



SOW YOU KNOW - 2021

Gochland-Powhatan Master Gardener Association Weekly Facebook Tips

Happy New Year!

2021 was the first year of

Sow You Know

*weekly gardening tips written
by Gochland Powhatan
Master Gardeners for our
gardening friends and
neighbors. Please enjoy this
Year in Review.*



*For information about these
and other gardening subjects,
please contact our help desk:
gpmastergardener@gmail.com*

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Frost Dates for the Richmond Area

by *Connie Sorrell, April 5, 2021*

Frost date news flash: Jack Frost has not left town, yet!

With all the beautiful shrubs, perennials, vegetables and annuals coming into the garden centers, it is very tempting to start planting now. WAIT. According to the Virginia Cooperative Extension here are last frost dates for these USDA planting zones:

Zone 6a: 5/5 - 5/15

Zone 6b: 4/25 - 5/5

Zone 7a: 4/15 - 4/25
(Richmond Metro Area)

Zone 7b: 4/5 - 4/15

IF you just have to buy something now, be sure to keep it in a covered location, like a garage, or covered on nights when frost is predicted.

If you want to get some seeds started outside, start cold season vegetables, like radishes, kale and spinach.

Start those summer seeds or set out your transplants AFTER the last frost.

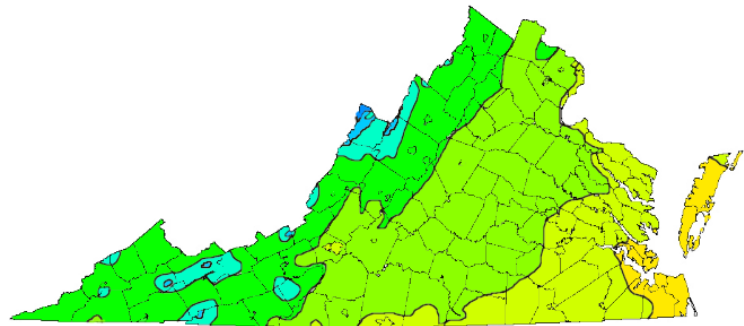
Happy Gardening!

Here is the link for the detailed planting guide from the VCE:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-331/SPES-170.pdf



Virginia USDA Zone Hardiness Map
2018



Time to Prepare Your Pots!

by Martha Nichols, April 12, 2021

As the warmer days arrive with more frequency, it is easy to develop “spring fever.” The urge to plant something can make you want to pull out the pots and get going! But a bit of work now will save a lot of trouble later on. It’s time to clean your pots!

Cleaning your pots removes the mold spores, viruses, and bacteria that might be lingering from the last use to contaminate your new plants. It also removes built-up mineral and salt deposits, those white or gray rings that could end up dehydrating a plant.

In order to disinfect your pots, soak them in one part unscented household bleach to nine parts water for at least ten minutes. When finished, wash them with dish detergent. Make sure to remove any mineral deposits from your clay pots with a wire brush or steel wool. Rinse them well to remove any soap residue.

Cleaning and disinfecting will take only a few minutes but it will save a lot of time and money in the long run. Your plants will thank you for it!

Resources

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/1994/3-16-1994/clean.html>

<https://philadelphiacountymastergardeners.blogspot.com/2012/02/why-sanitize-spring-cleaning-your.html>



Cicadas – Brood X in 2021

by Pat Lust, April 19, 2021

Have you seen them yet? Billions of cicadas are waking up from their 17-year sleep. Brood X, one of many groups of periodical cicadas, ranges from Ohio to Georgia to Pennsylvania, and will be more concentrated in Northern Virginia than in the Goochland/Powhatan area. Virginia hosts another brood (Brood II) that will emerge in 2030.

If you have a large population of cicadas in your area, they will provide food for many species of birds, small mammals, snakes, and humans, if you dare to go there. (You can google cicada recipes.) They are not harmful to your pets, and you can rake up their remains to use in your compost.

You can use nets to protect your young trees and bushes from them, but that will inhibit pollination.

