

# The Grapevine

June 2023

New River Valley Master Gardener Association Newsletter

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### Wendy Words

Congratulations to our 2023 NRV Master Gardener training class! Once you earn your fifty hours, volunteered in 3 or more activities, and have 4 of those be a plant clinic or Share the Spare, you will become fully certified. To date, 21 of the 22 completed their training. Toni Pitts was a Master Gardener 20 years ago from Illinois. She re-took the course with us and is now recertified. Sheila Reyna will finish her test in the next few weeks and become an intern.

Have are great summer and volunteer when you can!



L to R: Deni Dillon, Rachel Wilkins, Martha Akers, Claudia Levi, Kay Hunnings, Ed Blackford, Morgan St. Laurent, Debbie Taylor, Susan Sisk, Laura Swift, Judy Rea, Donna Cunningham, Kristi Williams, Sue Tysor, Cathy Radford, Jim Radford

Not pictured: Kelley Laughlin, Sue Mellon, Toni Pitts (now a MG), Tina Plotka, Shelia Reyna (soon to be Intern), and Dawn Vaughn.

## Highlights from the NRV MGA Plant Sale May 13, 2022 by Beth Kirby



Photo: Lynn Martin

The 2023 NRV MGA Plant Sale is a wrap! We had a great day with only a few sprinkles early in the day. Cloudy and not so hot, so a good plant sale day. Rosemary Hartmann played bouncer and kept the masses at bay until 9 a.m., when they flooded the sale. Meredith Hoggatt actually got a video of the customers streaming across the parking lot.

We had a better selection of natives and our own Master Gardeners grew annuals for the first time. Learning how to grow plants from seed was a new experience for some volunteers -- easy and fun, but labor intensive. I hope we can continue this trend.

Rain barrels sold out and the yard sale was a hit as usual. Houseplants continue to be popular and we had a nice selection of some unusual plants.

We had quite a few "newbies" working at the sale this year and they all seemed to have a good time. Thanks to all the generous Master Gardeners who donated plants from their gardens. And thanks to everyone 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.

There is no better place to learn about plants and your fellow Master Gardeners than the plant sale. We also have a new, computerized plant database that will be very useful for years to come.

Have a great summer!  
Beth

## Two Pancake Recipes

by Erica Jones

OK, I will confess my mother was 100% German and we were brought up on some maybe-odd food. Or maybe not!

Buckwheat flour is sorely misunderstood. I've had some that makes me understand why people tend to avoid/hate it. If you buy vacuum-packed from the organic/highbrow section of the grocery, it is totally different from other varieties. Buckwheat needs to have the bitter hulls removed for best flavor, and apparently the fat in the flour will deteriorate faster than other grains. Store leftover flour in the freezer. See: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/food-science/buckwheat-flour>. This reference talks a lot about buckwheat noodles. Never had them. Hmm.

### Night-before Buckwheat Pancakes

1 T yeast  
¾ C milk  
Smidge sugar  
Pinch of salt

Put these ingredients in a quart jar; let the yeast dissolve. Add ¾ C buckwheat flour and mix. Cover and put in refrigerator. The next morning, before you heat your griddle, heat some water, put the mix in a mixing bowl and put the bowl in the hot water. It takes about 20 minutes for the yeasts to wake up. Then, add 2 well beaten eggs, and 1 or 2 grated apples. The batter will be thin; but if too thin add more flour; if too thick add more milk; if feeding a horde, add both. Batter will bubble slightly when it is ready. Proper consistency is very thin like crepes.

### German apple pancake

You need a 12" or so cast-iron frying pan to make this. Preheat oven to 450F. Apples can be of any type. Takes about 4 - 6 depending on size. Peel (or not) apples and cut into eighths - enough to cover the bottom of your cast iron. You want fairly small pieces; the smaller they are, the faster they cook. Add a smidge of butter and cook the apples (in oven or on top of range) until softened but not mush. Sprinkle with cinnamon, nutmeg, lemon juice, and/or sugar if you want.

