Trumpet Vine

Knowledge for the Community from Loudoun County Master Gardeners

Spring 2015

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LOUDOUN COUNTY MASTER GARDENER LECTURE SERIES

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

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

May 7. "*Garden as if Life Depended on it: Eco-friendly Gardening with Audubon at Home*" with Terrence Liercke, past president Audubon Society of Northern Virginia. Location TBD.

June 4. "*Grow Native*" A visit to Watermark Native Plant Nursery in Hamilton, Virginia, Loudoun County's first and only native plant nursery with owner Julie Borneman.

July 9. "*Goodbye Grass, Hello Suburban Meadow*" with Tom Mannion, Landscape designer. Location TBD.

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

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

The Miracle of Spring

Despite the record low temperatures and the late, heavy snows, there are seeds waiting to germinate, and flowers waiting for just a little warmth to bloom.

Dedicated vegetable gardeners have seedling pepper and tomato plants growing under lights in their homes. Outside, flower buds are swelling in response to warming temperatures.

Photo by Edye Clark

Cherry Blossoms

Photo by Carol Ivory

Pepper Seedling

Master Gardeners welcome spring with their **6th Annual Gardening Symposium** on March 21st. This event is planned for the community and features four leading garden speakers. Please kickoff the first full day of spring by joining us at Ida Lee. For information and registration see http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/events/annual-symposium/.

Master Gardeners are growing hundreds of vegetable and herb plants for your vegetable gardens. This year we are offering 15 varieties of tomatoes, 11 varieties of peppers and 6 herbs. For details on the spring plant sale and order form go to the website or click here.

The Master Gardener Help Desk gets busy in the spring. We are available Monday through Friday mornings 9-12. Drop in or contact us by phone or email. We can provide you advice on planning and planting your vegetable garden and provide lists of the plants that are best for pollinators and butterflies.

Master Gardeners at Community Events

Master Gardeners at SterlingFest 2014

Have you seen Master Gardeners at the Lucketts Fair, at Earth Day in Ashburn, MayFest in Lovettsville or the Bluemont Fair? Each year Master Gardeners participate in at least a dozen community events from April through October in an effort to reach residents in all corners of the county with information about safe and sustainable horticultural practices.

Behind the scenes the Master Gardener Community Events Team is communicating with participants, and staging the canopies, tables, and materials for each event. At the beginning of each season the team ensures that all the canopies are in working order and that all of the information boxes are supplied with the most current brochures and materials. In the spring and fall some weekends are very popular and two or three events are happening concurrently. The Community Events Team ensures that there's sufficient equipment and materials for all the events.

Visit the Master Gardener booth at any of the following community events:

- April 18th and 19th, *Leesburg Flower and Garden Show,* Downtown Historic Leesburg, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- April 22th, *Earth Day at Inova*, Lansdowne Inova Hospital, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
- April 26th, *Earth Day Loudoun,* Ashburn, 42920 Broadlands Blvd, Ashburn, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- May 16th and 17th, *Spring Farm Tour*, Ida Lee Park
- May 23rd,*MayFest*, Town Green, Lovettsville 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
- August 15th and 16th, *Lucketts Fair,* Lucketts Community Center 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Sept. 19th and 20th, *Bluemont Fair,* Rt. 760 and Snickersville Pike, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Oct. 10th, *SterlingFest,* Commerce and Enterprise Street, Sterling Park, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Oct. 17th and 18th, *Fall Farm Tour*, Ida Lee Park
- Oct. 17th, *Aldie Harvest Festival,* Historic Aldie Village, Rt. 50, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Oct.17th, *Hillsboro Heritage Day,* Hillsboro Old Stone School, Charles Town Pike, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Oct. 25th, *Painting Purcellville Green at the Chapman DeMary Trail,* 1 to 4 p.m.

Spring in Loudoun County

After a long and late winter the crown jewels of spring in Loudoun County, our native dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and redbud trees burst into bloom. For several years our native dogwoods were under attack from anthracnose, a fungus which killed many of the trees growing in the forests. However the disease is in decline and dogwoods planted in the sun with good air circulation stay healthy.

Cornus florida "Cherokee chief"

Cercis Canadensis, Fieldstone Farm, Hillsboro

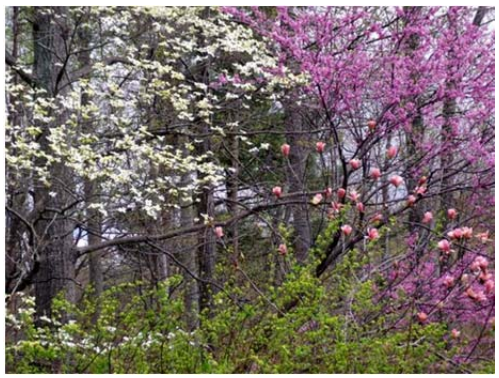
Landscape at Fieldstone Farm, Hillsboro

In addition to beauty, the dogwood and redbud make an important contribution to the environment.

Flowering dogwood is a soil improver because its leaf litter decomposes more rapidly than most other tree species. For this reason, flowering dogwood has been planted on abandoned strip mines and used for urban forestry projects. Flowering dogwood fruit is a valuable food plant for wildlife because of its high calcium and fat content. Many bird species consume the seeds. The eastern chipmunk, white-footed mouse, gray fox, gray squirrel, black bear, beaver, white-tailed deer, and skunk eat dogwood seeds as well. Dogwood are the host plant for the blue azure butterfly.

Henry's elfin butterfly and hummingbirds use eastern redbud for nectar. Honey bees use the flowers for pollen. Redbuds are in the legume family and the flowers taste like sweet peas. They can be put into salads or fried and eaten. The long, bean-like seed pod is food for some birds.

Enjoy our native flowering trees this spring.



Naturalized area with redbud, dogwood and saucer/tulip magnolia.

Photos by Edye Clark, VCE Master Gardener

Planting Veggies for a Spring Garden

When planning your garden beds, remember that your veggie beds should have access to a lot of sunshine, fresh air and good drainage. Also, you should be aware of what plant hardiness area you live in and the recommended planting dates.

Harvest of radishes

Loudoun County is mainly in the Piedmont. The last killing frost, on average, occurs April 20 -30. Fauquier County is mainly in the Mountain area where the last killing frost occurs May 10-15. For a complete planting guide for the state see Virginia Tech Publication 426-331.

Be sure to read your seed packet for recommendations on germination instructions, sowing instructions, spacing and descriptions.

8 week old cabbage seedlings ready for planting

Some vegetables need to be sown indoors 6 to 8 weeks before transplanting into the garden. You will need to give these plants a week to 'harden off' or acclimate and harden to outdoor temps and sun before transplanting. That means leaving them outside, protected from wind, for up to 4 to 6 hours a day, but bringing them in overnight.

As soon as the ground can be worked, peas, lettuce, spinach and other cool weather crops can be planted in the garden.

- **Arugula** – Also called Rocket, is a cool weather salad green with a spicy flavor. It has become very popular in the last few years and is an easy grower. Seeds sprout quickly, even in cold soil. Direct seed as soon as soil can be worked, either by broadcasting or in rows. Cover with row cover to prevent flea beetles from reaching the plants.
- **Broccoli** – Seed can be sown directly in the ground 4 weeks before the last frost date or set out transplants 2 weeks before. Ideal temps for broccoli are in from 65 to 80 degrees. Feed plants 3 weeks after transplanting, using a low nitrogen fertilizer.
- **Cabbage** – Start seeds indoors 6 to 8 weeks before last frost date and transplant into the ground 2 weeks before. Although seeds can be sown directly into the soil, transplants are more reliable. Cabbages are heavy feeders and require rich soil and consistent moisture.
- **Carrots** – Sow seeds 2 weeks before last frost date. Carrots need loose soil to form a good root. Beds need to be kept weeded to avoid competition for nutrients. When seedlings are about 2" tall, thin to 2-4" apart. Keep their shoulders covered to avoid green and do not use a lot of nitrogen, as that can cause forked roots.