Chemical controls are not recommended because they will do more damage to the good guys than to the cicadas. Perhaps the best plan is to avoid planting any new trees or shrubs in the year prior to the cicada year.

According to Kirsten Conrad, your “garden plants are going to be OK.” The damage is done to branches about the diameter of a pencil. She suggests that we “Enjoy this rare, spectacular and cyclical phenomenon.”

Resources

MGNV video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6dkHK6VqAc>

Cicada Mania - <https://www.cicadamania.com>

Purdue - https://www.purdue.edu/fnr/extension/purdue-landscape-report-17-year-cicadas-are-coming/?fbclid=IwAR3vvlztbyQpMOQf_ZSwjH-52eYgRdr2IzZHKCpyqw3sKvqqYcA4F6M1IOs



Purdue University Extension – Forestry and Natural Resources

The Sharpest Tools in The Shed

by Kitty Williams, April 26, 2021

There is no doubt that sharp, well-maintained tools make routine garden chores more pleasant and productive. Tool maintenance is about more than that, however. It's about safety, first and foremost.

Dull, badly kept garden tools are a hazard to both plant and gardener. Pruning shears could slip or twist, causing serious injury. A ragged cut is an open door to disease and insect invaders. A rusty old shovel can just plumb wear you out. Those are just a few examples. You probably have others.

So when and how should you sharpen those tools?

When? That answer is simple: According to the Virginia Cooperative Extension's Hand Tools Safety guide, "whenever extra effort is needed to make the cut..."

How? Here are some excellent resources:

Do it yourself:

- Oregon Master Gardener™ Association's publication, *Sharpening Garden Tools*, includes a guide to the sharpening tools you'll need, instructions, cautions and additional resources.
- Popular Mechanics magazine's well-illustrated and pragmatic overview states: "... often all you need is a file." Click the link to learn to use that file.

Some of the many sharpening services in the Richmond area.

Mr. Leonard's Knife Sharpening Service is a favorite of gardeners and cooks alike. (804) 370-8598.
<https://mrleonardknifesharpener.com>

All three Richmond area Pleasants Hardware Stores take in tools to be sharpened.
<https://www.pleasantshardware.com>

Resources

Oregon State University Extension's 10-Minute University™ . "Sharpening Garden Tools"
<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/default/files/documents/12281/sharpeninggardentools.pdf?fbclid=IwAR10jWCeXtTa3428gaGaLHBdRgGX1aCbAE117BZbwm8HH1WrZrpM4sXeIUA>

Popular Mechanics. <https://www.popularmechanics.com/home/tools/g2810/sharpen-your-lawn-and-garden-tools/>



Saving Pollinators

by DanaDee Carragher, May 3, 2021

Have you noticed more and more people talking about the alarming decrease in monarch butterflies, bees and other pollinators? We know that urbanization, deforestation, pesticides and climate change have taken their toll.

It is estimated that pollinating insects are responsible for one in every three bites of food we eat, so it's not just about saving pretty butterflies!

A few small things done by many backyard gardeners may make a difference, however. We weekend gardeners can help.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Plant milkweed in your landscape. Richmond nurseries have milkweed that grows well in our area. When you plant milkweed, you also help countless other insects that depend on it as a host plant and a nectar source. Three types of milkweed that grow in our area, *Asclepias incarnata*, *Asclepias siriaca* and *Asclepias tuberosa*, are all good.
2. Plant other native nectar sources for adult butterflies and bees. Adult monarchs love a variety of nectar sources – milkweed is for babies (caterpillars)!
3. Create a diverse habitat. The more diversity in structure and plant type, the more homes you provide for wildlife like monarchs. When you plant for monarchs, you plant for so much more.
4. Think urban. City dwellers can do their part! Urban areas like Paris, London, and more recently, Boston, are putting beehives on rooftops. It's warmer up there, and bees fly to public gardens to pollinate and gather nectar. Restaurants are using the honey, rooftop and public gardens thrive.



