

Shenandoah Valley GARDENING

Newsletter of NSVMGA, the Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association

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NSVMGA's Extension Master Gardeners are pleased to again sponsor a day of gardening education. This year's **Gardening in the Valley Symposium** returns to Shenandoah University on Saturday, March 9, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The day includes a continental breakfast and lunch, the opportunity to mingle with speakers, and the chance to win door prizes and chance auctions. Speaker books and other gardening books and supplies are also available for sale.

Scheduled Speakers & Topics Include:

- **Greenhouses: Is One in Your Future?** Tim Ohlwiler - Extension Agent, Agriculture and Natural Resources - Horticulture.
- **With Nature in Mind: Design & Plants for Resilient Gardens.** C. Coleston Burrell - Garden Designer, Lecturer, Author and Photographer.
- **Foraging in Your Own Backyard: Edible Weeds and Ornamental Plants.** Frank Hyman - Writer, Gardener, and Keeper of Backyard Chickens.
- **GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms): What's in Your Garden?** Deborah Koller and Betsy Brown - Extension Master Gardeners

Registration is \$65 per person when paying by [credit card or PayPal](#) or \$70 at the door. NSVMGA members can also pay Treasurer Sue Rogers in advance by cash or check. Shenandoah University is located at 1460 University Drive, Winchester, VA 22601.

For more information, visit nsvmga.org/events/gardening-symposium/ or contact nsvmga.info@gmail.com.



From the President Bob Gail



If you're anything like me, the winter weather is bringing on the annual bout of cabin fever. Although the conditions are not exactly perfect for gardening, there are a few things that you can do this season that can help bring forth a successful year in the garden.

Now is the best time to **review your gardening records** from last year and to learn from your mistakes. If you didn't write down your successes and failures last growing season, try it this year; you will be amazed at the information that you can gather from simple notes. Look at the varieties of plants that produced the most and tasted the best. Draw simple diagrams of your garden so that you can remember where you planted what and practice crop rotation on a small scale. You can also order your seed catalogs and start researching new varieties of plants that you want to try. Hopefully you swapped seed and saved some money Saturday, January 26th at the **Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardener Association's Seed Exchange at Blandy Arboretum and Experimental Farm**. This annual free event is great not only for seed gathering but also for spending time with others who share your passion for gardening. Put it on your calendar now for the last Saturday in January 2020.

Although this may seem elementary, **winterizing tools** is an essential part of gardening and saving money. Remove soil and other debris with a steel brush to prevent corrosion and decay. If the tools have wooden handles, remove splinters with fine sandpaper and apply a light coat of oil over the entirety of the tool. Many wooden handles will rot if not stored properly, costing money and causing headaches in the spring, so store them inside, out of the elements.

If it has been three years or more, this would be a great time to complete a **soil test**. (Photo below.) Soil testing is a simple and inexpensive way to gauge the status of your garden. A soil test will check the pH of the soil and perform a nutrient analysis and give recommendations for amendments to improve the soil. This can save money in terms of fertilizers, lime, and other treatments. Remember, proper soil pH allows plants to take up nutrients from the soil and utilize them fully, making a healthier, more disease- and pest-resistant plant. For more information on soil testing or for soil testing kits, contact your local Virginia Cooperative Extension office or see us at an info booth or help desk.

Lastly, plan to attend the NSVMGA 2019 **Gardening in the Valley Symposium** March 9th at Shenandoah University. The scheduled speakers are excellent, and there will be garden vendors for your shopping delight, book sales from the speakers, door prizes, and chance auctions. Visit our website at nsvmga.org/events/gardening-symposium/ for more information and to register.

Although winter may be a time that you can't actively grow plants, there are plenty of activities to get you through to the next growing season! (Photos by Stacey Smith.)



Master Gardener Annual Volunteering & Education Cy Haley

The New Year brings new opportunities for Extension Master Gardeners to volunteer, so now is the time to create a game plan. What? Game plan? That's right. Certified Extension Master Gardeners are required to earn 8 continuing education hours and 20 volunteer hours each year. At the start of the New Year it's easy to think, "I've got all year to get in those 20 volunteer hours and 8 education hours." It's also easy to let time pass and end up at the end of the year still needing those last couple of hours, when there aren't many open projects or trainings, so now is the time to create a game plan.

