

December/January 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 seems just a few days ago we were enjoying fall colors. Today it was 15 degrees in the early morning! Many gardeners seem not to enjoy this time of year, but in a recent Wild Ones webinar Ben Vogt reminded us that “Brown is a color”. Meadows are full of different hues of yellow and browns and abound in textures. The red berries of spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), Cranberry viburnum (*Viburnum triloba*) and Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) cheer us on wintery days.

We have much to appreciate being so fortunate to live in the Rockbridge area.

And we have a community of fellow “plant nerds” to spend time with in our many activities. Our gardens delight visitors, our programs are educational and often quite entertaining, and we can’t say enough about our school gardens. AND we are especially fortunate to have volunteers who effectively take care of our finances, website, and public communications. And of course, we would not continue to exist without the class training

team and project leaders mentoring our new students along.

As we move forward through the next few weeks let us take time to appreciate ourselves and our friends.

Enjoy your holiday season and we hope 2025 is a healthy and happy year for you and your families.



The seed pods of native Eastern Wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpureus*), a small understory tree with lovely fall foliage

Jan and Vicki

RAMGA FYI

1. RAMGA annual dues are due, starting January 1, \$25 per year. You can pay online using PayPal or your credit/debit card. Your credit card will list the transaction as "PAYPAL ROCKBRIDGE".

You can also send a check to RAMGA, PO Box 1383, Lexington, VA 24450.

2. Hummingbird Hill Natives, a nursery in Crozet, has an excellent free newsletter. [Check it out here.](#)

3. **SEED SAVERS** FROM KAREN LYONS: Once again, our RAMGA Seed Savers Group will be presenting our annual seed event, open to RAMGA members and the public on Saturday, January 18th in the RARA Piovano Building in Lexington between 10 am and noon. We will feature over 100 species of plant seeds that our project members have harvested, processed, and packaged. In addition, we will be distributing seeds generously donated by several commercial seed suppliers and individual community donors. Master Gardeners will be on hand to answer your seed-related questions, and we will have informative handouts and examples of seed starting equipment.

Our Seed Library (available on the RAMGA website) will be updated in January to include this year's featured species. Information includes plant descriptions, pictures, cultural requirements, instructions on planting, and links for additional information. A visit to the library is highly recommended before the seed event to help in your selections, and again later in the year when you are ready to plant.

So, mark your calendar and plan on stopping by to pick up some free seeds and enjoy socializing with your fellow gardeners.

4. [RAMGA November minutes](#)

RAMGA Milestone Awards

At the Fall RAMGA picnic, members were honored for their contributions to the mission of RAMGA.

Photos by Bugs Utsey.

250 Hours (left to right)

*Will Guild, Ginger Reed,
Nancy Stikes*





*500 Hours (left to right)
Vicki Hall and Jen Coluzzi*



*2000 Hours (left to right)
Anita Tuttle, Faith Vosburgh, Anne Riffey-Buckner,
Peggy Agnor, Jan Smith*



Phyllis Fevrier

Recipients not attending the picnic:

250 hours – Mary Hodapp, Patti Jansen, Marybeth Sharkey, Jane Stange

500 hours – Ann Gruner

1000 hours – Lori Wood

New Master Gardeners



Congratulations to Louise Brennan (left) for achieving 50 volunteer hours! Louise has joined the Communications team as a writer and proofreader (Yeah!).

Despite some health issues, Pam Lightfoot and Jeff Davidson achieved their 50 hours! The fact we don't have their congratulatory pictures in the newsletter is due to the holidays.

We are thrilled to welcome the following 2024 class that are now official Master Gardener Volunteers! Cathey Brabandt, Louse Brennan, Catherine Campbell, Margo Clegg, Jeff Davidson, Debbie Desjardins, Pam Lightfoot, Denise Merideth, Vieve Moeckel, Jennifer Olewine, Cynthia Roberts, Donna Strickler, and Jeff Young.

We Came, We Ate, We Composted: RAMGA Fall Picnic

By Jennifer Olewine

I'd say the event really began with the winsome drive through Collierstown. It's one of those parts of our beautiful county with views so alluring, and those hairpin curves that come out of nowhere! The day could not have been more pleasant: Sunny, mid 70's.

We gathered in a large, partitioned picnic shelter at Lake Robertson. RAMGA members on one side and perhaps a family reunion on the other. I suspect it was the sight and smell of hot dogs that drew me to the wrong side. Before I could get comfortable, I heard "Ma'am are you a garden person? You're on the other side."

We had a very nice turnout which was more confirmation for this very green Master Gardener that this group is a fun, cohesive lot of humans. The picnic was attended by RAMGA members, family, and one very well-behaved furry friend. Many mouth-watering dishes crammed the large food table that seemed to be busting at the seams. I don't think there was room for another platter. Entrees, side dishes, Jersey-Mike's subs, desserts, oh my! Our buffet blew those hot dogs next door away! With so many hearty, indulgent options, my plate required a two-hand hold on my way back to the table.

