



Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community from Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Winter 2010

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LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER MONTHLY MEETINGS

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
UNLESS NOTED, MEETINGS ARE HELD AT
THE VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
OFFICE, 30B CATOCTIN CIRCLE SE,
LEESBURG, AT 7PM

Mark Your Calendar: Second Annual Gardening Symposium will be held March 5-6, 2011. Watch our web site for Updates!

Jan 6. *Square Foot Gardening*, Linna Ferguson. Linna is an everyday person who show you, no matter your lack or time or space that you can grow your own healthy food. For more information, see her website, <http://www.foodscaper.com>.

Feb. 3. *Shady Business - Invest in a Tree*, Master Gardener Tree Stewards. The LCMG Tree Stewards have participated in training related specifically to trees and their talk will describe the benefits of trees, trees that are recommended for this area and the proper way to plant a tree and make sure it survives.

March 3. *Native Bees - Important Pollinators*, T'ai Roulston, Research Associate Professor; Curator, State Arboretum of Virginia. Armed with a slew of degrees, one of T'ai's major research interests are pollination ecology. He will speak on many areas of native bees. To learn more, visit T'ai's website <http://people.virginia.edu/~thr8z/HomePage.html>.

LCMG 2nd Annual Gardening Symposium

Thanks to all of you who attended last year...your response was wonderful. We are in the midst of final details for 2011's event. So mark your calendars for March 5th and 6th, 2011. Our theme is Sustainability and we will once again have two days filled with great speakers, wonderful vendors and delicious food.

Saturday will kick off with Amy Marasco Newton, President of the Newton Marasoc Foundation talking to us about how sustainability affects us and how we can make changes to become better environmental stewards. Other speakers on Saturday will include Bryce Lane from NC State University, Kevin Monroe from Audubon Society of NOVA, and Nan Chase, author of "Eat Your Yard!".

On Sunday the fun continues with talks ranging from pruning, composting and landscaping with native plants, to sq ft gardening, rain gardening and getting your kids involved. Our speakers range from several of our own Master Gardeners to Professor Ron Cloer of NOVA Community College, Joe Keyser(also known as the Compost Man) to several other local experts.

Our trade show returns, bigger and better than before and lunch again will be included both days. Back by popular demand is Wegman's, along with a local caterer. As per your requests, vegetarian meals will be available both days.

Mark your calendars and come the first of the year, check out our website, www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org for a complete listing of the seminars along with ticket information. The event will be held at Historic Carrodoc Hall in Leesburg. Directions and ticket information will be available on our website. Tickets will be available on the website through PayPal again this year.

Hope to see you there! Any questions? Please email me at LCMastergardener@aol.com.

So, You Think You Can Garden?

Are you the person in the neighborhood who seems to know plants by name and are sought after to answer your neighbors' gardening questions? Are you interested in learning about sustainable gardening practices, water conservation, and how to use fewer pesticides in your garden? Do you want to share this knowledge with the general public? Do you like to swap plants and visit gardens with other gardeners? Are you looking for a healthy and fun volunteer opportunity? Are you interested in attending stimulating classes locally to learn more? If you can answer 'yes' to these questions then you should consider becoming a Loudoun County Master Gardener. Now is the time to register for classes which are held at the Loudoun County Extension Office on Catoctin Circle in Leesburg on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9:00-12:00. Classes begin February 1 and run through April 28. For more information and an application form please see our website: loudouncountymastergardeners.org. More information can be found in the Fall 2010 Trumpet Vine which you can also access at our website. Or you can call our HelpDesk at 703.771.5151 to learn more. The Help; Desk is located at 30B Catoctin Circle, Leesburg VA 20176, which is just across from the post office.

Linda Ward, Loudoun County Master Gardener

Where Are Master Gardeners?