- **Collards** –Transplants can be planted 4 to 6 weeks before last frost date. Plant in well drained, rich soil.
- **Kale** – Plant in early spring in fertile soil, but cover with row cover or frost blankets during severe cold.
- **Kohlrabi** – Becoming more popular every year. Similar to a turnip but is related to cabbage. Set plants out 4 weeks before last frost date. Cover in freezing temperatures. Cool temps enhance their flavor.
- **Lettuces** – Sow anytime in spring, after the soil is workable. Sensitive to cold, so they should be covered during cold snaps. Ideal daytime temp is between 60 and 70 degrees. They can grow in partial shade and like high nitrogen fertilizer like fish emulsion.
- **Onions** – Can be grown from seeds, sets or transplants. Any should be planted in early spring as soon as soil is workable.
- **Peas** – March 17th, St Patrick's Day, is traditional pea planting day and planting in the snow is not unheard of once in a while. They will germinate in temperatures as low as 40 degrees, and seedlings can survive short periods of temps down to 25 degrees. Using a legume inoculant, either a slurry or granular, is recommended but not necessary.
- **Potatoes** – A good indication of when to plant potatoes is when the grass starts to green up, which is March/April in the Piedmont area. Dried potato pieces with 2 to 3 eyes each should be planted in loose fertile soil. As the plants grow, mound soil up around stem to allow more tuber growing area.
- **Radishes** – The fastest plant to harvest veggie in the garden. Plant 4 weeks before last frost date and they are ready in 25 to 30 days.
- **Spinach** – Seeds can be planted over frozen ground to germinate as the soil thaws. Transplants can be set out 4 weeks before last frost day. Prefers fertile soil. When days start getting longer and warmer, spinach will go to seed (bolt) and turn bitter.
- **Swiss chard** – This plant seems to be replacing kale in popularity. Sow seeds before the last frost and thin to 6" apart when seedlings are 3" tall. Water regularly.
- **Turnips** – Plant 2 weeks before last frost date. The edible greens will be tender if the soil is fertile.

It is good to remember that vegetables need 7 to 8 hours of full sunlight daily. Cool season veggies get by on 6 hours and some can be planted in partial shade.

This list contains your standard spring crops, but there are other specialty and old time types like mesclun, mustard greens, sorrel, rhubarb and many more.

Swiss chard seedlings under row cover

Swiss chard

If you are new to vegetable gardening, it is best to decide what you and your family like and how much space you have before planting your garden. There are no mistakes in gardening, just experiments. Keep a journal and read the seed packet!!

Article and photos by Normalee Martin, VCE Master Gardener

Eat Like a Chicken

One of the first weeds to emerge in spring is common chickweed (*Stellaria media*). It is an annual, but since each plant can produce 2,500 to 15,000 seeds, if you have it in your garden it is likely to become a permanent guest. It begins as a small plant; only 1/8 to 1/3 inch long. The stems are limp, and as they spread they root at the nodes so a single plant may become a matted groundcover that can take over large patches of lawn or garden. Its white flowers are tiny also – about ¼ inch across. Technically there are 5 petals (thus "stellaria" or star) but each petal is deeply notched so they look like 10.

Photo by Adam Grubb and Annie Raser-Rowland

The good news is that chickweed is eminently edible – and not only by chickens. All parts of the plant (except the roots) may be cooked or eaten raw. Recipes abound on the internet – one place to look is http://www.wildmanstevebrill.com/. Steve Brill, a well-known urban naturalist, says that chickweed has "more vitamins than a health-food store." Supposedly eaten raw it tastes a bit like sweet corn. The recommended way to use it is to pull up the entire plant, cut off the roots, wash carefully, pat dry, and chop it up for a salad. A simple way to cook chickweed is to first lightly sauté a garlic clove in olive oil; add the washed but not dried chopped chickweed to the pan, cover and steam for about 5 minutes; season with a few drops of soy sauce.

Alice Bagwill, VCE Master Gardener

Rhubarb: An Overlooked Fruit or Is It A Vegetable?

Many people are unfamiliar with rhubarb. When there were more one-family farms, it was not unusual to find rhubarb being grown on the side of the vegetable beds or in a perennial bed. Rhubarb has been around for a very long time, having existed in Roman times and was used medicinally. Many of our grandparents and great grandparents cherished their plants.

Most people consider rhubarb to be a fruit but botanically it is a vegetable, but for those who have grown it, that is not what really matters. What matters to them is that it can be used in so many ways - rhubarb pie, strawberry-rhubarb pie (the Amish are well known for this), rhubarb jam, rhubarb in muffins, and rhubarb sauce served over ice cream.

Photo by H. Michael Miley

Rhubarb is grown in the home garden or in a hothouse which would be what appears in grocery stores. Many people feel that home grown rhubarb produces a richer red and richer flavor. If you desire to grow it in your own garden, it is best to order root divisions from a seed catalog or to know someone who raises it and needs to divide their plants. Rhubarb seeds can be ordered from a catalog but the seed doesn't always breed true. Divisions that are ordered can produce stems that are either red, pinkish or even more green. Some people believe that the red variety will give the best rhubarb taste and will give better color in recipes or in jam.

In order to grow rhubarb in your own garden, select an open and sunny location with good drainage. The growing space needs to be fertile so dig in compost and/or well-aged manure. Work the compost or manure deeply into the soil as this will encourage the growing rhubarb to produce deep roots. If you are planting several rhubarb divisions, dig a trench. Keep in mind that about 4 divisions will develop into plants that will feed a family of four. Set the root divisions in the trench 3-4 feet apart. Keep the growing part of the division just at the surface of the soil. Divisions that have their "heads" below the ground will probably rot. Firm the soil around each division and water well. When new growth appears, apply a layer of organic mulch (not hardwood mulch). For the first growing season keep the area well watered and weeded as this will produce the healthiest plant.

Rhubarb loves cold and cool weather and will thrive in Alaska but has difficulty in hot climates like the states in the south. It is also virtually pest free. In harsh winter conditions a layer of straw can be applied to cover the crowns and then pulled back in the spring.

Many advise that no harvesting occur the first year in order for the plant to become well

established. For harvesting thereafter, select the outer leaves and twist the stalk away from the plant. Cutting the stalks with a knife may produce rot. Continue to harvest the outer stalks but not more than half of the stems. Harvesting can continue until the heat of summer.

If you are fortunate enough to find rhubarb to purchase in the store, select stems that have the richest color and the smaller stalk width. If there are leaves still attached, select the stems that have the freshest leaves. To prepare the rhubarb for cooking, *discard the leaves* since they are toxic. You will use only the stems. The thinner stalks will cut more easily; the thicker stems can be treated like celery. If they are fibrous, peel them like you would celery. Cut the stems into 1"-2" pieces. Rhubarb by itself is very tart so follow guidelines for the amount of sugar for your desired sweetness and then select your favorite recipe.

Below is a recipe that appears in the "Ball Blue Book ", a small cookbook that explains about home canning and contains recipes. Perhaps this will inspire you to try this overlooked fruit/vegetable. ENJOY! NOTE: The ingredients in this recipe can easily be cut in half.

Victoria Sauce

2 quarts chopped rhubarb (about 12 stalks)

1 1/2 cups chopped raisins

1/2 c. chopped onion

3 1/2 cup brown sugar

1/2 c. up vinegar

1 teaspoon allspice

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon ginger

1 teaspoon salt

Photo by yummychunklet

Combine rhubarb, raisins, onion, sugar and vinegar in a large saucepan. Cook until thick, about 25 minutes. As mixture thickens, stir frequently to prevent sticking. Add spices, cook 5 minutes longer. Pour hot into hot jars, leaving 1/4 inch head space. Adjust caps. Process 15 minutes in boiling water bath. Yield: about 4 pints.

This would be delicious over ice cream or yogurt or over a fruit mixture.

