



Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community from the Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Winter 2009

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www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER MONTHLY MEETINGS

FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC Meetings are held at the Virginia Tech Extension Office, 30B Catoclin Circle SE, Leesburg at 7pm

December 4, Photography in the Garden: Perceiving more clearly than the eye can see, Warren Krupsaw, local nature photographer who's work has been exhibited in numerous venues including the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History.

January 8, Nurturing Natives, Deborah Chaves, Horticultural Instructor at Monroe Technology Center

February 5, Growing Organic, Barbara Lamborne, Proprietor of Greenstone Fields which specializes in organically grown flowers, raspberries, blueberries and shiitake mushrooms.

March 5, Native Wildflowers, Keith Tomlinson, Managing Director for Meadowlark Botanical Gardens who's emphasis has been native plants in the landscape.

Pick a Perfect Christmas Tree!

Do you pick the same type of Christmas tree out as your parents did? There are 3 varieties of evergreens that are favorites. The Scotch or white pine tree is for the person who likes a bushier broad teardrop shaped tree. The needles are usually borne in clusters of 2 to 5 called bundles along the branch. They are 1" to 4" long and tend to be stiff on Christmas tree varieties with coloration from green to blue-green. The next type of evergreen is the fir, which includes the Fraser, Douglas, and Canaan firs. All are prized for their dense conical shape. The needles are usually blunt-ended and flat in profile, but soft to the touch. The 1 to 2" needles range from dark green to blue-green on the top and silvery underneath. The last group is Spruces. Norway and Blue spruce are naturally symmetrical with the typical favored cone shape. The needles are square in cross section, stiff and sharp pointed. The needles are ½ to 1 ½" long and vary in color from bright green, bluish to dark green.

Cutting your own Christmas tree is the best way to guarantee freshness. Always check the tree for damaged branches and insect activity, i.e. webs, egg sacks. If you are buying your tree off a lot, check for freshness by looking for healthy color and that branches are still pliant when bent, not brittle. If you run a cupped hand gently up the branch opposed to the needle direction, they should not drop. A gentle shake of the tree will also show no needle drop.

Once the tree is home, place it in a bucket with plenty of water until you are ready for setup. When it is time to bring the tree inside, shake off loose needles, cut 1 to 2" off the bottom of the trunk to aid in water absorption. Remember to remove any lower branches when you are outside to fit the trunk inside your tree stand.

There are many cut-your-own tree farms in Loudoun County. Two good resources are found through these web sites, www.buylocalvirginia.org and www.vdacs.virginia.gov/trees/loudoun. So go find that perfect tree!

Cathy Anderson, Loudoun County Master Gardener Intern

Have You Thought About Becoming a Master Gardener?

Loudoun County Master Gardeners are gearing up for the Class of 2009! Is this something for you? If so, get on the phone and call now! Time's a wasting as the deadline for the class is January 6th. What exactly is this program?

The Master Gardener training program trains Volunteers to assist the Urban Horticulturalist in providing service and educational programs to Loudoun homeowners. Persons interested in joining the LCMG program do not have to be experienced gardeners. The one characteristic all MGVs have in common is a desire to give back to or contribute to their community. To join the program, you must complete and return an application form to the Extension Office (which can be found on-line at <http://www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org/becomeanmg.htm>).

Training space limits the number of students accepted to 30. Applicants are personally interviewed by current Master Gardener Volunteers (MGVs) and Extension personnel before being accepted into the training program - this helps us all make sure that the program requirements are understood before commitment is made.

What is this commitment? It begins with classroom training. Training runs from February 3rd until April 30th. Classes meet every Tuesday and Thursday mornings in the Extension Office in Leesburg, Virginia. Classes run from 9am until noon. It is expected that trainees attend each and every class. The classes follow the Loudoun County School calendar, so breaks are scheduled accordingly.

Classes are taught by industry professionals, Loudoun County's Urban Horticulturalist, and qualified Master Gardeners. There are over 25 classes and labs scheduled for the 2009 class. The material covered ranges from Soils, Botany, Turf, Fruiting plants, Pruning, Landscape Design, and Vegetable Gardening. If this sounds overwhelming, it's not. The instructors are clear, the material is wonderful, and even if you are lacking a true green thumb, this is a place to really learn some nuts and bolts about our land and use of it. Many current MGVs have taken the classes to help themselves become educated, and then use that education to share with the public. Training is when you will meet so many great friends as well!

