healthy options. In addition, we serve as a Plant Clinic, giving away our planting charts, seeds, soil test kits, and advice.

The market on Saturday (the only day we are there) is a bubbling hub of children, families, out of town visitors, and our own community. Their presence acknowledges the advantages (both physically and mentally) of a farmers' market.

Please consider joining us for a shift and see how your spirits are lifted by the generosity of others, as well as the lovely atmosphere.

NRV Garden Tour 2022

by Lynn Brammer

The New River Valley Garden Tour is celebrating its 26th year of bringing private gardens to the public through this annual tour. The Montgomery-Floyd Friends of the Library, along with support from the New River Master Gardeners, host this self-guided tour.

What we as Master Gardeners contribute is our expertise. Sign up for a shift and you will tour that garden prior to the public tour. This will enable you to become familiar with the dynamics and plants of the garden you get to host. It is an easy way to earn hours, while you show off a magnificent garden to the tour-goers out that day.

Or consider volunteering at the Plant Clinic canopy that will be placed at one of the gardens Saturday July 9th. The tour will be 9am to 5pm, rain or shine.

Checkout the Signup Genius and don't hesitate to contact me with questions or concerns.

Backyard Orchard ... in the making

by Ashley Johnson, Master Gardener Intern

According to Google, five trees is the minimum needed to classify an area as an orchard. When we bought our Christiansburg home last summer, it included three fruit trees: one peach and two apple. Not quite an orchard but you have to start somewhere.

Earlier this spring, March 29th to be exact, I spent a very cold morning outside at Smithfield Plantation with several other Master Gardeners learning to graft fruit trees. Our fall 2021 training class had to wait until spring 2022 for this final class because grafting fruit trees in the fall is not a great idea. Perhaps if John Chapman, better known as Johnny Appleseed, had the opportunity to take John Vest's grafting class, he could have varied the apples he planted to include some good eating apples, rather than just hard cider "spitters" ... but I digress.

During the class, I grafted two apple trees onto Geneva 41 dwarf tree stock, choosing the varieties *Pink Lady*® and *Golden Grimes*. After class, I brought them home, potted them up, and they spent the next 30 days in our dark, cool, 1907 farmhouse basement.

No signs of life yet from *Golden Grimes* but after only 30 days, the *Pink Lady*® apple had beautiful leaves appearing above the graft union! SUCCESS!!! I was all smiles moving my little apple tree out of the basement and into a shaded spot under our deck. Once outside, even in the shade, it started growing quickly with the leaves turning a deeper shade of green. It will stay in a sheltered spot until this fall and then be planted into the ground near our other apple trees.

I'm still a tree short from technically having an orchard but I'm that much closer to some excellent fall desserts... eventually!



John Vest demonstrating how to properly graft a fruit tree during the March 29th Grafting Class at Smithfield Plantation Pavilion.



Scion and rootstock



Newly grafted apple tree



New apple trees resting in my dark, cool basement, focusing on root development and knitting the graft union together.



May 2nd : After spending a month in my basement, signs of life above the graft union. A successful *Pink Lady*® graft! The tree will now be moved into a sheltered, shaded place outside.

All photos: Ashley Johnson

Travels Without Paige: Quarry Gardens

By Erica Jones

OK folks, you missed a fun & educational tour of what an extremely inspired pair of homeowners can do with a majorly abused/disturbed piece of land! On April 15th, I was part of a group tour sponsored by the Virginia Master Gardener Association at The Quarry Garden, in Schuyler, VA.

There were some wildflowers in bloom too, although it was so early that I had to bend over to see them. And, it seems there are more than a few folks who can now add a notch on their bucket lists, having gotten there.