Resources

www.saveourmonarchs.org

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/plantsanimals/pollinate/?fbclid=IwAR19AjHcuDGPdD7iHd0YCrSwk4LkNJEKisZz6jHYi65YhASC3weQ-uUgFs>

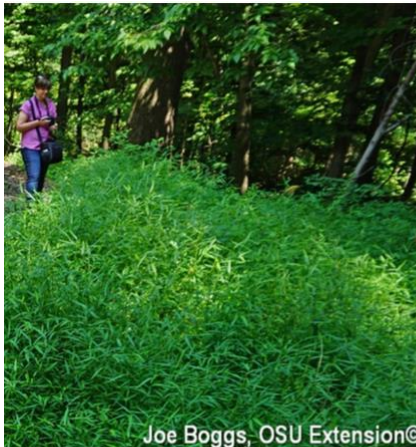
Invasive Plants – Get Started Removing Them

by Pat Lust, May 10, 2021

Invasive plants crowd out the native plants and take up their space, without returning the environmental benefits that native plants do. Some invasive plants even produce a substance that kills the native plants around them.

Many of the plants that we now consider invasive were brought into our environment as ornamentals, and some of them are quite beautiful to look at. Others were brought as food plants and have escaped cultivation and become problems.

Two in the Goochland/Powhatan area that have become serious problems are Japanese stiltgrass and garlic mustard. Japanese stiltgrass is an



Joe Boggs, OSU Extension©
Japanese Stiltgrass
Buckeye Yard & Garden Online
Ohio State University



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION
Garlic Mustard
Home and Garden Info Center
University of Maryland Extension

annual and garlic mustard is a biennial, and both can be eradicated by pulling and destroying them before they set seed. Unfortunately, they are widespread, and birds, other critters or wind will bring new seeds to your property each year. So, you'll need to pull them again and again.

Japanese stiltgrass can create an attractive green carpet on the forest floor, but it kills all the native plants that would be there to support other wildlife. Garlic mustard, brought from Europe in the 19th century as an herb and for erosion control, is very aggressive. Its young shoots are edible, but you'll want to get rid of the plants before they mature!

Resources

DCR Invasive plant list - <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/invspdflist>

VNPS Resources - <https://vnps.org/conservation/invasives/webreferences/>

Setting Out Annuals – A Little Goes a Long Way

by Robin McCutcheon Duncan, May 17, 2021

Garden centers are hitting peak inventory now for annual plants, those that grow from seed and set seeds again before the growing season ends. These plants, also called "bedding plants," fill the borders along our lawn and houses as well as add color to the landscape. Most prefer either sun or shade to part-shade.

Impatiens (shown), also known as Busy Lizzie, is one example. It prefers part-shade and shows especially well in large group plantings. You can add fertilizer every 2 weeks once they start to grow. Pinching the flowers off once their blooms are spent encourages more blooms.



Other part-shade plants to consider are sweet pea, petunias, sweet alyssum, begonias and the ever popular blue lobelia.

Sun-loving annuals, like salvia, sunflowers, marigolds, zinnias, and geraniums, are fantastic! Although they will need watering, they also stand up well in the heat. Again, pinch off the spent blooms to get more blooms.

Below are a couple of websites to check out. Remember that we are in zone 7, so check to verify that the plant does well in our zone. Once you make the effort to plant these annuals, you will find that a little goes a long way.

Resources

<https://www.gardenloversclub.com/plant-finder/annuals/partial-shade-annuals/>

<https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/ornamental/flowers/fgen/full-sun-plants.htm>

Amaryllis Care

by Becky Sido, GPMGA, May 24, 2021

The secret to keeping amaryllis flourishing for years is to keep the plants actively growing after they have finished blooming.

When the amaryllis is done blooming

Cut off dead blooms and dried stalks at the top, but let the leaves grow. Put in sunniest place available and water only when soil is dry.

Place amaryllis outdoors when the weather warms up

When the threat of frost is over, acclimate the amaryllis plant to the outdoors by first placing it in the shade or indirect light, gradually moving the container to where it will receive full sun for at least 6 hours daily. Feed it plant food every other week and don't let the amaryllis dry out.

