



The Grapevine

August 2011

New River Valley Master Gardeners Association

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The New River Valley Master Gardener Association is a nonprofit organization working in conjunction with the Montgomery County Cooperative Extension Service to bring horticultural education and enjoyment to people in the New River Valley.

The Grapevine welcomes news, articles, questions, editorials, and comments. *The Grapevine* is published monthly and provided to all active members of the NRV MGA. Non-members may subscribe for \$15/yr. Please submit all items to the Newsletter Editor by the 25th in order to be included in next month's issue.

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Notes from the Board

Just a reminder to be thinking about serving as an officer for our wonderful group. Wouldn't you like to be involved in deciding the direction our association takes in the upcoming year. Connie Lawson, our fearless leader, has graciously agreed to continue in her capacity as president if we chose to re-elect her. Our treasurer, Erica Jones has served two terms so this position is open. Also, Helen Young will not be able to continue as vice president. Ini Beckman, our co vice president is out of town so we are unsure of her status. So be aware that ALL positions are open even if someone has agreed to run for re-election. We have four members at large to consider also...one of them being someone from the upcoming trainee class. Please look at the job descriptions on our web site and give me a shout if you have questions or would like to throw your hat in the ring.

Thank you, Lynn Brammer

Youth Team

We have several Master Gardener Projects designed for youth. Many are in area schools and a few like the Junior Master Gardener Program at the Hahn Horticulture Garden, and some are only single events like Kids Tech. Many of us have been involved in these programs. I would like to start an interest team for youth programming. We have potentially two or more new school projects beginning within the next few months and sharing ideas will only make the more established programs and the new ones stronger.

Please contact me if you are interested in becoming part of this team. I would like to set a meeting for sometime in September if we have enough interest.

By: Wendy Silverman

What's Growing in Your Backyard?

Hi to All,

Regarding "Lessons in Our Backyard" what has anyone done to eradicate wiregrass? Any suggestions will be appreciated. BTW, it is only in my perennial bed and I do not want to kill the flowers which makes it more challenging.

Thanks, Susan Lockwood

Floyd Garden Visits

We enjoyed wonderful tours of two gardens in Floyd last month. We got to visit two different gardens and settings with various plants and trees at Pamela Cadmus's and Jane O'Keeffe's homes.

At Pamela's there were many plants offered for sale as well as the gardens to tour. Jane had beautiful flower gardens and an inviting garden shed full of interesting things from bird nests to cozy seats.

Both hostesses offered delicious foods and drinks and we all enjoyed a fun social evening. There were even some MGs there who have retired from our group and it was great to see them again.

Below are some photos Dave Helscher sent in.



Pamela Cadmus's plant offerings.



Sample of Jane O'Keeffe's flower garden

Recipe of the Month

Caper Brochette

8 plum tomatoes
3 garlic gloves, pressed
2 T balsamic vinegar
2 T chopped fresh basil
1/2 t pepper

1/2 t salt
2T olive oil
3 T capers
1 t sugar
French baguette, sliced & toasted

Dice tomatoes; sprinkle with salt. Let stand on paper towels or in colander for 1 hour.

Combine tomatoes with remaining ingredients; chill 1 hour. Serve on bread slices.
Yield: 3 cups

Lib Wilhelm's Cheese Slaw

1 pound Swiss cheese, shredded
1 bunch green onions with tops, chopped
1/2 cup chopped mild banana peppers (from a jar)
1/2 cup finely chopped jalapeno peppers (from a can or jar)
Mayonnaise

Combine cheese, green onions, banana peppers and jalapeno peppers in a bowl. add enough mayonnaise to bind and mix. Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. Add additional mayonnaise if needed at serving time.

Optional: Carve out the center of a cabbage and fold back the outer leaves. Spoon the cheese mixture into the center.

By: Jane O'Keeffe

Blister Beetle Troubles



I found a number of little bugs that were black with a gray strip down the back. These beetles were eating my potatoes and then I found them on some of my flowers. I collected a number of these beetles and took them to the Hahn garden walks with Eric. He told me these were called Blister beetles. They get their name because they have a defensive secretion of a blistering agent, cantharidin.

Cantharidin is a poisonous chemical that causes blistering of the skin. Cantharidin is used medically to remove warts.

There are approximately 7,500 known species worldwide. They cause crop damage. Species of *Epicauta* feed on cultivated plants, such as: potatoes, tomatoes, beets, alfalfa and flowers. They defoliate the plant.

Blister beetles pose a potential threat to horses if they should get into the alfalfa that the horses eat.

It is suggested to use Rotenone/pyrethrin spray. Sevin worked well for me. Boy was I glad that I had rubber gloves on when I picked up those little beetles. I understand they are worse some years. I had never seen them before, however this year they are sure have been a pest!

By: Connie Lawson

Blister Beetles!

Beware horse owners! I was rather shocked to notice something about these deadly bugs in this newsletter as Carol was laying it out . . . I thought we were free from them in our region. (Drat!) I recognized them instantly on the page because I'm aware in other areas of the country they have a notorious name for killing horses when baled in hay and fed. This simple fact clearly illustrates their highly toxic nature.

So I've got a few facts to add here for us horse lovers as an aside to the newsletter feature.

As stated, it's the cantharidin in the bodies of living OR dead blister beetles that can be deadly when ingested in sufficient quantities by horses, cattle, and sheep.