Kristin Westfall, Master Gardener

Pest Spotlight: Flea Beetles

Alton N. Sparks Jr., University of GA, www.bugwood.org

It's that time of year again! March is finally here and most of us can FINALLY get back into our gardens to plant flowers and vegetables that will be welcoming through the summer months. However, this also means our foes of the garden will soon be making their presence known somehow managing to descend on freshly ripened vegetables, flowers, and berries backed by an army to come. To have the upper hand on how to outwit the seasonal invaders to your garden, this "Pest Spotlight" column will discuss tips, tricks, and research tested methods to take the control back in your yard. Following a traditional Integrated Pest Management plan is always recommended, no matter If you have a two hundred acre farm or an eight story balcony to control. Integrated Pest Management focuses on knowing your pest in order to control your pest. This means, proper identification, feeding preferences, breeding practices, and phenology knowledge are essential in order to outwit your enemy. In addition, having as many "tools" in your "toolbox" is important when it comes to your control methods of choice. Instead of relying on one tactic, use multiple! All the better to outwit those bugs! Classic examples include using cultural methods (tilling, adjusting time of planting, etc.), using organic soaps and oils, and manual control (picking aphids off plants).

The first pest who has earned a spot in the spotlight is the flea beetle. Small, black, and difficult to see it leaves a memorable mark. If you have ever seen leafy greens, eggplant leaves, or root vegetable greens that look like they had someone take a hole punch to, chances are a flea beetle is involved. They are one of the first pests out in gardens and given their small size and tendency to hop plant to plant (hence, flea) they are hard to control! Here is valuable information and tricks to make sure your garden is flea beetle free this season.

Flea Beetles (*Alticini sp.)*

Description:

Adult flea beetles are very small, ranging from 1/10 to 1/16 inch in size. They tend to be dark in color, black-brown. They have enlarged hind legs and are able to jump similar to a flea (though not quite that sophisticated) when they are disturbed. Like all beetles, they have a grub larval form that usually makes its home in the soil under favored plants.

Range:

Unfortunately, flea beetles are found all throughout North America.

Lifecycle:

Adults are overwintering in the soil as we speak and will soon emerge to feed on available crop greenery. Females will lay their eggs near desirable host plants which should emerge within two weeks.

As grubs, the beetles feed on roots further damaging plants. After two or so weeks they will pupate and reemerge as adults a few weeks later. Much to our delight they can exhibit four generations in a single season!

R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Slide Set, Bugwood.org

Plants of Choice:

They enjoy most vegetables, especially cabbage greens. Potatoes, spinach, eggplant, beets, turnips, tomatoes, peppers, mustard greens, and radish are also favorites.

Damage:

The beetles leave small perfectly circular holes in new leaves. When the populations are heavy in early spring, they can kill small seedlings easily. Larvae also feed on roots and the adults can transfer viruses through feeding on multiple plants. Older, established plants usually can weather the damage.

Control:

Cultural:

- Plant as late as possible in the season, after populations have decreased
- Use floating row covers until adults are reduced in numbers
- Cultivate the soil around and after to take care of any larvae remaining
- Plant flowers and other plants nearby that will promote natural enemies

Organic:

- Dust with diatomaceous earth
- Spray with Neem oil early morning or dusk (to prevent drying out)

Chemical:

- Spinosad, bifenthrin, and permethrin are all approved control with low environmental impact
- Control is good for about a week and should be reapplied as new growth is most attractive to insects
- READ label carefully! Make sure pesticides are approved for both the plant AND pest!!

Amanda Rose Newton, Entomologist, Master Gardener

Getting Started with Asparagus

Fresh, home-grown asparagus is one of the real treats of early spring. A member of the lily family, this long-lived perennial vegetable is an ancient crop native to Europe, especially along the Mediterranean seacoast, Eurasia, and North Africa and was enjoyed by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. Widely considered an aphrodisiac, it was banned from girls' convent schools in France during the 1800s but given to bridegrooms on their wedding nights "just in case". It was once cultivated for medicinal purposes for a number of different ailments.

Photo courtesy of Deb Ryan
www.EastofEdenCooking.com

Asparagus is a low-calorie vegetable loaded with dietary fiber and various nutrients and micronutrients including folate, potassium, vitamin A, and vitamin C.

It is well-adapted to our climate and has even naturalized along railroad tracks, fencerows, and roadsides. When the spears are allowed to grow on after the harvest, the ferny stalks make a lovely backdrop in the garden.

In the beginning: Year Zero

Before you plant asparagus, a lot of thought and work is involved in siting and preparing the bed, deciding whether to plant crowns (faster and easier) or seeds, and determining how many plants to buy.

Siting: In choosing the site for planting asparagus, keep in mind that the bed will be productive for at least ten to fifteen years, possibly longer. Choose your site with care. Remember that asparagus plants can grow up to 5-6 feet tall and 2-2½ feet wide. They will shade other, smaller plants in the garden. Site your bed on the north side your garden, in an area where you can leave the plants undisturbed for many years. Even better, give them their own separate bed. If possible, avoid frost pockets where a late hard frost will damage emerging spears.

Asparagus prefers full sun. Any good garden soil, when properly prepared, will work well for asparagus *provided, however* that it is well drained; asparagus can't tolerate wet feet. Raised beds are a solution to situations where the drainage is less than ideal, with the beds ranging from 4-to-8 inches high. Asparagus prefers a pH of 6.5 to 7.0; if necessary add lime to your soil in the preparation stage to make sure it is within these parameters.

Bed preparation: Success with asparagus is based on bed preparation, beginning at least six months, preferably one year, before actually setting plants in place. Prepare the bed carelessly or poorly and your asparagus planting will never reach its full potential.

One year before planting:

- Select the site.
- Take a soil test at least six months before planting, digging deeply, about 12 inches below the surface for your sample. This is essential; you will add fertilizer and lime based on the result.
- Remove all perennial weeds (such as thistles, any grasses, bindweed) in the bed-to-be using whatever method you prefer. Or choose a site relatively free of perennial weeds.
- Double dig or plow the soil as deeply as possible.
- If there are rocks in the bed, remove them; they will cause spears to be crooked.

- Based on the soil test, add lime, as well as phosphorous and potassium (both essential for good asparagus growth) plus other nutrients, as needed, incorporating them into the soil.
- Add organic material to the soil by growing and turning under a green manure crop or adding well-rotted manure, leaf mold, wheat or oat straw, hay, and/or compost. (Be sure the manure, straw and hay are weed-free.) Although some authorities recommend peat moss, it is better to avoid it since it has a pH of 3.4 to 4.8. You can add organic material several times, as needed to create friable, deep, loose loam, tilling in each time you add.

The Planting Year: Year 1:

Selecting a variety: Asparagus plants are dioecious, that is, each plant is either male or female. The old standard cultivars were 'Mary Washington', 'Martha Washington', and 'Waltham Washington', all of which are still available. A stand of any of these varieties will contain approximately 50% male and 50% female plants. Female plants, however, are not ideal in an asparagus bed. While females do tend to have more spears than males, the spears tend to be smaller in diameter. In addition, female plants bear seeds which scatter about the bed, germinate, and become hard-to-remove perennial weeds unless you are diligent about weeding them out as soon as they appear.

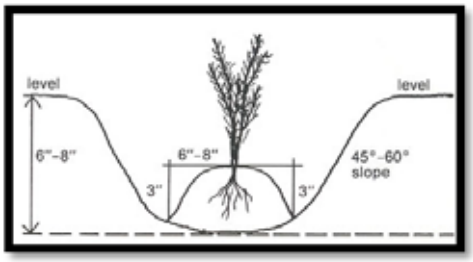
Today, thanks to the breeding program at Rutgers University in New Jersey, newer, all-male hybrids are available which have thicker spears and significantly higher yields than older varieties. Called the Jersey series, there are several named cultivars including 'Jersey Knight', 'Jersey Giant', and 'Jersey King', all of which are suited for Virginia. 'Jersey Knight' is particularly recommended for our own area. All of the Jersey series cultivars are resistant to rust and fusarium crown and root rot.

'Purple Passion' is a purple variety which is sweeter than green asparagus. Unfortunately it is a poor yielder and turns green when cooked, losing its "specialness" in the process. It is 50% female, so it will spread seedlings around the garden. Still, it can be fun to have few plants, just for the novelty.

When you plant an asparagus bed, if properly done, you can count on it producing for a very long time. Unless you start a new bed elsewhere, this will be your one chance to plant a cultivar which will give you the very best results. While the Jersey series plants may be more expensive, in the long term they will be well worth the extra up-front expense.

