



Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community from Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Winter 2014-2015

Volume XI, Issue 1

www.loudouncountymastergardeners.org

LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER LECTURE SERIES

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, 7PM
CHECK THE LCMG WEBSITE FOR THE
LOCATION

Jan. 8. *Journey Through
Hallowed Ground: The Living
Legacy Tree Planting Project*
with Peter Hart, JTHG
volunteer and certified
arborist. Extension Office

February 5. *Early Formal and
Landscape Gardens of England*
with Margery Erikson, garden
lecturer. Rust Library

March 5. *The Magic and
Mystery of Vernal Pools* by
Tammy Schwab, Fairfax County
Park Authority Manager,
Education and Outreach.
Extension Office

April 9. *Landscaping with
Heirloom Plants and Herbs -
Smithsonian Style*, with Erin
Clark, Smithsonian Garden
horticulturalist. Location TBD.

For more information, please
visit our web site at
loudouncountymastergardeners.org

Visit us on Facebook:
Master Gardeners of Loudoun
County, Virginia.

Winter – A Time to Reflect

The annuals have completed their life cycle and the perennials and woody plants are dormant. The garden is peaceful, and nothing is demanding our attention or labor.

This season provides all gardeners with time to reflect, research, consider changes and plan projects without the pressure of a growing season. Winter is a good time to observe the “bones” of the landscape, the structure of the trees and the shape of shrubs. Consider potential changes with plenty time to consider and research before taking any action.

Whether you start planning major renovations to gardens and beds or clean out and reorganize your garden tool shed or corner of your basement, winter affords a welcome breather, a change of pace and time to regroup and recharge.



We hope that this winter edition will support your winter gardening activities with ideas, resources and two book suggestions.

Enjoy!

2015 Symposium

The Loudoun County Master Gardeners are sponsoring a one day gardening symposium, March 21st. Four prominent garden speakers will provide inspiration, ideas and information to help you get in the mood for the growing season. Please join us at the Ida Lee Center in Leesburg to learn from these four outstanding speakers.



Barbara Pleasant: Barbara is an award-winning author and contributing editor to *Mother Earth News* and the *Herb Companion* magazine. She is a former contributing editor to *Organic Gardening* magazine and also contributed to numerous gardening books. She is an admired lecturer to garden clubs, botanical gardens and Master Gardener organizations. Barbara's talk will cover proven strategies for growing, eating, storing and preserving your homegrown veggies and fruits – from someone who is doing it!

Barbara's website: <http://www.barbarapleasant.com/>

Dean Norton: Dean is the Director of Horticulture at Mount Vernon Estate. For over 150 years people have studied, researched and dug the earth for clues helping make the home of George Washington one of the most accurately restored 18th century estates in America. Dean will be speaking on the beauty, use and importance of Mount Vernon's gardens and landscape as well as preservation over the years with a focus on the most recently restored pleasure garden.

Dean can be found at: <http://www.mountvernon.org/the-estate-gardens/gardens-landscapes/>



Jessica Walliser: Jessica is a horticulturalist, author and devoted bug lover. Using information assembled for her newest book, "Attracting Beneficial Bugs to Your Garden: A Natural Approach to Pest Control", Jessica shines some light on the methods needed to attract beneficial insects to the garden - and keep them there. Understanding the cycle of predator and prey is an integral part of growing organically. She presents ground-breaking university research regarding the intricate connection between plants and insects, and explains the need for maintaining the garden's natural balance.

Jessica's website: <http://www.jessicawalliser.com/>

David Culp: David is the creator of the gardens at Brandywine Cottage in Downingtown, PA and has been lecturing about gardens nationwide for more than 15 years. His articles have appeared in *Martha Stewart Living*, *Country Living*, *Fine Gardening*, *Green Scene*, and many other publications. He is a former contributing editor to *Horticulture* magazine and served as chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Hardy Plant Society. David is Vice President for Sunny Border Nurseries in Connecticut. Author of the "Layered Garden", David will be speaking about designing, maintaining and embracing the layered garden. It contains a basic lesson in layering—how to choose the correct plants by understanding how they grow and change throughout the seasons, how to design a layered garden, and tips on maintaining a layered garden.

David's website: <http://www.davidlculp.com/index.html>



Mail-in registration opens January 15th, see the last page of this publication. On-line registration begins February 5th.

Symposium information: <http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/annual-symposium/>

Gardeners' Winter: A Time for Assessing and Planning

Does the joy of gardening really allow a clean escape from all things gardening? Just consider this to answer that question: Why are mailboxes getting jam-packed with seed, plant, and gardening-related catalogs in the dead of winter? These merchants know what they are doing.

As I sit here on a December day unable to garden, I find myself looking back to my gardening year, with an itch to catalog-shop—for example, to get ideas for crop rotation in the vegetable garden. Although I have a library of gardening books in my home, I still visit the local library to grab an armload of gardening books to enjoy in my spare time, gardening season or not.

Generally for everybody, there is the internet for research, but how does one separate the valuable seeds of information from the chaff? Conscientious gardeners develop that savvy in time, and you can be so increasingly savvy. Since little gardening activity happens in winter, you can do research/assessment of what happened during the past or many previous gardening seasons. When it is nicer outside, go and survey what is noticeable in a sleeping garden. Actively learn, investigate, or just ponder. You get to visit the garden with minimal chores waiting. During winter, you can focus more on your gardening questions or curiosities, and even make a list of them. If you prefer more personalized consultation ... come spring, call the Loudoun County Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteer Help Desk (703-771-5150) or visit a Master Gardener Volunteer (MGV) Gardening Clinic usually set up in Farmers Markets around town. The more you engage in finding answers, the more bits of knowledge you gain and combined with all other resources, the savvier you get as a gardener. Visit a library and enjoy the stacks of gardening books. In the spring, you can also attend a topical lecture or two available from Master Gardeners during the gardening season. Check out our Loudoun County MGV website to view our calendar of events and see what we offer: <http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org>



Old Gardeners never die;
they just throw in the trowel.

A sincere, sustainable-minded gardener does not run out of gardening questions and curiosities to research and satisfy because we do not want to simply “spray and go” and be done with it. We want to know the what, why, how, and when of our gardening issues. We try our best to be conscientious about what we do in our gardens, so we find ourselves always figuring out, assessing, trying, learning, and planning along the way.

So let me talk about one subject that may have been a curiosity at some point in your gardening life. What to do with the **not really weed weeds and other volunteers** that may actually be helpful in the garden.



This gardening curiosity was answered for me by an article in the Fall 2014 Trumpet Vine. It was about **Lambsquarters**, that weed I guess many of us have seen prolific in our gardens in early spring. Hundreds of seedlings had taken over my asparagus beds, and I just could not keep up pulling them during the busy spring gardening season. So most grew and ended up sharing the bed with the asparagus, growing as tall as the asparagus ferns by mid-season. If one knows asparagus, we worry that asparagus does not like competition. There goes my asparagus harvest next spring!

But then I read that article! I made of note of it and will see what I can do with this edible weed the next time around. Remember, if it was in your “organic” or pesticide-free vegetable garden, you can try it!

People have an automatic reaction to weeds. For lack of additional information, once we are able to identify weeds, there we are pulling, pulling, pulling wherever we see them, the way we would tend to pull crabgrass within reach, with little thought.

With a little research, you may think differently about what you consider to be a weed. Let's look at amaranth, wild amaranth, or pigweed (*Amaranthus spp*). I had them everywhere in my garden last gardening season. I pulled and pulled every tiny seedling that I'd see but I still could not keep up. One day I saw a stand already over 2 feet tall. They had taken over a bed where I had just dug up potatoes. It would take effort to remove them, but I did not want them to go to seed, so I cut out all the seed heads, a quick chore. I planned to go back and pull out the sturdy plants. And then I learned something. They can serve as trap crops! So there in a bed they remained until the end of the summer harvest. Now I have to research them further because I also learned they are edible, leaves and seeds, and I could just imagine all the seedlings to come in the spring.



Amaranth

To ensure very careful foraging, following are some reliable sources:

<http://www.aihd.ku.edu/foods/Pigweed.html>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mv006>

<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2013/08/130812-amaranth-oaxaca-mexico-obesity-puente-food/>

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/real-food/wild-greens-zmaz80mjzraw.aspx#axzz3K0ctwl3q>

A while back I read that the weed **common purslane** (*Portulaca oleracea*) can be put in salads. I did research on it and confirmed that it is edible. I tried it and I did not care for it so that was the end of that curiosity. At least I know. You may decide for yourself.

