



The Grapevine

September 2022

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

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From the MG Coordinator

by Wendy Silverman

This summer has been full of events and activities for the NRV Master Gardener Program. From Master Gardener College to plant clinics galore at area fairs and festivals to the NRV Garden tour, Juneteenth and Montgomery Museum day, we have been busy! Thank you all for volunteering at these events, in addition to all of the on-going or long-term projects we do throughout the NRV. I get requests several times a week for people wanting to be a part of our program. To date, we have 30 people on the waiting list to apply to be a Master Gardener and the number keeps growing. Last year, we only had 13 people interested. The numbers are so strong because we are a presence in the community.

Our yearly schedule of one-time events is winding down. We have a few events scheduled in September and October. Meredith Hoggatt will be organizing our involvement for Hokie Bug Fest this year. Junior Hokie Showcase, a 4th grade program we volunteer at, has been moved from October to March. Thank you again for all of your hard work this season. It is **you** who make the NRV Master Gardeners AMAZING!



Wendy Silverman

***Wildflowers of Britain Month by Month* by Margaret Erskine Wilson**

Book Review by Erica Jones

I stumbled onto this book in an exceedingly odd fashion – not sure you need to hear the whole tale.

It is a compilation of watercolors of one Margaret Erskine Wilson who lived in England 1918 -2009. She started painting British wildflowers in 1945, as an educational endeavor for some of her friends. She ended up donating the watercolors to a Natural History Society upon her death. Apparently, she also painted wildflowers in the USA (a brother lived here), Afghanistan, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, and Crete.

What I hoped I was getting was a field guide to British blooming things, but for those of us used to pen on paper drawings of wildflowers, it would be tough to use. As a set of very pretty paintings with multiple species per page, usually about eight plants, the book is superb. She did do paintings by location and month, so if you were rambling the countryside during that month it might work. When she got to the months of October – December, you see a lot of fruits and berries. Trees in flower and fruit form are scattered through the months.

She labeled her paintings with common names; the editors put the genus/species in the margins to reduce confusion. If you know any plant families, it is amusing to ponder the British version of some of our plants – for example their honeysuckle is “*Lonicera caprifolium*.” Is it as pesky as our Japanese version? Don’t know, but it is pretty.

The publisher – Merlin Unwin Books - has also published *A Murmuration of Starlings: The Collective Nouns of Animals and Birds*, as well as *Much Ado about Mutton!*

<https://merlinunwin.co.uk/pages/catalogue>.



Photo: Erica Jones

Gardeners' World is a British Tradition

by Liz Swinfen

Take it from me — British people are crazy about gardens. Anyone who has ever visited will have seen the lovely gardens at even the most modest homes. In addition, there are public gardens at stately homes and National Trust properties with professionally-run gardens. Visiting these is a very popular pastime. The big garden shows, Chelsea in London and Tatton in the North near Manchester, are multi-day events and attract many, many thousands of visitors and competitors, and are covered on TV. In addition, villages get decorated to compete fiercely in 'Most Beautiful Village' competitions and winners proudly announce their success on banners. There are multi-layered hanging baskets and colorful boxes in every conceivable window. It is a sight to behold.

I mention all this as background to explain why a TV program called *Gardeners' World* has become an institution. It has been airing weekly since 1968 and has made stars of the presenters, notably Percy Thrower the original, and subsequently, Alan Titchmarsh. The current presenter is Monty Don, a genial low-key kind of guy who operates out of his home in Herefordshire (west of the country near Wales) with his dogs, who are well-known too. He has a Yorkshire terrier called Patty and a golden retriever named Nellie, in case you were wondering. There, he shows us what he is doing in his garden this week, instructing the viewer how they can do it too. If you never opened a gardening book, you could probably learn all you need to know from watching regularly. The climate is probably a bit more temperate than here, less cold in the winter and normally less hot in the summer, although this year has been uncommonly hot, but near enough to follow most instructions.

In the US, it is televised on Britbox, Amazon Prime, Roku, and maybe some others. You can find many episodes on YouTube.

Each week Monty and the other presenters (Carol Klein is my favorite -- so enthusiastic) visit gardens and talk to the owners about why they have done such and such, or how they have overcome some obstacle like bad soil or shade or something. The visits I find hysterical are where someone (usually a man) has become obsessed with one particular plant or flower. They have become experts and devote all their garden space to this one thing. I've seen ones celebrating dahlias, gooseberries, and snowdrops but there are many and the gardeners are always treated with much respect. The wife is usually in the background fixing tea and when questioned, admits that she doesn't really care anything about this but is happy that it's keeping her husband occupied.