Give the Amaryllis a Rest

Early fall, before the first frost, cut off all the leaves & bring the amaryllis bulb inside. Put the amaryllis in a dry cool dark spot, protected from frost, for two months without watering.

When ready to start growing the bulb again, water it with warm water and put it in a sunny spot. However, give it little water until it begins growing. Amaryllis may take 4 -6 weeks to bloom.

Plant the Amaryllis

No need to repot bulbs every year, amaryllis grow best when they are slightly pot-bound and may only need to be repotted every three or four years. When you repot it, you may notice smaller side bulbs that can be broken away from the main bulb. These can also be potted and grown on in a sunny spot. They often do not bloom the first year but may bloom after two or three years of growth. Be careful not to bury the bulb too deeply. At least one third of the bulb should be visible above the soil surface. Plant the bulb in a pot that is less than two times the diameter of the bulb.

Wax Amaryllis

Even though directions tell you to throw away wax amaryllis after blooming, I have had great success in getting them to rebloom. Carefully cut off the wax and plant in soil after blooming, following the directions above.

Enjoy your blooming amaryllis for many years!



Resources

<https://extension.umn.edu/houseplants/amaryllis>

<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/can-i-get-my-amaryllis-bloom-again>

<https://wayne.ces.ncsu.edu/2016/12/growing-amaryllis-bulbs/>

Consider Keeping Bees

by DanaDee Carragher, May 31, 2021

Bees are the main pollinators for fruits and vegetables. There are over 4,000 species of bees native to North America, and the honeybee alone contributes to the production of many billions of dollars' worth of crops in America every year.

Midlothian beekeeper John Heyel urges friends and neighbors to consider keeping bees in their backyard.

"I have kept Orchard Masons for the past 15 years. They are simple to keep – I think I spend 1-2 hours a year maintaining their habitat and for \$30 you can buy a simple habitat setup off the internet. They are fun to watch, and the kids love to see them emerge from their tubes in the spring. They only fly for about 2 months out of the year (April and May) and they are non-aggressive. You don't need a bee suit, veil etc; since they rarely sting (they are not protecting a honey store like honeybees). My kids and I would hold them in our hands as they emerge from their winter cocoons and then flew."

He sees his vegetable garden benefiting from more pollinators nearby. The simple act of keeping bees often enhances fruit and vegetable production because of all the pollination that the bees achieve.



Resources

VDAC's Beehive Distribution Program which supplies bees and supplies to applicants will be deferred until adjustments to the state budget are determined in 2020-2021. <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/plant-industry-services...>

Beehive Distribution Program Guidelines & Requirements. https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/.../beehive_distribution...

Further reading: "Entomologist's Tips for Installing and Maintaining Native Bee 'Houses'", by Devon Johnson <https://vtx.vt.edu/.../ext-entomologists-tips-for...>

Kudzu

by Rachael Watman, June 7, 2021

It's hot. Things are growing, including the South's favorite invasive, kudzu.

Kudzu, *Pueraria montana*, is a perennial, deciduous, climbing vine which spreads from a central root crown. Vines can grow up to 30 to 100 feet per year. During the early summer, kudzu can grow a foot per day.

Getting rid of kudzu is a master class in patience and flexibility. Persistent eradication of the root crown is key. During the spring, new vines will form at nodes and spread out in all directions, creating root crowns every one to two feet. Roots of these established crowns can expand to several inches in diameter and grow to depths of three feet. The crowns can weigh up to several hundred pounds, which help the plant withstand long periods of drought. They have a high starch content enabling early spring growth.



There are four primary methods of controlling kudzu: Herbicides, Physical Removal, Prescribed Fire and Intensive Conservation Grazing. The best management plan is an integrated one which incorporates a combination. Selecting an effective method of control depends on several factors: What is the size of the infested area? How close is the kudzu to sensitive species or desirable vegetation? How accessible is the patch of kudzu?

Last week, the Department of Forestry cut fire lines into my two acres of kudzu to begin the years-long journey towards eradication. I'm in this for the long haul.