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/cfiv/homeowners/030726.html>

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-364/426-364.html>

This is not an article about edible weeds or possible garden-worthy uses for weeds we normally would banish from our gardens. It is about spending the time this winter to catch up and research those gardening questions and curiosities pushed to the back of our minds during the growing season.

Novice gardeners, seasoned gardeners, professional gardeners, we all have questions and curiosities as we go about our gardening activities. Edible weeds just happen to be in the back of my mind this winter because of all those weed issues I had to deal with last summer. More than anything, I cannot wait to see if my asparagus harvest was affected by sharing a bed with lambsquarters and pigweed. I would much rather feast on and give away asparagus than pigweed, so I have my work cut out for me this coming spring.

The gardening information you gather from winter-time assessing, planning and research will provide useful knowledge to process and apply next season.

Remember, if tasting or trying edible weeds, caution, check, and confirm! See you in the spring!

Maria Daniels, Master Gardener

Winter Care of Geraniums

Geraniums (*Pelargonium x hortorum*) are grown as annuals here in the mid Atlantic, but they are actually tender perennials. That means with a little care, getting geraniums to last over the winter is fairly easy.

Saving geraniums over winter can be done with variation in 3 basic ways: in pots, making them go dormant or making cuttings.

In Pots:

Dig up your geraniums and place them in a pot that can comfortably fit their root ball. Prune the geranium back by 1/3. Water the pot thoroughly and place in a cool, well lit part of your house. If your cool area does not have enough light, place a lamp or light (with a fluorescent bulb) very close to the plant. Keep the light on 24 hours. The plant may get a bit leggy, but it should last the winter. I usually prune mine at least once during the winter.

Going Dormant:

Geraniums will go dormant easily, meaning you can store them in a similar fashion to storing tender bulbs. Dig up the plant in the fall and gently remove the soil from the roots. The roots should not be clean, but free from clods of soil.

There are 2 different ways of keeping them while dormant:

- a. Hanging upside down in a basement or garage, or hanging upside down *in a paper bag*, in a basement or garage.
- b. Storing upside down in a cardboard box.



Storing upside down in a cardboard box

For either method, soak the roots in water once a month, then re-position. The geranium will lose all its leaves, but the stems will stay alive.

Making Cuttings:

You will need the following supplies to make cuttings:

- a. Good rooting media- Sand, perlite, vermiculite, coir, peat moss-all are components of a good rooting media, especially when mixed in a 50/50 combo mix. Examples are sand/perlite, coir/vermiculite, sand/peat moss and so on. Rooting media should be porous, well drained and heavy enough to hold the cuttings upright.
- b. Rooting hormone- Most commonly found as a powder. There are several different brands available through nurseries and garden centers.
- c. Rooting containers/pots- Choose a container for the cuttings that has drainage holes and is small enough for a gallon sized plastic bag to fit over. I use plastic containers as they hold moisture better than porous terra cotta.

Cuttings should be taken from the parent plant in late summer, or before a frost. Anytime in September should be fine. Using a sharp knife or scissors, remove about 5 or 6 inches of stem from the healthiest tips of your plants. Remove all leaves from the lower half of the cutting. Pinch off any flower buds. I moisten the stem with water, and dip into the rooting hormone. Moisten rooting media lightly before filling the pots, so

cuttings will stand straight. Do not let any leaves lie on the soil as this will cause them to rot. Also, leaves that touch during propagation often rot.

Once all the cuttings are secured in the media, moisten the pots again, and put a plastic bag over the cutting. This creates a high level of humidity, keeping them from wilting while new roots form.

Keep containers in a warm location that gets bright but indirect sun. Avoid high heat or hot direct sun. If water droplets form on the inside of the bag, remove it, and allow to dry before replacing it. Make sure to add water to the rooting media as needed. I take the bags off permanently after a few weeks and the cuttings look healthy.

When the roots have gotten about 1" long, after about 4-6 weeks, the cuttings can be repotted into a bigger container with a coarse well drained soil mix. Plant at the same depth as they were in the rooting media. Make sure they continue to get good sunlight, water and fertilizer throughout the winter. I use a light watering of a fish/kelp fertilizer. Prune back as necessary.

These three methods are the easiest ways to overwinter your geraniums, and because they are such tough and accommodating plants, unless you do something drastically wrong, they will pull through for you every time.



Normalee Martin, Master Gardener

Providing for Wildlife in Winter

The National Wildlife Federation has the following articles of interest to gardeners on its website:

- [Seven Red Birds for the Holidays](#)
- [Winter Berries for Birds](#)
- [Don't Forget Water for Birds in the Winter!](#)
- [What to do With Fallen Leaves](#)
- [Nuts for Wildlife](#)

Let's Grow – Elevating the Backyard Garden to New Heights

If you are an experienced vegetable gardener then you already know that January not only brings new resolutions but also the excitement of a new season. *Although much too early to plant anything in the soil*, the new offerings from the seed catalogs, which have arrived in hordes, do inspire one to think this new year will be the most successful yet!

This year the Garden to Table group will again be hosting an afternoon seminar to help you get a kick start on the season as well as inspire you to plan for your most successful season yet. Please continue reading to find out more details on this information-filled afternoon.

Date: **Saturday, January 24th, 2015**, at the Gum Spring library in Aldie. There will be two classes beginning at 1:30 PM:

Class 1 - 1:30 - 2:45 PM - Grow More Vegetables in Less Space

Small spaces can produce enough fresh produce for an entire family. Learn the techniques for maximizing limited space to feed your family. Wide row planting techniques will be highlighted.

Break: 2:45 - 3:00 PM

Class 2 - 3:00 - 4:15 PM - Tree Fruits Can Be Grown Sustainably in Small Spaces

Apples, peaches & pears are an important part of an edible garden but can outgrow a small backyard quickly unless utilizing a specialized technique. Espalier is a century's old technique which combines the techniques of pruning and training using smaller cultivars of tree fruits, and which is designed to help the fruit stay within the confines of a small space.

Espalier peach tree:



Winter



Spring



Late Spring

Children's programs are also being planned to coincide with each regular class so elementary school age children can learn at their level. In addition, Master Gardeners will be on hand on the 1st floor during the afternoon to answer other gardening related questions.

Please mark your calendars for this event and join the Master Gardeners as we celebrate the start of a new season.

Note... weather can wreak havoc on January events and if weather related issues arise check our website calendar at loudouncountymastergardeners.org or contact the Gum Spring library for updated information.

Denise Palmer, Master Gardener

Plant Societies

If you're passionate about a particular plant — daffodils, roses, hostas, for example — sooner or later you'll want to talk with others who are similarly "infected". Or you'll have a problem and need the advice and collective wisdom of specialists or experienced amateurs. Or you'll want to share your own rare seeds or cuttings, and in return receive equally rare ones to try in your own garden. And there, waiting for that moment, are the plant societies and their down-to-earth gardeners, full of knowledge to share.

Generally, the societies have a number of things in common:

- They all publish either a glossy journal four to six times a year or newsletter (paper or online) four to eleven times a year; some do both
- Almost all have an annual convention and show
- Almost all have websites containing extensive cultural material
- Many have extensive online libraries and/or archives of past material from newsletters, journals, and articles from specialists in the field
- Many have photographic databases of plants in their field
- A few have cultural webinars on their favorite subject
- Almost all of them sell books, CDs and DVDs on their subject
- Many have PowerPoint programs which can be purchased or rented by garden clubs
- Many have volunteers who will make presentations or judge shows at garden clubs
- They all have plant or seed sales or exchanges at least once a year at national conventions or local meetings
- Some of the societies offer a wide range of social media services such as YouTube, Twitter, e-mail list groups, Facebook, and blogs
- They are all reasonably priced, with annual individual memberships in the national societies running from \$18-\$50 but mostly in the \$25-\$40 range and local memberships in the \$10-\$25 range
- They are all full of fun-loving, information-rich people who are eager to share their knowledge with new members

I'm a member of the American Daffodil Society and the Washington Daffodil Society. The knowledge I've gained from my fellow members simply isn't available in books or through seminars held outside of society sponsorship. Only in the company of other enthusiasts is it possible to delve so deeply into a particular plant and learn its secrets. And through these two groups I've met people from throughout the country, and even from New Zealand, Ireland, and England. If you join one or more societies, you will too.

Even if you don't join a society, be sure to visit the website of a favorite plant. Many of these websites are full of helpful information, troubleshooting tips, and links to extensive databases, with answers to questions you didn't even know you should ask! They're truly an education.