To get started, pull out your calendar or planner and look through the projects listed in our volunteer management system (VMS). See where you'd like to volunteer, or look at the calendar in VMS and see when you'll have time to volunteer or attend a meeting. It's easy to do. On the VMS home page, on the lower left-hand side, click "Projects" under "General Information" for a list of all projects and trainings, or click "View All Events" under "Event Calendars." Click on an event, either in the project list or on the calendar, and get all of the details. It will tell you what, where, when, and who -- all the information you'll need to get started volunteering. If you see something you're interested in, sign up right there, or reach out to the listed event coordinator and see if they need more volunteers. Remember, we're a five-county unit, so the project doesn't have to be something just in your county. Also check out the unit projects, too. There's a lot of prep work that goes into our unit projects. The Extension Master Gardener Class, Gardening in the Valley Symposium, GardenFest, and FallFest all need volunteers. You'll also find continuing education opportunities, such as the Symposium, Monthly Association Meetings, and Educational Adventures.



If you're not able to find the right place to volunteer, or if life prevents you from getting in the needed volunteer time, reach out to me, and I'll help you. I can also help you find continuing education opportunities. That's part of my job as Volunteer Coordinator, so please let me know, and we can work together to find you ways to contribute and earn those required hours.

Don't forget to enjoy yourself while you're volunteering. This is a great bunch of Extension Master Gardeners, and having fun is part of what makes us work together so well. One last thing, remember to enter your hours into VMS as you earn them! The members who enter their hours monthly or quarterly have one less thing to do at the end of the year. Now, let's look at that project list!

Monthly Association Meetings Carolyn Rutherford

NSVMGA's monthly meetings keep members informed on volunteer and continuing education opportunities and provide the connections and support of fellow Extension Master Gardeners. Meetings are a chance to relax and get to know each other and include a social snack. Business meetings are open to NSVMGA members, and educational programs are open to all. Extension Master Gardeners earn a project hour and an education hour for attending. Trainees and interns earn two project hours. (No meeting in March.)

February 17, 2019, 3:00 p.m.

Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit

125 Prosperity Drive, Winchester, VA 22602

Tim McCoy, VT Extension Associate, will discuss the Native Bee Network Project.

April 28, 2019, 3:00 p.m.

Fort Valley Nursery

1175 Hisey Ave, Woodstock, VA 22664

Terry Fogle, owner, will discuss color, texture, and shape in the garden.

Winterberries - *Ilex Verticillata*

Lesley Mack

Winterberries (*Ilex verticillata*) are deciduous hollies that are among winter's brightest lights. A northeastern native species shrub, it provides food and shelter for many species of birds and bees.

We have had our *Ilex verticillatas*, and other *Ilex* species and cultivars, for more than ten years, and every year they have produced a vibrant, long-lasting red color... almost a stop-light-red. Many species of songbirds, waterfowl, and game birds certainly heed the "stop light," as they stop to enjoy the berries remaining after the higher-fat-content food sources are exhausted in the cold days of winter.

While winterberry flowers are small and not particularly showy, they are very popular with honeybees and other pollinators. Their fall color runs from reds to a brief yellow to non-existent, but the display of fruit more than makes up for that shortcoming. Winterberries prefer a site with moist, well-drained, acidic soil in sun, with lots of mulch to retain the moisture.

These hollies are dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate plants. One male plant can pollinate five to ten female plants (or more, depending on the species) and should be planted in reasonable proximity to the females. It is also important to choose the male pollinizer that blooms at the same time as the female winterberries you are planting.

As usual with plant species, *Ilex verticillatas* have also been hybridized for color and size. Typically a large shrub, at 8 to 15 feet in height and width, there are now dwarf cultivars available. Some hybrids produce persistent and abundant larger berries than the natives, and berries are now available in yellows, light yellow, creamy white, and oranges with hints of pinks. (Pictured below, the peach-colored *Ilex Verticillata* "Aurantiaca." Photo by Lesley Mack.)

Set off against a background of fresh snow, winterberries are a dazzling reflection of the sun's light. One cultivar's name, "Sparkleberry," tells it all.



Learn more about Winterberries at NC State Extension's [Ilex verticillata](#) or University of Maryland Extension's [Winterberry Holly](#).