Resources

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/natural-heritage/document/fspulo.pdf>

https://dof.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/Invasive-Plants_pub.pdf

Making Friends with Caterpillars

by Kitty Williams, June 14, 2021

Years ago, I planted a row of dill in my garden. The seeds sprouted, the plants flourished, and one day I found dozens of ravenous caterpillars devouring the lovely fronds. A massacre ensued. Soon afterwards, I learned that the little creatures were baby Tiger Swallowtail butterflies. Oops.

Other very hungry caterpillars have riled me by chomping on my flowers and veggies. Although I'll never be happy to see a tomato hornworm, my attitude is changing. Most caterpillars contribute to the beauty and vitality of our world, you see.

If you love butterflies, welcome their larvae (caterpillars). Many wonderful websites can help identify caterpillars and the moths or butterflies they will become.



Bird populations also depend on caterpillars. Baby birds can't eat hard seed husks or beetle carapaces, so they need vast quantities of soft, nutritious caterpillars to grow and thrive. Author and entomologist Doug Tallamy once observed chickadee parents ferrying caterpillars to their babies every three minutes from dawn to dusk over the 16-18 days it took the chicks to fledge. He calculated they brought 6,000-9,000 caterpillars in total.

All this doesn't mean you must let them eat all your plants. You can learn some Integrated Pest Management strategies. Avoid broad spectrum insecticides that kill the good guys along with the true pests. A link to the Master Gardeners of Northern Virginia's overview of IPM techniques is below to get you started.

As Joni Mitchell once sang, "Give me spots on apples, but leave me the birds and the bees, Please!"

Resources

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/11/opinion/in-your-garden-choose-plants-that-help-the-environment.html>

<https://mgnv.org/reading-room/gardening-basics/recommended-integrated-pest-management-and-cultural-practices/>

Pruning Tomatoes

by Debbie Duval, June 21, 2021

Pruning well-established tomato plants is a great way to maintain healthy plants all season. Major benefits of pruning are disease prevention, increased fruit production and, allows for more manageable plants.

The plant's height needs to be at least 12-18 inches before pruning is initiated.

Next, determine the variety of tomato you are growing. Determinate varieties or bush varieties (Rutgers, Roma) do not need pruning, they tend to be compact and produce a set amount of fruit. Indeterminate varieties (Big Boy, Beef Master, most heirloom and, cherry) are called vining varieties, they continue to grow all season, and require pruning.

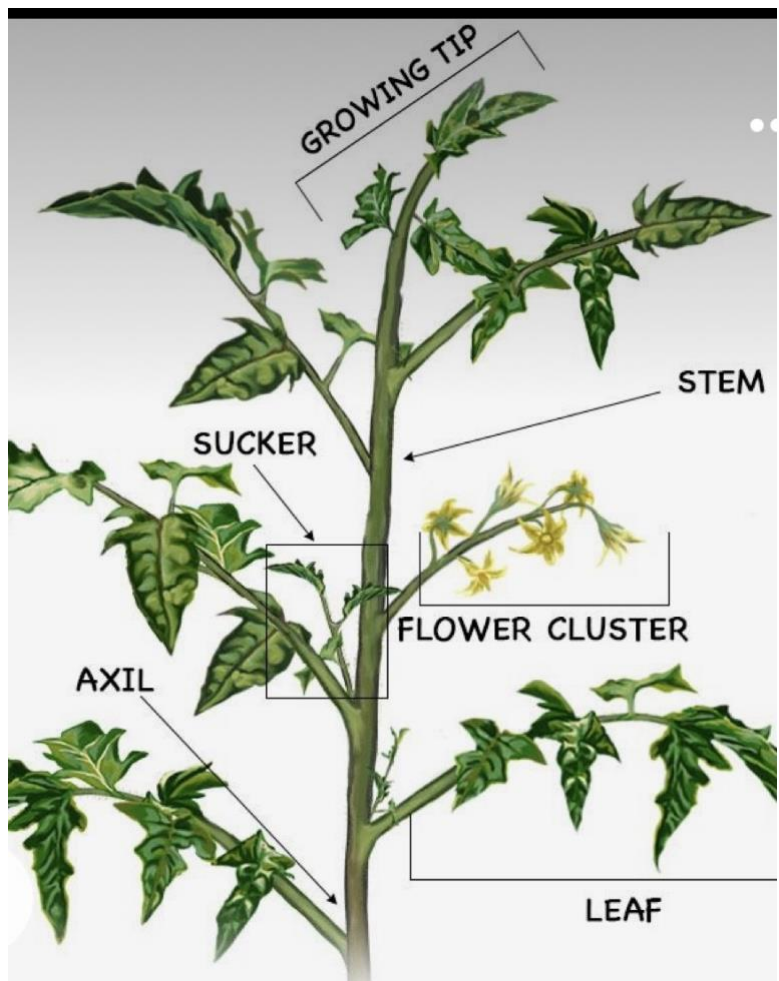
Ideally pruning is initiated early in the day, during cooler temperatures, and when the leaves are dry.