The native American Monacan tribes employed the soapstone for a variety of purposes with gusto. The property became a soapstone mine in the mid 1900's; the Nelson/Albemarle area first had soapstone mines starting in 1919. The property has also been a local dump, as well as being logged. Soapstone was removed from the area via the Schulyer railroad, which was originally run by electrified trolley. The logging, in a sense, helped the wildflowers in places where a scattered tree cover allows light in. The logging also enabled a wider variety of plants and animals. The dump (in one of the quarries) was cleaned up with help by boat.

The current owner said they have about 600 species of plants and 35 'galleries' of native plant communities on the property. The property also has interesting soil types, given the soapstone dust mixed in the soil. The soapstone seriously raised the soil pH, created very thin soil layers, covered areas with lichens in fruticose form, and created wet spots.

One plant new to me was the 'shrub' Devil's Walking Stick (*Aralia spinosa*), which this time of year are very straight, prickly stems about the diameter of a walking stick.

They were busy making a thicket!

My knowledge of native shrubs is pretty marginal. If you want a good book on them, try VDOF's "Common Native Shrubs and Woody Vines". For you invasive-obsessed types, there is even a small section on them.

The owner continually makes improvements and hopes the deer fence around the 40 acres around the quarries will be completed soon.



Soapstone on the patio



The dynamite shed

We had some 'interesting' moments. One tour guest wanted to know why the owner did not bring in wolves to help with deer control. I flummoxed a different tour guest clutching a big camera when I confessed to pulling up pussy toes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*) with vengeance at home. (Weed = wildflower misplaced???!). And me, I still need more education on rocks and minerals.

See <https://quarrygardensatschuyler.com/> for tour schedules. The property owner has 'listening devices' for people on the tours. The paths are very narrow, so these really help with a group of 20 people.

There are indoor restrooms, a meeting area, a train exhibit, a set of blue bird houses made out of local wood (have you ever seen dogwood wood??), and a covered lunch pavilion.

For additional information:

- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24522526?seq=1>
- <https://www.pbs.org/video/quarry-gardens-schuyler-oalgos/>
- <http://www.virginiaplaces.org/geology/soapstone.html>
- <https://www.farmvilleherald.com/2017/08/the-schuyler-quarry-gardens/>
- <https://www.tclf.org/quarry-gardens-schuyler>



Birdhouse of dogwood wood

All photos: Erica Jones

Inspired

by RuthAnn Sloop Whitener

Liz Swinfin suggested we share new ideas for a new year. I was inspired!

I discovered that I can do a new thing with flowers, spending time with our granddaughter! In a recent visit with our Florida Whitener family, our 13 year old granddaughter Sarah Elizabeth and I enjoyed crocheting together. For me, it was a wonderful way to enjoy flowers without getting my hands dirty! Sarah created a bunny and a fish. We added some flower decorations to them! She gifted them to her friends.



Photo: RuthAnn Sloop Whitener

THOUGHTS ON THE MONTGOMERY MUSEUM GARDEN

by Beth Umberger

For over thirty years, Master Gardeners have maintained the garden at 300 Pepper Street, working with hundreds of volunteers throughout the community. This week, the museum officially moved to the old Wells Fargo Bank in downtown Christiansburg. They hope to re-open on June 22. The historic building at 300 Pepper will be rented out with the understanding that the grounds and the garden will continue to be a place that the community can come to picnic, walk, meet friends, or admire the plants that change throughout the seasons.

Currently, we are overwhelmed with the move and making adjustments to insure the future of the existing garden. I am rushing to implement my plans.

It takes time to establish native communities when you are using plants started from bare-root or even seed. Once established, these plants start producing seed and the number of the plants increases and the plant communities shift. At the same time, there are still invasive plants that require years to control or remove. I am continuing to work on the vision I have for the garden: self-sustaining beds with as much diversity of species as possible, as well as completing brick paths and steps. I'm thankful for the hard work of Gwen Ewing, Sandy Whitt, Margene Hersh, Dan Stewart, and others.

I want the garden to serve all levels of interest and for the visitors to make their own discoveries. Some just look at the pretty flowers, others search for cherry tomatoes to eat, or try to figure out what insect they are seeing.