Now that the classroom section of the commitment has been addressed, what about the rest? We have a 75 hour internship! Wow! 75 hours sounds like a LOT! But, broken up into three areas of our mission, it's not really that difficult. 25 hours are required as service on the "Helpline" and at plant clinics, where you would be paired with tenured MGVs. So, you won't be dispensing advice without a touchstone. 25 hours are required putting in the sweat equity into our Demonstration Garden at Ida Lee. If you are not physically capable of doing gardening chores, there are other tasks that can be accomplished ... most involving the journaling and paperwork of the Demonstration Garden! Lastly, 25 hours of "Other" services - such as working the booth at the Leesburg Flower and Garden Show and other such events, or perhaps helping write articles for this publication!

At the end of the year, with all hours satisfied, Interns are certified as a Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer. After this first "grueling" year, to maintain status as an MG, you must complete 25 hours of volunteer work and 8 hours of continuing education (an easy requirement just by attending the monthly Association Meetings!)

So, are you ready for the call of the Garden? Come Join the Loudoun County Master Gardener Volunteers!

Forcing Flowering Branches

Are you ready for a breath of spring? Tired of the Winter Blues? Do you have a yard of forsythia, verberna, crab apple trees, or plum that you cannot wait to see blooming? Well, don't wait! Make Spring come to YOU! Forcing branches into early bloom is as simple as 1, 2, 3.



Photo used by permission Lotta Helleberg, <http://www.inleaf.blogspot.com>

1. Find a tree or shrub that has buds present.
2. Cut branches to desired length
3. Place in water and wait and watch!

So, sounds simple, right? The general rule of thumb to force flowering branches indoors is to wait until after the first hard freezes and when the temperatures begin to rise again in late January, you are free to roam your yard searching for branches containing plump buds. Be sure to trim branches that won't ruin the form of the plant.

Bring the branches indoors, place in a container of warm water and place container into a warm room (65 - 70 degrees is ideal). Change the water once or twice or use a floral preservative to help keep the water from growing anything "extra". Depending on when the branch would normally bloom, you will have to wait from 1 to 8 weeks for the blossoms.

However, artfully arranged "sticks" make a nice presentation, and you will be so very happy when your work yields the lushness of spring. One of my favorite branches to force is the "Star Magnolia" (shown here) because its fresh sweet scent fills the air and the delicate white blooms don't seem out of place in the winter.

Other favorites for forcing include the following:

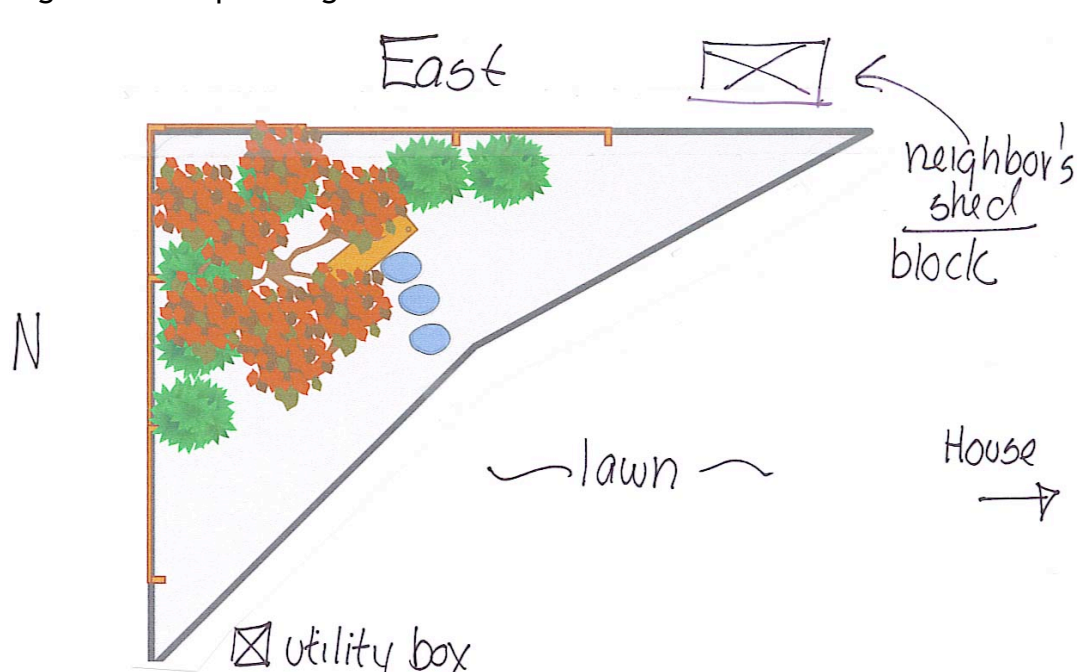
- ❖ Forsythia - bright yellow flowers are so cheery in the drab months of winter.
- ❖ Witch Hazel - another yellow favorite
- ❖ Redbud - these purple/pink buds are edible - a spicy addition to your salad.
- ❖ Japanese or Flowering Quince - wonderful blooms, but watch out for those thorns!
- ❖ Spirea - lots of blooms along this branch but may take longer than others due to its later flowering time.
- ❖ Any trees in the *Prunus* family - flowering almond, cherry or plum.
- ❖ Honeysuckle - who doesn't have that in Loudoun County?
- ❖ Lila- another wonderful scent to bring indoors the promise of Spring.
- ❖ Dogwood - our state flower - and how nice to enjoy it more during the year