Batter:

3 large eggs  
¾ C milk  
¾ C white flour (yes white; I think other flour would overwhelm the flavor)  
½ t salt  
Optional – 1 grated apple  
1 ½ T melted butter

Beat the eggs, milk, flour, grated apple, and salt until very smooth. Use butter to grease the skillet if needed. Pour into hot skillet with apples, bake 15 minutes at 450, then lower temperature to 350 and remove when light brown and crisp. Can reheat the next day if there are leftovers. Serves 4-6.

## Raised Garden Boxes: Build & Set

by Laura Swift

Our friends Lisa and Brent have 30 raised garden beds in Jamestown, TN. Brent has named them "Popkorn's Raised Garden Boxes." Lisa is in the Master Gardening training in Jamestown, TN area. Below is a photo of the garden boxes from our recent visit in March 2023.

Brent shared these building plans with Lisa's Master Gardening class while they were all visiting on a field trip to their garden.

I asked if I could share them with all of you. He said, "Feel free to share with anyone interested."

I have included his measurements and assembly instructions below.



Photos: Popkorn

### What You Need

#### **Boxes**

Quantity	Material	\$/Item	Total Cost w/Tax
11	2"x4"x12'	6.98	84
1	4"x4"x8'	9.27	10
3	26" x 12' Galvalume roof panel	39.98	132
5 lbs.	2-1/2" Exterior screws	35.98	39
	Total for boxes		\$265

#### **Foundation Top & Cap**

Quantity	Material	\$/Item	Total Cost w/Tax
2	4"x4"x12'	16.98	37
1	6"x6"x12'	53.47	59
1	6"x6"x8'	26.67	29
1	4"x4"x8'	9.27	10
24	4" Simpson Ties, 50/box	35.98	36
	Total for cap/foundation		\$171
	Grand Total for one unit		\$436

#### **Fun Fact: How He Came Up With The Name**

*Brent's grandpa name is Popkorn because he loves popcorn and has it for dinner every Sunday evening. He buys 50 pounds of red popcorn at a time.*



## What You Need

The dimensions of each box are 135" long by 46-1/4" wide. Here's his cut list:

- 4 - 2" x 4" x 135" long wall
- 4 - 2" x 4" x 46-1/4" short wall
- 32 - 2" x 4" x 23-1/4" vertical studs
- 4 - 4" x 4" x 23-1/4" corner posts
- 10-1/2" spacer block for vertical studs

Metal Galvalume 5V Roofing Panels (cut by store)

- 2 - 134-3/4" long wall
- 2 - 39" short wall



**Step 1:** After cutting the 2 x 4 lengths, assemble them as stud walls using 2-1/2" exterior wood screws



**Step 2:** Place 4" x 4" posts in each of the 4 corners. Insert the roof panels and screw on the top cap (6" x 6" s are ripped in half for top cap, fastened to top of 2" x 4 wall using the 4" Simpson Ties)

**Step 3:** Install the water line for each of the boxes.



**Step 4:** Build and place raised garden boxes. After setting a 4" x 4" foundation, the boxes are placed on top, screwed down, and backfilled with gravel.



First row of boxes complete, with a gravel base and then a good clean top soil blend.

## Gardening with Lyle ... After-School Sessions

by Erica Jones

I had the shaky idea of having the kids take cuttings of fairly easy-to-propagate plants; taking them home with me; and seeing if we can get any rooting going in four weeks. I was told it might be too much for them to handle at that age, but decided to try anyway.

I talked about the plant selection (coleus, fibrous begonia, snake plant, and Thanksgiving cactus) and then them pick. I took the cuttings off the plants. Then, they tried to snip off extra leaves (not a good idea), applied rooting hormone, and stuck them in yogurt cups filled with pre-dampened vermiculite.

Please keep fingers crossed! The containers were put in the mini-greenhouses (aka plastic bags with wire) and they are currently hatching. I did modify a couple of containers because some of the children did not have the dexterity/delicacy to deal with small pieces of plants. We did have a few takers on the snake plant, amazingly, but coleus the most popular. No one wanted the fibrous begonias but I made a few cuttings.