Cantharidin, unfortunately, is extremely stable and so holds onto its evil toxic qualities long after the bugs die and their bodies are baled. Blister beetle poisoning in horses can present as a temporary set of symptoms: inflammation of the urinary and digestive tracts, colic, frequent and difficult urination, and may bring on secondary infections. If toxin levels are high, add to this list extremely reduced calcium levels and damage to heart muscle tissue. Affected livestock can die within 72 hours of blister beetle ingestion.

Much to the chagrin of horse owners who may pride themselves on feeding their equines with discriminating palates only the finest second cutting hay, one method of prevention is to feed only first cutting hay since the bugs aren't active until mid-July each season. While blister beetle populations increase in dry summers and are reportedly linked to large grasshopper populations, hopefully their numbers will remain low enough that the horse and livestock toxicity issues in this region can remain minor.

By: Tom Moates (www.TomMoates.com)

Shearing Your Norfolk Island Pine

Araucaria heterophylla, the Norfolk Island "Pine" (which is a conifer but not a true pine) is often grown as a house plant. Its symmetrical tiers of branches, covered with short needles, are very attractive when the plant is small. But most people toss their Norfolk Island pines as they get bigger, and anyone who's ever grown one knows why: its growth accelerates, the spacing between whorls of branches gets bigger, and the lower branches abscise, leaving a plant that's mostly trunk. And this is because, in its native Pacific island, a Norfolk Island pine is a large tree.

You can't plant a Norfolk Island pine outdoors in southwestern Virginia. It's a Zone 10 plant, not hardy north of southern Florida. As you approach Miami on the Interstate through miles of subdivisions, the skyline is punctuated by the towering, open crowns of Norfolk Island pines. My husband and I made this journey some 25 years ago, and when we got to his parents' house in one of the suburbs of the city, we saw a dense, heavily shaped conifer

in the front yard, and it too was a Norfolk Island pine. And so I found out that a Norfolk Island pine can be sheared. Not all conifers can, but hemlocks and junipers, for example, can be shaped into hedges and their growth checked. And pines and spruces destined to become Christmas trees can be sheared to make their branching denser and keep them small. The trick is to cut only new growth when it is still soft, as few conifers have the ability to form new branches from old wood.

It took me a few years to dare to mutilate a potted Norfolk Island pine, but as the one in my south window started to drop its lower branches, I knew it was then or never. I waited until the plant started that season's growth and chopped most of the new growth off, including the leader. The truncated branches each put out two smaller branches, which I cut back in turn the following year, and so forth. I think that for this to work well, the process must start when the plant still has its lowest branches. Mine had already lost several when I started shearing it, so the existing branches are fuller but they lie above an expanse of bare trunk. I had hoped cutting off the leader would cause additional tiers of branches to form immediately above the existing branches. That hasn't happened, but the tendency of lower branches to abscise seems to have been suppressed.

So it has been an interesting experiment. I hope another Master Gardener who has a younger Norfolk Island pine will try shearing it and let me know what happens!

By: Hazel Beeler

"Future MG"

This is Malyah Nade Edwards first gardening experience. We had her on a blanket and she got the cultivator and spade and was having a ball while we picked beans. Malyah is my great granddaughter!

By: Fern Cone



Local Happenings

August

8th -NRV MG Board - Mont Co. Extension office, 6pm

18th -Membership meeting 6:30 pm - Square foot and therapeutic gardens -
351 Rolling Hills Drive, Christiansburg. Contact Debra Graff 381-1470

September

12th -NRV MG Board - Mont Co. Extension office, 6pm

15th Membership meeting 6:30 pm- Alex Niemera, "Gardening in all Seasons" Hahn Hort Garden

August Garden Chores

The Whole Garden

- *Collect seeds for next year's garden.
- *Continue weeding garden beds.
- *Continue watering your garden as needed during dry weather.
- *Check plants for signs of pests and diseases.
- *Study bulb catalogues and order garlic and flowering bulbs and corms to plant in fall.

Trees and Shrubs

- *Train wayward vines.
- *Stop pruning shrubs and trees.
- *Don't fertilize shrubs and trees after mid-month.
- *Consider adding shrubs to lower borders.

Flowers and Grasses

- *Make sure that lawns that are not dormant receive one inch of water a week.
- *Continue deadheading spent flowers to prolong bloom time.
- *Cut hollyhocks near the ground after they bloom.
- *Divide or transplant Oriental poppies.
- *Add extra-blooming perennials to the garden.
- *Sow self-sowing annuals where you'd like them to appear next spring and summer.
- *Cut flowers to bring indoors.
- *Continue dividing bearded iris.
- *Plant crown imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*).
- *Plant fall crocuses and colchicums as soon as bulbs are available.

Fruits and Vegetables

- *Continue sowing spinach.
- *Direct-seed turnips for fall harvest.

*Continue harvesting herbs.

*Harvest green lima beans.

Harvest cucumbers, eggplants, and peppers as they ripen so new ones can develop.

*Propagate strawberries or weed them and thin out the runners.

*Prune away berry canes that have finished fruiting.

Thanks to all the great contributions in the Grapevine this month!! I look forward to being able to share from more of our members as the months progress. Remember, you can count your time spent on your contribution as hours!!

**New River Valley
Master Gardener Association
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