Begin by pruning any yellow leaves, as the plant begins to mature the lower leaves will naturally begin to yellow and wilt. Also, prune lower branches that are within 6 inches of the soil line. This will prevent soil-borne diseases from splashing up when raindrops hit the soil. Unfortunately, in the Piedmont region, soil-borne diseases present a huge problem for tomatoes.

Suckers or side shoots also should be pinched off. Suckers form in the crotches or axils, between the leaves and main stem. Ideally, you remove suckers when they are small and can be hand pinched. For larger suckers (thicker than a pencil), pinch out just the tip of the sucker, leaving one to two leaves behind to reduce sun-scald. Prune suckers all season, as they grow quickly and need to be removed once or twice a week.

Removing suckers ensures nutrients remain in the central plant for healthier plants and larger fruit.

Lastly, eliminate all but four to five side branches from the main stem, leaving the plant's top shoot intact. Whenever possible, prune by hand, but if using shears, sanitize the tool before and after each use.



Although pruning tomatoes require some work, the reward of healthier vines and fruit is well worth the effort.

Resources

<https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-prune-a-tomato-plant...>

<https://durham.ces.ncsu.edu/2020/06/pruning-for-healthier-more-productive-tomatoes/>

Blossom End Rot

by Debbie DuVal, June 28, 2021

What is happening to my tomatoes?

Blossom-end rot (BER) is a disappointing occurrence in an otherwise perfect-appearing fruit. It is usually described as a brown leathery rot occurring on the blossom end of the tomato. BER can also occur on peppers, eggplant, squashes and melons, but is more prevalent in tomatoes.

The good news is that it is not infectious (not caused by fungi, bacteria, or other pathogens).

The causes of BER are physiological, and occur when there are long periods of drought, heavy rains, freezing temperatures or other disturbances in the plants water supply. These fluctuations can induce a deficiency in the plants calcium uptake and will cause BER.

Preventing BER includes the following:

- Obtaining a soil test prior to planting.
- Maintaining a soil ph of 6-6.5.
- Applying any required lime as indicated by soil testing results 2-4 months prior to planting tomatoes. Liming also assists in supplying calcium.
- Applying recommended amount of fertilizer and avoiding over fertilizing.
- Consistent watering schedule. Tomatoes require 1.5 inches of water weekly during fruiting.
- If your plants develop BER, water the base of plant with a calcium nitrate or calcium chloride solution (4 tablespoons calcium per gallon of water). Avoid spraying the plant foliage with the calcium solution.
- Lastly: remove any fruit damaged with BER immediately, as the damaged areas will serve as an entry route for other diseases.

We are all looking forward to many perfect tomatoes. Hopefully these tips will reduce the chances of BER spoiling your season.

Happy Gardening!



Rebecca Finneran, MSU Extension

Resources

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/blossom-end-rot-in-tomatoes-causes-and-prevention/>

<https://garden.org/learn/articles/view/1793/>

Powdery Mildew

by Pat Lust, July 5, 2021

Powdery mildew appears as patches of white or gray powder-like substance on plant leaves in warm, dry weather, especially in July in Virginia. Incidence is increased when the humidity is high.