Using clear plastic bottles as a mini-greenhouse is far easier to do, especially if you do not have 23 kids involved. I did this at home as a back-up. Hopefully something will form roots! I also belatedly started some cuttings myself, but they have not yet rooted. This gardening stuff takes planning!

Along with the cuttings, we had the children plant seeds for the propagation day. Wendy had some leftovers from a seed planting exercise at the Storm Water Days in Shawsville. The leftovers consisted of fabulous media-filled cell packs with three cells, lids, and seeds (of course). After the seeds are planted and labelled, you put the cell pack in a small plastic baggy and seal it up with a rubber band.

On both days, we gave the children a wide choice of seeds to try to start. And Martha Akers, one of our new trainees, had started some tomato seeds at home and brought them in (germinated!) for them to take home. We thought it important to have something for them to take home from each after-school session.

We successfully dodged using the word "sexual" (for propagation) and called it "seed" and "non-seed or vegetative." Phew!

As of this writing, we still have two more sessions scheduled with the 23 or so second and third graders, one teacher, and 3 other adult volunteers. I can hardly wait!



Martha added a trellis between the two low raised beds she built at the school. Summer & Lyle beneath it. Photos: Erica Jones.

## From the Association President

by Sarah Smiley

Hello NRV Master Gardeners,

I must echo Beth Kirby's thanks to everyone who took time to provide support for the annual plant sale and want to thank Beth for her leadership on this big event. I am not sure if Beth is ever NOT working on the plant sale, as it is a year-round labor of love. From plant digs to starting seeds, finding sponsors, and organizing set-up and sales, it is an event that brings out the best in our MGs. It is also a great showcase for our work, sourcing funds for project work in our communities, socializing, and giving the newest MGs a chance to jump in and meet all kinds of people.

Beth is requesting feedback from everyone on what they enjoyed and ideas for improvements for the plant sale, so this is a good time to ask you to reflect on your NRV MG experience overall. I always appreciate hearing what you enjoy and your ideas for how we can do things better.

One area the Board has been discussing improvement is how we can best highlight the talents of our members. MGs are people who enjoy learning and I know from conversations over the years that everyone has interesting hobbies and talents. A main question is: would you want to share your talents/hobbies with the group? Another question: should we design more of our educational meetings around learning from our members and supporting their work/efforts? Wendy Silverman is researching if members can note their hobbies or interests in the Better Impact system, and when we figure out if this is possible and if we can pull from it, I will provide you more information.

As a reminder, even though you receive the Board meeting notes, the meetings are open to NRVMGAs members. Your insights and ideas are encouraged and welcomed.

### Milestone Awards (as of 12-31-22):

L to R:

- Beth Kirby: 2000 hours
- Steve Hale: 1000 hours
- Mel Flaherty: 250 hours
- Gwen Ewing: 6000 hours
- Erica Jones: 3000 hours
- Ashley Johnson: 500 hours

Not pictured:

250 hours: Liz Mears, Dan Stewart, Emma Patterson, Annette Yearout.

500 hours: David McEwen, Sarah Smiley, Carol Trutt, Deborah Roberts, Rosemary Hartmann.



Photo: Susan Perry

## Meet Our Members at Large

### **Gwen Ewing, Member at Large & Historian**

I grew up on sand under a hot 100 degree sun in Augusta, Georgia. I'm the youngest of five children. My oldest sister lives in Augusta and retired on May 19th, 2023 after teaching kindergarten and first grade for 56 years. My other three siblings and parents have passed on to that great big beautiful garden in the sky. I retired in 2015, so I will get to teach my sister how to be retired.

I can remember my Mom taking us to the farmers' market and buying bushels of beans. We snapped them; then she blanched and froze them. My Dad gardened a little: watermelons did well, along with tomatoes.

I enjoy meeting new people and learning gardening techniques from each of you. I've been a Master Gardener since 1990 -- or was it 1989? I left work at VT's Graduate School at 5 pm and drove over to the Hahn Horticulture Garden on VT Campus, Washington Street, Monday nights, from 5:30 - 7 pm for 30 years. I still volunteer there! I also volunteer at the Montgomery Museum Garden on Pepper Street, in Christiansburg, since it began in 1991.