Amongst our friends, including Will Guild, there was lively chatter. At our table, we talked and laughed about our families, RAMGA projects, troubleshooting our own yards and tending to Fall gardens- as garden people do. With full bellies, we composted our scraps- thank you, Phyllis- and got ready for the volunteer hours awards. Folks were honored for 250, 500, 1000, 2000, and 3000 hours to our community! Amazing.

The picnic was a huge success. Per usual, the food was plentiful and the taste out of sight. The company was like-minded, fun and friendly, and the weather was perfect. Ten out of ten recommend attending the next RAMGA picnic.

Before closing, I do want to make a shameless plug for the new RAMGA long-sleeve, buttery-soft tee-shirts that were sold at the picnic. They're screen-printed with the RAMGA logo (we used RAMGA patches as the template) on the left chest. They're attractive, warm and have laundered well too (on low heat). For twenty-one buckeroos, you can get yours too. Expect to see more at future RAMGA assemblages.

Addendum from Phyllis Fevrier. Our picnic had almost Zero Waste! I am so proud of this group. Only a small amount of trash and recycling, plus a half bucket of compost. Kudos to MGs from the Waste Reduction team!



Small amount of waste, recyclables and compostable material from the picnic



RAMGA Shines at the Festival of Trees by Tamara Teaff,
photos by Jan Smith

Natural Bridge State Park hosted its annual Festival of Trees.

In observance of the theme "Trees of Hope", the RAMGA tree featured our school gardens with the subject of "Planting Knowledge in School Gardens".

Note that according to Better Impact, 1750 student contacts were made by 27 RAMGA volunteers at 2 local elementary schools for 2024.

Winter Seeds

By Louise Brennan

On Saturday, Nov. 16, Karen Lyons and Anita Tuttle led a workshop at the RARA Community Room in the Piovano Building on winter seed preparation and sowing. A robust crowd of more than 50 gardeners attended, eager to cheer up their winter months by nurturing native seedlings.

As Karen pointed out at the beginning of their talk, there is nothing wrong with ordering seeds from commercial operations like Burpee; these seeds are designed to “appeal to humans”, and many of us enjoy them in our gardens. But Karen also provided the names of native plant seed companies (which are posted on the RAMGA website); these can produce wonderful gardens for pollinators and birds, though they demand a little more preparation. Karen and Anita were both knowledgeable and funny as they described their successes (and failures!), and many of the crowd were excited by the possibilities and techniques they explored for us.

Anita began by teaching us her “sandpaper” method of scarification, and Karen followed with a description of how to use containers—both



pots and milk jugs—to germinate seeds both indoors and out. Then

came the treats: tables of seeds to give away. There was a long line of eager “customers” who were thrilled to choose among grasses, wild columbine, goatsbeard, Golden Alexander, Black Cohosh, milkweed, coneflower, brown-eyed Susan, and so many more! Many of these plants are deer resistant.

If you missed this event, do not fear! This was, as Karen said, a preview of the **big January seed give-away: Jan. 18 from 10-12 at the RARA Community Room**. Also, of course, there is the seed library at our local library.

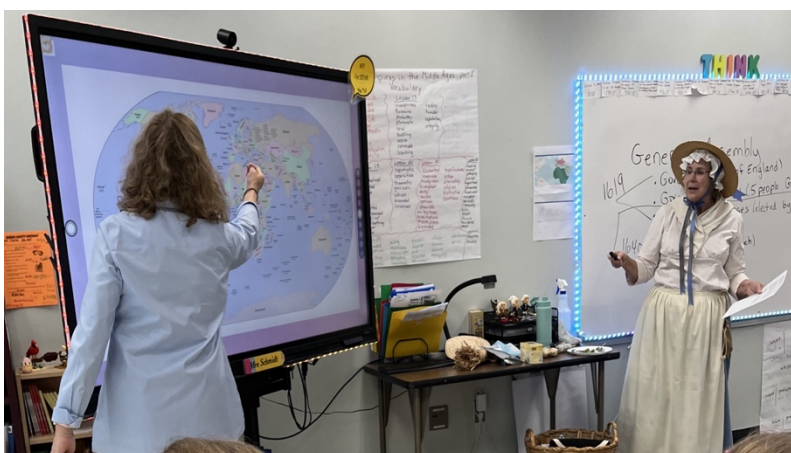
Many thanks to Karen and Anita for a fun and informative morning!



RAMGA PROJECTS

Natural Bridge Elementary/Central Elementary: RAMGA Connects

By Tamara Teaff



As an ad hoc project, members of the Natural Bridge Elementary School Garden Team shared information about herbs used in the historical context of Virginia Studies with 4th grade classes at Central Elementary.

As Barbara Thomas (right) dressed in colonial garb, explains the country of origin for each herb, Cynthia Roberts locates it on a map of the world.

Learning About Seed Saving (Photo from the NBES Garden Team)

By Tamara Teaff

Students at Natural Bridge Elementary worked with the garden volunteers to harvest seeds from the hyacinth bean vine that offers a privacy screen on the fence surrounding the school garden. These seeds will be used to replant the vine next spring. Through this activity, the kids are learning about the value of seed saving.