Lina Burton, Master Gardener

Plant Societies with Local Chapters

American Bonsai Society

National Society: <http://www.absbonsai.org/> Individual membership: \$45
Regional society: Potomac Bonsai Association
<http://potomacbonsai.com/> Individual membership: No dues
Local Society in Virginia: Northern Virginia Bonsai Society
<http://www.nvbs.us/> Individual membership: \$25. Meets once a month in Arlington.

American Daffodil Society

National Society: <http://daffodilusa.org/> Individual membership: \$30
Local chapter: Washington Daffodil Society: <http://thewashingtondaffodilsociety.org/>
Individual membership: \$15 Meetings usually at various locations in Northern Virginia.

American Dahlia Society

National Society: <http://www.dahlia.org/> Individual membership: \$27
Local Society: The National Capital Dahlia Society: <http://nationalcapitaldahlia.org/>
Individual membership: \$18.

American Gloxinia & Gesneriad Society

National Society: <http://gesneriadsociety.org/> Individual membership: \$25
Local chapter: <http://www.nationalcapitalgesneriads.org/> Household membership: \$10
Society focuses on African violets, gloxinias, lipstick plant, goldfish plant, cape primroses, flame violet, and Cupid's bower. Meets at National Arboretum.

American Hemerocallis Society

National Society: <http://www.daylilies.org/> Individual membership: \$25
Local Society: There are seven clubs in Virginia. The two closest to Loudoun are:
Northern Virginia Daylily Society: <http://www.fairyscapedaylilies.com/NVDS.htm>
Individual/family membership: \$10 Meetings in various Fairfax locations.
National Capital Daylily Club: <http://www.daylilyclub.org/> Household membership: \$10
More Maryland-DC oriented, but also meets in Virginia and has Virginia members.

American Orchid Society

National Society: <http://www.aos.org/default.aspx?id=1> \$40-\$65 (digital only v. digital and print)
Local Affiliated Societies: Three societies are close to us:
Hollin Hills Orchid Society: <http://www.hhos.org/> (meets in Annandale)
Lord Fairfax Orchid Society: Contact zitawinzer@comcast.net (meets in Winchester)
National Capital Orchid Society: <http://www.ncos.us/ncos/index.htm>
Individual/household membership: \$30 (Meets at National Arboretum).

American Rhododendron Society

National Society: <http://www.rhododendron.org/> One or two people in household: \$40
A large society with numerous chapters covering the genus *Rhododendron* (i.e., both rhododendrons and azaleas). National and local chapters frequently participate with Azalea Society of America in joint meetings, conventions, and events. For an additional \$8, members can join a second chapter as an Associate Member.

Two local chapters:

Mid Atlantic Chapter: <http://macars.org/chapter.html>
Individual membership: Through National Society; dues included in National Society membership.
Potomac Valley Chapter: <http://www.arspvc.org/>
Individual membership: \$35; dues included in National Society membership.

American Rose Society

National Society: <http://www.rose.org/> Individual membership: \$49

Local Society: Arlington Rose Foundation: <http://www.arlingtonrose.org/> \$15.
Meetings in Fairfax.

Azalea Society of America, Inc.

National Society: <http://www.azaleas.org/> Individual membership: \$30

Local Society: Northern Virginia Chapter, ASA: <http://www.nv-asa.org/> Individual membership: Dues included in national membership. Meetings in various Northern Virginia sites; frequently has joint meetings, conventions, and events with the American Rhododendron Society.

Goose Creek Herb Guild

A Loudoun County organization, Individual Dues: \$30

For more information on upcoming meetings and events contact Karen Lowe lowelandfarm@aol.com

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/GooseCreekHerbGuild/info?tab=overview>

Herb Society of America

National Society: <http://www.herbsociety.org/> Individual membership: \$55 if joining National society only.
Membership in Potomac Unit (below) automatically includes membership in the national society.

Local Society: Potomac Unit: <http://www.potomacunithsa.org/> Individual membership: \$60
(includes membership in National Society) Local unit includes Northern Virginia, Washington, and Maryland and meets several times a year throughout the area.

National Chrysanthemum Society, Inc.

National Society: <http://www.mums.org/> Individual membership: See Local Society, below

Local Society: Old Dominion Chrysanthemum Society (Alexandria) <http://odcsmums.org/>
Individual membership: \$30 (includes membership in National Chrysanthemum Society, Inc.) Meets in Falls Church, with shows in different places in Northern Virginia.

North American Lily Society

National Society: <http://www.lilies.org/> Individual membership: \$20

Local chapter: Potomac Lily Society: <http://www.potomacilysociety.org/index.htm>
Individual/couple membership: \$4. (Based in Herndon).

North American Rock Garden Society

National Society: <https://www.nargs.org/> Individual membership: \$30

Local Society: Potomac Valley: <http://www.pvcnargs.org/>
Individual/couple membership: \$15 Meets in various locations in the DC area.

Virginia Native Plant Society

State Society: <http://vnps.org/> Individual membership: \$30 (headquartered at Blandy)

Local Chapter: Piedmont Chapter: <http://vnps.org/piedmont/> Individual membership: included in State Society dues. Can join additional chapters when joining VNPS for an additional \$5 each. Meets generally in Fauquier County but also in Loudoun, Clarke.
Prince William Wildflower Society: <http://vnps.org/princewilliamwildflowersociety/>
Meets in Manassas, Gainesville, and other Prince William locations.

Lina Burton, Master Gardener

Hamamelis virginiana **Common or Virginia Witch Hazel**

In late October we come to the end of the gardening year. But not quite – there's one woody plant yet to bloom and give us a glorious sendoff into winter— *Hamamelis virginiana*, common or Virginia witch hazel.

Hamamelis virginiana is native to the Eastern and Central United States, including our area. In the wild, it frequently is found growing in moist woods, bottomlands, and along streams. It is considered an understory shrub or small tree, growing under oaks, red maples, hickories, sweet gum, and yellow poplar and in conjunction with other small trees such as sassafras and dogwood. In our gardens, it can be grown as an understory plant, as a woods-edge plant, or in full sun. No matter where it's grown, it's an attractive addition to the garden in a naturalized woody area, in a shrub border, in a grouping or as a specimen plant in the open lawn.



Photograph by Julie Makin, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Hamamelis virginiana is slow growing. Under landscape conditions it usually reaches 10-15 feet tall and nearly as wide. If it is particularly happy, however, it can grow to as tall as 35 feet and as wide as 25 feet. It has multiple trunks with smooth, gray to grayish-brown bark.

The spider-like flowers are yellow with four crinkled, ribbon-like petals from ½ to 1 inch long, and have a spicy fragrance. The calyx lobes themselves are equally colorful, ranging from yellowish to reddish brown inside. *H. virginiana* starts blooming in mid-to-late October (although it can be earlier or later) and the plants retain their flowers for 2-4 weeks or even longer depending on the weather. Unfortunately, the flowers often appear before the leaves fall in the autumn, and the yellow flowers compete with the yellow leaves for attention, somewhat diminishing their effect. But after the leaves fall, the flowers remain to be enjoyed.

The flowers pollinated in the fall form ½ inch long green seed capsules, each containing one or two seeds. The seeds ripen over the following spring and summer with the capsules gradually turning light brown. The following fall, the capsules split open with a loud cracking sound and vigorously eject their seeds, sometimes as much as 30 feet from the parent plant.

The leaves of *H. virginiana* are 3- 6 inches long with scalloped edges. They're attractive for three seasons – reddish-bronze in the spring as they emerge, a nice glossy medium-to-dark green in the summer, and various shades of yellow in the fall when they are at their most showy.



Developing seed pods in mid-summer
Photograph by Julie Makin, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center



Photo courtesy of Mark Brand

H. virginiana isn't just another pretty plant. Witch hazel, distilled from the bark of young stems and roots of *H. virginiana*, has been used medicinally for centuries. Witch hazel creams, lotions, and water are still used today for a number of conditions and are widely available in pharmacies or online. And witch hazel twigs were used (and in some places still are used) as "divining rods" by dowsers in looking for underground water sources prior to digging wells. In addition, birds (particularly wild turkeys) and small mammals like chipmunks, rabbits, and squirrels eat its seeds. (Unfortunately, it is also mildly attractive to deer which may browse on its buds, leaves, and twigs, so it is best protected when young by a wire cylinder secured around the plant until it is large enough to flourish even if nibbled by Bambi.)

Witch hazel is tolerant of a wide range of soils but prefers well-drained but moist, rich garden soil with a pH of 6.8 or less. It is tolerant of clay provided that it is well-drained. It will tolerate wet soil and dry soil but extremely dry soil should be avoided. In full sun, it is essential that it have moist soil; otherwise, the leaves will tend to scorch.