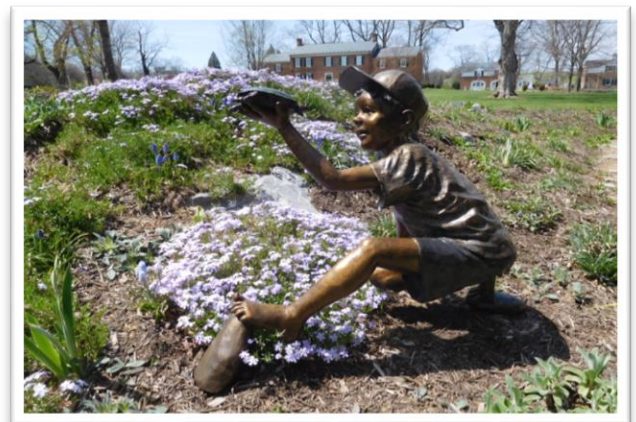
Off the Beaten Path

Elaine Specht

Glen Burnie Gardens. Located on the western side of Winchester along Route 50 between downtown and the hospital, the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley (MSV) has much to offer patrons with interests in art and history, but the gardens are equally worth a visit. The museum complex includes a restored 18th century home, Glen Burnie, initially constructed by the son of early Winchester settler and surveyor, James Wood. For nearly two centuries, the home remained in the hands of Wood descendants, the last being Julian Wood Glass, Jr. Together with his partner, R. Lee Taylor, Glass designed the Glen Burnie Gardens, beginning in 1956. The gardens continued to evolve throughout the rest of the 20th century, and today they are maintained by the MSV.

Brick walkways, stone walls, and hedges divide the garden space into many separate garden rooms. Formal spaces include a Parterre Garden, recently redesigned Rose Garden, and Perennial Garden. Even the Vegetable Garden has a formal flair. Stone and metal sculptures and water features are integrated as focal points throughout all the gardens. Along the northern edge, Kathie's Spring Garden (Pictured below. Photo by Elaine Specht.), completed in 2015, is cheery in the spring but also alive with blooms throughout the summer and fall.

Glen Burnie Gardens are open for self-guided tours April through October. Visit MSV's website at <https://www.themsv.org/visit/the-gardens> to learn more about the gardens.



Seasonal Gardening Tips Elaine Specht

Starting Vegetable Seeds Indoors. When starting seeds indoors, it's important to allow sufficient time for the seedlings to become sturdy enough to survive transplanting. Since a hard spring frost can damage or kill many vegetable plants, you also need to time their transfer outside to occur after the danger of frost has passed. Although there are no guarantees, if you're located in the northern reaches of the Shenandoah Valley, such as the Winchester and Berryville areas, your last frost date is likely to be around Mother's Day (May 12, 2019). For people in higher elevations near New Market and Mount Jackson, your last frost date likely will be closer to Memorial Day (May 27, 2019). The chart below will help you plan when to start some popular vegetable seeds indoors so they'll be ready to transplant when the threat of spring frosts has passed.



When to start seeds for:	Last Frost Date: Mother's Day	Last Frost Date: Memorial Day
Pepper	March 17 – 31	April 1 – 15
Broccoli Cabbage Tomato	March 17 – April 7	April 8 – 22
Cucumber Squash Melon	April 14 – 21	April 29 – May 6

After you've transplanted your seedlings outdoors, keep an eye on the weather. If there is a forecast for an unusually late frost, round up some buckets, baskets, or other covers to protect your tender plants.

Because the following vegetable plants do not transplant well, it is recommended that you directly sow these seeds outdoors rather than starting them inside: beans, beets, carrots, corn, okra, peas, radish, spinach, & turnip

See Virginia Cooperative Extension's [Plant Propagation from Seed](#) and [Seed for the Garden](#) resources to learn more.

Junior Master Gardener Homeschool Program Lynn Hoffmann

The 2019 Junior Master Gardener Homeschool program will start March 5 for any area students in the 3rd to 6th grade. Classes are at the Wesleyan United Methodist Church on Von Fossen St. in Winchester every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Junior Master Gardener classes will cover all aspects of growing and caring for a garden and plants. Students then get to put their skill to work over the summer growing season at the C-CAP garden in Winchester. The students will plant and raise vegetables for donation to the clients at C-CAP. (2018 Junior MGs Pictured. Photo by Lynn Hoffmann.)

Extension Master Gardeners will instruct the students in the classroom and help them in the garden throughout the summer. Parents are involved over the summer and get to participate with their children as they learn how to grow and maintain a garden.

The Junior Master Gardener Homeschool Program is a joint effort between VCE's Northern Shenandoah Valley Master Gardeners and the VCE-4H program, with 4-H Program Assistant Tammy Epperson as the contact person to sign up students. Those interested can call the Frederick County Extension office at 540-665-5699 for more information or to sign up. This free program is open to all students.