Master Gardeners may have been at a location near you! We are out serving the community everywhere we can reach interested individuals. Here are some of our Fall activities:

September

Speaker at the Ashby Ponds Garden Club
Flower Arranging Program at Ida Lee
Educational Booth at the Bluemont Fair
Educational Booth at the Ashburn Farm Green Expo

October

Fall Farm Tour at the Ida Lee Demonstration Garden

November

Speaker at the Purcellville Library: Preparing for Winter
Speaker at Cascades: Fall Gardening, Cascades

Do you need a speaker for your organization? Loudoun County Master Gardeners are primed, and ready to go. We have several favorite topics ready to go, or you can, with some lead time, request a special topic pertinent to your group. Complete a Speaker Request Form and send it to Debbie Dillion, ddillion@vt.edu to request a speaker. Debbie Dillion can be reached at 703-771-5838. Some topics which may be of interest during the winter months are: Basic Landscape Design, Starting Seeds, and Creating Wildlife Habitats.

Gifts for the Gardener

I sent out an email the other day to the entire Loudoun County Master Gardeners asking them what they had on their Christmas list this year. It was fun reading all the responses I received, ranging from “a remedy for stinkbugs” and “a great tomato crop for 2011” to the more attainable gifts listed below.

- ❖ A fragrant, Rosemary topiary tree.
- ❖ Soothing windchimes
- ❖ Any book on gardening
- ❖ A new pair of gardening gloves
- ❖ A “weird, unique piece of sculpture”
- ❖ Subscription to Virginia Gardener magazine
- ❖ A Hokie stone for the garden
- ❖ Gift certificate to favorite nursery, along with the labor to plant
- ❖ Mulch, along with the labor to plant
- ❖ Gift certificate from my family for labor in the garden
- ❖ And the best one of all....a “team of young men” to help in the garden.



Do you sense a theme here? I have to say it's on my list. Having just moved into a new home and bringing half of my old garden with me; I would love to have about ten days worth of labor from a team of young men. How about The Twelve Days of Christmas - garden style?

Last verse: on the twelfth day of Christmas my true love gave to me....

12 wind chimes chiming
 11 pruners pruning
 10 men a mulching
 9 mowers mowing
 8 hoes a hoeing
 7 kids a weeding
 6 friends a planting
 5 concrete urns
 4 garden books
 3 clay pots
 2 leather gloves
 and a Rosemary topiary tree.

Have a wonderful holiday and enjoy the season with all it's wonderful blessings!

Becky Phillips, Loudoun County Master Gardener

The Loudoun County Master Gardeners has available for purchase heavy-duty pop-up garden bags in the large size for \$20, in festive Christmas red & green. Also available are gardening books at 20% below retail prices. Some of the favorites have been *Good Bug*, *Bad Bug*, a compilation of the most common bad bugs with organic solutions for their control, as well as pictures of beneficial bugs on waterproof pages for carrying into the garden, and *Tomatoes Basil Garlic*, about growing and enjoying these most popular garden vegetables.

These products can be purchased during Help Desk hours (M-F, 9AM - Noon) at the Extension Office in the Wachovia Bank Building, 30 B Catoctin Circle, Leesburg, 20175, 703-771-5150.

All proceeds will help fund the Master Gardener program, which receives no operating funding from the County or the State.

Should I start my own vegetable garden?

That is a question that has been asked more and more lately with all the concerns about food safety and exactly where our food is coming from. What can be safer than going out into our own garden and picking that delicious tomato right off of the vine? But what does a vegetable garden entail and how will I know if I can successfully grow one? How much space will I need? What if I only have a deck? What if I don't have any backyard?

Let's look at some of these considerations for successful vegetable gardening:

You do not need a large area to produce a lot of vegetables or small fruits (like strawberries). You can do it in an area no larger than 4' X 4' and produce enough green beans, tomatoes and peppers for the family to enjoy through the summer months.

You will need at least 6 hours of **sunlight** a day and 8 hours is even better. This is true for annual vegetables (like tomatoes, peppers, carrots, etc.) and perennial vegetables (like asparagus and strawberries).