I hope to work with you on many projects. I especially meeting some of you at our plant sale preparation days and at the sale itself.





## Karen Parker, Member at Large

I have been gardening for as long as I can remember...working summers with my grandparents in nearby Glade Hill, VA on their tobacco farm (gasp) and helping my parents in their vegetable and perennial gardens. Even at a young age, I felt a deep connection to nature and the world outside, which has played out throughout my life. I am always up for a good science experiment and to this day I am humbled and amazed by my experiences in the garden.

I attended Virginia Tech with all my Ag buddies from Rocky Mount and majored in Elementary Education so I could share my love of plants and gardening with children. After graduation, my husband continued his education in Richmond. Eventually, we ended up in Oklahoma for a brief Army tour. It was there that I started my first vegetable garden. It was a great climate for gardening, and I was hooked. Next stop was Leesburg for 38 years. We lived in the historic district of town, with a small yard and lots of shade, so I had a long hiatus from the veggie garden. My attention turned to perennials and a small kitchen garden with herbs and patio vegetables. I was, however, determined to make my small piece of property into a wildlife sanctuary. It was in Leesburg that I created my most rewarding gardening experience, which came in the



Photos: Karen Parker

form of a water garden that my husband and I designed and built along with the help of our children and few neighbors. We maintained this peaceful oasis for over 30 years, as it provided countless numbers of science lessons for the children and endless delight at Mother Nature in all her glory.

As Loudoun County built up around us and we neared retirement, we realized we needed a change. Although we first bought land in Floyd Co, we realized Blacksburg was the right fit. Now I am learning how to garden on the slant of a ridgetop with eroded soil, surrounded by woods and lots of deer pressure. Being in the woods, I feel as if I am in "almost heaven" but I still have some work to do on learning to live with the deer. Finally, I have space for a vegetable garden again and I'm excited to continue my love of gardening and experimentation in a natural environment that was a wildlife sanctuary long before I arrived.



I was drawn to the Master Gardener program because of its basis in education and service to the community in the NRV. Being a graduate of the class of 2022, I have most enjoyed the educational opportunities provided in the areas of vegetable/fruit gardening and gardening with natives. In training, my volunteer focus was on food insecurity and I look forward to the upcoming active gardening season and participation in the many Master Gardener projects.

## **Morgan St. Laurent , Member at Large**

Hi! I'm Morgan. I live in Blacksburg with my husband, Chet, and our zoo of animals (3 cats, 2 dogs, and 5 fish tanks of mostly guppies). I've lived in the NRV since 2006 and graduated from Radford in 2013 with a degree in Information Sciences and Systems. I've worked at Moog for 15 years in the IT department.

I've always loved gardening (thanks, Mom!), but never really got into it until the past few years. My favorite part is taking a tiny seed and watching it turn into new life. I also have way too many houseplants.

I kept an eye on the Master Gardener program for several years before I finally asked my management to allow me to have off in the afternoons to do this thing that had nothing to do with my job. Luckily, I work for some of the best people on the planet, and they encouraged me to attend. So, here I am, learning from the literal garden masters and using that knowledge in my own yard, as well as to help others in the community ... and my own family, who suddenly think I'm a plant whisperer.



Morgan's Garden Helper Jake, already planning his next house-plant project.

Photo: Morgan St. Laurent

## Luralee Cornwall, Member at Large



I became a Master Gardener in 2010 in Fredericksburg, VA with the Central Rappahannock unit. I am a retired school teacher who taught in Lancaster, VA and Stafford, VA. I taught every grade but 7th in my 32.5 years of teaching. I have two children, two grandchildren, and a Down syndrome sister. My husband Steve and I moved back to my childhood home in Blacksburg in 2014. I love that I get to garden where my father gardened.

My father was in the AG Engineering and Agronomy Departments at VA Tech. His research was on no tillage planting and revegetation of strip mines, so I remember learning to identify crown vetch, etc. on car rides as a child.