Photo courtesy of Chicago Botanic Garden

Grown in full shade, witch hazel has an open, irregular shape as it reaches for whatever sun penetrates to the forest floor. In full sun it is vase shaped with a more rounded crown and blooming will be more lush. An ideal site would be one with morning sun and afternoon shade, perhaps at a woods edge or near larger lawn trees which will provide shade from the hot afternoon sun, or along a stream.

It isn't necessary to prune witch hazel, but it does tend to be wide spreading, and an occasional pruning in the spring, soon after flowering, will keep the plant in bounds. Of course, if you plant witch hazel in an open location where it has room to grow, spreading isn't an issue. It does have a tendency to

sprout suckers, which should be removed promptly; otherwise, you'll end up with a colony of witch hazels in your yard instead of one single shrub or tree.

Witch hazels can be planted in either spring or fall. It's better to purchase balled-and-burlapped or container grown plants. While it's possible to grow them from seed, the double dormancy requirements make it a lengthy, patience-trying experience. Cuttings are just as difficult, with their own set of problems.



Photo courtesy of Fairweather Gardens

H. virginiana is a problem-free, low-maintenance plant. The leaves can occasionally be marred by insect-caused galls, but this is a temporary, minor problem doing no long-term damage to the plant. Generally, witch hazels are disease free.

Currently there are only a few selections and cultivars of *H. virginiana* available. Most notable are:

- 'Little Suzie', a semi-dwarf (4-5 feet tall and wide) late-flowering plant which flowers profusely and is suitable for a small garden
- 'Harvest Moon', a November-flowering selection which drops its leaves *before* it flowers
- 'Mohonk Red', a selection with soft red petals with yellow tips, named after Mohonk Nature Preserve in New Paltz, New York, where it was discovered
- 'Green Thumb', with pale green leaves marked in the center with a dark green "thumb print"
- 'Lemon Lime', with variegated leaves (which in my opinion looks a little sick!)

Surprisingly, *H. virginiana* has been more popular and readily available in Europe than it has been here in its native country. In recent years, however, its popularity has grown, and the native witch hazels are now easier to find commercially. With the introduction of new cultivars and with breeders working to create even more — particularly plants which drop their leaves *before* the flowers appear in the fall — the future looks bright for these late bloomers!

By Lina Burton, Master Gardener

Winterberry = Winter Beauty!

Ilex verticillata or winterberry is a wonderful native deciduous holly that shows its beauty in the fall and well into the winter if birds don't eat all the berries as they appear. Once established this shrub requires no effort.

The winterberry grows slowly and has a roundish shape that is easily pruned in early spring to control the size if wanted. In the summer the shrub has tiny white flowers that attract all kinds of bees. Take note it is necessary to have a male and a female *Ilex* within 50 feet of each other to insure pollination and fruit set on the female (called dioecious). I have had success with this year after year planting the varieties Berry Nice and Jim Dandy. Berry Nice is shown below in both photos. The Jim Dandy male variety can be planted to pollinate several of the female varieties.



Winterberry has so many attributes for wildlife. The shrub is a great nesting site for birds to take cover in the summer and pollinators to enjoy the nectar of the tiny flowers. Songbirds enjoying the fruits of its labor are Cedar Waxwings, Eastern Bluebirds (below left), catbirds and robins to name a few. *Ilex verticillata* is also a larval host source for Henrys Elfin butterfly (below right).

Photo
by Phil
Brown



Photo
Credit:
txmg.org



There are several different varieties of this wonderful native shrub, so do some research and if you have room for a couple on your property, I highly recommend it. If you have a lot of acreage, you may want to plant many of them and let them go wild to form a thicket. Beautiful fall color leaves with a tinge of orange and yellow and those bright red berries will be your fall view. And the stems with the berries will adorn any winter floral arrangement. Do note the berries are a great provider of food for wildlife, but they can be toxic to humans.

For more information on the cultivars to pair together for optimal bloom times:

<http://extension.psu.edu/plants/green-industry/news/2012/shrub-of-the-month-2013-ilex-verticillata-winterberry>.

Barb Bailey, Master Gardener

***Phaius*, an Easy to Grow Terrestrial Orchid**

Phaius (FAY-us) - the Nun's Cap Orchid

How many times have we marveled at the exquisite beauty of orchids as we meandered through displays in garden centers? Undoubtedly, many of you have thought about growing orchids at home. Usually we end up carrying a few home because we couldn't resist the temptation, then start looking for care tips in hopes that they will thrive. Oftentimes, enthusiasm slumps quickly as the plants start to look unsightly about a year or two later, and mostly they get tossed at the end of that period. The truth is that growing orchids is not as difficult or arduous as most people have assumed. There are several orchid species out there perfectly suitable for hobbyists, including the somewhat uncommon terrestrial orchid *Phaius*. However, if you are fond of garden plants and have reasonable success with flowering houseplants, then very likely you can grow orchids -- particularly *Phaius tankervilleae* (a cultivated species of *Phaius* orchid) -- also known as the nun's cap orchid, or swamp orchid.

Background: *Phaius* is a genus of terrestrial orchids inhabiting swampy forests and grasslands, and ranges widely from tropical Asia, into parts of China, down to Africa and Australia. Here in the U.S, *Phaius* have been naturalized in southern Florida and Hawaii. Commercially available ones these days are mostly hybrids of a cross between two *Phaius* orchid species -- *Phaius wallichii* and *Phaius tankervilleae* -- *P. wallichii* is the most robust, and *P. tankervilleae* has a long history of cultivation. Modern hybrids of the two generally have been referred as *Phaius tankervilleae*, and examples include *Gastrophaius* Dan Rosenberg, *Phaius* Joan Hart, and *Gastrophaius* Micro Burst. Although not easily found in floral outlets outside of Florida, nun's cap orchids are available through the mail by specialized growers, or can be spotted occasionally in flower shows.



www.OrchidsAmore.com.



www.OrchidsAmore.com.

What makes terrestrial orchids different than other orchids? Other popular cultivated epiphyte orchids such as *Phalaenopsis* (moth orchids), or *Cattleya* (corsage orchids), dwell on tree branches and derive moisture and nutrients from the air, fallen debris and rain in their natural environment. Under cultivation, they typically grow best in a well aerated and **mostly woody medium**. As a terrestrial orchid, *Phaius* is best grown in pots with a **soil-based mixture**. Don't be baffled by the term 'terrestrial orchid', as this simply means these plants do well in the ground under a desirable climate.

Description: Nun's cap orchids have a very good indoor-outdoor disposition. It's magnificently compact and upright, with up to 6-8 large furrowed bright green leaves arising from one single bulb, reminiscent of palm leaves. Matured leaves can reach 2-4 feet long and 4-5 inches wide, depending on the variety. Multiple vertical inflorescences (flower stalks) derive from bulbs, with each bearing more than 10 large (3-4 inches) brightly colored blooms, and some even have striking pumpkin-like coloration with a tantalizing translucent

quality. This striking stature makes nun's cap orchids very conspicuous amongst other houseplants. They bloom once a year, usually in the midst of the dreary days of winter (January-February). Flowers open from bottom to top, and blooming period can last up to a month.

Care is easy: Because nun's caps are terrestrial, they are easier to care for and more resilient than most other orchid hybrids. With a little bit of extra knowledge of the four key growing elements: light, moisture, fertilization and air circulation (often neglected but equally crucial), they can prosper quickly. Although care is not challenging, nun's caps are not suitable for home growers who tend to leave their plants unattended.

Container: Nun's cap orchids enjoy constant moisture at the roots, more so than other popular orchid hybrids, and therefore a plastic nursery pot is preferred over terra-cotta. Plants intensify their beauty after maturing outdoors in the summer, and culminate around January-February. For better support and esthetic reasons, it is best to insert the nursery pot into a taller and more ornate pot at the start of its winter residency, as the plant doesn't like to be moved while setting flower stalks.

Growing media: A good growing media consists of 1/3 regular moisture control potting mix, 1/3 well decomposed compost (cow manure or leaf mold), and 1/3

bark-based orchid potting mix. Good drainage is absolutely necessary.

Light requirement: Nun's cap orchids enjoy bright yet filtered sun during the winter, preferring a place near a **south-facing window with filtered light**. If filtered light is not possible, place the pots 4-5 feet away from any direct sun that could do damage to the leaves. Add an additional florescent light (with one warm light tube and one cool light tube) for several hours per day.

During the summer, nun's cap enjoys a **protected semi-shady area** where direct morning sun exposure is no more than half an hour per day.