The next consideration is the soil. To find out specific information about the kind of soil you have you can have your soil tested. This is a very inexpensive and useful way to find out what you need to add to the soil to make your vegetables grow successfully. To get your soil test kit you can go to Extension Office (on Catocin Circle in Leesburg) and you will get specific instructions for taking samples with the kit. After you send the kit in to Virginia Tech you will get results that will tell you what amendments (lime, potassium, phosphorus, etc.) you need to add to the garden in the appropriate amounts.

If your soil is clay (or if plants do not seem to thrive for any reason) one of the best amendments is compost or leaf mold. This will loosen up and enrich the soil and add nutrients that worms and other garden critters feed on to make the garden a very good growing environment. And you can make your own compost or leaf mold or you can purchase it at any garden center.

Another consideration for a vegetable garden is water. In Northern Virginia we may have times when we need to add supplemental water for the garden to thrive. How much you add depends on rainfall amounts so put out a rain gauge or some cans to catch rainwater and measure it. If we have not received 1 inch per week add 1 inch to your garden.

Of course the biggest question is "Do I have time for a vegetable garden?" You can make your garden more maintenance-free by covering all the soil with a mulch, like straw, to keep weeds down and keep moisture in the soil. This will cut down on time spent on chores such as watering and weeding.

Even if all you have is a deck you can grow vegetables. Seed companies are now producing many varieties of vegetables that take up very little space and yet produce wonderful vegetables. You can even get these vegetable plants at your local garden center or through seed catalogues.

Many vegetable plants are so lovely that you can even incorporate them into your front yard landscaping if the sun doesn't shine long enough in your back yard. Your Home Owners Association won't even be able to tell you are growing vegetables until they see you out there eating all those wonderful goodies!

Birds in the Winter



Winter can be a difficult time for birds. While the ones that winter over have acquired adaptive behaviors that help them survive, snow storms, sudden drops in temperature and prolonged temperatures below freezing can sometimes mean death without some human help.

Finding food. As winter approaches, many birds change some of their eating habits. Birds that usually eat insects may start to eat berries and seeds to supplement their diets. Birds will start to look for reliable sources of food for wintertime survival. And in the fall many birds began forming flocks to be better able to find food and to protect themselves from predators.

Birds spend the winter cleaning up. Chickadees and wrens search for dormant insects hidden away in bark crevices and under fallen leaves. Some birds eat very large quantities of weed seeds. The American goldfinch, dark-eyed junco, mourning dove and song sparrow all consume large amounts thistle, ragweed, smartweed and other weed seeds.

Winter days are short, the nights cold and the natural food supply has often been consumed or hidden by snow. Insects are dead or dormant and water can be hard to find. Birds have a high metabolism that helps keep them warm, but their metabolism must be fueled with high energy foods, especially foods eaten just before nightfall. Most songbirds will fill a special storage pouch in the esophagus with food before dark and digest the food overnight to maintain their body heat.

Staying warm. On cold, wintry days, most birds fluff up their feathers, creating air pockets, which help keep the birds warm. The more air spaces, the better the insulation. Some birds perch on one leg, drawing the other leg to the breast for warmth. Shivering is used by almost all birds for short term adjustment to the cold. It is the main way birds increase their heat production while resting. Shivering converts muscular energy into heat for the short term and that energy must be replaced soon. Some species can grow additional feathers in the winter and others can lower their metabolism and heart rate and burn fewer calories to survive the coldest nights.

The more social species such as chickadees stay warm at night by roosting together in tree cavities or nest boxes. You can help by keeping nest boxes up all winter and cleaning them so that birds can use them for winter roosting.

Other birds seek shelter in evergreens. Red cedars, hollies, pine trees and other evergreen screens provide much needed shelter as well as seeds and berries.

Water. Though food is scarce in winter, dehydration can be a bigger threat to birds than starvation. Fewer sources of non-frozen water exist. Though birds can eat snow, it takes much more energy for a bird to eat snow and warm it to body temperature than it does for them to drink unfrozen water.

Water is not only important for hydration, but it also helps birds preen their feathers. Without proper preening, birds' feathers won't



stay positioned and aligned. Feathers out of alignment in winter create gaps in their insulation making birds lose body heat faster.

