

# THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

April 2024



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**Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardener community newsletter.**

Each month we bring you relevant seasonal scientific-based horticultural information for Rockbridge County. If you enjoy this newsletter, please pass it on. Subscription information is on the last page of this newsletter or on the RAMGA website, [www.ramga.org](http://www.ramga.org).

Virginia Master Gardeners are Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers, extending horticultural and environmental outreach across the commonwealth. Volunteers receive fifty hours of training and are required to do, at the minimum, 20 hours of volunteering per year and 8 hours of Continuing Education to maintain their MG status.

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**Upcoming:** Saturday, April 20, 10:30am, RARA Community Room, 350 Spotswood Dr., ‘Asian Jumping Worms: The Latest Invasive’ with Jordan Thompson, Virginia Tech MS Candidate. Free.

Saturday, May 4, 8:30 – noon. Valley of Virginia Herb Sale. Hopkins Green, Lexington. Cash or check only.

Saturday, May 11, 8:30 – Noon. RAMGA Plant Sale returns! Sam Houston Ruritan Barn, 1260 Valley Pike, Lexington. Cash, checks, credit or debit cards accepted.

## HAPPENINGS...

Local events are in a larger font

**\*\*\*Saturday, April 20, 10:30am, RARA Community Room, 350 Spotswood Dr. RAMGA Program: “Asian Jumping Worms: The Latest Invasive” with Jordan Thompson, MS candidate at VA Tech.**

**Saturday, April 20, 9:00am – 1:00pm. Native Plant Sale. The Nature Foundation at Wintergreen. 3421 Wintergreen Drive, Roseland, VA. <https://www.Tnfw.org>**

**Saturday, April 27, 9:00am – 2:00pm. Monticello’s Center for Historic Plants Plant Sale, 1293 Tufton Farm, Charlottesville.**

**Saturday, April 27, 9:00am – 1:00pm. Bedford Master Gardener Plant Sale, Bedford County Extension Office, 1257 County Farm Rd., Suite B, Bedford, VA**

**Sunday, April 28, 1:00pm – 3:00pm. Jefferson Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society Annual Native Plant Sale, Barn at the Ivy Creek Natural Area, Charlottesville.**

**Saturday, May 4, 10:00am – 2:00pm. Piedmont Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale. Albemarle Square Shopping Center, Charlottesville.**

**\*\*\*Saturday, May 4, 8:30 – noon, Valley of Virginia Herb Sale. Hopkins Green, Lexington.**

**May 9-12, all day. 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual West Virginia Wildflower Pilgrimage, Blackwater Falls State Park, Davis, West Virginia. A wide variety of tours and workshops each day. For more information: <https://wvdnr.gov/programs-publications/wildflower-pilgrimage/>**

**\*\*\*Saturday, May 11, 8:30am – Noon, RAMGA Plant Sale, Sam Houston Ruritan Barn, 1260 Valley Pike, Lexington.**

**Saturday, May 11, 9:00am – 2:00pm. Central Shenandoah Master Gardeners In-Person Plant Sale, Rockingham County Administration Offices located at 20 East Gay Street Harrisonburg. Cash and checks only. <https://csvgma.org/event/spring-plant-sale-garden-fest/>**

**\*\*\*Saturday, May 11, 9:00am – noon. County Council of Garden Clubs Annual Plant Sale, Hopkins Green, Lexington.**

## 2024 RAMGA Plant Sale Returns! Saturday, May 11, 8:30am – Noon, Sam Houston Ruritan Barn, 1260 Valley Pike, Lexington.

The sale will offer over a thousand annuals, perennials including native plants, vegetables, fruit-bearing plants, shrubs and trees, bulbs, and houseplants.

All proceeds support the many free and low-cost programs Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners offer to the community. Credit cards, checks, and cash will be accepted.

In addition to plants, we'll also have Kidz Korner, where one can

- pot a plant to take home
- design a plant mini poster
- read a plant book
- explore the Plant Sale to become a plant expert!

And much more!