While powdery mildew (a fungus) is rarely fatal to the plant, it can cause some defoliation and damage to the blossoms. Perhaps the worst part is that it messes with the beauty of our gardens.

It is very difficult to get rid of the fungus once it is well established. If you catch it early, some preventive or early-intervention practices can be useful:

Prune off any early signs of the disease and destroy those branches. Do not put them in your compost!

Be sure there is good air circulation in areas that are susceptible to the fungus.

Do not fertilize, especially not nitrogen, in the affected area. The fungus is attracted to new growth.

One bit of good news is that the fungi that cause the powdery mildew are host specific. There are hundreds of species of fungi causing powdery mildew, but each prefers specific types of plants and will not infect other types of plants.

Resources

“Controlling or Eliminating Powdery Mildew.” Growing a Greener World. Joe Lamp’l

<https://www.growingagreenerworld.com/controlling-or-eliminating-powdery-mildew/>

“Powdery Mildews Fact Sheet” Colorado State University Extension

<https://extension.colostate.edu/.../powdery-mildews-2-902/>



Cucumber leaf infected with powdery mildew - NC State University Extension

Deadheading

by Rachael Watman, July 12, 2021

I'm not going to lede with the obvious joke and for that you should be grateful.

Deadheading is the removal of an old or spent bloom before the plant sets seed. If it isn't done, a chemical message is sent to slow down and eventually stop blooming. While there are specific deadheading preferences for each flower, if you see new buds or blooms beneath the dead one, it is time to prune the spent flowers.

Cut off the old or damaged growth on your perennials to just above a lateral flower, leaf, or bud. Most annuals can be deadheaded with pruners or by pinching off the old blooms with your fingers. Determine where the blooms form and remove the old bloom (including the seed pod) while leaving the fresh bloom below intact. As long as you are only removing the flower stem above the first healthy leaf, deadheading should not have a negative impact on the rest of the plant.

Some flowering annuals do not require deadheading, such as Lantana and Verbena. However, most annual plants, and many perennials, benefit from deadheading. This includes dahlias, daylilies, echinacea, geraniums, lavender, lilacs, painted daisies, roses, rudbeckia, and zinnias.

It is recommended you start deadheading flowers in the spring when petals begin falling off and continue until the fall to maximize the duration of blooms. Once the weather turns cold, stop deadheading to encourage reseeding.

Deadheading is a lot of work if you have a lot of plants, but it goes quickly, and you will definitely reap the rewards long into the season. All you have to do is start and just keep truckin' on until you can hang it up, see what tomorrow brings.

Resources

<https://lancaster.unl.edu/hort/articles/2002/deadhead.shtml>

<https://extension.unh.edu/blog/2019/07/what-best-way-deadhead-perennials>



Virginia's Native Sunflowers

by Pat Lust, July 19, 2021

When someone mentions sunflowers we usually think about large-flowered ones that grow in the fields in central Virginia and in our gardens – ones whose seeds we feed to birds or snack on ourselves. But, let's consider the wide variety of smaller but equally beautiful sunflowers that are native to our area.

The three pictured are all perennials. The Swamp Sunflower likes a moist area, grows up to 8' tall, and blooms in the fall. It is a good idea to prune it in June to cause more branching and fuller blooms

The other two prefer dry, sandy soil and bloom from June through September. While all sunflowers thrive in the sun, the Woodland Sunflower lives up to its name and is happy in a shady area.



Swamp Sunflower

Woodland Sunflower

Oxeye Sunflower

North Carolina State University Extension

Generally speaking, Virginia native sunflowers are fairly resistant to disease and insect damage. They are considered high-value wildlife plants, especially in supporting native bees. The Oxeye Sunflower is of particular interest to hummingbirds. And, any of these native sunflowers would be a great addition to your pollinator garden.

Resources

"Helianthus." North Carolina State University Extension. (Look for further links on this page.)
<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/helianthus/>

"Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora" (list with links)
<http://www.vaplantatlas.org/index.php?s=&c=sunflower&do=search%3Aadvanced&search=Search>

Know Your Pesticides!

by DanaDee Carragher, July 26, 2021

It is important to be very careful with the application of pesticides. Mosquito companies are becoming popular and many of their products kill all flying insects. Look for companies that use natural repellents.