Provide birds with a heated bird bath or a bird bath with a separate temperature controlled heating element. Squirrels and other critters will also use this water supply. Check and clean it daily. Water evaporates quickly in the winter.

Providing food. People who wish to provide food for birds can use two approaches. First, grow native plants that provide birds with fruits, seeds and habitat. Inkberry holly, spicebush, winterberry, winged sumac, red chokeberry, viburnum, native flowers that are allowed to go to seed, cherry trees and sunflowers are among the many plants birds love.

The second approach is to feed birds directly. Do not buy mixed seed; it contains filler such as red millet which the birds don't like. It just creates a mess. If you were to provide just one type of seed the best would be *black oil sunflower seed*. This is high in energy, inexpensive and liked by the widest range of desirable birds. Shop around and buy it in large quantity.

Safflower seeds are also widely liked by cardinals, finches, chickadees, titmice and the small woodpeckers. Articles often mention that squirrels don't like safflower seed but my backyard squirrels love it.



I provide *suet* all year round. Birds feed it to their babies because it's soft and high energy - like insects. But suet is especially important in the winter to maintain metabolism and body heat. Birds from wrens to pileated woodpeckers will be attracted to the suet. You can buy a variety of suet for under a dollar - birds don't care about fancy suet. But if you spend more, get the hot pepper suet to keep the squirrels away.

Nyger seed is promoted for feeding goldfinches. However, it is expensive and can be messy. The goldfinches are happy eating sunflower and safflower seeds.

Millet is the least expensive and can be scattered on the ground for sparrows, juncos and mourning doves.

Keep the feeding area clean, wash feeders periodically in one part bleach to nine parts water. Monitor the feeders to ensure that the seed does not get wet and moldy.

Many birds will feed at more than one level, but they have their preferences. Provide food at various levels for high traffic. Ground level feeders: mourning doves, sparrows, towhees and juncos. Table level feeders: cardinals, finches, jays. Hanging feeders: titmice, goldfinches, chickadees. Tree trunk: woodpeckers, nuthatches, wrens. Position feeders close to the cover of trees and shrubs so the small birds don't fall prey to hawks.

Should you feed the birds? There is very little research on the effects of feeders on individual species but limited studies suggest that feeders do not rob birds of their foraging skills. Birds do not become overly dependent on feeders and feeders are not affecting migration. Migration is triggered by changes in daylight not the availability of food. Feeders do help birds survive particularly harsh periods of cold or snow.

Position your chair where you can sit and observe the birds. The finches will sit at the feeder for the longest time, chickadees and titmice linger just long enough to get one seed, cardinals stay a little longer. The nuthatch runs down the tree trunk head first.

Carol Ivory, Loudoun County Master Gardener

No Fuss, No Muss ... Yes, Ornamental Grasses!

Colorful perennial? Check! Shape and size varieties? Check! Drought tolerant? Check!

Winner!

It is the time of year when most perennials are done giving color. If you don't have snow, your garden is brown and possibly still full of fallen leaves. An occasional bird ventures out to nibble on the seed heads and you look forward to springtime. Why wait? If you planted a myriad of ornamental grasses, you would have color all year round AND a safe haven for wildlife!



Ornamental Grasses are a wonderful addition to any perennial garden. There are red, blue, green, variegated and more with colorful inflorescences (flowers). The winter interest is breathtaking when all else is subdued. They sway in the breeze and appear almost feathery. And wildlife will enjoy the refuge as much as you enjoy the sight. Maintenance is generally once a year - in the late winter or early spring when you are contemplating pruning, clip these grasses back to about 1 foot. Don't do it too early (as many landscape companies do), or you lose the habitat for wildlife and the beauty of the wintertime grasses.



One of the terrific native grasses for our area is *Panicum virgatum* "Shenandoah" (Shenandoah Red Switchgrass): Native to Virginia, this grass is used across the spectrum for riparian buffering, erosion control, wildlife habitat and forage, all season interest, and all around beauty. Pictured is the spring flowering grass. The fall produces red foliage. The winter has seed pods for beauty and wildlife forage. Grows up to 6 feet with a 2 foot spread. Plant in full sun for best color. Picture from University of Michigan.