A healthy crown, Photo courtesy Kathy@skippysgarden.com

Crowns: Purchase 1-year-old, disease-free crowns from a reputable vendor. This is not the place to take shortcuts or try to save a few dollars. Older crowns may have been damaged when dug; less reputable sources may not have disease-free stock. Crowns should have buds present and the roots should be plump, not shriveled, about the size of a pencil and grayish-brown, not black. If there are any rotted roots present, remove them before planting. If it is necessary to hold the roots before planting in their permanent position, heel them into the garden.



Planting schematic for direct sown seeds and seedlings. Fill soil in gradually. Drawing courtesy of Cornell University, Department of Plant Pathology

Seeds: Asparagus can be grown from seed although it will take an extra year from time of planting to the first harvest. As with crowns, buy disease-free seeds from a reputable dealer. Seeds can be planted directly in the ground where they are to remain, in peat pots in a greenhouse, or in a nursery bed for later transplanting into their permanent position.

Sown ½ inch deep in peat pots and grown in a greenhouse, seeds take 10-14 days to germinate at 70-77 degrees. Transplant the seedlings when they are 6-10 inches tall either close together in a nursery bed or in their final place in the permanent asparagus bed in June, as shown in the drawing above. There are advantages and disadvantages to each method: by transplanting directly into the final bed, you avoid the extra work and root disturbance caused by a second transplanting; however, keeping the bed of tiny seedlings weeded can be difficult. If you do use the transplant bed, dig the crowns the following spring, before growth begins, and transplant into the final bed, as for any one-year old crowns.

If sown in the nursery bed, plant seeds in the spring after the soil reaches 60 degrees (usually about mid-April). Sow them 1 inch apart, 1-1½ inch deep, in rows 24-26 inches apart. At this temperature, the seeds will germinate in approximately 25 days. To speed germination, soak the seeds for 4-5 days in water held at 85 to 90 degrees, dry them enough to handle easily, and plant as soon as they are dry. Keep the bed moist but not wet.


Seedlings. Photo courtesy Greengardeningcookingcuring.com

How much to plant: For the Jersey series, plant 5 crowns per person for fresh use and 12 pounds per person for fresh use and preserving. For standard varieties, double this amount. Yes, that *does* mean doubling the size of your bed!

Planting: Plant asparagus in the spring 4-6 weeks before the last average frost date or as soon as the ground can be worked, in March or April, in soil which has reached at least 50 degrees. There is no advantage in planting them earlier. They won't grow until the magical 50 degrees is reached and may rot in the cold, wet soil.

Planting is labor intensive but well worth the effort. First, dig a trench 6-12 inches deep by 12-18 inches wide, with five feet between each trench. At the bottom of each trench scatter 1 lb. of 0-46-0 (triple superphosphate), 2 lb. of 0-20-0 (superphosphate), or 4 lb. of steamed bone meal per 50 feet of row. It doesn't matter if it touches the roots; it won't damage them and it will be right there, in the root zone, where it is immediately available to the plants.

Using a hoe, create a slight ridge, about 2 inches tall (think of a 2-inch mountain ridge ridge) down the entire length of the trench. Or, alternatively, create 2-inch mounds (think of mini-volcanos) where each crown will be set. The schematic above for direct sown seeds and seedling transplants is an example of how the trench should look, but the planting technique is different.

Set the plants 12-18 inches apart and 5 inches deep for Jersey series (slightly deeper for standard varieties), bud side up, with the crowns on the top of the ridge or mound and the roots spreading downward into the trench. (To encourage air circulation in organic gardens, plant the crowns 24 inches apart in the rows.) Cover the crown with 2 inches of soil and very slightly and gently firm it up; do not compact it, however and do not fill up the trench at this point. Instead, fill the trench only to the point where the roots are covered and the soil in the trench is level with the soil over the crown. Over the course of the summer gradually, at about two week intervals add more soil to the trench until, by August, the trench is level with the surrounding ground. Water throughout the summer if there is less than one inch of rain a week. If you are going to use trickle irrigation, this would be a good time to lay the hoses although you will have to move them aside and put them back in place every time you add more soil to the trench. Be sure to keep the bed weed free.

With all of this done, the hardest of your work is over. And next summer you can begin thinking of on-going care of your new asparagus bed and (at long last) your first harvest!

By Lina Burton, VCE Master Gardener

Time for Digging: Choose your Tools

Digging, cultivating, pruning — all gardening tasks and all requiring tools. Like an upscale kitchen store, garden centers and internet sites present a dazzling array of equipment. How many of these does a gardener need and how many can a gardener store or carry? Of course the answer is "*It depends.*" It depends on the type of gardening we do, physical limitations, strength, height, preferences, etc. This article will consider popular digging tools.

Unlike plants, gardening tools don't have Latin names and people call their tools all kinds of things so this article resorts to using lots of photos to make sure we all know what we are talking about.

Trowels

Photo by Barb Bailey

Many consider this the basic hand digging tool. One Master Gardener said this about her go-to trowel pictured on the right. "*I am a tried and true user of a trowel. I use it all the time and probably use it when I should be using a larger tool like a shovel. Guess I am a glutton for punishment! It has a nice red semi-padded handle but other than that there is nothing special about it but it is my "go to" tool when puttering around in my mature flower gardens. I use it to plant annuals dotting my landscapes, when planting bulbs, and when I plant my precious tomatoes, peppers and basil. Quick and easy is what it is all about. Only time it fails (or I do) is when the Virginia clay is harder than a rock and I can't pound it into the ground! Then I have to give up and go to my shed to get out a good old shovel!*"

Photo by Carol Ivory

Of course there are fancy trowels. Here's a bulb trowel (narrower blade with inches marked off on the blade) with an ergonomic handle that supposedly is easier to use with less strain on the wrists.

Photo by DeWit Garden Tools

Root and Rock Trowel

One supplier offers ten different trowels. Here's their root and rock trowel and their tulip trowel recommended for clay soils. It's fun to window shop but do you want to carry around all those trowels?

Photo by DeWit Garden Tools

Tulip Trowel

Other hand diggers

Photo by Julie Borneman

Whether you call this by its Japanese name, a **cuddlefish hoe**, or just a **hand hoe** or **cultivator** this is a popular tool. One Master Gardener says, "*I have several of these, two short handled ones, a long handled one and a telescoping one. It's my "go to" digger. Because of the small head I can work very precisely around plants. Given the two sided head, I have some versatility. It is the tool that I am never without.*"

The **HO-MI Asian Hand Cultivator or Korean Hand Plow** is the favorite tool of one our Demonstration Garden stalwarts. She says, "*My favorite little digging tool is my "HO MI", a Korean tool given me by a friend who purchases them in a Korean grocery store. It is triangular in shape, with a sharp point that gets right down to dig out even dandelions, but is also useful as a cultivator, an edger, or for transplanting and dividing plants."* This tool can be comfortably used for hours making it particularly suitable for older or arthritic gardeners. For more information about different versions of the HO-MI see this webpage.

Photo by Fran Grozier

Photo by A.M. Leonard

Many Master Gardeners use the **soil knife** as their all-purpose digging tool. They use it to divide plants, plant bulbs, flowers and herbs, dig out weeds, remove rocks, cut through roots, cut twine and ties, and just dig holes! One side of the blade is serrated to cut through roots and plant crowns. A Master Gardener said "*my favorite tool is the soil knife. The point goes into hard soil easily to get to the bottom of dandelion roots."*

The soil knife is based on the Japanese-crafted **Hori Hori knife** which some Master Gardeners prefer to the soil knife.

Those 200 bulbs that you bought are much easier to plant with **a bulb auger** and a trusty cordless drill. Bulb augers come in all sizes, styles, qualities and prices at garden centers, hardware stores and on websites. Unless your soil is well cultivated you'll definitely want to use this for any large bulb planting project.