I love attending Master Gardener College. Before COVID, I enjoyed auditing horticulture classes at VA Tech through

the Senior Citizens Higher Education Act of 1974. I enjoy volunteering at the Hahn Garden.

I like to grow vegetables, since I like to cook and eat. Unfortunately, the critters in our yard think I am gardening for them. I raise and freeze green beans for my granddog boxer Adora to eat nightly at dinner. The plants in our yard come with many memories: the grapevines, the rhododendron, and the humongous white pine on Willard Drive that was a Christmas tree when I was a child. My favorite garden tool is a kneeling bench, since I am happiest on my knees weeding, planting, and praying. I have spent many years caregiving, where I acquired a life supply of Tums. Since tomatoes like calcium, I put a Tum in the ground with every tomato I plant. Gardening restores the soul!

Member of 2021 Master Gardener Training Class



Photos: Luralee Cornwall



## The Bulletin Board

### Learn All Ed Blackford's Secrets ... OK, OK ... A Few of His Secrets!

MG Intern Ed Blackford is a man of many talents & he has offered to share some of them with the rest of us. Specifically, he grows, dries, and paints gourds.

On June 26 at 6:00 PM, Master Gardener Intern and Gourdaculturist Ed Blackford will give a presentation on 'Gourds - History, Uses and Personal Experiences.' He and his wife, Elaine, grow, prepare, paint, and sell their gourds at local craft shows such as Steppin' Out and Wilderness Road Festival. He is looking forward to sharing his secrets with fellow Master Gardeners!

The talk will be at the Christiansburg Government Center for all interested Master Gardeners. Hope to see you there!



Photo: Lynn Brammer

Ashley Johnson says, "I approve this message."



Now is a good time to plant okra. We will have okra recipes in the September issue.





# NEW RIVER

chapter

VIRGINIA NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

<https://vnps.org/newriver>



## Native Plants Sale

**Saturday June 10, 2023**

**9:30 am - 1:30 pm**

SEEDS-Blacksburg Nature Center  
Price House, 107 Wharton St, SE  
Blacksburg

- ✓ *We use sustainable non-peat potting mix*
- ✓ *We only sell plants native to Virginia*

**Restore habitat for wildlife  
with native plants!**



## 27th Annual NRV Garden Tour: Saturday July 8

by Lynn Brammer

The 2023 NRV Garden Tour will feature 7 private gardens in Blacksburg. This self-guided tour is sponsored by the Montgomery-Floyd Friends of the Library (FOL) with assistance from the NRV Master Gardeners (MGs). It will be held on July 8 from 9am - 5pm, rain or shine.

As a MG volunteer, your role will be welcoming those taking the tour, highlighting and identifying unique plants/trees, and answering questions. Owners often are available throughout the day to greet tourists but are not required to be out all day. You are there to assist them by sharing your knowledge about the flora and fauna of the garden in which you volunteer.

This is a wonderful opportunity for MGs to highlight sustainable garden principles practiced in the garden. Mulching methods, erosion control, use of drought tolerant plants, pest management, and watering methods are all potential areas to point out. After signing up for a garden, you will receive information via email regarding the background and history of that garden. You will be asked to take a tour of that garden prior to July 8<sup>th</sup>, to provide you with a comfort level and insight about your role. You are not expected to know the name of every plant in the garden in which you volunteer. Our presence as MGs adds to the tour and is a great public service. At one of the gardens, we will also host a Plant Clinic tent. Always popular, it is another opportunity for the public to view the terrific offerings we share.

As a volunteer you will be invited to attend our Sunday Garden Social (4 - 6 pm on July 9<sup>th</sup>), where we celebrate the garden owners (27 years of owners are invited), the FOL volunteers who check/sell tickets, our sponsors, musicians, artists, and YOU! The details of that event will be sent to all volunteers.

The tour is a wonderful day of community and fellowship for garden lovers. The NRV Garden Tour Committee is an all-volunteer team working hard to make each year a success. A percentage of the proceeds are given to the NRVMGA in gratitude for our participation.