Native Purple Muhly, *Muhlinbergia rigida*, is a Master Gardener and wildlife favorite. The prettiest time for this grass is the late fall when it forms clouds of purple seeds. This plant grows two to three feet tall in a tidy clump. Pink Muhly is another favorite.



The Loudoun County Master Gardener's Demonstration Garden at Ida Lee Park in Leesburg features a beautiful ornamental grass bed. If you visit now, there won't be gardeners in the garden, but you will be able to see how the grasses look in the winter. You can read about all of the grasses planted at <http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/Demo%20Garden%20Pages/Ornamental%20Grasses.htm>

Master Gardener Help Desk Highlights

Did you know the Master Gardeners can answer questions you have about plants or pests in your yard? We are here to help you! Over the last few months, many questions were about lawn care and cabbage moth caterpillars. Folks wanted to know when to reseed and fertilize the lawn and how to rid of caterpillars eating broccoli and cabbage. Answers: Reseed and fertilize in the fall (not spring) and use BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) to control the caterpillars. Of course you need to carefully read the label on everything you use before you apply it.

The Loudoun County Master Gardener Help Desk is located in the Virginia Cooperative Extension Office, 30B Catoctin Circle SE, Leesburg, VA (in the Wachovia Bank building and across from the Post Office). We are staffed Monday through Friday between 9am and noon to take your telephone calls (703.771.5150) and emails or inspect samples you bring. The office is open, but unstaffed until 5pm and specimens can be left for examination the following day. Brochures on plant care, upcoming Master Gardener Events and Soil Test Kits are available at the Extension Office.

Send us your problem via email. Complete the ***Client Log Sheet*** (example on next page) found on our website <http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/gotquest.htm>. Save the Log Sheet form to your computer and complete as many areas as you can, using the tab key to move through the fill-in fields and send it back to us at ex107mg@vt.edu. If you are requesting a Plant ID or Pest ID and suggested treatment, please attach photos of the plant or pest to the email submission and we will email you back with the information you need.

Here are a few tips to help us provide you with the right information:

- ❖ If you need a plant identified, please bring in a sample large enough to determine the size and growth habit. Please bring in an entire stem or branch, not just a leaf.
- ❖ If you suspect insect or disease, please bring in a sample showing both the problem area and some healthy growth (if any). Again an entire branch or stem will help us determine what is going on. We would appreciate that your sample be in a bag so as not to potentially contaminate the office.
- ❖ Clear digital photos are great for email identification, but please keep the size reasonable to reduce download time.
- ❖

We may have to do some research to come up with the right answer to your problem. If necessary we will contact you usually within 1-2 days.

Barb Bailey, Loudoun County Master Gardener



Virginia Cooperative Extension



Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Client Log Sheet

Contact information

Name: _____ Date: _____
 Street Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____
 Telephone: _____ Email address: _____
 Would you like to receive our quarterly newsletter? Yes No

Helpline request

Service requested: Plant ID Insect ID Plant Diagnostics Information
 Plant name: _____ Age _____ Size: _____
 Question / description of problem: _____

Date first noticed: _____ Happened before? Yes No Number of questions: _____
 % of plant affected: _____ Number of plants affected 1 species or multiple species?
 Location of plant or pest: Indoors Landscape Garden
 Type of soil: Sand Loam Clay
 Terrain: Low Level Sloped
 Drainage: Poor Moderate Good
 Is plant mulched? Yes No If yes, how deep? _____ How close to base of plant? _____
 # hours sun/shade: Shade: am pm Part shade: am pm
 Sun am pm
 Exposure: N NE NW S SE SW E W windy
 Recent weather: Normal Rainy Dry Hot Cold Other
 Irrigation? Yes No If yes, how much? _____ How often? _____
 Fertilizer / Pesticides? Yes No If yes, what? _____ When? _____
 Lawn Care Service? Yes No Have neighbor(s) used pesticides? Yes No