Is Dormancy necessary? Dormancy is not necessary, because *Phaius* orchids are native to tropic and sub-tropic regions. Under cultivation, plants simply stop growing in the winter after the flowers fade, until it's time to move them outside when night-time temperatures stay consistently above 55° F. Plants will rejuvenate as soon as the temperature rises.

Temperature and humidity: During the winter, average room temperatures are fine. In the summer, 70-90° during the day, 60-80° at night are ideal. Note though, that *Phaius* are intolerant to persistent high temperatures above 90°. If temperatures get that high, provide some temporary relief by moving plants indoors and move back out when temperatures drop. Indoor humidity level is problematic for most households during winter months, and a portable humidifier nearby is recommended. This is pertinent to all house plants, and *Phaius* is no exception. However, *Phaius* doesn't require as high humidity as other orchids and 50 percent humidity should suffice.

Water: Water only the roots and **avoid the crowns and leaves**, as prolonged accumulation of moisture on crowns and leaves tends to harbor fungal infections. Keeping the soil moist, but not soggy, is vital to the over all health of the plant. Psuedobulbs should appear plump and fully hydrated at all times. Good soil drainage coupled with correct watering techniques should ward off most fungal issues. If plants are inadvertently being neglected, add water immediately after they've shown signs of stress and *Phaius* should recover quickly. However, extended dehydration is detrimental and should be avoided.



Repotted Phaius with old growth removed
www.OrchidsAmore.com

Fertilization: Average hobbyists tend to have the notion that orchids don't need to be fed too often. The truth is that some species, particularly *Phaius*, do need to be fed frequently (at least once a week) with a diluted high nitrogen fertilizer at half strength. For best results, add fish emulsion to your regular feeding program once a month during the summer to encourage growth. Flushing the plant 2 or 3 times each summer to prevent salt build-up is also recommended.

Air circulation: Be sure to have good air circulation year round. This aspect of growing healthy plants has often been neglected. A simple desk-top fan moves the air quite nicely during the winter.

Diseases: Biting insects don't tend to bother *Phaius*. If you follow all of the measures listed above, your plants should be happy and also resilient to most fungal diseases.

Other tips: *Phaius* leaves are a little brittle and they tend to get snapped at the base by gusty winds or carelessness. Also, old bulbs don't produce new leaves, and need to be removed every 2-3 years. This is a good time to separate your bulbs as well. Plant one to two bulbs in a pot, and they will reach maturity in 4-5 months.

Ling Lay, Master Gardener

Teasel: Another Useful Weed



Teasel is an introduced biennial, considered an invasive plant. Its seed head that remains after the three- to eight-foot plant has flowered is strikingly beautiful. It can be seen in the fall and winter along many roadsides. It consists of a cone of spine-tipped, hard bracts, or modified leaves. Since the Middle Ages, Europeans have used dried seed heads of the teasel plant to raise the nap on woolen cloth. Teasing wool creates a soft, almost furry texture on one side of the cloth.

Because of the demand for these seed heads, farmers in 19th century New England grew fields of teasel, with each acre yielding up to 150,000 heads. In the autumn, they would be harvested and dried. Teasel heads wore out quite quickly with use, so wool manufacturers needed a constant supply of them. Eventually a machine, the "teasel gig," replaced the seed heads. Today fine combs with steel wires raise the fibers on teased fabrics, although the consensus is that there is still no substitute for teasel heads in producing the finest cloth.

From [Naturally Curious](#) by Mary Holland

Changing Steep Mowing Slopes into Productive Gardens

After moving into our new home, we noted a landscape that had not been tended to for nearly 10 years. It needed significant grooming and readjustment to return it to a healthy and balanced flow of flora and fauna. The 4 plus acres of woods contained scrub, bushes, poison ivy and rose bushes that had overtaken what should have been a bucolic setting. We were presented with a large area of lawn to be bush-hogged and mowed on slopes that in places had inclines greater than 25 %. This lawn required 4 hours per mowing and sometimes multiple mowings a week.

Planning, Analysis and Constraints:

One initial lawn concern was to keep up with the feeding and weeding of a fast growing lawn and eliminating weeds, vines, and poison ivy that invaded the forest and the lawns. Another issue was the steep terrain of the land. Many areas were dangerous to navigate around trees and inclines with the mower tip over an ever present danger. After a few sideways slides down hills, we decided to plan a transformation of all our slopes into new garden areas to eliminate weekly mowing and to enhance the landscape with fruit trees, vegetables, and ornamental gardens and grasses.

To plan, the first step was to take a full survey of the property, review and measure the steep areas with the most problems, examine the options for each section, and select the most appropriate given the existing constraints of daylight and shade, soil quality, wind direction, and scenic compatibility with existing structures and forest edging. After the review, we realized that multiple areas needed correction. For example:

1. Very steep slope in front yard - with full south and west sun.

This area was covered with a weed suppression cloth, a recycled rubber edge was placed at the bottom of the slope, and the area was covered with mulch. The plants chosen for this area were high and low type grasses. The hot sun is ideal for these plants and the westerly winds make the grasses shimmer in the afternoon sun.



2. Steep slope ideal for a terraced veggie garden - with eastern and southern exposure.



This slope was near the kitchen and perfect for a vegetable garden. The "cut and fill" method of creating it was used as described in "The Garden Planner". It involves cutting into a slope, moving the topsoil to the bottom of the garden, leveling the subsoil, and replacing the topsoil on the level surface. The same recycled rubber edging used for the very steep slope was also used at the bottom of this garden. The soil was enhanced with compost and fertilizer before planting tomatoes, kale, and sweet potatoes. Tea plants for homemade green tea were also introduced as an experimental planting. In addition, the garden was surrounded with a fence to keep the local deer away.



3. Steep slope under trees - with partial sun/afternoon shade.

This area was partially wooded and had multiple black walnut trees and mulberries. Again, weed suppressing cloth was placed over the existing lawn and a truckload of mulch was spread. In the spring, red azaleas were planted and a decorative log along with spring blooming bulbs were placed throughout the garden. In the future, annual flowers will be planted for summer color.

4. Gentle slope in field - with all day full sun.

This area has intense sun all day with a western wind. The lawn was covered with weed suppression cloth and then mulched. In this garden, fruit trees (peach, pear, plum, and fig), a nut tree (almond), and some blueberry bushes were planted. This is only year two of the planting and the garden is still establishing itself. This summer, five peaches, eight pears, and ten figs were harvested, also one very successful sunflower.



The total acreage removed from the mowing cycle was approximately 1 acre. The mow time on steep slope areas (1 hr.), the times mowed per week (averaging three times during the heavy growing periods), and the fuel usage savings (approximately 1/2 gallon per mow) saved considerable maintenance effort on the property. Additionally, we developed a large vegetable garden, a fruit tree area, and have improved the visual landscape around the home.

The new gardens are a work in progress. It has taken over a year to put them in place. With these four projects we have transformed the 25% slopes of dangerous mowing lawn areas into productive gardens. The materials were all found locally in stores and the labor and time were incrementally applied throughout the year. The cost was negligible since we used our own sweat equity. Locally produced mulch was trucked to the property, dumped into a common site and distributed to each garden throughout the summer as needed.

Although we have not eliminated all the mowing, we have made it safer. The time and expense of repeatedly grooming unmanageable areas has been cut. We have turned part of the property back into a productive and aesthetically pleasant landscape that now includes fruits, vegetables and wildlife habitat. Next year we will encourage more bird sanctuaries on the land by developing a shade garden in the upper woods. In the long term, we hope to continue to create a balance between the natural and human world that will exist in a sustainable and beneficial manner to all the inhabitants of the area.

The books with detailed hints to get started on this project include:

"Reader's Digest Practical Guide to Home Landscaping", the Reader's Digest Association, May 1993

"The Garden Planner", Editor Ashley Stephenson, St. Martin's Press, 1981

"Natural Landscaping, Gardening with Nature to Create a Backyard Paradise", Sally Roth, Rodale Press, Inc. 1997

Nancy Feeney, Master Gardener

Kevin Feeney, Mower in Chief

The Trees of Oatlands Plantation

Beautiful, old and remarkable trees can become like old friends that you enjoy visiting frequently throughout the years. Loudoun County abounds with such trees; all you have to do is look closely on old properties, in cemeteries and along roadsides.

Oatlands Plantation, a National Trust Historic Site just five miles south of Leesburg has many majestic trees. This article touches on just four of the magnificent trees on the Plantation.