Extension Master Gardeners in the Community

Clarke County

Ann Levi

Clarke County Extension Master Gardeners are looking forward to a productive and (hopefully) less rainy 2019. Fun fact about the rain: According to Blandy's weather data, average annual rainfall is about 40". In 2018 Blandy recorded 68.3"!

County Extension Master Gardeners plan to meet soon to discuss projects for the year. If members have ideas for projects or events, let us know, or fill out a Project Application. A big shout out to Ginny Smith for many years of coordinating Clarke's Extension Master Gardener activities.

Frederick County

Mary Turner

Frederick County Extension Master Gardeners are starting off the year with two exciting projects at Timbrook Community Garden. The 10' x 25' Pollinator Garden will feature native plants and a nesting box for native bees. In the 10' x 25' Three Season Vegetable Garden, Extension Master Gardeners will prepare, maintain, and harvest crops to share with Fremont Street Nursery and Highland Food Pantry. Public programs are planned at both gardens as volunteers seed, plant, rotate crops, install the bee nest, and observe bee activity at the gardens. Additional programs will occur at each garden site for the Fremont students.

The County Help Desk continues throughout the winter months, responding to an increasing number of questions about the Spotted Lanternfly. County residents are invited to call (540-665-5699), e-mail (greenhelpline.frederickco@gmail.com), or stop by the VCE Office at 107 N. Kent Street in Winchester. Extension Master Gardeners staff the office on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.



Page County

Lesley Mack

As a "small but mighty" crew, Page County Extension Master Gardeners continue to grow with community-related projects that they hope will positively affect people for years to come.

A favorite project, in its fourth year, is the Shenandoah Elementary School Farm to Table Day. County members seed 400 peat pots with an easy-to-grow vegetable, such as squash or bush beans. They tend the seeds until they sprout, and then deliver them to the school with included care information for each. (Care cards pictured above. Photo by Lesley Mack) All of the students and teachers in grades K-5 receive a sprouted seed pot to take home. Hopefully, the sprout is planted, grows, and produces a crop.

Page County members welcome questions from area residents about plants, gardens, or encounters with insects. You can contact them year round with your gardening questions through the VCE Office in Stanley, at 540-778-5794.

County Extension Master Gardeners support those who enjoy gardening or who are just learning about their environment. Hopefully the support, efforts, projects, and communication will contribute to area residents' growth for years to come.

Shenandoah County

Kathy Doyle & Roz McIntosh

Shenandoah County Extension Master Gardeners are holding winter help desk hours. Samples of plants or insects in sealed zip-top baggies are welcome. County residents are invited to get gardening questions answered through phone or email by contacting the help desk at 540-459-6140 or GreenHelpLine@gmail.com. In-person office hours are Fridays, February 2 & March 2, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at 600 North Main Street, Woodstock, VA 22664.

Those Extension Master Gardeners interested in helping with the greenline help desk can attend one of two training sessions on Friday, March 29, 2019 in the VCE classroom. The morning training is 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, and the evening training is 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Some county projects demonstrating horticultural best practices are ongoing and always open to the public, including the Edinburg Mill Rain Garden and Storm Water Bioretention Project, the Corhaven Graveyard in Quicksburg, and the New Market Demonstration Rain Gardens at the library.

County members will have a Project Planning Meeting March 18, 2019, in Woodstock at the Extension Office classroom from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. to finalize 2019 project planning.

Warren County

Jessica Priest-Cahill

Warren County Extension Master Gardeners are excited to coordinate the 2019 Northern Shenandoah Valley Unit Trainee class, held this year in Front Royal. Certified Extension Master Gardeners are trained volunteer educators who must attend a minimum of 50 hours of classroom instruction and contribute 20 hands-on volunteer hours in order to become an Extension Master Gardener.

In the Community, continued...

ener. To remain active, they then must contribute at least 20 hours of approved volunteer time and 8 hours of continuing education annually. This high standard ensures they are equipped to provide the education and training to promote environmentally sound horticulture practices through sustainable landscape management in their local communities.

Warren County members also continue to work at Samuels Library, providing help with their indoor plants. In the spring, they will work outside at Samuels Library, the Belle Boyd Cottage gardens, the Happy Creek Arboretum pollinator garden, and the Calvary Episcopal Church garden rooms. We will also have a monthly help desk set up at the Southern States in Front Royal on the first Saturday of each month beginning in April.

If Warren county residents have gardening questions, please contact us by email at greenhelpline.warrenco@gmail.com.

For more information,
contact county coordinators
or email
NSVMGANews@gmail.com.