Other Plant Sale features include:

- music from Lexington's own Little River Band
- a garden-focused flea market table with books, tools, and other green elephant treasures
- adoption-ready pets from the SPCA
- a plant clinic for answering your gardening questions
- refreshments available (coffee and doughnuts) from the Sam Houston Ruritan Club
- composting demo
- raffle
- tool sharpening (1 per customer)

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## APRIL GARDEN TIPS

### General:

- Before working in your garden, make sure the soil is dry enough. It should crumble in your hand; if it is not, wait until it dries out before working the soil.
- Clean up garden debris from last year.
- Pull weeds from beds.
- Work organic material such as chopped leaves or compost into garden beds.
- Mulch garden beds 2 to 3 inches deep with an organic material.
- If you did not complete your garden fertilization in March, continue that in April.

- Newly planted perennials, trees and shrubs will generally need 1 inch of water each week – either from rain or irrigation
- Keep an eye out for Asian jumping worms. Here is how to deal with them: <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/invasive-jumping-worms/>

### Insects:

“Insects to be on the Lookout for in April”, a great publication by Eric Day, Insect ID Lab, Dept. of Entomology, Virginia Tech

[https://albemarle.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/albemarle\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/files/hort-tip-sheets/4-14-insects.pdf](https://albemarle.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/albemarle_ext_vt_edu/files/hort-tip-sheets/4-14-insects.pdf)

### Fruits and Vegetables:

An excellent and useful VCE publication organized by climate zone (Rockbridge, for the most part is zone 6B heading towards 7) is “Virginia’s Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide: Recommended Planting Dates and Amounts to Plant”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-331/426-331.html>



This is the big month for planting vegetables. However, if planted too early, frost will kill your plants unless you are prepared to protect them on those cold nights.

- Plant out starts for cool season vegetables: broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, spinach, swiss chard, kale.
- Sow seeds for cool season crops: peas, radishes, lettuce, onions, beets, parsley, Swiss chard, spinach, kale, leeks.
- Plant cane berry plants.
- Plant blueberries and strawberries.
- Spray fruit trees with dormant oil spray if temperatures are over 40 degrees.
- Time nutrients to fruit trees at the fruit setting time. A good rule of thumb is to fertilize after the petals fall.

### Perennials:

Fertilize perennials and spring bulbs as soon as possible if not already done. I am a big fan of Osmocote, a time release fertilizer.

- Spring is the ideal time to divide most perennials, both summer and fall bloomers. Replant the divisions or share with friends.
- Remember that some perennials are late getting started in the spring; mark the spot in some way so you do not inadvertently plant over them.
- Delay organic mulching to allow soil to warm up but act before weeds become established.



### Trees and Shrubs:

If you are planting new trees and shrubs, remember to consider hardiness, light requirements, soil drainage, wind tolerance, mature size, insect or disease problems, maintenance levels, etc. when choosing your plant. Remember the “plant right place” rule. Here is another good Tech publication, “How to Plant a Tree”, <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/SPES/SPES-226/SPES-226.html>

### Lawns:

- Sharpen mower blades.
- Finish seeding early in the month.

### Pruning:

- Prune spring flowering shrubs after flowering is completed.
- Prune roses to an outward facing bud

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## Outdoor Seed Sowing

Good soil is one of the key elements of successful seed starting. If you are starting a new bed, first remove the sod. Then, amend the soil with compost or composted manure, both of which can be purchased at a big box store or nursery. Consider starting a compost pile yourself. Dig the organic material in about 6-8” deep. Wait a week or so for the soil to settle and new tiny weeds to emerge which can then be easily raked out. Loosened soil provides needed oxygen to the seed. Rake the bed smooth to even out the clumps of dirt. If you are planting vegetables, use the Virginia Tech Publication 426-331

[www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/426/426-331/SPES-170.pdf](http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-331/SPES-170.pdf) for the

recommended planting dates for our climate zone 7a. Cold season vegetables (kale, chard, beets, etc.) can be started in early March). Most annual seed can be planted outside once the daytime soil temperature reaches 65-70 degrees.

Start with fresh seed from a reliable dealer. If you have purchased your seed ahead of planting time, store in a cool, dark area. Your seed packet should contain most of the information you need to plant your seeds, including the year it was packaged. Some seeds need light to germinate. Other seeds might have a hard seed coat that needs to be nicked or soaked overnight in warm water to hasten germination (scarification). The packet should tell you how many days to germination (sprout), seed spacing (although the general rule of thumb is 2 to 3



times the diameter of the seed) and any other pertinent cultural information.