Gardens from the Ground Up

Photos and article by Louise Brennan

Editor's note: The following article is about two members of the class of 2024 who took their RAMGA training to the next level.

Although gardens are always a work in progress (put in a more joyful way, they are a new creation each year), many of us are lucky enough to have gardens that are already established. Yes, we have new beds to dig, new grass to sow, and new weeds to pull. But the shape and structure of our gardens are mostly in place, and we are now working to embellish and expand them. Some of us are literally building gardens from the ground up—as are Denise Meredith and Jeff Davidson from the Master Gardening Class of 2024.

Denise moved back to Lexington 3 years ago and raised three of her five children here. When the last of them graduated last spring, she began to have time to think about a “real garden.” With some land along Mill Creek awaiting her, she took the Master Gardening course and began to dream. Her first step was to think about trees—especially the possibility of a small orchard. So, she signed up for a grafting workshop at Wilbourn House in Brownsburg. There her teacher, Regina, gave her root stock, hands-on instruction, and the choice of several varieties to graft. Denise chose Wine Crisp, Virginia Beauty, and Pink Lady—all of which are living happily in big pots until she can plant them in their permanent home where they will form the foundation of her future orchard.

Denise was so enthusiastic about her experience at Wilbourn House that I drove out on a beautiful fall day to meet Regina (and her wonderful new puppy) and to learn about her passion for grafting. Her orchard is made up of about 50 trees, many of them with 5 or more grafted limbs! There reason for the multiple grafting is so Regina can harvest 5 different apples from each tree. (She jokingly calls them “Frankentrees”!) Around the base of each tree, she has planted comfrey as a nitrogen fixer, and her trees look as if they love it. When I visited, she was getting ready to take saplings to an event at Wade’s Mill; I was enchanted by them and their wonderful names: Pink Sugar, Watermelon, Goldfish, Strawberry Parfait, Frostbite, Ambrosia, Pink Pearl, and Cat Head, among others. I couldn’t resist buying a Pink Pearl, which is one of her red-fleshed varieties. Regina and her husband have lived in Brownsburg for 12 years, and her love for trees (there’s a huge Dawn Redwood at the back of their property) is contagious. You can visit her website (<https://www.wilbournhouseorchard.com>) if you want to visit or take a grafting workshop as Denise did.



A “frankentree”

Another exciting garden is being imagined by Jeff Davidson and his wife Michele. Having moved from Ohio (and its rich soil) to Lexington to be near one of their sons, Jeff and Michele took on the ambitious project of renovating a house and then establishing a garden. Currently, the house is the priority, but they have begun removing ugly plantings (like “junk old ewes”) from old beds that had been neglected. And they are full of ideas for working on their beautiful two-acre lot. Jeff has learned a lot about invasives, and he has his work cut out for him. But he’s also eager to put in shrubs and trees when he has time to think through a large-scale plan. And Michele, who is a veteran vegetable gardener (and cook), is definitely longing to use her skills.



The Davidson property

It is going to be exciting to watch each of these gardens take shape. Many of us know just how daunting a new landscape can be but the joys of watching a new garden emerge are worth the effort. We wish Denise and Jeff many hours of pleasure, along with the hard work!

CONTINUING EDUCATION

By Denise Meredith

1.

Facebook LINK for Virginia Native Plant Society Group

7th Annual Prince William Native Plant Symposium

February 8, 2025

“Stop Mowing, Start Growing:

A Native Plant Symposium for Beginners and Beyond”

Keynote Speaker: Doug Tallamy

<https://pwconserve.org/staging/3382/native-plant-symposium-2025/>

2.

Loudoun County Plant Nurture Grow - 14th Annual Gardening Symposium

Saturday, March 22, 2025

9:00 am to 3:00 pm

Academies of Loudoun

42075 Loudoun Academy Drive

Leesburg, VA 20175

Please join the VCE Loudoun Master Gardeners for this wonderful educational event. Four prominent speakers will share their knowledge and inspire us as we prepare our gardens for the spring and subsequent growing seasons. Featured Speakers and Programs:

- Thomas Bolles and Mary Sketch Bryant, “4 The Soil”
- Brie Arthur, “Aromatic Symphony: Captivating Garden Fragrances” and “Foodscape Harmony: Embracing Natives and Edibles”
- Janet Draper, “Chasing New Knowledge Among Perennial Change”

The symposium will also feature a marketplace with gardening items from local vendors and lightly used books. Visit bit.ly/MGSymposium2025 for more details, including speaker bios and an event schedule. Register before tickets sell out!

Registration opens on January 9, 2025

Tickets start at \$65*

*Additional fee for Panera lunch option. Attendees are welcome to bring their own lunch.

3.

Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia is offering a Youth Education Program! (YEP!)

The [LINK](#) is interesting and might give ideas to parents or grandparents. The website also offers dates and locations for demonstration gardens that might be new to you.

4.
Virginia is for Gardeners is offering a lot of information about resources for the future that might be good for which to know and plan. Their website [LINK](#) is interesting.

5.
For more webinars and reading suggestions offered by various agencies, please click on the Virginia Cooperative Extension and Extension Master Gardeners [LINK](#) here.



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.