Because the program is shown weekly on Friday night at 8:30, the focus is on what is happening in the garden currently and always ends with a list of "Jobs for the Weekend."

I hope you can find some episodes to enjoy.



Photo: BBC

Travels With(out) Paige – Thoughts on the English Countryside

by Erica Jones

I was exceedingly lucky to go on a walking tour of the Cotswolds and Cornwall in May. I flew in and out of London, but saw nothing of it.



How could you not like this wisteria? The British seem to know how to keep it under control. Looks nice on the pinkish limestone.

England is an island and as such, gets ocean benefits for its climate. Believe it or not, the coastline is our equivalent of Zone 9, with central England a Zone 8. And no, unlike eastern NC, it does not get particularly hot in the summer -- 85°F is considered a heat wave -- and yes, they ARE currently having a heat wave! It does not get particularly cold in the winter – therefore, the Zone 8 and 9. My memory of reading books by British authors growing up is filled with the words cold, snow, and frosty but palm trees are all the rage along the southern coast of England.

Annual rainfall numbers vary but generally fall between 23-40 inches. I took too many sweaters, although we did have hail one day.

We started in the Cotswolds - west and south of London. It seemed like everyone in the small towns had some sort of garden. Even though we were in the countryside for about 99% of our trip, we saw almost no land that had not been farmed or lived on at some point. Acres of 'wilderness' like you get in Appalachia/

Utah/Arizona just do not happen in that part of England. Something I did not see were big forests like we have here in SW Virginia. Speaking of trees, something is killing their ash trees. We saw a lot of tall but dead ash trees.

The city of Oxford has a botanic garden (started in 1621) and tries to keep a wide sample of plant species from around the world. I was amused to stumble in the "Eastern US" section. Travel all that distance to see plants from home. Huh!

There were greenhouse collections and a walkway along the river Cherwell. The oldest tree in the garden was an English yew and yes, it was big. As botanic gardens go, it is pretty tiny (4 ½ acres) and is located right in town.

Cornwall is in the southwestern part of England and has a lot of coastline. The rocks switch from limestone in the Cotswolds to slate in Cornwall. We were there in the peak thrift season. Thrift plants are tough; they love to inhabit rock walls (with excellent drainage) and natural rock cliffs.

With the mind-boggling (warm) growing zones, and pretty consistent monthly rainfall, you've got tons of wildflowers. But finding resources to help identify the wildflowers my pictures, once I got back here, has been tough. Maybe Monty can help!



Slate walkway with stones stacked vertically.
Photos: Erica Jones

Summer Highlights



Erica Jones



Ruth Ann Whitener



Ruth Ann Whitener



Rona Vrooman

My neighbor has elevated container gardening -- literally. This year, he built a stand that holds 16 buckets above the ground. DIY inspiration?



Erica Jones



Ruth Ann Whitener

One Big Bug!

by Beth Umberger



Mydas clavatus (clubbed mydas fly) on
Asclepias incarnata (swamp milkweed)

Photo: Beth Umberger

During the garden tour for Sustainable Blacksburg, using an app called iNaturalist, I identified *Mydas clavatus* (clubbed mydas fly) visiting *Asclepias incarnata* (swamp milkweed) in Polly's pollinator garden at Hale's Community Garden. Polly and I were surprised at the size of the insect.

This large fly mimics spider wasps and is harmless. Adults are rarely seen because the time this insect is an adult is short. It is easy to identify because of its size, clubbed antennae, and all black color except for the orange on the second segment of the abdomen.

It is active in mid-summer when the adults feed on nectar and pollen. The eggs are laid in soil or decaying wood. When the eggs hatch, they eat the larvae of beetles living there, especially June beetles.

Learning about life cycles of insects in your garden makes you appreciate the complexity of our ecosystems and how to support these systems. We can leave logs to rot, eliminate the use of chemicals, and provide flowering native plants. The clubbed mydas fly is one of many interesting insects that live in our gardens.

Kroger's Dill & Cucumber Salad (found on Kroger.com)

Tried, Tested, & Given a Rating of 'Yummy' by Gwen Ewing

The sugar and dill combo is what makes this old-school recipe irresistible.

Prep: 10 minutes

Cook: 10 minutes

Total: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

3 English cucumbers, thinly sliced

1 small onion, thinly sliced

½ cup water

1 cup rice vinegar

¼ cup granulated sugar

2 tablespoons fresh dill, finely chopped



Photo: Kroger

- ◆ Toss the cucumbers and onion together in a large bowl.
- ◆ Combine the vinegar, water and sugar in a saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil and pour over the cucumber and onions.
- ◆ Stir in dill. Cover and refrigerate until cold, at least one hour.