1. Plant your seed in small furrows made with the edge of a hoe, a stick, or your finger. Make sure the rows are far enough apart to allow for full grown plants.

2. Space your seeds evenly at the recommended distance from each other in the furrow.

3. Cover the seed and tamp down lightly. If the seed needs light to germinate, leave them on top of the soil surface or with a very fine covering of fine peat moss or vermiculite.

4. Water the seeds in. A gentle sprinkling with a watering can or a watering wand should do it. Save the sprinklers until the seeds for when the garden is established. Seeds need a continuous supply of moisture to germinate and to grow.

5. Once your seeds have germinated and sprouted, you will probably have to thin them so each plant will be able to grow to its full potential. You can thin (prick out) once they have formed their true leaves, but it is better to wait until the seedling are between 2-3" tall.

**Sources:** <https://libguides.nybg.org/c.php?g=655025&p=4597421>

<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/extension-gardener-handbook/13-propaga2on>

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-001/426-001.html>



## A Fishy Tale of Lettuce

*By Karen Carlton*

I got the idea around Christmas time to try aquaponics. It is the growing of lettuce and herbs with water from a fish tank.

So, I got the aquaponics kit from Amazon; it had all that you would need to start your own aquaponics garden, except for the fish. I set up the two 1.5-gallon tanks and put in all the other things that came with it. I filled it with tap water. I have since learned that it is not a good idea to put fish in tap water and if you do have tap water in the tank, it must be treated so it's safe for your fish. The reason is that tap water is treated with chemicals such as chlorine which can kill the fish. I didn't have fish in the tank yet, so I was safe from being a fish killer.

The kit had suggested I get Betta fish for my tanks. Now here is where the learning to be an Aquaponic gardener comes in, as I had no idea what was involved in this adventure! I got my Betta fish as an early Christmas present from my boyfriend. Just to warn you, it's



like with any new pet that is purchased, money is involved, not a lot but enough for said boyfriend to grumble about the cost of two Betta fish and 4 snails. For example, the chemicals needed to treat the water you put in the tank where the fish will live, the food for the fish and the snails plus any cute little items that go in the tank to keep the fish and snails happy such as a shell house. He had to purchase the snails. The reason is the snails will eat the algae that accumulate in the fish tanks. If you have too much algae in the tank, the algae will take up all the oxygen and the fish will die because of that lack of O<sub>2</sub> in the water. So that is why there needs to be two snails for each tank. The fish are named Dasher and Carol and no, I didn't name the snails. I figure I was going out on a limb naming the fish.

Now in the kit there is a foam top with cut holes and little foam blocks to put the seeds in. The seeded blocks go in the cut holes in the foam top. You place the foam top on top of the fish tank. The fun begins with watching what appears to be nothing happening. Then you start to see green leaves and the growth just keeps going until there are lettuce leaves that can actually go into a salad. Yes, I did put my lettuce in a salad. My boyfriend said "well, it doesn't taste fishy." Big eye roll here: no, it won't taste fishy, it will taste like lettuce. The benefit of having an aquaponics garden is that it is so handy to be able to pick off leaves of lettuce right at hand in your own home combined with the pleasure of seeing your food grow and then eating it. And, not the least, saying that I grew lettuce in my Aquaponics garden.

I thought Aquaponics was going to be easier than outdoor gardening. You know, no weeds, bugs, etc. to deal with when you garden outdoors. I have found out that is not the case. It is just swapping one set of problems for another. For example, the pH of the water has to be maintained for the fish to live in and the plants to thrive. Plants drink water so the tank has to be replenished with the treated water. Fish must be fed as do the snails. Occasionally, algae does build up more than what the snails can eat and the tank has to be cleaned. It is a different way of gardening, but the same mind set has to be there to reap a crop; which means it still has to be tended to in order to be able to eat what you grow. If you are up for an adventure, then try aquaponics gardening; you won't be disappointed!

Picture Credit: <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1351/>

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The Garden Gate, a monthly newsletter by the  
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