Photo by Carol Ivory

Large digging tools

Photo from Southern States

Many gardeners prefer **forks** to shovels. One says "*The digging fork has been a favorite for years. I took a workshop at Wilson College on Bio Intensive, double digging gardening back in the '90's. That and the spade were what we were taught to use. I find it easier to work with than a shovel, and it does break up the soil more than a shovel. It is also good for harvesting root crops*." Another commented "*For large chores, I prefer a garden fork to a shovel, because I can maneuver it better. I gave myself a stress fracture of the foot, by trying to jump on a shovel to dig out liriope."* Note the Ergonomic D-handle which aids comfort and control.

The **Broadfork** or **U bar** is good for the vegetable garden. A Master Gardener explains "*It doesn't turn the earth, but instead moves it. Turning the soil can upset the complex relationships between beneficial organisms and the soil. Moving the soil will break the top 4 or 5 inches of soil to allow fertilizer and water in, and also making it easier to smooth out the soil in order to plant.*"

While primarily used in the vegetable garden it can also be used to dig up shallow-rooted shrubs such as azaleas.

Photo by Organic Gardening

Shovels

When you do use a shovel, make sure it is the right size for you. Consider shovels with smaller blades, shorter handles and D-handles. Garden centers have a wide variety of shovels that you can handle to see how they feel. Careful selection can save your back some wear and tear.

This spear head spade goes into the ground easily, even into clay due to its narrow blade and sharp point but it still has the full upper edge for pushing down with your foot. It was designed by a gardener with physical limitations and some Master Gardeners have found it to be very helpful.

Photo from Gardeners Supply

Spear head Spade

Specialty Item

The Hound Dog Stand-up Garden Tiller loosens the soil so you can easily make a planting hole; breaks up the clay into clods without making a "clay pot" around the planting hole, and is great because you use it standing up. Another back saver.

When choosing your digging tools choose the tool that fits the job and the tools that fit you. Change up tasks so you are not repeating the same motion for too long. Take frequent breaks and do gentle stretching.

Enjoy your garden work.

Photo from Home Depot

Hound Dog Stand-up Garden Tiller

Carol Ivory, VCE Master Gardener

Bees Abound: This Spring Your Garden Will Be Visited By More Than Just Honey Bees!

Despite the record low temperatures in the upcoming forecast, spring, in theory, is just around the corner. With it, marks the return of many of our favorite flowers, edibles, and pollinators. We are all familiar with *Apis mellifera*, our domestic honey bee but what about the other 200 species likely to come through Loudoun County? You read that right: 200 species! Many of them incredibly tiny, they all make significant contributions to our native fruit, vegetable, and ornamental crops and as gardeners, this is something we can get excited about. Unlike our honey bee, most of the bees you will meet below are not truly "social" bees meaning they do not show the same caste system and hive comradery we have come accustomed to associating with bees. Most prefer to stay out of the way and generally specialize in one plant in particular, making it essential to encourage their presence if growing any of the plants they favor. Here is a brief scope of some of the more common bees you may get (or want to entice) in your yard this spring and summer:

Photo by Amanda Rose Newton

Photo by Jack Dykinga

Southeastern Blueberry Bees: (*Habropoda laboriosa*) Get their name from, you guessed it, pollinating blueberries! These pale, blue grey bees are only active a few short weeks during blueberry season. The female blueberry bee will actually vibrate her flight muscles to loosen the pollen from the interior flower. This also is a messy process, and she ends up easily transmitting pollen from one flower to the next allowing for incredibly efficient pollination.

Photo by Sandy

Mason Bees: (*Megachilidae)* These bees truly are the "builders" of the native bee group. They utilize mud and leaves to create nests in holes in rotting wood or logs. It has become popular for local growers to carry mason bee nests, which can help promote these bees to one's yard. They pollinate a variety of crops from orchard fruits to orchids and are quite coveted among farmers. They are easily identified by their iridescent sheen and streaks of pollen on their underside. Unlike most bees, they do not carry pollen on their back legs, but rather their bellies!

Photo by Nancy Adamson

Squash Bees: (*Peponapsis sp*) Are responsible for pollinating the flowers of squash, pumpkins, melons, and cucumbers and should be a welcome visitor to your garden. They are roughly the size of a honey bee but are easily distinguished by their long antennae and distinct behaviors. They tend to get up at the crack of dawn, when the squash flowers open to start harvesting pollen. Honey bees tend to stroll in much later in the day, during the warm part of the afternoon. Squash bees are so into their crop of choice that they make their nests directly underneath the ground below the flowering portion of the plant.

Photo by Dna-man

Sweat Bees: (*Hatictidae*) You have likely seen these metallic critters nearby after a hard day's work in the garden. They are attracted to the mineral component of your sweat, hence the name, and tend to get a "little friendly". They are solitary bees that choose nesting sites in rotting logs and prefer alkaline soil. They are particularly good at pollinating crops that favor these soil types, Alfalfa being the main one. Farmers will even go out of their way to develop alkaline soil to attract them!

Photo by Beatriz Moisset

Miner Bees: (*Andrenidae*) These shy, ground nesting bees are a dark black or reddish brown and smaller than the average honey bee. Miners are some of the first bees you will see as spring starts ramping up. They are solely responsible for the pollination of Azaleas, which honey bees do not tend to visit. Azaleas keep their pollen tucked away and like the squash blooms, must be shaken out to be accessed.

Attracting Natives to Your Yard

Now that you are more familiar with a small sampling of the vast amount of bees present in the county, you may be interested in using their special abilities to your benefit. In addition to the plants mentioned above, many of the other flowering plants commonly admired by honey bees serve as powerful attractants as well. A good rule of thumb in choosing native plants that bees may enjoy is whether it smells good to you. Bees, like us humans, have a bit of a sweet tooth and tend to gravitate to the flowers that smell sweet and are high nectar producing. Plants to consider:

- Foxglove
- Coreopsis
- Indigo
- Purple Coneflower
- Joe Pye Weed
- Asters

Another route is to create your own home for native bees. As mentioned, most natives are solitary and certain species, particularly mason bees, create nesting sites within wood. You can create a replica of this model fairly inexpensively in a day using two common methods

Tying hollow bamboo poles or hollow sticks together makes an ideal, easy to access nest site for bees. It is fairly self-explanatory and can be displayed horizontally anywhere in the garden.

Photo by Robert Engelhardt

Drilling holes into a wood block at certain distances apart and depths. There are detailed plans for this all over the internet that can easily be completed in a day.

Those who work with youth should also keep in mind this is an excellent project to get young people involved.

Interested in learning more? Additional resources are available through the following websites. Remember to think of the native bees when beginning to plan your spring and summer gardens!

- www.xerces.org
- www.pollinator.org
- www.masonbeehomes.net
- www.pwrc.usgs.gov/nativebees/

Amanda Rose Newton, Entomologist, VCE Master Gardener

Plant Names in *Latin*: When You Need to Be Sure

Hydrangea, Azalea, Petunia, Dahlia, Impatiens, Iris, Clematis … plants' Latin names that are also their common names. Straightforward, enduring, familiar, classic. What happens then when we get entangled in the world of mopheads, lacecaps, mums, daisies, jonquils, daffodils, dusty millers, mallows, Aaron's beards, St. John's worts, lilies, jasmines, pansies, sages, black-eyed Susan's, and hollies. Oh my!

Forget having to figure out even just the above examples. Simply imagine yourself admiring a landscape beauty you see somewhere, wanting it so much for your garden that you set out to find it. You somehow learned of its common name: Mile-a-minute. A rather unique name, so you are assured in your search. If you are lucky, you would have found *Polygonum aubertii* or silver lace vine. Yes, it can be invasive, but it is a landscape beauty and with proper care, a welcome asset to your garden landscape. But a search knowing only the common name most likely would have been tiring, confusing, and near disastrous. Imagine planting in your lovely garden *Persicaria perfoliata* or *Ipomoea cairica* instead? These last two are also called mile-a-minute, pesky weeds that they are, and you would not want to bring them into your garden on purpose. The Latin ID makes a difference.

All right, this scientific identification may not be much of an issue to a gardener who generally sticks with tried-and-true and familiar landscape treasures, even if they are a mouthful like rhododendrons. Really? What gardener is totally immune to temptations of exotic (not necessarily invasive) and unique plants continuously introduced in the trade or hyped in our trend-infused society? Even just for curiosity? It is good to be sure.