Indoor Plant Clinic

Lynn Hoffmann

Celebrate Groundhog Day on February 2nd with Extension Master Gardeners as we host our 2nd houseplant clinic at Bowman Library.



Join us between 11:00 and 2:00. We'll have lots of free plants for you to take home, as well as plant workshop stations to help you report plants or diagnose plant issues you might have.

We have a great line up of Extension Master Gardener speakers, too.

- 11:15 - Houseplant Propagation and Division**
with Stacey Morgan Smith
- 12:15 - Orchids**
with James Jones
- 1:15 - How to Use Plants to Decorate Your Home**
with Janet Keithley

There will be tips on using natural plant supports for your different kinds of vining plants and a craft area where you can make plant-people stakes or a Ping-Pong-ball accent for your favorite plant.

Lots of fun stuff to get you out of the house on a wintry day!

Home Gardening Questions Answered

by VCE Master Gardener Volunteers

Call or email if you need help!



Clarke
540-955-5164



Frederick
540-665-5699



Page
540-778-5794



Shenandoah
540-459-6140



Warren
540-635-4549



facebook.com/NSVMGA - nsvmga.org - nsvmga.org/newsletter - nsvmga.info@gmail.com

Need Help? Contact Us!

Extension Master Gardeners are available year round through phone and email to help with home gardeners' questions.

Get a plant or insect ID, find out how to get rid of an invasive plant, and learn the most current research-based information on any type of gardening and pest management.

During the growing season, you'll also find us at farmers markets, info booths, county fairs, and help desks.

Hit-or-Miss Office Gardening

Jennifer Huffman

Last year I started out in a new apartment and shared my patio gardening adventure. This year I am in a new office with a new set of challenges. The office is a small rectangular room with white walls and no windows, though it has plenty of “natural fluorescent” lighting. This year my “hit-or-miss gardening” will address caring for plants in low or artificial lights.

There are some things to consider in plant care when there is absolutely zero natural light most days and complete darkness on weekends. (I do love a challenge!)

Choose plants that require the lowest light possible.

For my situation, the plants will only have fluorescent lighting. Fluorescent light bulbs produce mostly blue light, which is excellent for photosynthesis and the health of the flora; however, without much of the red spectrum, which is needed to flower, non-flowering species are generally best.

Choose plants that thrive in dryer air. Indoor air is always dryer and less humid than outdoor air, so I'm looking for plants that love arid conditions. I can also find plants that like only a little humidity. I can then mimic nature with steps such as misting, which will ensure the plants receive the appropriate moisture needed.

Choose plants that require minimal watering.

The plants will be alone on weekends, so it is crucial to find plants that don't mind drying out a little between waterings. One option is the Snake Plant (*Sanseveria*), which not only tolerates drying out, it actually prefers it. (Photo by Stacey Smith)



Choose a quality houseplant

fertilizer. A fertilizer can be store bought or homemade. Once the kind of plant is chosen, I will research to see what would be the best form of nutrients for that species.

I'm referring to the University of Maryland Extension's [Houseplant Care](#) article as I take this journey, and I'll share other resources along the way.

Gardening with Wildlife

Jessica Priest-Cahill

It's winter here in the northern Shenandoah Valley. Some animals respond to the shortening days and cooler temperatures by migrating south or hibernating. Many animals remain to deal with the vagaries of our winter weather, a shortage of food resources, and lack of accessible water. What landscaping choices can you make to help wildlife survive the harsh winter months?

Leave the leaves. Frogs, insects, and other small animals will overwinter in damp leaf litter. Birds will forage in the leaves.

Don't cut stems. Planting perennials with thick stems and leaving the cut stems over winter will provide shelter for many overwintering insects. You can leave the dried plant stems in your beds. Insects such as small carpenter bees, like *Ceratina strenua*, will bore into the pith of many plants to lay eggs and will reuse these tunnels to hibernate in winter.

Provide food. Plant native shrubs and trees that provide winter berries and seeds. Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) and American Holly (*Ilex opaca*) are two native species that provide edible winter berries for birds. Coreopsis and Goldenrod (*Solidago*) bloom in the summer, but their seeds provide food for birds during the winter months. Once it matures, an Oak tree will provide food and shelter for many animals through the seasons, such as acorns for squirrels and other small mammals over winter.

Provide water. If there's an extended cold snap, animals' regular water sources might freeze. Adding a water feature that you can fill on cold days, such as a birdbath or puddling stone, will provide animals with accessible water. Warm water will freeze faster than cold water, so fill your water feature with cold water.