Osage Orange, *Maclura pomifera*, Mulberry family



This gnarled tree is around 200 years old. It is believed to have been obtained by George Carter via Thomas Jefferson, based on the report that in 1804 Meriwether Lewis sent slips of “Osage plums and apples” to Jefferson. The orange-tinted bark and wood which give it part of its name can be seen between the gray ridges. Its wood was used to make very fine and valuable bows by the Osage Indians who traded the bows across the United States. These bows were worth 1 horse and 1 blanket in trade.

This species was originally native to a small area of the southern plains (OK and TX); it now grows over much of the United States. Early farmers planted it in a hedgerow to function as fencing until the invention of barbed wire in 1874. The wood is extremely durable and is considered to be one of the most decay resistant woods in North America. Osage orange also produces more BTUs when burned than any other domestic hardwood.

One of the burls on this old tree looks like a lion’s head. Despite its age this venerable old tree still has a healthy and full crown and still produces fruit. The fruit is said to repel insects and spiders. Currently several chemicals are being extracted from the wood that could have potential as antifungals or antibiotics.



American Holly, *Ilex opaca*



This holly probably stopped looking like the average holly tree about 100 years ago. It’s huge and hollow, providing shelter for raccoon families. The leaves in the crown of this tree have become small and the tree is in decline but the shoots growing up around the base of the trunk are healthy and vigorous with large leaves.

American hollies normally live about 100 years. They are very slow growers with a long tap root. Holly berries are an important food source for many animals. The trees are male and female, all have flowers but only the female trees have berries.

Ginkgo, *Ginkgo biloba*

This is the world's oldest living tree species. Fossil records indicate ginkgos stood when the dinosaurs roamed. During the Ice Age many species were killed off, surviving only in certain areas of China. Ginkgos were brought to the United States in the late 1770s.

When the US bombed Hiroshima Japan in 1945, the sole survivors of the direct atomic blast were several ginkgo trees the trees lost their leaves but budded out the following spring and are still growing today.

Ginkgos are no longer found outside of human cultivation.



The foliage turns a brilliant gold in the fall, and leaves fall at one time. Some complain of the smell of the flowers on the female tree and prefer the male of the species.

This Oatlands tree was the state champion ginkgo until a larger one was found in the Tidewater area.

Japanese Maple, *Acer palmatum*

These are fern leafed Japanese maples that not grafted but naturally grown cultivars. These two amazing trees are 100 years old. They were planted by Ms. Eustis, the third owner of the Oatlands Plantation who was very interested in Japanese plants.

These trees are planted in a good location. The ideal soil for this tree is evenly moist, slightly acidic, high in organic matter and well-drained. Planted in a low but sloping area in front of the historic



greenhouse they are protected from high winds and late spring frosts, as leaves tend to emerge early and may be injured.

Standing within the limbs of these trees is a very calming experience.

While these trees on Oatlands Plantation are especially remarkable, there are wonderful trees throughout Loudoun County. Watch out for them.

Carol Ivory, Master Gardener, Tree Steward

Photos by Edye Clarke, Master Gardener, Tree Steward

The Birds Around Us



What could be a better way to cheer up a winter garden than a variety of native birds? Any garden can be a natural oasis with just a little effort. Plants are an essential element in determining where birds spend their time. Your garden may be tiny in comparison to others, but with something as simple as a windowsill or deck, you can still “borrow” birds from neighbors.

One idea can be as simple as a few hedges or shrubs around your house. Leave them unclipped and pruned in the winter so the birds will have their fruit and berries. Some good plant choices are elderberry (*Sambucus*), yew (*Taxus*), viburnum (*Viburnum*), holly (*Ilex*) and juniper (*Juniperus*); which are all preferred by garden birds. If you have flower beds, leave as many of the spent flowers as

possible to provide food for birds when the seeds ripen. Plant perennials and annuals favored by birds in Northern Virginia. For example, bachelor buttons (*Centaurea cyanus*), zinnia (*Zinnia*), coreopsis (*Coreopsis*), coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), sunflower (*Helianthus*), and black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia*) are all easily located at local garden centers and mail order catalogs.

It is imperative for birds to keep up their energy to survive the Northern Virginia hard winters. Backyard feeding stations can make the difference between life and death for many birds. One great way to ensure energy is to provide suet, either by mesh feeders, platforms or simply smear on the trunk of a tree. Suet can be found almost anywhere you can purchase birdseed and is relatively inexpensive in comparison to alternatives. You can even make suet to attract your favorite birds. We have beautiful cardinals in Virginia and they love their suet to be mixed with sunflower seeds. Our woodpeckers, bluebirds, and orioles love fruit mixtures, and our wrens and nuthatches love beef (ground down). Suet is simply animal fat that has been rendered into the form of cakes or balls. You can melt lard or bacon drippings on low until liquefied. Strain through cheesecloth to remove particles and pour fat into your favorite molds. Another easy recipe:

- 1 cup rendered suet
- 1 cup chunky peanut butter
- 3 cups stone ground cornmeal
- 1/2 cup white flour

Melt suet and peanut butter together until liquid. Add cornmeal and flour or preferred fruit bits. Mix well. Allow to cool slightly then pour into molds. Refrigerate or freeze until firm and you are ready to use. You can smear it on pinecones or tree trunks. According to studies published from bird observers from California to Maine, if you prefer bird seed, oiled sunflowers are the most popular with most seed-eating birds. Tube and basic hopper feeders are great ways to distribute your seeds. Using these techniques, you will probably see cardinals, finches, chickadees and nuthatches at any given time.

Don't forget to protect your birds from the harsh winter weather. You can make a significant impact by simply gathering large and small branches to construct a brush pile. It will provide insulation and air pockets for roosting. Also nesting boxes facing south for passive solar heating is another great idea to help make a positive environmental footprint.

Finally, don't forget your binoculars. After hours of preparation, feeding the birds in winter can be a rewarding way to enjoy birds in your own backyard. Any nature enthusiasts and hobbyists alike will tell you there is nothing more satisfying than seeing hard work and a tender touch create a healthy and happy environment for wildlife to enjoy and cherish, all being just a few steps out your back door.

Joni Waller, Master Gardener

Loudoun Butterfly Count 2014

Heading into the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy butterfly count this year, many people were asking, "Where are all the butterflies?" Across our area, other butterfly counts had already taken place and numbers were very low. Why? Well, remember that polar vortex and those extreme cold temperatures that we had last winter? And remember that cooler wet spring that we had? Those environmental factors really took a toll on our butterflies and other insects.

Most of our butterflies overwinter as chrysalides or caterpillars. Some overwinter in the egg stage and a few, like the Question Mark and Comma, overwinter as adults. The harsh temperatures may have just been a bit too much for many of them and the cooler spring delayed some of our plants. The earlier butterfly counts revealed the impact of these conditions.

But what about our central Loudoun count? Eighteen years ago, Bob Lyon tracked butterfly populations in Loudoun and determined that the first week of August is the peak for us in terms of butterfly diversity and numbers, and so we hold our count on the first Saturday in August each year. This year that decision was particularly pleasing because while the year started out slow, when it came time for our butterfly count, we had a good showing that, while lower than some years, was still decent.

So what happened on August 2, 2014? For starters, we had really nice weather. Temperatures were high 70s to low 80s and it was sunny. We had 8 teams manned by 76 people covering our count circle and by the time the day was done, we had spotted, identified and tallied **3,063 butterflies across 55 different species!**

How does this compare to the past 5-6 years? Well, with the exception of last year during which we experienced a downpour, our count has averaged about 3,500 butterflies. So we are a little below that. In terms of species diversity, however, our average is about 50 and this is only the second time that we have ever reached 55 species!



Giant Swallowtail Butterfly

What were the standouts this year? There was a Giant Swallowtail at the Blue Ridge Center for Environmental Stewardship that got everyone's attention! We spotted a total of 63 Monarchs, giving us an indicator that Monarchs may see a modest recovery this year. Silver-spotted Skippers and Eastern-tailed Blues were out in force and our teams found 424 and 487 respectively! We also had the highest number of Zebra Swallowtails (58) ever spotted on our count but other swallowtail numbers were down. We also saw very few hairstreaks although we did have 5 Juniper Hairstreaks at one location. Fritillaries were also lower.

You can look at the data and compare our results across the years by downloading our summary sheet here:
http://www.loudounwildlife.org/PDF_Files/ButterflyCountData_Summary.pdf

Nicole Hamilton, CEO, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy

Boosting Future Butterfly Counts

Butterflies and bees are at risk all over the country due to loss of habitat. As individual gardeners we can all make a difference by planting native nectar and host plants and refrain from using all types of insecticides. Many elementary schools in Loudoun County are creating pollinator gardens to create habitat for pollinators as well as an interesting learning lab for the children.