I was once at a big-box garden center on a cold September where I overheard a couple arguing about a hibiscus that the lady wanted so much but the husband argued would die when it gets cold soon. Even as an experienced Master Gardener I once made a mistake of buying a tropical hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis)* at a fall plant sale that ended up still a waste of money, when the bargain I wanted was a hardy hibiscus *(H. moscheutos)* or even a rose of Sharon (*H. syriacus*). If there is no label on the plant except *'Hibiscus'*, a smartphone search on plant identification—leaf features, for example—would have guided their decision then or for next time they look.

Now that spring plant-shopping and plant-buying season is again upon us, wouldn't it be nice to be armed with the scientific Latin names of desired plants? Let me tell you another story:

I was visiting my mother retired in Asia to help her get resettled in a more senior-accessible condo. As a Master Gardener, naturally I took over setting up a garden in her new spacious veranda. My mother kept on talking about her Japanese ashitaba plants. Ashitaba, ashitaba that I should make sure gets replanted there. Apparently it is a new trendy super food like pomegranate, acai, wheat grass, or goji berry, its cuttings from vigorous growth passed around. Just munching on a few leaves every day is supposed to treat diabetes, anemia, high cholesterol, ulcer, muscle aches, etc. I got curious eventually, and of course, very careful, so I researched it.

A lecture to my mother followed, "No, mom, that plant is not the ashitaba (tomorrow's leaf) you talk about; that is *Gynura procumbens (*longevity spinach*)*. I hope you did not pay an ashitaba price for that as *Gynura* is cheaper (call it 'ashitaba' and the plant sells for a premium). See these photos? Japanese ashitaba (*Angelica keiskei*) looks different from what you have."

It was too much detail for my mom to focus on, so at least I made sure she was not hurting herself munching on what she believes is ashitaba. What my mom has, *Gynura procumbens,* is thank goodness also very edible and claims to treat similar ailments. It is of some consolation to me that the National Institutes of Health is

doing research on the plants' claims and not dismissing it. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12602932. My research of matching scientific Latin names (i.e., binomial nomenclature) made the misidentification obvious:

Photo by Horizon Herbs

Angelica keiskei

Photo by Bev Wagner

Angelica archangelica

Photo by In the Garden blog

Gynura procumbens

The middle picture brings me to another matter. About four years ago, I bought starter *Angelica* plants from a reputable herb nursery. The *Angelica* that is majestically tall and whose stems can be made into candy. While I never got around to using it, I was pleasantly surprised that they came up year after year. This may be the year I give it more attention knowing it is a relative of this ashitaba leaf I learned about by happenstance. While we should responsibly view such claims with skepticism, this makes gardening, especially vegetable and herb gardening, continuously interesting. After all, decades ago, we did not know of mizuna, arugula, raab, or stevia. When dealing with edibles, it is more important to be sure, and Latin names are a good new challenge to tackle. Remember the old fear of a nightshade tomato that became the edible *Lycopersicon esculentum.*

As to landscape plants, which ones are desirable and which must be avoided? Good examples are the loosestrifes and honeysuckles. Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is absolutely undesirable and a threat to ecosystems, but gooseneck loosestrife (*Lysimachia clethroides*) may be introduced into the garden with caution.

Yes, gardeners can get by successfully without fussing with Latin names. After all, gardening should provide respite from the stresses of modern living. But imagine rolling off your tongue the Latin name for tomato.

So, if you are up to the challenge, the fun, the extra learning, and even the bragging rights of knowing the scientific Latin names of plants, try getting started. Is that exotic large-leaved summer plant *Alocasia* or *Colocasia*? They are both called elephant ear, but *Colocasia* has edible tubers and leaves (taro) and *Alocasia* does not. You go to the nursery insisting on finding *Colocasia esculenta* (*esculenta/um* meaning 'edible'), not *Alocasia*. That makes a difference for the adventurous but responsible gardener.

Maria Daniels, Loudoun County Master Gardener

From Hell Strip to a Bit of Paradise

Spring, yes, it is here! The start of gardening season is gearing up to full blast. Gardeners' brains are popping, gardening plans are in full swing, feet and vehicles are on their way to garden centers and nurseries. If home landscapes are already established and merely to be maintained, the insatiable gardener cannot help but look around for any obscure spot that will be the next gardening project. Here is an idea: How about that odd spot that is not quite part of your property but somehow frames your beloved home from the road?

Curb appeal does not always begin at your property line, as you may well be aware of already. The entry path to your home is not labeled "The dying row of boxwood belongs to a neighbor," or "That ugly topped-off crape myrtle is the handiwork of the city landscaper." Those eyesores are out of your control, but a spot that you think may also be beyond your green thumb may in fact be just waiting for your magical touch.

Start doing your homework and you will soon be happily taking on a very fulfilling gardening project. Check with your municipality who most likely owns that strip, or check if indeed you are allowed to adopt that usually pitiful strip of land between the street and a public sidewalk or curb and your property.

It is called a Hell Strip or the similar Devil Strip, No Man's Land, among more dramatic references. More humdrum names are Grass Buffer, Utility Strip, Road Verge, Tree Lawn, or Sidewalk Plot. Here are sample images:

Photo by Anne Marie Chalker

Photo by Toni

Photo by Hanna

(The below-the-title image courtesy of: http://aroundtheyard.com/)

Spring is a great time to tackle this project if only because of the quick gratification to transform such spot once and for all. Seeds may be sprinkled at this time, such as those of alyssum or bachelor's buttons, along with putting in plants that start showing up in droves at the garden centers and nurseries. This is also a good time to take divisions from established plants and put them in the spot (ex: thyme and sedum). The project can

continue into early summer with foundation plants that are drought tolerant, and in the fall as well to utilize a wide selection of spring bulbs. The project needs tweaking perhaps until the homeowner has a sustainable patch there. Here are sample images of what hell strips can be turned into:

Photo by Toni

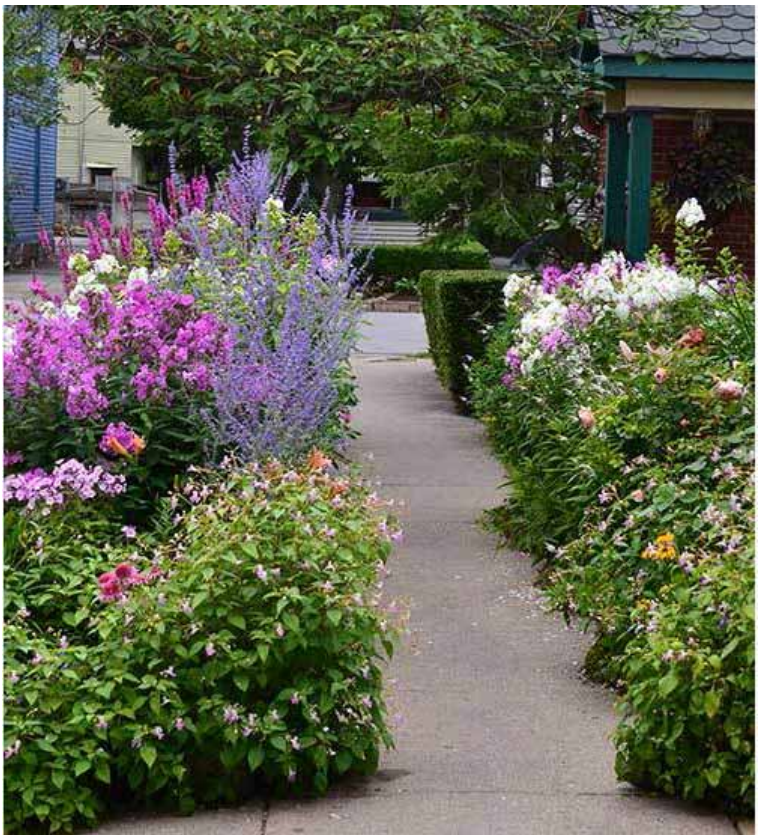


Photo by Donna@GWGT

Photo by Ann Nickerson

Photo by Laura

See the difference? Once you have checked and double-checked (with municipality authorities, homeowners associations, Call 811) and are sure you can plant your hell strip on your piece of the neighborhood, go for it! Use these images or the images now playing in your head as inspiration.