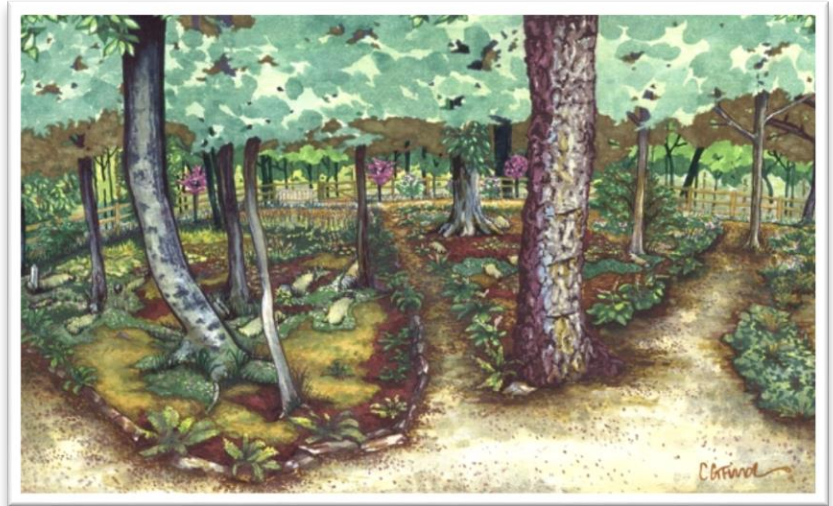
Wildlife needs four basic things to survive: cover to escape predators and for protection from the elements, food, water that is accessible, and space to mate and rear young. With planning, you can ensure that your garden provides these elements through the entire year. See VCE's Publication "[For the Birds, Butterflies & Hummingbirds: Creating Inviting Habitats](#)" or the DCR Publication "[Native Plants for Conservation, Restoration, and Landscaping](#)" for more information about planting for wildlife.

NSVMGA members...want to help plan your Association? Come to a board meeting!

Thursdays 6:00 p.m. February 14, March 14, & April 11
at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit, 125 Prosperity Drive, Winchester, VA 22602

Work Days at Corhaven Graveyard Sarah Kohrs

One Extension Master Gardener that has worked at Corhaven Graveyard (an NSVMGA project in Shenandoah County that provides community work days, educational gardening programs for visiting groups, examples of monarch way stations, gardening in a riparian buffer, historical and native perennial plants, and more) said, "I feel like this is one of the most meaningful projects the NSVMGA has ever taken part in." In 2018, rain canceled a lot of work days and workshops; however, 2019 is new year. **You're invited to participate in what Corhaven Graveyard has to offer.** (At right, "Corhaven Graveyard" as depicted by local artist Carolyn Findler, (2018).)



Throughout 2019, members of the community can find opportunities to work alongside Extension Master Gardeners at Corhaven Graveyard. This approach allows for hands-on learning of how to care for monarch gardens and tribute spaces within a riparian buffer, choosing the best location for native perennial plants used to diversify and maintain a healthy garden atmosphere for pollinators and native fauna, and similar sustainable gardening practices. On work days, bring what makes you comfortable in gardening, such as a kneeling pad, gloves, a hat, sunscreen (and bug repellent, if you like), and wear clothes and shoes you don't mind getting dirty. Here are upcoming planned work days:

Monday, February 18, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon - spend part of your Presidents Day weekend in a meaningful way. Weather permitting, work with Extension Master Gardeners on site. Tea and a light lunch in Corhaven's gathering space afterward.

Friday, April 19, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. - spend part of your Good Friday in a meaningful way. Weather permitting, work with Extension Master Gardeners on site. Tea and light refreshments in Corhaven's gathering space afterward.

In order to participate in Community Work Days at Corhaven Graveyard, you must RSVP by the Saturday before the event by contacting Sarah Kohrs, project lead, at 434-922-2029 or senkohrs@gmail.com. Thank you for considering this wonderful opportunity! Corhaven Graveyard is located at 2883 Quicksburg Road, Quicksburg, Virginia. For more information on Corhaven Graveyard, a burial ground for African Americans enslaved on an antebellum plantation, visit corhavengraveyard.org.

Free Children's Workshops Lynn Hoffmann

Extension Master Gardeners offer **free monthly nature workshops for children** at Bowman Library. Preregister at the library: (540) 869-9000.

Each event is the third Wednesday of the month at 6:00 p.m. and includes a talk and hands-on workshop.

