

November 2024

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Submissions due the 20th of the
preceding month.

Into the Garden

Leadership Team Letter

Jan Smith and Vicki Hall

It is that time of year to start thinking of purchasing and planting native seeds. I know the catalogues come later but looking for new sources is always fun. Our public program on November 16th will have Anita Tuttle and Karen Lyons explaining how to successfully sow native plants. RAMGA will also give away free native seeds to the public so they can try winter sowing.

Native plants are always popular, and you don't have to grow them inside! Perhaps you can try to grow some for our April 26th Native Tree and Shrub Giveaway and other RAMGA program plant sales? No harm in trying! See my "greenhouse" on the next page of this newsletter

Speaking of trees, the Natural Bridge State Park is hosting its annual Festival of Trees, and the theme for this year's event is "Trees of Hope". Donations will support Rockbridge Connect and Nourish (CAN), Project Horizon, and the Natural Bridge/Glasgow Food Pantry. This is a fun, social way for RAMGA members to get in the holiday spirit. JackeRose

Boston, crafter extraordinaire, is game to help. If interested, contact Jan Smith janhuntersmith@gmail.com We will meet sometime in mid-November to create ornaments and then choose a set up time.



In 2025 RAMGA will not be holding a large May sale. Kudos to the team who pulled off a money-making sale, but which required many hours of a few people's time. The 2024 Team should retire and rest on their laurels. The Board has decided that since we fortunately are not desperate for funds, that RAMGA should investigate different sale ideas. In its early stage, a team of members from the more recent classes will brainstorm, research, and then manage a re-invented plant sale(s). The first meeting's consensus was for a smaller, educational, kid-friendly and fun plant sale(s). Members will identify and then manage small components of the re-constituted plant sale(s).

Examples could be mentoring a group to grow vegetable plants, or leaders to plan kid-friendly activities. If interested, contact Bugs Utsey bugsutsey@gmail.com. This is an opportunity for our more recent members to make their mark on this organization.

Jan and Vicki

Here is Jan's "Greenhouse"



In Memoriam: Katherine Smith, 1940-2024

Reflections on the Life of Katherine Smith, by Phyllis Fevrier

Katherine Smith, gardener extraordinaire, was the driving force in establishing the Rockbridge Area Master Gardener chapter in 1994. She had the vision, along with the local gardening community, to join forces with the Cooperative Extension Services thus creating the current chapter's program mission. By designing curriculum and teaching classes, her goal was to advance Master Gardener students' understanding of native plants and ecology before it was even fashionable.

Katherine believed in paying attention. She understood native plants and why they are so important to our environment. She fought against invasive species way back in the early days.

Her plant knowledge was extensive. She once told me why *Abelia x grandiflora* (a non-native shrub) was ok to grow here. Her explanation: She had studied and documented the small wasp that came to get nourishment from the bountiful flowers. Instead of helping to pollinate the flowers by going into the flower, it pierced the base of the flower just above the sepals to get nutrition from the ovary area. This stopped the seed formation, and the plant was less able to spread by seed. This is one small example of how Katherine was an unlimited source of fascinating plant information.

Katherine worked hard to keep native plants front and center to our local horticultural education. She helped launch Boxerwood Nature Center and Woodland Garden in 1999. With great skill and effort, she aligned our small community's members with the Virginia Native Plant Society protocol as she started the local chapter of the VNPS in 2001 along with negotiating and funding the Native Plant Sanctuary at Boxerwood in 2018. The Upper James River Native Plant Society chapter is still thriving today because of her efforts.

Katherine's influence on Master Gardeners spanned decades. Her involvement included initiating projects, holding administrative positions, and bridging the local chapter with the larger VMG office at Virginia Tech.

Katherine's fondness for the Buena Vista Visitor Center drove her to introduce native plants to the project's small garden located on site. She is remembered by her loyal volunteers. Dave Bryer recalls the epic *Porch Talks*, where everyone could bring home gardening challenges that Katherine loved to help solve. Dave recognized that Katherine was a force to be reckoned, as she insisted on weed whacking behind the plant beds which had a 30-foot drop to the creek below. The group finally overruled her and banished her to the safe side of the fence. Barbara Ekin also remembers fondly the educational *Porch Talks* and Katherine's dedication and explicit directions to running the garden. Barbara notes that the Visitors Center Garden was often the location of pruning demonstrations, tool talks, and labs.

Susan Bradford beautifully captures Katherine Smith for those who did not know her. "Her zeal to share knowledge was boundless. That legacy will continue to echo through our RAMGA community."



And more from Susan Bradford:

When we moved from Suffolk and retired to Lexington, I knew I wanted to continue my involvement with Master Gardeners. I attended a meeting for the new recruits to meet the different project managers and learn about the opportunities to volunteer. I met Katherine there and wrote my name on her list as being interested, mostly because being new to the area, I knew where the BV Visitor Center was! Katherine kept communicating with me to come Tuesday mornings. Not hearing from the other project managers, I did.

Katherine proved to be an unlimited source of wisdom. At first, when weeding, I didn't always know if I should pull this 'weed' or if it was a 'native' and to be spared. When I would call Katherine over to ask, she most often did not reply with an identification and a 'Yes, pull it', or 'No leave it'. Most often she would ask, "Is the stem square shaped or round? If it is it's square it's in the mint family." She would ask me next, "Have you crushed the leaves? Do they give off an odor?". Then she might direct me to pull it and examine the roots. "Is it a tap root, or fibrous. Do they have nodes?" At first all I wanted was a "Pull it" or "Leave it", but I realized she was teaching me the investigative skills I needed to master in order to be my own problem solver. I wish I had one OUNCE of her knowledge. I will miss her greatly!