Another goal is to continue to provide habitat for insects, which in turn provide food for birds and other vertebrates. The fungi appearing in the wood chip mulch paths is another important component of any ecosystem. Last summer I harvested two choice edibles, chicken of the woods and hen of the woods.

I have lots of things I would like to do in the garden. With the help of Mary Rhoades and Becky Novy, I am hoping to get some seasonal signs in the garden next summer. We are also potting up non-native plants that are being removed to make room for natives that support insects. These potted plants will be used in the Master Gardener plant sale next year. This year we provided native plants for the Kiwanis Park, Stadium Woods, Depot Park, personal gardens, the Master Gardener sale, and the New River Valley plant sale.

Recently, I have been frustrated when people walk through the garden as I am bent over weeding or dragging a hose and they start making suggestions about how I can improve the garden. Twice as I was pulling up invasive bishop weed, a neighbor walking their dog informed me that I will never get rid of the invasive plants in the garden. Well, I am and I have!

Garlic mustard is still abundant along the property boundary, mostly because the neighboring property allows their garlic mustard to go to seed. But each year, the seed bank gets smaller because I pull all seed-bearing garlic mustard first. Field bind weed is under control in the tall plant bed, but is abundant in several other locations. Constantly pulling

keeps it under control and sometimes eliminates the plant.

Burning bush, English ivy, Callery pear, privet, Asiatic bittersweet, multiflora rose, and wintercreeper are constantly seeding in from surrounding properties. We are still working on their removal, as well as Indian strawberry, and very aggressive natives, such as wingstem, panicked aster, Virginia creeper, grape vine, and Jerusalem artichoke.

There are beds in the garden that rarely need weeding because they have become so well-established with natives, while others still need lots of work to reach that stage. As natives are planted, especially during the summer, they still need water. Once established, unless there is a major drought, watering is not needed. It is my hope that as more of the native shrubs mature and start producing berries, more natives will be spread around the neighborhood and in the garden.

I have added up to 30 new species of natives a year. Some do not make it and others flourish. Several years ago, I was thrilled to have a person who is very knowledgeable about native plants walk up to me on Heritage Day and tell me that I had a diverse selection of natives.

At Stadium Woods and in my home garden, I have several invasive plants under control. It requires knowing the plant and its life cycle. In Stadium Woods, huge patches of garlic mustard have been either eliminated or reduced to a few specimens that I remove every time I walk past. Money plant is rarely seen. A European spindle tree is under control. Privet is almost eliminated and as seedlings appear, I remove them. Re-seeding into Stadium Woods is a problem, as the neighborhood is mostly rental property and many invasive plants have taken over in hedges and shrub borders. Three owners next to the Woods have given us permission to work to remove their invasive plants. I am growing natives in pots that we will plant during rainy spells or in the fall to replace the invasive plants. So I am confident when I say that we can and will control the invasives.

My greatest joy is seeing people walking through the garden and using it as a place to explore. I keep signs and explanation to a minimum, to allow imagination and observation to take place. Growing and sharing plants allows for the best educational opportunities.

All the gardens I have ever established have disappeared, but I want this one to continue. It is now a habitat that lots of creatures depend on for their existence. The Earth's ecosystems that evolved over millennia are in distress and this garden has become part of the solution.

May you visit the garden with wonder and curiosity about all the creatures that live there and find it a place of inspiration, as well as a source of plants and seeds for your own gardens. If you would like to help establish native habitat, I can add you to the email list that I send out at least once a month with the hours, work items, and interesting happenings in the garden. You will often go home with some plants as well. If you have a project that needs native plants, we like to share divisions, seeds and plants.

Beth

PHOTOS

Photos: Emma Patterson



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*Comments, questions, and submissions can be sent to Susan Perry
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A special thanks to everyone who contributed to this issue of the newsletter.
You know who you are!