Scheduled topics include:

- February 20, 2019 - **Bird Houses**
- March 20, 2019 - **Bird Feeders**
- April 17, 2019 - **Veggies in Pots**



(2018 Bird Feeder Workshop, photo by Lynn Hoffmann.)

Bowman Library is located at 871 Tasker Rd, Stephens City, VA 22655.

Preregister at the library: (540) 869-9000.

Home Composting

Charles Layton

In this country, up to 30% of leftover food and yard waste is sent to our landfills, where it takes up space and releases significant amounts of methane. Most of these materials could be composted, excluding meats, fats, grease, fireplace ashes, dairy, pet waste, and some yard waste that is diseased or too bulky. (Meats and fats will attract rodents and flies, and pet waste can contain parasites or germs harmful to humans.)

A successful compost pile will have equal amounts of greens (grass clippings and waste food, including fruit) and browns (dead leaves and small twigs), as well as plenty of moisture. The greens and browns should be put down in alternating layers and kept moist, and the green materials will provide the nitrogen necessary to break down the compost into usable organic material.

The end result of composting will be a highly desirable organic material that enriches soil and helps to retain moisture. It also introduces beneficial bacteria and fungus to existing garden soils for both vegetable and flower gardens.

Your compost pile should be located in a shady spot away from standing water but near enough a water source so that you can keep the pile moist (but not wet). If possible, food waste should be buried about ten inches deep in the pile. Regular turning of the compost with a garden pitchfork and keeping the pile moist will accelerate the breakdown into garden-ready organic matter. The whole process takes about a year but could occur in as little as two months in a small pile under ideal conditions.

The art and science of composting is very popular and you can find a great deal of information on various methods and materials used, including the additional step of taking the temperature of the pile with a thermometer! The basics remain: Greens, browns, moisture, and regular turning.

For more information see the EPA's "[Composting at Home](#)" or VCE's "[Backyard Composting](#)."

Rain Chains – Useful Beauty

Carolyn Rutherford

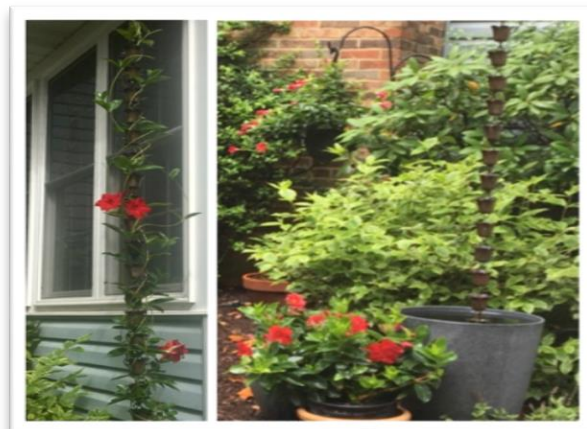
Rain chains are a beautiful way to collect and reuse rainwater. They make a pretty and interesting focal point in any garden area near your house, barn, or garage – anywhere you have a roof and a downspout. They are even beautiful in the snow and with flowing water frozen in place. Plus, they are low to no maintenance!

There are many styles to choose from – acorns, tulips, pineapples, simple loops, chains, and hundreds more. They are available in bronze, copper, aluminum, and stainless steel, as well as other materials. You can even make them yourself if you are good at that sort of DIY.

Rain chains originated in Japan, where they have been used for hundreds of years to collect water from rooftops. The rain chain guides water downward, link by link, into large barrels for household water usage. In Japan they call them *Kusari Doi*, which literally means “chain gutter.”

Rain chains originally consisted solely of interlocking rings, ranging from simple to very intricate designs. While these are still popular, a new decorative style has emerged. These decorative rain chains usually consist of a series of metal cups, chained together, with a hole in the bottom. Rain overflows and runs through the cups to the cups beneath, down to the ground or to your plants. They can even drain into a puddle stone for birds and butterflies to enjoy. Rain chains are available in a wide variety of designs and shapes, such as bells, bowls, baskets, umbrellas, acorns and flowers. Considered both aesthetically pleasing and functional, rain chains are gaining popularity here in the United States. (History courtesy of [rainchainsinanutshell.com](#))

Here you see, at left, a Mandevilla (*Apocynaceae*) that took it upon itself to decorate this rain chain. At right of the other photo, a rain chain drains into a large urn-type planter pot. The water collected in the pot and carried in a small watering can usually waters this garden's other containers and hanging plants all summer. (Photos by Carolyn Rutherford.)