So, grab those pruning shears, take a walk around your yard, and imagine the possibilities!

Linda Shotton, Loudoun County Master Gardener

Garden Design 101

What's a gardener to do when you're not able to get your hands dirty? Pull out all those catalogs and start planning more beds. I was asked to do an article on Garden Design - I was given



two pages. In college this was a class that was two quarters long just to learn the basics. The class we teach thru Master Gardeners is three hours long. So for the purpose of this article we will be covering the basics of designing a single garden bed not the entire yard. We will be designing a garden bed of mixed perennials for viewing pleasure.

To get started you want to get on paper the following information:

Where is the bed going to be located? How big is it going to be? What are the cultural considerations? (i.e. sun, water, soil, etc) What is the purpose of the bed? What do you have existing? What do you want?

Now sketch your bed out, noting all the information you have about it.

My bed is missing any color and when I sit outside to enjoy the shade all I see is mulch. So I want to make it more enjoyable to sit in and to enclose the bench for a little more privacy.

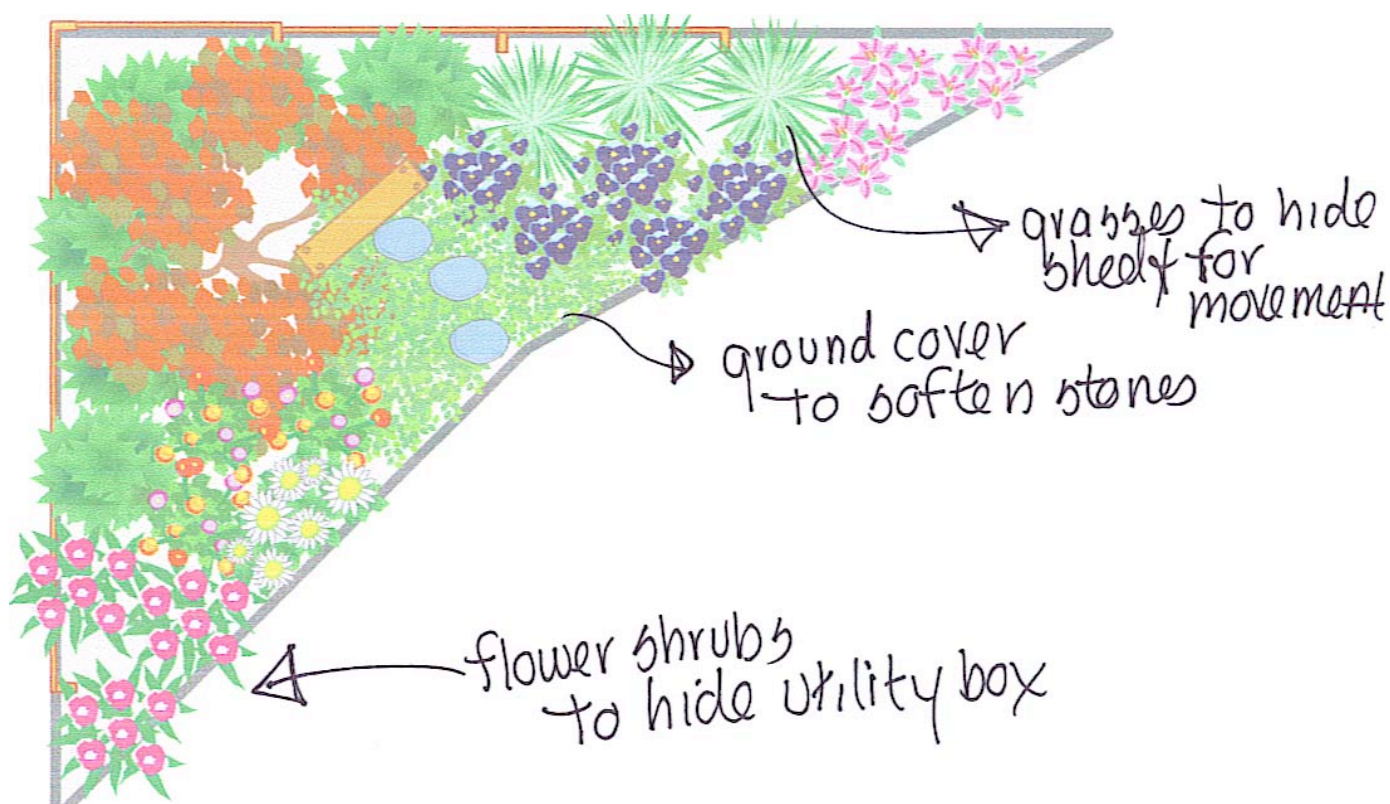
In choosing your plant material you want to take into consideration both size and color of your choice. Size - height and width of the plant - and if the bloom stalk