We ask that if you intend to take the tour of other gardens prior to or after your shift, you purchase a ticket (even the tour committee members purchase a ticket). Tickets are \$15 and available June 1<sup>st</sup> at the libraries or via our website. All tickets proceeds benefit the local libraries: Blacksburg, Christiansburg, Floyd (Jesse Peterman), and Shawsville (Meadowbrook).

Our 2023 Master Gardener coordinator of volunteers is Dianne Blount. She will schedule shifts through SignUpGenius, share the garden owners' information, and arrange a visit prior to the tour. Many thanks Dianne!

Please mark your calendar for July 8<sup>th</sup> and consider working a shift.

Check [www.newrivervalleygardentour.org](http://www.newrivervalleygardentour.org) for additional information and photos.

Questions or concerns: Lynn Brammer.

## Thoughts on Trees, Yards, and Homeowners

by Erica Jones

I taught a 'beginning gardening' class at the Christiansburg Public Library in April. It turned out to be mostly discussions on landscaping, given that the title was as vague as you can get. (Be prepared for almost anything if you are not specific!) SO...

Two of my talk 'victims' wanted to talk about their semi-mature trees, and how pesky the trees were being because they had gotten tall and were making shade. As a result, these two attendees could NOT grow what they used to grow underneath the trees 10 years ago. No, not much grows well under trees, which can come as a horrible (!) surprise to homeowners who love grass. But given that we humans can cut down trees, some homeowners consider that an option.

I have stumbled upon on this attitude before -- some folks get stumped by a change to some aspect of gardening, and focus on what the yard looked like 10 years ago. I say, "Why fight nature?" Just mulching instead is the easiest, although I do try to convince them to explore plants for their newly shady area. I may have flopped -- I can never tell. One approach that has worked well for me is to talk about what other people have done in the same situation. I usually give some options and let the ideas stew. We all need some processing time -- maybe more as we age.

I did manage, I think, to tell the vegetable-growing person something useful. He was about to start anew with a new yard in new town. I gave him the suggestion of picking his (sunny + available water) area, mulching really heavily with newspaper or cardboard, covering that with a thick layer of leaves/hay/other mulch, and going away for a year. If the ground is really dry, watering first helps. What I didn't say is that I have done this myself and the only thing I ended up with was Virginia creeper (which is endemic in my yard). But it does work for many!

The other concern I heard was that commercial producers are growing plants (I assume not vegetable!) in soil treated with long-term insecticides. I have not read up on this lately, so could not be of much help.

## THE BLACKSBURG BOXWOOD MYSTERY

by Emma Patterson

On the corner of Roanoke and Wharton Streets, in the original 16 blocks of Blacksburg, sits a small white nineteenth-century house. It's the type of low, unremarkable building you could drive past for years (as I did) and hardly notice. You might also never realize it harbors a mystery – in plain sight. Outside the house, a giant boxwood is growing. The trunk is ancient and gnarled, about 10 inches in diameter. It appears to be nearing the end of its life, even as other evergreen bushes next to it – including younger boxwoods – flourish. Where did it come from? Who planted it? And how old is it really? A mystery comes to life. There is a story here.



Photo: Susan Perry



Photo: Susan Perry

Before we attempt to solve this mystery, first let's share a little about boxwoods. We all know them (or think we do) – the box-shaped or round evergreens used in English gardens or shaped into amazing hedges (think Edward Scissorhands). According to a University of Florida publication, *Buxus sempervirens*, or boxwood "is a fine textured plant familiar to most gardeners and non-gardeners alike. Eventually reaching 6 to 8 feet-tall (old specimens can be much taller), boxwood grows slowly into a billowing mound of soft foliage."<sup>1</sup> This same publication

notes politely that boxwood flowers "have a distinctive aroma that irritates some people." Romans brought the shrub to the rest of Europe, where they soon grew in the wild, and English and French royalty had their gardeners cultivate, tame, and shape them for pleasure gardens and mazes. One of Henry VIII's wives, Queen Anne Boleyn, found the smell from the palace boxwoods so offensive that she had them all removed.<sup>2</sup> Of course, she herself was removed shortly after that and the boxwoods returned to the palace gardens, but that's a story for another day.