February

- 1 Shenandoah County Help Desk (GreenHelpLine) at County Government Building, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
- 2 Indoor Plant Clinic at Bowman Library 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.
- 6 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 13 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 14 Board Meeting at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit 6 p.m.*
- 17 Association Meeting at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit, 3 p.m.*
- 20 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 20 Children's Nature Series at Bowman Library, 6 p.m.
- 27 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

March

- 1 Shenandoah County Help Desk (GreenHelpLine) at County Government Building, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
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- 27 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

April

- 1 Spring Newsletter Deadline
- 3 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 8 Garden Talk "Start Some Seeds" at Handley Library, 6 p.m. – 7 p.m.
- 10 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 11 Board Meeting at Mid-Atlantic Farm Credit, 6 p.m.*
- 17 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 17 Children's Nature Series at Bowman Library, 6 p.m.
- 24 Frederick County Help Desk (GreenLine) at VCE Office, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
- 28 Association Meeting at Fort Valley Nursery, 3 p.m.*

Starred Events Open Only to Association Members & Guests

Save the Date!

Gardening Symposium – Educational Talks
March 9, 2019 @ Shenandoah University

GardenFest & Master Gardener Plant Sale
Free day of gardening fun for the whole family!
June 1, 2019 @ Belle Grove

FallFest – Free Workshops, Talks, and Giveaways.
September 8, 2019 @ Belle Grove

Seed Exchange at Blandly – Free Seed Swap
January 25, 2020 @ Blandly Experimental Farm

Join our FREE event!

Saturday • June 1, 2019 • 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

GARDEN FEST



No Pets Please
Free Admission
Free Parking

Events:
- MASTER GARDENER -
Plant Sale
Cash & Credit Cards Accepted

Hands-On Workshops,
Garden and Specialty Vendors,
Children's Trail and Activities,
Second Hand Rose
Rummage Sale,
Garden Tool Sharpening,
Raffles, Food, And More...

Gartenhaus
- Workshops -
Welcome to the Gartenhaus:
Workshops starting at 10 AM

Habitat Gardens and Native Bee Houses:
Get info on our Native Bees and how to turn your garden into a habitat garden.

Garden Wreaths:
See how to build a wreath with some ideas from England or Europe. Use natural materials and flowers from your garden.

Flower Rounding for cloth and paper designs.
Plus more ideas for your garden.

Sponsored by:




Hosted by and Located at: **BELLE GROVE PLANTATION**
336 Belle Grove Rd., Middletown, VA 22645
\$5 Belle Grove Manor House Tours • Ages 12 and older, 10 AM to 4 PM

For more info: **540.869.2028** • Email: info@bellegrove.org
Visit: nsmga.org/events/gardenfest
See us at [Facebook.com/NSVMGA](https://www.facebook.com/NSVMGA) for event updates.

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Stacey Morgan Smith

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 Master Gardener Program is on social media:
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The Editor's Pollinator Garden

Stacey Morgan Smith

I'm putting together this issue on one of the coldest days we've felt in a while. The only gardening going on here is planning, looking at seed catalogs (while trying not to order a dozen varieties of tomato seed), and reminiscing about the beautiful butterflies that visited the garden.

A late-season bloomer ended up being the most popular butterfly flower. This deep purple aster was mislabeled at a plant sale but has become one of my favorites. It appears to be a New England type aster (*Aster novae-angliae*) and grows 3 – 4 feet. The skippers are always the first to find it, with swallowtails, monarchs, and American ladies not far behind. I counted no fewer than seven monarchs on it at one time! Asters are always a good choice if you garden for butterflies.

There's little color in the pollinator garden now, but it continues to feed goldfinches. Though it looks untidy, the stems, leaves, and seed heads will stay still spring. There may be insects in the stems, overwintering butterfly chrysalides in the leaves, and seed left in the *Rudbeckias*. Soon we'll see signs of life amidst all the brown as we prepare for another year of blooms!

Our newsletter writers are also preparing for the year, as they plan out their articles for the remaining three issues. If you'd like us to write on a topic, let us know by emailing NSVMGAnews@gmail.com. Our members are invited to write on any gardening-related topic to share with our readers.

New people in roles bring fresh ideas and exciting change. As part of our yearly planning, we are also looking for a new newsletter editor for 2020. I'm happy to talk with anyone who might be interested.



Enjoy our newsletter? [Click to subscribe!](#)

Spring Issue Deadline: April 1, 2019.

Email articles or events to NSVMGAnews@gmail.com.

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