Road Trip by Rona Vrooman

One of our road trips this summer included a stop at the Southern Virginia Botanical Gardens in South Boston, VA.

Despite the heat and humidity, there was something to appreciate and enjoy in every direction – plants, vegetables, flowers, trees, and sculptures. And the gratifying part is that the gardens are supported by the Southside Master Gardener Association.



Focusing on food crops, I saw a Children's Teaching Garden, a Victory Garden, and a Therapeutic Garden. All were safeguarded with high fences and watered using rain barrels.



The gardens feature a Native American Medicine Wheel Herb Garden. According to the brochure, it is the first phase of a larger project to celebrate the heritage of Native Americans. Ceremonial plants of cedar, sweet grass, tobacco, and sage encircle a tower, and carved totem animals guard each of the four directions.



Nearby, a sculpture of a young girl overlooks the Three Sisters Garden of corn, beans, and squash.



Pollinator favorites such as purple coneflower and *Liatris* were doing their job. And, because this was previously a major tobacco farming area, I wasn't surprised to see *Nicotiana*.

Tucked into the corner was a Music Garden with larger than life xylophones and chimes.



As we were leaving, I spoke to a volunteer who was rejuvenating a bed. She smiled when she told me she had more than 4,000 hours!

Photos: Rona Vrooman

Quick 'College' Review

by Erica Jones

I only saw four members of our local Master Gardeners at Master Gardener College, although I admit I missed Thursday and the short Sunday session. Someone asked me why more locals don't come. I do not really know, although I know early June can be a busy time of year for gardens and families. A few people I quizzed were, gasp, traveling.

Here are some random jottings of my experience at Master Gardener College:

- I need to apologize to the check-in folks. I had problems signing up on the website with my "VT.EDU" email address. In a flurry of impatience and aggravation, I signed up under my dog's name ... and forgot. Well, they could not find Erica anywhere until Wendy remembered the name of my pound-pup. Go Wendy! So, call me Paige now, please.
- Teaching styles:
 - ◊ The first speaker I heard, Janine Woods, showed up dressed to the nine's and captivated the audience with her delivery and willingness to take on some potentially sensitive topics (race, poverty, discrimination, etc.). She got the audience to participate.
 - ◊ The head of the soil testing lab, tackling a potentially very boring topic, regaled us with some of the questions the lab has gotten from people looking at their soil test results. "No question is too dumb"!!!
 - ◊ The associate extension agent from Roanoke, Shawn Jadrnicek, whose focus is irrigation, let us pepper him with questions. He cantered through some potentially confusing numbers but sent us home with excellent handouts. Different soil types can take irrigation at dramatically different rates, before you get runoff. We got an earful from Shawn about why he does not like raised beds. He suggests mounded rows covered with landscape fabric. His points about the problems with raised beds really struck home with some of us and left us squirming. Yes, landscape fabric certainly can be used intelligently (but is often used very poorly).
 - ◊ Laurie Fox (Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center) briefly detoured into why she took a more philosophical approach instead of her original plan of a 'do this, do that, don't do this' presentation. She decided she could not cover enough material in her 90 minutes. (I took a graduate level class on 'how to teach kids to read' and one of the professor's major points was 'less is more'. He thought teaching was much more effective if you covered less stuff more thoroughly and repeated yourself often.)
 - ◊ And finally, Cole Burrell had some excellent photographs to back up his talk.
- And yes, someone brought up the idea of recycling human urine. Must be the 'hot topic.' He said his wife was not so keen on the idea. Hmmm ...
- Are we rusty on interacting in-person settings (with people)? I'm wondering. I know personally, I was very uncomfortable dodging people in Derring dining hall for lunch. (VT students sure do eat well !!) But some (not all) of my efforts at gardening small-talk with random participants was sometimes brushed off. Maybe my ability to pick who to start a conversation with is marginal, but cheezz -- we were there to learn and interact, yes?
- Local plants sales are THE place to get plants! (Although please leave the out-of-control types at home ... or warn people, at least.)

(My very first) Master Gardener College at Virginia Tech

by Ashley Johnson

Day 1: I attended two workshops: one exploring plant problems and the second, an update from insect and disease experts about what they're currently seeing around Blacksburg and the state. We walked around campus looking for signs, symptoms, and possible causes. A bit of a "dying tree tour" — not one you would see on a garden tour, but fascinating nonetheless.



Floral design class. Author upper left.

My afternoon was spent in the floral design workshop. I love how a group of people, using the same materials and instruction, can create beautiful yet unique arrangements. Each one looked very different from the next.