Maria Daniels, Master Gardener

An Introduction to *Edgeworthia chrysantha*

As I am writing this article in a very wintry February, my thoughts are colored by both the celebration of a shrub that is already producing flowers in zone 7 (a short list of possibilities) as well as the anticipation of brighter colors, fragrance, and green foliage in the early spring months. *Edgeworthia chrysantha* is an outstanding example of a "shrub for all seasons". I was given an *Edgeworthia* last May, purchased through a North Carolina nursery. I had first become acquainted with *Edgeworthia* at The Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard, also zone 7a. That specimen is thriving in a partially shaded spot near the Visitor Center. Though it gets morning and mid-day sun in the winter, its flowers set in the autumn months, have had a struggle with a particularly icy winter last year. The shrub itself continued to thrive though its early spring flowering was subdued by ice damage. This may happen to my newcomer given our recent icy weeks.

Photo by Nate Simms

Edgeworthia chrysantha was discovered in the late 1800's by Michael Pakenham Edgeworth (1812-1881), an Irish-born amateur botanist who was employed by the East India Company. It is in the:

Family: *Thymelaeaceae*

Genus: *Edgeworthia*

Species: *chrysantha* (Greek for golden flower)

Photo by Megan Hansen, CC License

Its common name is Oriental or Chinese paper bush. It is a native of China and the Himalayas in Nepal. Its bark fibers have been used to make fine quality Japanese and Chinese papers. It also reportedly has medicinal (anti-inflammatory and analgesic) properties and has been used in Chinese medicine.

Edgeworthia is a deciduous shrub. Its stems branch in an "apical dominance" pattern, meaning all of its growth is controlled by elongation of the terminal bud. This suppresses the lateral buds from growing into shoots. If one removes the terminal

bud with pruning, the lateral buds (from 3-6" below the pruning cut) are stimulated to grow. The bark is a particularly lovely cinnamon-brown, furry towards the tip, and leaf scars leave a "raised impression".

The alternate leaves have an almost tropical appearance in the summer. They are oval, narrow, about 3-6" long, 3/4-2" wide. They are a lush, dark, bluish-green on top and silvery-green on the underside. The leaves do not emerge until after the late winter/early spring flowering, and they drop in the autumn months after the next spring's flower buds have emerged in late summer on old wood.

Photo by Tanaka Juuyoh

The flower buds emerge as pendulous heads, about 1/2-3/4" in diameter. They are silky, shiny white and are composed of a cluster of many florets. They truly brighten the winter garden as they begin to flower in late February to March and April. Most cultivars have white florets with yellow at the center. There are also less common cultivars which have red or orange flowers, such as *E. rubra* 'Red Dragon', or 'Akebono'. In addition to being brilliantly colorful the flowers are also wonderfully fragrant, being compared to a gardenia only spicier.

The shrub prefers to grow in moist, well-drained rich soil. It only needs watering during hot, dry summer conditions. It is virtually pest-free. It requires little if any pruning and in our zone grows to a 6'X6' size. Its growth may be 15-18" per season. It is hardy to zone 7 and there may be dieback after an extremely cold winter. It is ideal for a lightly shaded area or in a protected or woodland setting. It propagates by rhizomes, and the parent plant can be divided in mid-late winter. If one chooses to prune the shrub it should be done after the flowering in the spring.

We can think of *Edgeworthia* as one of Mother Nature's "Signs of Hope" as it brightens our winter landscape and smiles down on the emerging spring bulbs. Wonderful specimens can be found at the National Arboretum in DC, the Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College, The Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard, the JC Raulston Arboretum at NC State among others. I refer you to any or all of their websites for a wide variety of photographs of this plant for all seasons.

Beth Simms, Master Gardener

Forgotten Bulbs

We've all done it (or eventually will do it). About January or February we venture into our garages, garden rooms, storage sheds, or wherever else we tuck our gardening paraphernalia and — *OOPS!* — there's a bag of bulbs we forgot to plant! Now what?

All may not be lost, depending upon what kind of bulbs they are, how they were stored, and how late in the season it is. In any case, the "nothing ventured, nothing gained" rule should apply. Some spring-flowering bulbs simply must be planted as soon as possible after you receive them. *Eranthis* (winter aconite) and *Anemone blanda* (windflower) are examples. In this case, all is probably lost. You can try to save the bulbs, but success is doubtful.

Other bulbs are more forgiving. These include tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths as well as crocus corms. Even as late as March you may be able to save some, if not all of these. They may bloom late, or not at all, but they may live and bloom happily the next year. How they were stored is important. If they were stored in a cool, dry place, they have a better chance of surviving than if stored in a place that is damp, very hot, or freezing.

First, sort through the bulbs. Any bulb which is firm and plump, not mushy or shriveled, is worth trying, even if poorly stored.

If the ground isn't frozen, dig holes and plant those bulbs at the recommended depth *right now!* If the ground is frozen, the simplest thing to do is buy a couple of bags of top soil, dump one on the ground, place the bulbs on top of this soil and cover the bulbs with the second bag of soil, creating an instant raised bed. It wouldn't hurt to add mulch on top of the soil.

Photo by Keepps

Alternately, using the bagged soil, you could pot them up, water them, place the pots in a cold but not freezing place (such as a garage, cool basement or cool greenhouse), leave them there until one-to-two inches of foliage shows above the soil, then slowly move the pots into a sunnier, less protected place to harden off the plants. If all goes well, you will at least have foliage; you may also have flowers (although they won't be at their best this year). After blooming, continue to water the potted bulbs until the foliage dies down, then either put the pot in a dry spot until fall or remove the bulbs, spread them on a screen in a shady spot for a week or two to dry, bag them in onion bags, and store them in a dry, airy but shady place, to be replanted in the fall.

If green leaves are showing and have separated from the bulb sheath, it's better to pot them up instead of putting them directly into the ground simply because you need to plant these bulbs so the leaves are above ground. If you plant them outside, they won't be planted deeply enough to protect them from the worst freezes, as would be the case if planted at their normal depth.

Bulbs are surprisingly resilient. One year when dividing daffodils in June, I dropped a couple of bulbs in the lawn near the flower bed where they had been. I overlooked them; the summer heat baked them; the rains soaked them; my husband mowed over them; the cold winds came, followed by snow — and then spring. One day walking around the bed I spotted a flash of yellow in the grass. Those two little bulbs had survived on top of the ground for eleven months and were blooming! The flowers were small; the stems short — only one inch long — but they were alive!

Bulbs are a complete package. They contain everything they need to survive sitting there on the shelf; they *want* to survive, and if they're still viable and given a chance, they quite possibly *will* survive. But not if you leave them in the garage, unplanted, or toss them in the trash without giving them that chance.

By Lina Burton, VCE Master Gardener

English Ivy and Your Trees - A Bad Combination!

Photo by Paul Slichter

Most of us are familiar with English ivy (*Hedera helix*) - it is a vining plant, with attractive waxy, evergreen leaves with whitish veins. It is shade-loving and is used as a ground cover; as a vine it is often allowed to grow on trees, walls, arbors, fences and other structures. But many of us might not know that it is an alien invasive plant, which can cause great damage to trees and almost anything it grows on.

Impacts on Trees

English ivy was brought to this country as a landscape plant; it is native to Europe, western Asia and northern Africa. In the U.S. it has proliferated in our landscapes and escaped into the wild. Unchecked, it will climb trees up to 90 feet and the vine may reach a thickness of 10 inches in diameter. It engulfs and kills branches by blocking light from reaching the host tree's leaves at the same time the ivy roots are competing with the tree roots for water and nutrients.

When English ivy reaches the upper area of the tree, it is exposed to enough sunlight to produce flowers and fruit. Tree branch dieback continues, and the host tree eventually succumbs from the steady weakening. The added weight of the ivy vines makes infested trees much more susceptible to blow-over during severe weather.