	bloom period	early spring	spring	late spring	summer	late summer	fall	winter
height								
54-60"								
48-54"								
42-48"								
36-42"								
30-36"				foxgloves				
24-30"								
18-24"								
12-18"	tulips				lavender			
6-12"							pansies	
0-6"	thyme							

is much higher - note that also. Above is a chart that will help you determine if your plants are all the same size and/or color. It will also help with determine the range of interest your plants will provide. Added in for consideration is the bloom time - a single spring shot may not be to your best interest. This chart can be used to help build your garden from bloom time, height, and color - just fill in your plant specifics!

Now start placing your plants! Keep in mind curves and odd numbers are more pleasing to the eye in most designs. Vary your plant heights, don't always put shortest to tallest, some perennials have tall flower stalks that work wonderfully in the middle of a bed, adding interest and movement. Picture Japanese anemones, summer verbenas. The smaller the flower/foilage the more you need for them to show, and the larger the fewer you need. Bright colors take up more visual space than pastels, the closer you plant the less mulch and weeding you will need to do. Limit your color palette - more color variety is not always best.

Magazine and catalogs are our friends. Cut and paste flower combinations on paper to get a feel of how they might look together. Create a "garden" on paper. Below is my garden after I added some additional shrubs and perennials. The gardens were created using a tool at Better Homes and Gardens website. www.BHG.com Try it - you just might create your next masterpiece.



Becky Phillips, Loudoun County Master Gardener

There's Nothing Boring about *Hellebores*...



One of the gardener's biggest challenges is to plan a landscape that holds its beauty through the winter months. When planting trees and shrubs for winter-interest, there's a variety to choose from, including an array of evergreens in shades of silver, blue and deepest green; the striking bark of red-twig dogwood and paperbark maple; the colorful blooms of witch hazel and camellias. But what about perennial choices for the cold, dark winter months?



One option is the Hellebore (*Helleborus* species and hybrids), sometimes referred to as "Christmas Rose" (*Helleborus niger*) or "Lenten Rose" (*Helleborus x hybridus*) because it blooms from midwinter to early spring. It is a jewel in the winter garden, thriving in partially shady conditions, with handsome foliage that is often evergreen and blooms that last for months. The flower colors can vary from porcelain white to deep wine, with in-between shades of pink, rose, magenta, cream, pale yellow or green. Flowers can be solid in color or enchantingly mottled on the inside of each cup-shaped bloom and come in singles to frilly doubles. Some forms even have a picotee edge with the look of elegant embroidery!



The popularity of hellebores has been on the rise during the past decade, and an assortment of species and hybrids are now easier to find in nurseries and your favorite plant catalogs. In fact, *Helleborus x hybridus* was named the 2005 'Perennial Plant of the Year' by the Perennial Plant Association! Despite this, they remain unknown to many gardeners.

Most hellebores are commercially propagated from seed. Even when specially-bred for color, strains often do not come 100 percent true, so it's best to buy plants in bloom if you want something specific. After establishing, clumps will often produce an abundance of seedlings on the ground below, appearing in early to mid spring; these can be transplanted. New seedlings may take 2-3 years to reach blooming size and the coloration and markings may be different from the parent plant.

The 'Lenten Rose' is a great perennial for beginning and experienced gardeners alike. With its easy-care habits, long-blooming flowers, and low light requirements, it is a perfect addition to a beautiful winter garden!