The day ended learning more about the local food movement in Floyd, Virginia and celebrating Master Gardener milestone awards. 538 Virginia Master Gardeners were honored this year, including 12 of our very own New River Valley Master Gardeners. These 538 trained

volunteers have served a total of 638,250 hours during their time as Master Gardeners! Yes, they have given over six hundred THOUSAND hours of gardening education to the residents of Virginia. Imagine all the seeds sown - seeds of knowledge, seeds of passion, seeds of wonder, along with what I can imagine is a staggering number of actual veggie and flower seeds also sown during those hours. There are currently over 5,000 Master Gardeners in the state. I'm so proud of all we are accomplishing!

New River Valley

Montgomery, Floyd, Giles, Pulaski

Edwin Hurysz	250	Polly Ashelman	500
Bill Kealy	250	Ben Shwarz	500
Donna Stewart	250	Dianne Blount	500
Linda Davis	250	Margene Hirsh	500
Cynthia Creighton	250	Susan Perry	1000
Doug Mitchell	250	Beth Umberger	3000

In addition to our NRV Master Gardeners in attendance and those recognized for milestone achievements, we also had amazing NRV Master Gardeners driving shuttles, leading tours, and serving as guides, helping Master Gardeners from across our state feel right at home.

Looking forward to day 2!

Day 2: We started the day looking at the role of urban agriculture: challenges, solutions, and finally, how Master Gardeners can contribute.

The next two sessions covered very important topics for gardeners: soil tests and irrigation. The instructors were excellent, answering all questions we had and several we didn't know to ask.

Before the class, I already knew how to properly take a soil sample and submit it to the soil lab, but did not feel confident analyzing and interpreting the results. I'm so excited to be able to better explain the soil analysis process and how to interpret the results to community members (and also be better able to shop for my own soil amendments).

I admit I chose the irrigation class for purely personal reasons. Watering gardens by hand is slow, dragging hoses and watering cans all over my gardens is exhausting, and I'm wasting time, water and energy - three very valuable resources. I need a better solution but I also know I'm not alone. I can share my knowledge and help others find better ways to water their gardens. I knew I spent a lot of time watering by hand but was shocked by the actual amount, when shown the results from some watering research performed. I'll be putting this new irrigation knowledge to use very soon.

We ended the day with a keynote address on Virginia native grassland restoration. There are so few native grasslands remaining in our state, most of us didn't even know they ever existed. This is definitely an area for action and major impact. As Maya Angelou said, "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

Day 3: We often think of “nature” as beyond our homes and yards. But in fact, we all live in nature. It is here, there, and everywhere. What we do in our own backyards has as much impact and importance as what happens in our national parks.

Today was spent thinking, learning, and discussing our role in nature as Master Gardeners. The morning began by exploring Virginia's 10-year *Wildlife Viewing Plan*. Before this week, I didn't even know we had a state wildlife viewing plan. Did you? The afternoon session focused on “nature as gardener” and how we can work with natural processes, rather than battling against them in our yards and gardens. In between these two keynote presentations, I attended a session on resilient and sustainable landscapes.

Have you ever heard this quote? “You should sit in nature for 20 minutes every day. Unless you're busy, and, in that case, you should sit an hour.” No idea who first said it, but I could NOT agree more. Whether you are local to the New River Valley, traveling to Blacksburg, or just driving past exit 118 on Interstate 81, I HIGHLY suggest a stop at the Hahn Horticulture Garden. You'll love it!

During the lunch break today, I took a very short walk from Litton-Reaves, the building where most of our events were held, to the Hahn. First, I wandered down different pathways, tested my plant ID skills (love the ID tags throughout the garden), then parked myself in the sweetest little wooden chair by the Jane Andrews Memorial Stream Garden. The water is babbling, the birds singing, a huge magnolia is keeping me cool in the shade, and there's not a mosquito in sight. It's perfection, my friends — the perfect spot to sit and ponder my role in nature and how to be a good steward of the bit of nature where I live.



With Erica Jones.

We ended our day with a meeting of the Virginia Master Gardeners Association. A new slate of officers was installed, reports shared, and our very own Erica Jones, along with other members of the Scholarship Committee, awarded several scholarships to deserving VMGA members.

Day 4: On our final day, we heard from author Barbara Pleasant. She recently wrote *Home Grown Pantry*, a guide for gardeners wishing to eat year-round from their own gardens. I'm looking forward to learning more about food preservation techniques.