Colonists emigrating to Virginia brought boxwoods from their home country. Those who could afford formal gardens established them to delight the eye. George Washington's Mount Vernon, for example, features *Buxus sempervirens* (American), *Buxus microphylla* var. *japonica* 'Green Beauty', and 'Morris Dwarf' (photo on right).

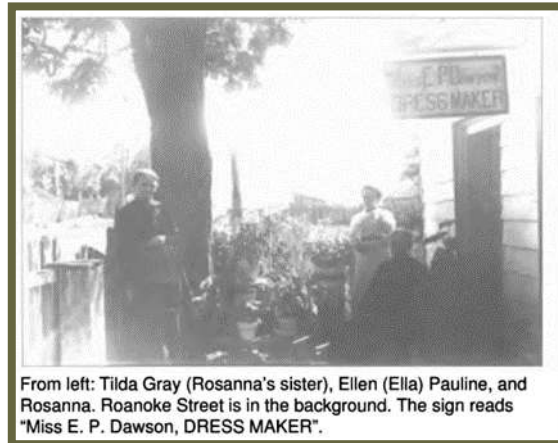


© Mount Vernon Ladies Association – Photographer Rob Cardillo



According to Mount Vernon's website, "Boxwood are the quintessential southern garden hedge plant. They are popular for use in knot gardens, parterres, edging, and as topiaries."<sup>3</sup> Their tree experts point out, "While the historic English boxwood (*Buxus suffruticosa*) are especially susceptible to a devastating and widespread blight caused by the fungus *Cylindrocladium buxicola*," newer varieties "have been bred to offer various levels of resistance."

Back in Blacksburg, in 1840, Rosanna Croy's father gifted the small house, originally a log cabin, as a wedding present to his 18-year-old daughter and her new husband, 29-year-old William Dawson, a teacher from Pennsylvania and Michigan.<sup>4</sup> "The Croy-Dawson house is one of the three log cabins on this block."<sup>5</sup> By the 1860's the log cabin was extended and covered with siding. Rosanna and William raised nine children in the house, and their daughter Ella, then granddaughter Georgia, continued to live there for 160 years, until Georgia's death in 2000. Rosanna and Ella ran a dressmaking "business from the house on Roanoke Street" after William's death in 1878.<sup>6</sup>



From left: Tilda Gray (Rosanna's sister), Ellen (Ella) Pauline, and Rosanna. Roanoke Street is in the background. The sign reads "Miss E. P. Dawson, DRESS MAKER".

And now to solve our mystery... Rosanna planted a boxwood near the original front door on Roanoke Street (which has since been moved to the side along Wharton Street). "The boxwoods on the property are said to have been transplanted from Mt Vernon, the home of George Washington."<sup>7</sup> How could they have lived so long? Although boxwoods are generally believed to live an average 20-30 years, they can live as long as "many hundreds of years."<sup>8</sup> The protection of a southern exposure and nearby fencing (before Roanoke Street was paved and widened) may have helped protect the boxwood. We may never know how the boxwood came from Mt. Vernon – a visiting family member? a grateful dressmaking customer? – but it reminds us of the Blacksburg and formal gardens of long ago.

<sup>1</sup> Gilman et al, 2022. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FP080>

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia (2010). <https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/3691817>

<sup>3</sup> Mount Vernon Ladies Association (2023). <https://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/gardens-landscapes/plant-finder/item/boxwood/>

<sup>4</sup> Sutphin, J. P. (2009). [https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/88163/SR\\_v13\\_sutphin.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/88163/SR_v13_sutphin.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>5</sup> Blacksburg Museum & Cultural Foundation. (2020). <https://www.theclio.com/entry/95822>

<sup>6</sup> Sutphin, J. P. (2009). [https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/88163/SR\\_v13\\_sutphin.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/88163/SR_v13_sutphin.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>7</sup> Blacksburg Museum & Cultural Foundation. (2020). <https://www.theclio.com/entry/95822>

<sup>8</sup> Royal Forestry Society. (2012). <http://www.treeandlandscape.ie/Tree-A-Z/common-box-buxus-sempervirens.html>

## A for Alpacas

by Rona Vrooman

Several years ago, we visited Smith Mountain Lake Alpaca Farm and learned some tips for differentiating alpacas from llamas, such as: alpacas are smaller and lighter, their ears are shorter and pointy, and their spines are slightly curved. As a souvenir, I purchased some alpaca manure produced by one of their adorable South American camelid mammals.