Cedar Lane Elementary School in Ashburn under the sponsorship of Principal Robert Marple, planted a pollinator garden in 2013. The school's environmental awareness group called the Forever Greens focused on Monarch butterflies last year and their efforts paid off. Their milkweed and nectar plants attracted native bees, honey bees and Monarch butterflies.

Photos from the Cedar Lane Elementary School 2014 pollinator gardens:



Swamp Milkweed



Monarch butterfly



Asters and goldenrod

As you plan your gardens for next year keep the butterflies in mind and follow these guidelines:

Plant natives. Most of the plants in your pollinator garden should be native to Virginia, these are the plants that our native insects can eat and are best suited to provide food for our birds and small animals.

Plant native perennials. Most of the natives on pollinator lists for Virginia are perennials. You don't want to have to start over every year planting annuals. A good bed of closely growing perennials can block out weeds and save hours of labor year over year. The downside of perennials is that getting them started can be slow when growing from seed. Perennials usually don't bloom in their first year. This explains the second downside, because nurseries and growers have to grow perennials for 2-3 years before they can sell them, they are relatively expensive. Find people who have native gardens and get their plants in the fall when they thin or divide them. Be careful that the freebies are not hybrids or cultivars with unusual flower and leaf colors. These may contain plant chemicals that insects can't eat. Double flowers also prevent pollinators from getting to the pollen and nectar.

Plant in clumps. Butterflies and bees like to be able to see the different types of flowers as they fly over. Clump the different types of flowers together rather than scattering them all around.

Try to provide blooms all season long. This is easy in mid-summer and fall, but can be a challenge in the spring. This is where crocus, violets and even chickweed can be helpful. The bees and butterflies that emerge in the early spring need nectar. Other good natives are bee balm, phlox, joe-pye weed, violets, geraniums, hyssop, goldenrod, asters, coreopsis, black-eyed Susan and purple coneflowers.

Plant milkweed. Monarch caterpillars can only eat milkweed. Consider planting swamp milkweed, a moderately tall, well behaved plant that will fit in most gardens. Other choices could be common milkweed and butterfly weed.

To learn more about gardening for pollinators see <http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/habitat/butterfly-garden.asp> and <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/HORT/HORT-59/HORT-59.html>.

Carol Ivory, Master Gardener

Top Tools for Gardeners

Garden centers and garden tool websites offer a dazzling array of equipment to solve all your garden problems! Many of us own far more tools than we use. Some seasoned gardeners have assessed their assortment of tools and pruned them down to a manageable number.

But suggesting that every gardener needs a specific set of tools is foolish. Gardeners and gardens come in a wide variety – sizes, types, needs. Plus, gardeners have strong opinions about certain tools and express preferences by brand name and sometimes even color!

But in this season of reflection, planning, and maybe cleaning and throwing out, it's interesting to see what 84 Loudoun County Master Gardeners consider to be the essential tools for a gardener.



A list of 20 gardening items plus a final category “other” (a fill-in) was constructed based on input from about 10 seasoned gardeners. Then the link to the survey was sent out to the membership. 84 gardeners responded, each selecting seven items in the list that they considered essential. Here is the list of top vote-getters:

Ranking	Item	Percentage of votes
1	Gloves	88%
2	By-pass hand pruners	75%
3	Shovel	62%
4	Trowel	51%
5	Soil knife (hori hori knife)	45%
6	Hat	42%
7	Sunscreen, insect repellent, NSAID, Benadryl	40%
8	Garden rake (bow rake)	33%
9	Pruning saw (folding)	31%
10	Hand hoe, weeder, scraper	29%
11	Garden tub/trug	28%
12	Spade	20%
12	Lopping shears	20%



Spade



Shovel



Garden tub / trug

Many tools have multiple names. There's quite a bit written on shovel vs. spade. For this survey, we defined them as pictured above. The hori hori knife, also known as soil knife, is used as a multi-purpose digger/weeder by many gardeners. It has a serrated edge and is very sharp. In the photo at the top of this page it is the orange-handled tool. “Hand hoe, weeder, scraper” is a general category that includes many tools used for weeding. Uses for the rubber trug, many sizes and colors, is limited only by your imagination. Mix up potting soil, contain messes, transport freshly dug plants, carry tools to the “job site” and many other

uses. The drugstore items—sunscreen, insect repellent, NSAID, Benadryl—keep the gardener going, protected from sunburn, pesky insects, aching muscles and minor allergic reactions to insect bites and bee stings. One gardener recommended placing folded fabric softener sheets inside your hatband to keep the insects away.

Of course the runaway, top selected item was gardening gloves. I believe that people who don't wear gardening gloves haven't met the right pair. Loudoun County Master Gardeners agree on the qualities of good gardening gloves: they have a snug fit, are comfortable, don't impede feeling or dexterity and can be tossed into the washing machine often. Gloves keep your skin from drying out, improve your grip on all your tools and protect your hands from dirt, blisters, nicks and scratches. Personally, gloves give me the courage to plunge my hands into deep ground covers and tall grasses and root around in places that aren't fully visible. I was a no-gloves gardener until I met the right gloves, now I wear them for many chores in addition to gardening. The only disagreement is over whether it's best to have 6 pairs of the same color so you don't have to match them or indulge in a pair of each color.



By-pass hand pruners are also a staple in the gardening bag. By-pass describes how the blades work—a scissors-like action. These pruners can be used on all types of herbaceous plants, woody shrubs and trees. Quality counts with pruners, throw away all those little cheap pairs that

come in tool sets and invest in a name brand pair that will cut dependably.

A folding pruning saw is perfect for all those cutting tasks that are too large for the hand pruners. This saw folds and fits easily in your gardening bag unlike lopping shears which are unwieldy to carry around.

Also receiving 10% to 19% of the votes were digging fork, hand cultivator, watering can, hedge shears, garden cart/wagon, and knee pads. Nineteen people checked "other" and wrote in items such as wheelbarrow, hoses and soaker hoses, adjustable hose nozzle, sunglasses, waterproof shoes/boots, deer deterrent and repurposed 5 gallon buckets.

This survey opened up the fascinating world of garden tools. Several suggested tools prompted internet searches to find out what they were. In two cases I found tools I owned but had never named! In the spring issue we will do a deeper examination of digging tools, in the summer issue, weeding tools, and in the fall issue, cutting tools. Follow this series to learn about hula hoes, sheep shears, Cobrahead weeders, Hounddog stand-up garden tillers, cuttlefish hoes, Nejiri weeders, spear head spades and more. We've also collected recommendations for tools and strategies that may ease the discomfort of arthritis, bursitis, carpal tunnel and other problems. Stay tuned!



Folding pruning saw

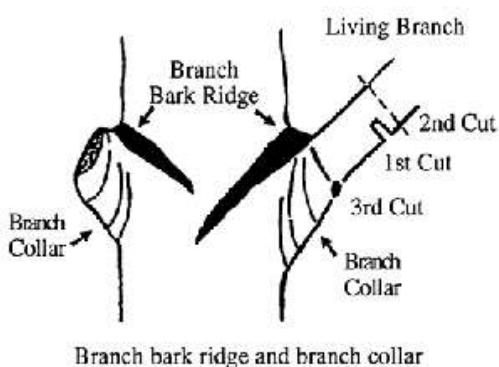
Carol Ivory, Master Gardener

Notes from the Help Desk:

Q: I see so many trees in the winter that been shaped or lopped off at the top, is this a common practice?

A: It is called “topping” and it seems to be widely practiced by non-licensed tree trimmers and many landscapers. Homeowners actually request it! And that is a bad thing for the tree.

Trees do not heal from cuts; they seal the area surrounding the cut. Sealing allows the wound to close off from entering pests and diseases that could attack the trunk and kill the tree. Sealing occurs when the cut has been made properly - outside the branch collar of the limb (see photo) NOT mid-branch as done with topping.



Topping a tree is not natural and could mean wrong plant in the wrong place. If you are continually reducing the size of the tree, then a smaller tree should have been planted. If the topping is done to spur new growth, it will spur weak growth called water sprouts that look like a broom at the end of a branch. Not natural at all.

Topping a tree also makes it susceptible to sun damage due to loss of canopy protecting the bark. And with the disfiguring of the tree, it can actually reduce property value. A tree shouldn't look like a lollipop!