We also had a keynote address from Alonso Abugattas about the ethnobotany and folklore of plants. He first defined “ethnobotany” for the audience. Simply put, ethnobotany is the study of how people relate to and use plants in their lives. This was a very interesting subject. We looked at several plants and their uses throughout history. He shared stories of wars fought with both sides using the same plants to dye wool for uniforms. Fighting between two groups with everyone dressed exactly alike, what could possibly go wrong? Yup, they had to find other sources for dye or everyone would die.



With Barbara Pleasant.

Thank you: The 2022 Master Gardener College at Virginia Tech was such a fun experience and I truly appreciate our NRVMGAs for awarding me a scholarship and opportunity to attend. Master Gardener College will be held again next summer, but the date and location have not yet been announced. I would encourage all Master Gardeners attend. The workshop topics, speakers, and tours change every year and there is something to interest everyone. It is a great way to meet other Master Gardeners and to share ideas. I met people during the event who were brand new 2022 trainees, as well as those who were receiving their milestone award for 16,000 hours served, and many people somewhere in between those two. Master Gardener College is a wonderful way to continue our mission as Master Gardeners: to share gardening-related knowledge with our community while continuing to learn (and grow!) ourselves.



Photos: Ashley Johnson

The Bulletin Board

(something new)

From Wendy:

Each year, a certified Master Gardener needs to acquire 8 hours of continuing education (CE). Now, it's easier than ever to earn these continuing education credits simply because there are so many different ways to earn them. You don't even need to travel anywhere if you don't want to!

You can earn all eight of your CE credit by attending webinars, Zoom meetings, and YouTube trainings, and as always, in-person trainings and field trips. A maximum of 4 hours can come from reading books and gardening articles.

From Carol Trutt:

The 2023 Community Grant Applications will be available on September 1st, so keep your eyes open. It will appear on NRVMastergardeners.com website and our New River Valley Master Gardener Association Facebook page. I will be sending the announcement letter and application out to schools, previous recipients, and others.

From Erica Jones

The October VMGA meeting will be held in person, in Williamsburg, a mere three blocks from the Amtrak station, on October 8th. The official meeting starts at 10am, although you are welcome to come any time after 9am.

This bimonthly meeting will be hosted by James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener Association at the Stryker Center, 412 N. Boundary St, Williamsburg (across the street from the Williamsburg Regional Library).

The North East Regional Amtrak route stops in Williamsburg, but getting there from Roanoke gets very interesting. You have to go to DC first, and then back south.

I don't know if JCC/W has a speaker planned but typically, the host group will talk about their projects and often invite you to visit some of them.

Garden Rangers at Plenty! Farm

by Elizabeth Bryant & Rona Vrooman

This summer, young people got their hands dirty at the demonstration garden at Plenty! in Floyd. From planting seeds to weeding and watering, from catching insects to composting with worms, from eating familiar vegetables to trying new edible plants and flowers, it was a productive and positive learning experience.

The demonstration garden highlights growing in small spaces and includes raised beds, a re-purposed swimming pool, buckets and growing bags, and pallet boxes and trellises, in addition to in-ground planting. Participants harvested several pounds of produce, herbs, and flowers weekly.



The Garden Rangers program is a partnership with Plenty!, NRV Master Gardeners (MG), and Healthy Floyd. Rachel Theo-Maurelli from Plenty! led the program with assistance from MG project leader Elizabeth Bryant and Rona Vrooman. Thanks to Wendy Silverman for presenting a lively and informative bug program.



Photos: Elizabeth Bryant & Rona Vrooman

Share the Plant, Share the Love

by Diane Relf

Share the Plant, Share the Love was very successful at Heritage Day 2022 - Pepper Street Gardens Branch of the Montgomery Museum of Art and History. We took 14 flats of rooted cuttings (each of which had 40-50 cuttings average) and only brought home four that have already been claimed for another project.

Plant lovers and budding plant lovers took home 210 containers full of rooted cuttings of one to three different compatible plants of their choice, and another 20 bags of unrooted cuttings. Most importantly, they all took photos of the QR code and URL that let them straight to the educational materials to teach them how to care for the plants they took home AND they agreed to share the plant forward as it grew.

Many got excited about the potential of sharing with adult day facilities and children's centers. Hopefully, we sowed over 200 "seeds" of plant/nature love and generosity. Thanks to all the Master Gardeners who participated in 2022, contributing approximately 2 to 4 hours each, providing both knowledge and skill training, as well as take-home-plants for future practice on these skills. And these EMG report having fun doing it!

Teaching new plant lovers: Donna Stewart, Christine Luketic, Dianne Blount, Darlene Whichard, and Susan DiSalvo.