English ivy prefers open forests and will grow into thick carpets on forest floors, crowding out native vegetation. It is also adaptable to many other habitats and moisture conditions, although it does not thrive in wet or extremely moist areas. It serves as a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch that infects maples, oaks and elms. English ivy spreads through vegetative growth, and new plants can grow from cut or broken pieces of stems that are able to root in the soil. It also disperses longer distances via seed, which is carried to new areas by birds. The plant is not a significant source of food for wildlife because the leaves and berries are mildly toxic.

Controlling English Ivy

If English ivy is being used as a ground cover in your yard, it should be kept from climbing trees and shrubs and from spreading into wild areas. However, if English ivy is already climbing your trees, we strongly recommend killing it. This can be done by:

- Cutting ivy vines at the base of the tree and then again at approximately eye-level, taking care not to cut into the tree bark.
- Carefully removing *only the length of vine between the upper and lower cuts*, trying not to damage the tree bark. Dispose of these cuttings so they cannot lie on the ground and take root. DO NOT PULL REMAINING IVY OFF TREE -- it may take the bark with it. Severed ivy left on the tree will die and eventually fall off.
- Pulling and disposing of ivy from at least 2 to 3 feet around the base of the tree.

If necessary (i.e. the ivy around the tree is too big in circumference to pull) after cutting the vine, follow with an application of concentrated systemic herbicide *only to the living cut surface of the vine*. Ground application of an herbicide can harm or kill the tree. Contact the Master Gardener

Help Desk for more information. Also, because cutting the ivy may stimulate vigorous regrowth at the base of the tree, vigilance is required to ensure long term control.

CAUTION: Mild to severe allergic skin reactions may occur when in contact with leaves or sap. Cover all exposed skin when working to avoid exposure.

Photo from TreeStewards.org

English Ivy Alternatives

There are a number of native plant alternatives for English ivy that are not invasive and that support native wildlife:

Ornamental Grasses
Switch grass
Wild Oat grass
Bottlebrush grass
Pennsylvania sedge

Ground Covers (keep at least 2 feet from the base of the tree)
Blue phlox
Carolina jessamine
Wild ginger
Allegheny spurge
Green and Gold
Christmas fern

Reference websites:

http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/programs/tree-stewards/english-ivy/
http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/hehe1.htm
http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/3010/3010-1478/3010-1478_pdf.pdf
http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/howto/mapping/invexse/englishi.html
https://utextension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W231.pdj
http://treestewards.org/take-ivy-off-trees/
https://ag.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/archive/englishivy.html

Join our Tree Steward on-going campaign to "spread the word, not the ivy". Here is a link to our brochure for anyone to distribute: English Ivy is an Exotic Invasive.

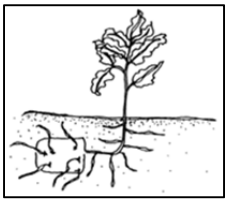
Barbara Jarvis & Anna Stafford, VCE Master Gardener Tree Stewards

Notes from the Help Desk:

Q: I am so excited to pick up my big beef tomato plants I ordered from the Master Gardeners this winter, can you please advise on the best way to plant them?

A: Remember the average last frost date in this area is any time from April 30 to May 15 depending where you are in the surrounding counties, so do not put your tomato plants in the ground prior to that or you risk losing them all together. We like to recommend after Mother's Day to be on the safe side as there tends to be one more killing frost after the 30th and you need to wait until the soil is warm. If there is a frost warning, be prepared to cover your tender annuals outside with an old bed sheet or something similar.

1. **Site** – tomatoes need a sunny location so make sure you have a spot that receives 6 hours of full sun and has well-drained soil.
2. **Prepare the soil** – while you are waiting for the last frost date to expire, you can prepare the soil. Tomatoes grow well in organic matter consisting of soil (not potting soil) mixed with compost in the top 6 inches. Both can be purchased just about anywhere if you don't have viable garden soil.
3. **Harden off the plant** – a week or so prior to planting, make sure you harden off the plant by getting it acclimated to the outdoors. Place in a sun-filtered location for an increasing amount of hours each day and bring in at night. Toward the end of the week, move into morning sun for part of the hour exposure and leave out at night.
4. **Plant** – when soil is warm, dig a wide hole in prepared medium deep enough to submerge a few of the leaves underground leaving 2 or 3 sets of true leaves above ground (see photo). Be very careful not to snap the stem planting this way. The leaves buried underground will root. Press soil firmly down around tomato plant.



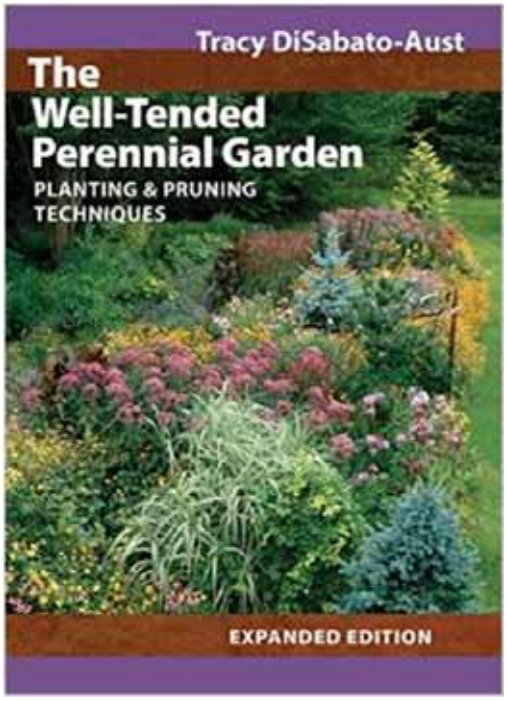
5. **Water** - to secure soil, water with about a pint of starter fertilizer solution.
6. **Mulch** – a month after planting and as soil is warmer, apply 2 inches of mulch on top of the soil but away from the stem to keep the ground from drying out drastically in between waterings. This also serves to keep soil borne diseases from splashing onto foliage.
7. **Stake** – tomatoes need to be staked or trellised in some way as the fruit will weigh down the stems and cause them to split, break off or bend over. Options include: tall wooden stakes w/ ties, wire cages, trellises or fences.
8. **Feed/Water** – tomatoes are heavy feeders so they require attention. Make sure they are getting an inch of water a week. Do not over water – get a water gauge to measure rain fall. Feed with a balanced solution (5-10-5) once a month.

Should you have any questions during your growing season, please contact our Help Desk at 703-771-7150 or submit online at http://loudouncountymastergardeners.org/gardening-advice/help-desk/.

Growing container tomatoes, see VCE Publication: https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-336/426-336_pdf.pdf. Also see VCE Publication: http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-418/426-418_pdf.pdf.

Barb Bailey, LCMG

The Well-Tended Perennial Garden



Do your coneflowers get leggy, are your Joe Pye too tall for your garden, don't know what to do with the lirope? If your perennials have a mind of their own and don't seem to shape up like the garden photos that you compare them to, this is the book for you.

Pruning your perennials before they bloom can be very scary. This book gives gardeners reassurance that YES they can prune back Joe Pye, Ironweed, Coneflower and literally hundreds of other perennials in the late spring and still have blooms on time and a happy plant. This was the big breakthrough point for me and when I hesitate, I pull out this book and get the courage to do what needs to be done to keep the perennials looking good.

Tracy Disabato-Aust was the keynote speaker at the Piedmont Landscape Association Conference in 2013. She's a dynamic speaker who clearly loves what she does and is a great entertainer. In contrast to her speaking style, which was light and breezy, this book is detailed, thorough, orderly and a great reference book. She provides practical advice that clearly comes from experience.

This book is divided into five sections. The first section has chapters on design, bed preparation, planting, pest control, staking, division and renovation of established beds. The second section examines different types of pruning such as deadheading; cutting back; pinching, disbudding, thinning and deadleafing; and pruning. The third section is the Encyclopedia of Perennials, 150 pages addressing the pruning and maintenance of almost 200 perennials. The fourth section is a maintenance journal for those who like to keep records of their garden work. The fifth section is the Appendix. But don't yawn, these appendices contain very useful information: seasonal care of ornamental grasses, a month by month perennial maintenance schedule, and perennials grouped by maintenance requirements. This book has become a trusty reference book for me.

Carol Ivory, VCE Master Gardener