Growing Notes

- grow in clumps to about 1-2 feet in height, 1-3 feet in width
- prefer dappled sunlight or shade through the hottest parts of the day
- nutritious soil with good drainage (but not overly dry) gives the best results
- evergreen in milder climates and protected areas; can be helpful to cut back the old foliage in late winter, but wear gloves—contact with the leaves can cause mild dermatitis in some people. Fortunately, this is something that *makes them less desirable to deer!*
- blooms are long-lasting as cut flowers

Edye Clark, Loudoun County Master Gardener Intern

Winter Cleanup

How much “cleaning up” you choose to do in preparation for winter depends on your garden and your philosophy. Some things that you will want to do in any case are:

1. Clear out any diseased or damaged plants and clear out plants that are particularly susceptible to disease.
2. Clear out fall and winter weeds.
3. Prune back plants and shrubs with seed heads that start too many unwanted plants. Butterfly bush *Buddleia* can be cut down to a foot high (this is a good one to cut before the spread of seed as it has recently been added to the “Non-native Invasive Plant” list). Prune dead or diseased branches but do not prune any more. Pruning stimulates new growth which will only be killed in the winter. Fall is never the time to prune spring flowering shrubs.
4. Bag and discard this plant material, do not compost it as you do not want any disease to be spread through your compost.

Leave some perennials standing. Coneflowers, Black-eyed susans, hyssop, liatrus and other natives provide food for the finches and other birds and good bird watching for you (see right - finch on purple cone flower). Leaving flowers and stalks through the winter will also provide homes for over wintering beneficial insects such as butterflies. Milkweed pods provide seed for food and several species of birds will use the floss for nesting in the spring. Later in the winter you may want to cut down the perennial stalks. If so, cut them into six-inch lengths and pile them in the garden. That way they will still provide cover for wildlife including the over wintering butterflies like the Mourning cloak. The insects will provide food for the spring migrating birds.



Another early winter task is the lifting of tender bulbs and tubers such as cannas, gladiolas and dahlias. As you do this, consider replacing these with hardy natives to cut down on your time, effort and basement storage.

Fallen leaves will decompose and enrich your soil. Parts of your garden may benefit from some benign neglect. Doing nothing is sometimes the best practice for a healthy garden. However, a thick layer of leaves or leaf pack can form a crust that is so thick and dense that rain cannot penetrate. Mulched or chopped leaves are the safest and best cover. Rain penetrates these and the chopped leaves decompose quickly. Leaves on the lawn must be either raked away or chopped up with the lawn mower. Perennials growing in unprotected areas will benefit from leaf mulch to protect them from wind desiccation.

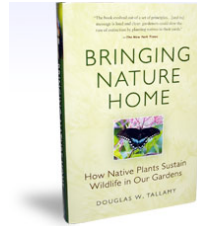
Move hardy potted plants to a protected area and bury them in leaf mulch to prevent heaving from frequent freezing and thawing.

Your winter clean-up can be a gradual process that stretches over the winter and morphs into early spring clean-up. Enjoy your garden year ‘round.

Carol Ivory, Loudoun County Master Gardener

Book Review – The Real Reason We Should Use Native Plants

This passage from *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy really hit home for me. “When I was a boy, driving at night during the summer would invariably produce a blizzard of nocturnal insects in the car’s headlights. Today I see only the occasional moth flutter by.” I remember all the insects in the grill of the car and the insects smashed on the windshield. This is a childhood memory. Where have the insects gone? And what does this mean?



The most compelling reason to plant natives and reduce the use of alien plants is that native plants support native insects which in turn are the food source for birds and other animals and are the critical link in the food web.

Planting natives to increase the diversity of native insects may seem to be just what a gardener wants to avoid. Too many people equate insects with plant damage and a host of negative and just plain icky things. But of the 9 million species of insects, only about 1 per cent interact negatively with humans. The other 99 per cent pollinate plants, return nutrients tied up in dead plants and animals to the soil, keep populations of insect herbivores in check, aerate and enrich the soil and provide food either directly to indirectly for most other animals. A healthy, balanced insect and animal community will not require the use of pesticides.

Doug Tallamy is Professor and Chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology in Newark Delaware. Chief among his research goals is to better understand the many ways insects interact with plants and how such interactions determine the diversity of animal communities. He obviously enjoys his subject and is able to transcend academic detail and write powerfully and compellingly for the lay reader.

What Should I Plant? is a chapter long tour of twenty native trees and shrubs that support lepidoptera species starting with oaks that support 517 species through chestnut that support 125 species.

What Does Bird Food Look Like? is a chapter on arthropod herbivores and arthropod predators filled with fascinating insect information. The wonderful photographs that illustrate this book are especially amazing in this chapter as we see up close insects as they live in nature.

This book contains practical advice on how to get started with natives and wonderful plant lists by region of native plants with wildlife value and desirable landscaping attributes.

This Garden Writers Association Silver Award winner is available from Timber Press, Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble. It would make a wonderful Christmas present.

***Carol Ivory,
Loudoun County Master Gardener***

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