Making cuttings and related activities: Beth Kirby, Christine D. Luketic, Gwen Ewing, Pat Rodgers, Deborah Roberts, and Ellen Burch.

Preparing educational materials: Diane Relf and Wendy Silverman.

Project co-ordinator: Diane Relf.

We have been asked to also do this next year at both the Tomato Festival and Steppin' Out. This may be your chance to see the light in people's eyes as you teach by hands-on sharing of plants, knowledge, and skills, **if current MGs want to start organizing it.**



<https://montgomerymuseum.org/events/heritage-day/plants/>

Directions to location: <https://montgomerymuseum.org/exhibits/gardens/>

Check out the QR code and the URL used to link program participants to the information about their plant. This is a quick and easy way to help the participant learn to educate themselves and does not kill any trees. You can find the information from extension programs all over the country and from some excellent commercial sources that you can identify by your research.



Set up and ready for the first group of plant lovers.
Photos: Diane Relf.



Mom and son are both happy with their new plants to take home and love. New baby daughter is not so impressed.



A little hesitant at first time to touch a sensitive plant. It brought thrilled surprise from kids of all ages.

Garden at Montgomery County Animal Care & Adoption Center

by Carol Trutt



The garden at the Montgomery County Animal Care and Adoption Center is looking amazing. With great help and guidance from Dianne Blount, we worked hard to get the garden in shape for the fall. Phlox is showing off its beautiful color, the sedums are getting ready to bloom and welcome the bees, and Russian sage is teeming with all sorts of pollinators.



Photos: Carol Trutt.

What's Still In Season?

by Emma Patterson

One of the most popular questions at plant clinics in mid- to late-summer is, "What is still in season – can I plant *anything* at this time of year?" This question typically comes up when someone stops by the VCE booth and checks out the free seeds (I am still stunned at times by how excited people get about taking free seeds home – almost lottery-level enthusiasm!) We advise them to wait until next spring (and to freeze the seed packets) for many of the earlier summer vegetables such as corn, tomatoes, and beans.

But yes, there is still plenty of time to plant *right now*. As Master Gardeners, we have all probably seen the beautifully colorful VCE "Recommended Planting and Harvest Dates" charts at our booth. Maybe we even have one in a place of honor in our *MG Handbook*, or know where to find it online (hint: <https://digitalpubs.ext.vt.edu/vcedigitalpubs/2283154249827475/MobilePagedReplica.action?pm=2&folio=2#pg2>).

So here is a fun quiz to test our knowledge of what's still in season when it comes to fall planting out in the open (don't worry, the answers are at the end)

1. Which vegetables can we plant outside between now and the end of August?
 - a. Broccoli
 - b. Cabbage
 - c. Leeks
 - d. All of the above

2. Which vegetables can we plant outside through Labor Day?
 - a. Beets, swiss chard, kale, kohlrabi, and lettuce
 - b. Broccoli, cabbage, Chinese cabbage, and leeks
 - c. Carrots, celery, pumpkins, and watermelon
 - d. None of the above

3. Which vegetables can we plant outside through September 15?
 - a. Mustard
 - b. Radish
 - c. Spinach
 - d. All of the above

4. Which vegetables last the longest outside – until late December or even early January?
 - a. Beets
 - b. Tomatoes
 - c. Leeks
 - d. Spinach

Okay, here are some answers: 1.d, 2.a, 3.d, 4.c & d. Feel free to circle the choices and keep this guide handy at the next fall plant clinic. Time for yours truly to get out there and put in some more lettuce ... happy fall planting!

Do Carrots REALLY Love Tomatoes?

by Susan Perry

After reading Emma Patterson's book review of Louise Riotte's *Carrots Love Tomatoes*, I got the book from the library so I could try some of the recommended plant pairings in my garden this year. I love trying new things and two were of particular interest: carrots + onions and onions + squash. According to Riotte, onions and carrots deter each other's insects: carrots emit an odor that repels onion flies and onions repel carrot flies. Since Riotte suggests that garlic repels borers and onions are in the garlic family, I planted squash and melons both close to and among onions (same family as garlic & equally stinky). My first attempt at carrots in the NRV in 2017, after years of success in Colorado, resulted in a VT lab diagnosis of carrot fly. Two years later, I got onion maggots. So I figured there was nothing to lose in trying Riotte's recommended companion plantings.

Let's start with the carrots, which I haven't harvested yet. The tops look great. And a recent deer invasion left a nice-looking carrot, albeit topless, lying on the ground. As Annette Perry mentioned in her article for the June Grapevine, carrots are extremely nutritious and have many health benefits. In addition, I consider the ability to grow large healthy carrots a sign of good soil texture, as they will be puny in compacted soil and may rot in clay or poorly-drained soils. It is also my unscientific belief that planting carrots, or any root crop, will help improve one's soil over time, if correctly rotated.