RAMGA FYI

Congratulations to Jennifer Olewine and Denise Meredith on attaining their 50 hours! Both are now certified Master Gardeners.

*Jennifer is on the left
with Denise on the right*



RAMGA PROJECTS

Natural Bridge Elementary School Garden

One Potato, Two Potato, Three Potato, Four - Natural Bridge Students Eat What They Grow

By Tamara Teaff



As a result of the harvesting of the potatoes planted by the current fifth graders last spring before the end of school, a Potato Feast was held at Natural Bridge Elementary. The potatoes were served with all the trimmings, including butter, sour cream, grated cheese, and bacon bits. Also, the kids were offered a selection of herbs to enhance the flavor of their potatoes. Students in grades third, fourth, and fifth plus faculty and staff received the potato treats.

The members of the Natural Bridge Elementary School Garden team who helped serve were Barbara Thomas, Lori Wood, Debbie Desjardins, Cynthia Roberts, Nancy Stikes, Becky Herndon, Bobbi Lahah, and Tamara Teaff.



Enjoying the Potato Feast!

Waddell Elementary Garden News

Waddell Fourth Graders Learn About Colonial Gardens and the Importance of Herbs in Colonial American

By Tamara Teaff

To connect to the Virginia Studies curriculum, Roots and Shoots Garden leader, Catherine Siegel, introduced the students to not only the importance of growing food in the Colonial period but also the value of herbs in the garden for medicinal, culinary, and aromatic purposes. To demonstrate, the students observed a model of a typical Colonial garden in which a small space was utilized for the growing of large quantities of food. Visiting the school's herb garden, the students had a hands-on experience with tasting and smelling various herbs while discussing how they were used. Students also made personal small sachet bags filled with lavender to illustrate how lavender was a valued aromatic herb for the Virginia settlers.

Those who assisted in the lesson were Master Gardeners John Sheriden and Tamara Teaff, as well as a friend of the school garden, Susan Small.



Model of a typical Colonial garden



Catherine Seigel explaining the multiple uses of the rosemary herb



Making lavender sachets

RAMGA MASTER GARDENERS in the Community

Mountain Day's 2024

By Kimberly Young

On October 12th the streets of downtown Buena Vista were bustling with activity as vendors and organizations all throughout Rockbridge County came together to celebrate at this annual arts and crafts community festival. This regional festival brings in thousands of area residents and those passing through just looking for some fall fun. What better way to usher in the colors of fall than an afternoon spent meandering the streets of this beautiful mountain town?

Our team of RAMGA volunteers spent the sunny afternoon engaging with the community. Volunteers discussed composting, answered gardening questions, and invited new members to sign up for the 2025 Master Gardeners Class. Questions for our MG's ranged from "What do I plant to get rid of mosquitos?" to "what programs are available for kids in our area?" and everything in between. Some residents stopped by just to say thank you for what we do within Rockbridge County. Stories abounded with tales of giant trees and garden adventures as folks have moved from state to state and climate to climate. The afternoon was filled with lots of learning and connection as well as a healthy dose of music and laughter.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Upcoming RAMGA Program

Can I Grow Native Plants from Seed?

By Karen Lyons

The short answer is...yes, you can. The somewhat longer answer is that many native plants require different planting techniques than those used for annuals or vegetables. Seeds usually form at the end of the plant's growing season, late spring through late fall. If these seeds were to germinate shortly afterwards, the young seedling would likely perish from winter chill, dry spells or other factors in the uncontrolled environment of nature. Native plants have evolved various ways for their seeds to remain dormant during the winter period, and some actually require the cyclic weather conditions to break dormancy. Each species has its own roadmap, but many follow similar pathways allowing us to recommend some general protocols such as "winter sowing."

To learn more about sowing seeds in winter follow this link:

https://www.ramga.org/files/ugd/c80da7_1b63bfaaa6234dbeba19c870b7160b60.pdf

Better yet, the RAMGA Seed Share Group is sponsoring a public program on winter sowing November 16th at 10:30 in the Piovano Building, 350 Spotswood Drive, Lexington. At about 11:30 following the discussion, we will offer free seeds that can be successfully planted using these guidelines. Please join us for the talk and/or seed giveaway. See the flyer on the last page of this newsletter.

We will still have our annual big seed giveaway event in January, as well as the free seed library at the Lexington Branch of the Rockbridge Regional Library available February through June.

State Office Webinars

Please take time during this quiet season to look back at webinars from this year and the past. The [webinar archive](#) contains an incredible amount of information, and many are worth watching more than once. We are fortunate to have such resources available.

State Office webinars are organized by Grace Stern, the EMG State Coordinator. They are intended to provide ideas and education for current VCE Master Gardeners. For suggestions or requests, please contact Grace at emgoffice@vt.edu.

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[Continuing Educational Opportunities](#)

For a list of books with up to 3 CE hours, as well as webinars by various agencies around the country, follow the link above. It contains information by stewards of trees, land care, and water. These look fascinating, even if you don't want to become a fully certified steward. Other topics are probably familiar: bugs, pests, pets, and pathogens, butterfly conservation, urban and community forest connection, peonies, and a toolbox with what to know about the spotted lantern fly, invasive species, and mite management.



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Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners Winter Sowing & Seed Giveaway*

Saturday, November 16th at 10:30am
with Karen Lyons and Anita Tuttle, RAMGA
RARA Community Room, 350 Spotswood Dr.



Come learn about the special seed sowing techniques
required for many native (and some ornamental) plants.

Free and open to the public!

We'll have a selection of plants suitable for fall planting for sale

*Seed Giveaway featuring some of these needy seeds will start at 11:30am



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