Whether you call it poop, beans, or fertilizer, the National Gardening Association website ([www.garden.org](http://www.garden.org)) notes that rabbits, alpacas, and llamas are just some of the exotic animals that produce usable manures. Because alpacas are ruminant animals with three stomachs for digestion, the output is less likely to contain weed seeds. It is also less likely to burn plants due to low organic content.

You can obtain it online or from a farm. Note that while alpaca web sites tout that it can be used immediately, other sites recommend composting first.

One thing I noticed was the shape – small pellets. The other thing I noticed was the smell (or lack of it).

How to use it? I have tilled directly into a new raised bed, sprinkled around established plants, and brewed a “tea.” Alpaca mama Jeanne from Chestnut Ridge Farm in Floyd, adds layers of manure with straw bedding to her no-till garden.

I see the value of using the manure to improve soil naturally and retain moisture, but when used alone, it may not provide the necessary levels of macronutrients. The Ask Extension website (<https://ask2.extension.org/kb/faq.php?id=309332>) states that “Since the Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium ratios are low (about 1.5:2:1), additional fertilizer may be needed and you might wish to get a soil test to know what your bed requires.”

While I’m not planning to buy a herd, if someone offers me “packa poo” – I won’t think twice about taking it. Alpacas earn an A for effort.



Alpacas at Chestnut Ridge Farm  
Photo: Rona Vrooman

## Tree of Heaven Talk at the Hahn

by Erica Jones

At a Wednesday talk at the Hahn, our speaker Tim Shively (a graduate student) actually found a poem about Tree of Heaven written by Florence Finch Kelly in 1926. One stanza goes, "You child of cement streets/Of clamor, smoke and grime/All plumed in green/A forest queen/To city folk you bring/The thought of far retreats." The last line of the poem is, "A balm of God's leaven." No accounting for some people's taste!

The tree was originally introduced into the US in the late 1700's as an ornamental! It is native to northeast and central China and can now be found in 43 states. We are not the only country to be struggling with it; it has infested Europe, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, and many others. The leaves are compound and one to three feet long and, if I say so myself, totally stink. Leaflets are pointed ovals (that is, ovate-lanceolate). The male flowers are larger and smellier than the female (tree is dioecious). Finally, if you are still not sure what you have, the leaf scars are gigantic.



Photo: Erica Jones

Tree of Heaven is a problem since:

1. It produces on average a million seeds per tree per year.
2. It grows in tough spots like road sides (disturbed areas).
3. It grows really fast (fastest growing tree in North America).
4. And for a tree, dies pretty quick (aka makes a mess) and
5. Is host for the spotted lantern fly.

It is somewhat allelopathic (like black walnut), although not to its own seedlings. Finally, it is fairly shade intolerant.

There are two organisms (besides the lanternfly) that live on it almost exclusively. One is an insect which has been released in Canada currently but not the US. Our speaker was doing his research on a fungus – a verticillium - *V. nonalfalfea* – which infects the tree's vascular system. After that happens, it will kill the tree in about a month. This organism can be introduced into the tree in 1 ml doses going under the bark – best done spring (April). Trees will also absorb it through their root systems. The verticillium was first noticed in Pennsylvania, when big stands of the tree were dying. So far, this organism is not been approved by FDA for use by us civilians. This may be because *V. nonalfalfeae* also infects hops (not good!).

Foliar herbicides will work, although you may need multiple applications. Cutting it down does not work - it will just sprout enthusiastically from the roots.

So, stay tuned. Maybe we will be able to get our hands on *Verticillium nonalfalfeae* in the future. I know more than a few Master Gardeners who would spread it with glee.



**PHOTOS**

Photos: Ruth Ann Whitener





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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 are THE BEST!