This year, I devoted one 18" wide by 12' long garden bed to 2 rows of onions on the outside/perimeter surrounding 2 rows of carrots in the middle. It all fit, barely, but worked well through most of June. The two 'quirks' I discovered were that in this layout, fertilizing onions must be done w/great precision because carrots definitely don't like nitrogen. I tend to go easy on the nitrogen for onions anyway, despite it being recommended, because hey, they're a root crop with the good part being below ground. But the little nitrogen I did use had to be as far away from the carrots as possible, which is hard in 18". The second 'quirk' is that it's recommended to stop watering onions 1 - 2 weeks before harvest, but carrots have to remain consistently moist until harvest. I think wider beds or just one row of carrots would have made these two 'quirks' non-issues. But the true success or failure of this little experiment will only be known when I start harvesting carrots. The onions turned out great. Of course, I am completely open to the idea that a lack of carrot & onion insects could simply be that the conditions this year weren't conducive to either type of insect. We hardly saw any Mexican bean beetles or Japanese beetles!

My second experiment using the information from *Carrots Love Tomatoes* was using onions to discourage squash vine borers. I had mixed results. At each end of the bed with the carrots & onions, I planted a zucchini plant. Each zucchini was planted within 18" of the carrots and onions, one at the 'head' of the bed and the other at the 'foot.' The zucchini at the 'foot' got



The topless Short 'n' Sweet one that got away ... from the deer.
Photo: Susan Perry

more sun so it got bigger, faster, and produced its first fruit on July 1. (This is the earliest ever!!! Am I the only one who had this weird result? I planted the zucchini seedlings on Memorial Day.) The bigger zucchini did get borers but we discovered & eliminated them in time. The smaller zucchini hasn't had any borers.

We have a second garden location filled with beds that are 4' wide x 6' long. In 2 beds, we planted onions – yes, we eat tons of onions! In the exact center of one bed, I planted acorn squash and in the center of the other, melons. As you can imagine, not wanting to compact the onion-filled soil, planting in the exact center was quite acrobatic, which at my age I consider a major drawback! Of course, the onions were planted in early April and I left space for the squash, which were planted on Memorial Day. By the time we began harvesting the onions after July 4, the squash & melons were still quite small because the foliage of the onions blocked sun from getting to the squash & melons. Once the onions were harvested, the squash & melons took off growing. To date, we have found no borers, one baby melon, and a number of promising acorn squash. Next time I do this, I won't plant the squash/melon in the exact center but rather, close to one side so they get more sun. As mentioned above, the lack of borers in this second location AND the lack of borers on the smaller zucchini at our house is not conclusive proof that the companion planting worked. It could just as easily be that vine borers prefer larger, more mature plants and the puny ones were not worth the effort. But I don't see a downside to trying these & other companion planting combinations next year.

One last thought. In a prior year, before I laid out defined rows, I planted a perimeter of onions and garlic around my entire garden. It kept all varmints (squirrels, chipmunks, & rabbits) away. So I remain optimistic that the stinkiest plants can perform some deterrence of unwanted garden marauders. Just hoping insects don't like smelly either!

Refrigerator Pickles

by Erica Jones

2 - 6 cucumbers (remove seeds from any over-ripe cucumbers), cut in lengthwise quarters
3/4 cup water
3/4 cup white vinegar
1/2 cup apple cider vinegar
2 teaspoons salt
1 1/2 tablespoons sugar
6 pieces of fresh dill
3 cloves garlic
1 teaspoon whole peppercorn
1 teaspoon whole mustard
1 pinch chili flakes
2 whole, raw grape leaves

Make brine by combining all ingredients except cucumbers and grape leaves. Heat the brine to pasteurize the garlic, then let it cool.

Put the 2 grape leaves in bottom of jar, squeeze the cucumber spears in a quart jar, pour the cooled brine over top. Should keep a long time but I make no guarantees.

Gardening with Growlights – Is It Worth It?

by Emma Patterson

Late last winter, the urge to get my hands in soil and start some seeds won out over the logical part of my brain that advised, "Wait a while longer." We know the feeling, right? It's been cold forever, the seed catalogs keep arriving daily in the mail, and all the indoor houseplants have had more than enough attention. So, it *must* be time to plant something for spring. Anything.