Call an arborist to fix the topping damage and to get the tree back to its true form. For more information see the VCE VA Tech Publication “A Guide to Successful Pruning: Stop Topping Trees!” <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-458/430-458.html>

Q: What is the difference between downy mildew and powdery mildew?

A: Downy mildew (pictured on *Rudbeckia* leaves) symptoms vary on the plants infected but the one thing in common is it is a grayish-white fungus that attacks the UNDERSIDE of the leaf. Powdery mildew is a white flour-like fungus that sits on the TOPSIDE of the leaf. Knowing the difference is key to proper management of the diseases if you use fungicides.

Both mildews are caused by humidity and poor air circulation. Managing wet leaves early on will help reduce development and spreading. Avoid early morning and overhead watering. Space plants apart to keep air flow moving and thin out as necessary.



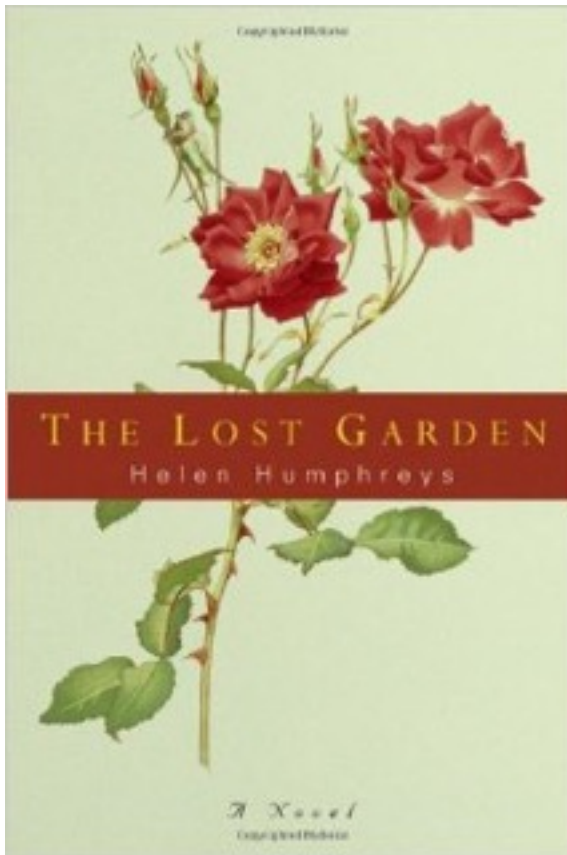
With winter right on our heels, it is important to pick-up any fallen leaves or affected leaves still hanging on to plant and destroy them. In some cases where leaf litter has fallen and been crushed, you may need to remove the mulch so spores do not overwinter.

For more on downy mildew: <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/BP/BP-68-W.pdf> and for powdery mildew: <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/450/450-603/450-603.html>.

Barb Bailey, Master Gardener

The Lost Garden

A Novel by Helen Humphreys



Winter is the perfect time to settle in with a good book. What could be better than a book about gardening? Well, this book is not exactly about gardening, but more about the lives this garden has touched. This work of historical fiction is twined around the British Women's Land Army, which was created to compensate for the farming men called off to war.

The book opens with a lonely-heart horticulturist, Gwen, studying parsnip canker in a London laboratory. Although she loves London, in an effort to flee a mundane life and a war-ravaged city she signs on to lead a group of girls called the "Land Army Girls". These women take on a run-down requisitioned estate in hopes of farming potatoes to support the war effort. Better with plants than people, Gwen is challenged to befriend and motivate these gals who are more interested with the soldiers encamped in the main estate house than with potatoes.

Gwen finds a neglected secret garden nestled on the estate and decides to bring it back to life as well as

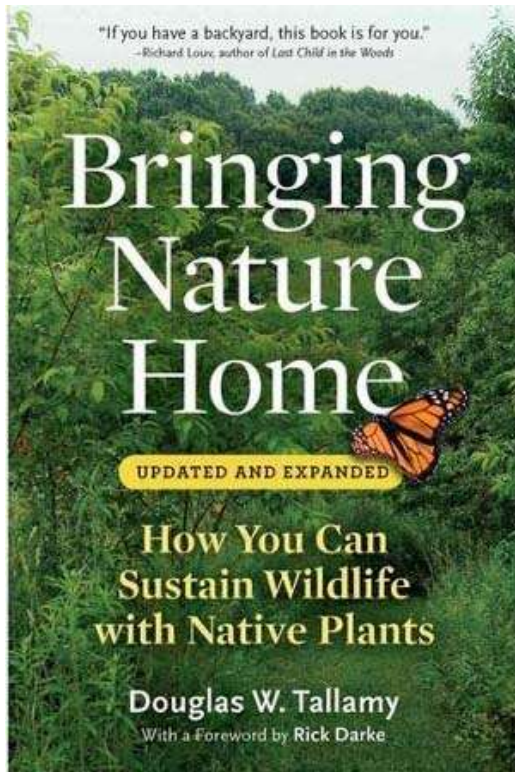
learn of the lives it has touched. The garden reveals a mirror of her own story of love, longing and loss. As she tends to the garden she also cultivates relationships, history, and possibly even love. Just like most lives, it is a bittersweet tale.

The book is a quick and easy read. If you are looking for something to read to grow your gardening knowledge this is not for you. It is just a story about World War II and a woman who likes to garden. However, it has just enough horticultural references for any gardener looking for a respite from the cheery holidays while waiting for the seed catalogs to arrive.

"There are many different stories to tell. It's never the same. Everyday weather blows in and out; alters the surface. Sometimes it is stripped down to a single essential truth, the thing that is always believed, no matter what. The seeds from which the garden has grown."

Julie Borneman. Master Gardener

Bringing Nature Home by Douglas W. Tallamy



Bringing Nature Home by Douglas W. Tallamy offers readers an in-depth discussion of how recent ecological changes in the US are threatening the biodiversity of our environment, and guides us in making simple changes to rebuild and support these important relationships. Originally published in hardback in 2007, the newer 2009 paperback edition has been updated and expanded to include lists of native plants by regional habitats.

Uncontrolled expansion and the “aesthetics and beauty” gardening movement have greatly challenged our local biodiversity. Native insects and animals are deprived of important food sources for their existence when native plants are swapped for alien ones. Sadly, if this continues, the extinction of these important living organisms is likely to happen within our children’s lifetimes. Tallamy states “...we humans have disrupted natural habitats in so many ways and in so many places that the future of our nation’s biodiversity is dim unless we start to share the places in which we live - our cities and, to an even greater extent,

our suburbs - with the plants and animals that evolved there.”

According to Tallamy, it’s not too late to save these species and prevent this crisis. Planting native plants in our home gardens is easy to do; these plants easily thrive in their native environments with minimal intervention. As the understanding of their importance expands, more and more nurseries are carrying a diverse collection of native plants making them easy to access at relatively low cost. While Tallamy doesn’t classify this book as a how-to guide, it does contain helpful information in Creating Balanced Communities (Chapter 8) and What Should I Plant? (Chapter 12) including the importance of natural predators, such as beneficial wasps that populate tomato hornworms in our gardens and how not all natives are created equal. Some are capable of hosting more insect herbivores than others.

Doug Tallamy is professor and chair of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware where his research interests include the behavior ecology of insects, conservation of biodiversity, impact of alien plants on native ecosystems, and plant-insect interactions.

When *Bringing Nature Home* was initially reviewed by the Trumpet Vine in 2009, the importance of natives in the garden was a brand new concept, now Tallamy’s book has become a gardening classic.

Amber Becker, Master Gardener

Loudoun County Master Gardeners Sixth Annual Gardening Symposium March 21, 2015

Ida Lee Recreation Center, Social Hall (Downstairs)
60 Ida Lee Drive, NW
Leesburg, VA 20176

Seminar with boxed lunch and water: \$65.00

Seminar with bring your own lunch: \$55.00

Registration fees are non-refundable. Space is limited, please register early.

I am registering for:

Symposium with lunch, # of people _____, x \$65 = \$_____

Symposium without lunch*, # of people _____ x \$55 = \$_____

(* Highly suggested to bring food as restaurants are over a mile away.)

Vegetarian Lunch Option (if more than one, please indicate #____)

Name: _____

Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Make check payable to LCMGA. Mail or drop off form and payment ***starting January 15, 2015:*** Loudoun County Extension Office, Attn: Symposium, 30 Catoctin Circle SE, Suite B, Leesburg, VA, 20175, from 9-5 weekdays.

OR

Register and pay online starting Feb. 5th at

<http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/annual-symposium/>

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Jim Hilleary, Loudoun Extension Office, at (703-777-0373/TDD*) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. *TDD number is (800) 828-1120.