Problem was, my house is dark. I have one bay window that gets nice sunlight, but it was filled with houseplants. Every other window had a porch near it or had the wrong exposure. After three winters of trying, I had to take a smarter approach – would a growlight be worth it?

I justified giving into that urge to plant by telling myself, "It's for the plant sale. And you've always wanted to try a growlight, right?" To be fair, I did wait long enough to read plenty of growlight reviews, order three growlights online (costing about \$45 each), and to recruit my husband into building a place to put them. He was bored enough to agree.

So, in the spirit of repurposing (AKA it's too cold to go shopping), we found a set of adjustable metal shelves in the back of our storage room and started measuring. The hanger on each growlight (the hanger came in the box) needed a foot from where it hung on the hook to the bottom of the light itself. The instructions said the growlight needed to be at least a foot above the plants (so that they don't get burned by the intensity). To be on the safe side, we allowed 3 ½ feet between shelves. That gave us two 5-foot-long shelves, with plenty of depth for long trays. My husband attached the shelves to the laundry room ceiling and drilled in the hooks for two of the growlights.

Delighted with his work, I got out my new seed starter kits and several long trays I had borrowed (thank you, Beth!) and started filling them with soil and seeds. In all, we ended up with 18 dozen seedlings – vegetables and flowers. With some careful watering, the seed starter kits went under the growlights. The growlights came with two settings – a blue light for growth and a white light for maintaining and encouraging flowers. They cast light as far away as 4 feet (straight down or on the diagonal). I started with the blue lights, turning them on each morning at 7 AM and off each night at 10 PM.

Imagine my surprise when I had seedlings sprouting in 3 days! I'd never seen them pop up that quickly and was not at all prepared for success. Clearly the growlights were doing something. Within a week, I had to start transplanting the seedlings into larger pots because they grew right out of the seed starter kits. My need for trays expanded beyond the two shelves my husband had built; fortunately, I had plenty of trays, plus a few old cookie sheets. Remembering that 4-foot range for the light, I set up boxes on the floor beneath the lowest growlight and filled up more trays of seedlings to set on the boxes.

By the time the plant sale came, the laundry room looked like a miniature jungle. I had rotated the plants weekly to vary the amount of light. That gave the plants from the perimeter a chance to get closer to the light and the plants on the inside a chance to get away from the most intense light. I watered only when the bottom of the trays looked dry, which turned out to be every few days.

Was it worth it? Overall, totally. Lessons learned? Plenty. Next year I will start a little later so that the plants are not as leggy in May. I won't plant so many seeds (no matter how much fun it was). And I will figure out more shelving so that I can use the third growlight (and not need boxes). Is it winter yet?



Photo: Emma Patterson

Mystery Tree ID

by Eria Jones

This tree showed up in our yard about 10 years ago and caused a flurry, as we were ignorant as to its identity. The *National Audubon Society Field Guide to Trees* discusses habitat. It says "dry rocky uplands" (good yard description !!!) and "aromatic shrub or small tree with rounded crown." The range map does not have it growing locally - we have wondered if it traveled in via a load of mulch. Do not be fooled by the insect (?) damage on the leaves - leaves are supposed to be "shiny dark green above; paler and sometimes hairy underneath." They are that in the spring, but then this happens.



The fruiting bodies, in real life, look similar to green hydrangea blossoms. Trying to identify this tree via pictures brings up several problems. First, you can not smell anything, other than both the leaves and the bark have unpleasant odor. Next, this one photo does not give you any idea of its form (rounded, spreading, not tall, almost shrub). In addition, my reference says "leaflets of differing shapes and sizes" (oh bummer!)

The tree is a *Ptelea trifoliata*. Common names are Wafer Ash and Common Hoptree. Supposedly, in the past, it was used as a substitute for hops for making beer. Its native range extends out to Utah, and looks like it is more at home in less mountainous areas - eastern Virginia and eastern Great Plains. I think it has good potential as a yard tree if you could figure out the foliage problem. It makes a nice light shade too. This is the northernmost member of the citrus family.

Tree ID can involve surprises and the obvious. My camera went bananas with the color so the photos below are not totally representative.



I saw this tree on the Friends of Library Garden Tour. Any guesses? (I am so not being fair !!!).
Photos: Erica Jones



How about this shot? This is English ivy almost totally covering a black locust tree. Not sure how long this battle will go on. The owner could not remember when they went with this version of topiary but the ivy 'trunks' were massive. Obviously, the owner is working hard at keeping the ivy from spreading along the ground. When you walk into the yard and first see this at eye level, it is very confusing. I assume the English ivy is self-limiting in how horizontal it can grow.

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Comments, questions, and submissions can be sent to Susan Perry

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