Investigate alternative pest inhibitors before you get the big guns out. Only a few years ago, weekend gardeners labeled bugs in the garden as “bad”, while now even novice gardeners know many bugs are beneficial for our plants. Choose a pesticide that is minimally disruptive. The **Virginia Cooperative Extension 2021 Pest Management Guide** is a wonderful on-line source of information.

Resources

2021 Pest Management Guide, published by Virginia Cooperative Extension.

<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/456/456-018/456-018.html>



It's Time to Plant for Fall

by Kitty Williams, August 2, 2021

During the steamy days of August, it's almost impossible to believe that fall is just around the corner. However, the planting and planning you do in the next few weeks will reward you with fresh vegetables until frost - and maybe beyond.

Timing is everything. Our average first frost in Goochland and Powhatan is October 15. To find the last date to sow for a particular fall crop, look on the seed packet to find the number of days from planting to harvests, add two weeks to that number to account for fall's shorter days and cooler temperatures, and count back from October 15. You can sow seeds for that crop until that date. If that sounds way too complicated, the Farmer's Almanac offers an online planting calendar for your zip code.



Prepare the bed. Pull up and remove your summer crops. Add a bit of compost or a small amount of complete fertilizer to revive the soil.

Plant the seed twice as deeply as you would have in the spring.

Dry soil is the enemy! Water the soil well before planting and keep the seeds watered. The Virginia Master Gardener Handbook suggests that placing a board over the row until the seeds just begin to sprout can help, but don't forget to remove it when they do...

With proper care and timing, you can enjoy veggies like beets, carrots, lettuce, peas, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard and turnips well into October. With our changeable weather, who knows? November isn't impossible.

Resources

Virginia Cooperative Extension: Fall Vegetable Gardening,
https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/75682/VCE426_334_1991.pdf?sequence=1

Planning the Fall Vegetable Garden, Piedmont Master Gardeners:
<https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/article/planning-the-fall-vegetable-garden/>

Farmer's Almanac <https://www.almanac.com/gardening/planting-calendar>

Image: "Lettuce" by photofarmer is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Tithonia – Mexican Sunflowers

by *Connie Sorrell, August 9, 2021*

If you love yellow, orange, and red, the Tithonia is a beauty that attracts lots of pollinators - bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds! It has abundant flowers, all with yellow centers. Not to be confused with the common sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), Tithonia is a member of the Asteraceae family. Its common names include Mexican Sunflower, Flower of the Incas, and Tree Marigold.

Native to Central and North America, Tithonia are sun lovers and grow best in hot, dry conditions. It is typically an annual, growing in zones 9-11. They should be started from seed about two weeks after the last frost. Flowering in the summer and fall, it can grow from 24 inches to 100 inches tall and will need to be staked. Be sure to space according to package directions, usually 24-40 inches apart but you might need to provide extra spacing to prevent powdery mildew in humid areas. You can deadhead for bushier plants.

Tithonia can grow in average to poor soil, in the acid range of 5.8 - 6.5. They require good drainage, typically do best in rocky or sandy soils, and are very drought tolerant. Snails or slugs or deer may bother Tithonia. One packet of seeds will give you a profusion of cut flowers in late summer and early fall.



Resources

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/mexican-sunflower-tithonia-rotundifolia/>

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/tithonia-rotundifolia>

Think Native!

by DanaDee Carragher, August 16, 2021

Think native. For your own pleasure and education, take a stroll in the Bayscaping garden in front of the Science Museum of Virginia. The garden was started in 2009 with native plants that attract honeybees, bumblebees, butterflies, birds, and other beneficial wildlife.

Further, the plants eliminate the need for chemical contaminants that contribute to pollution in stormwater runoff.

Native plants are indigenous species that were present here prior to the settlement by Europeans. You'll see lush grasses, walkways cascading with colorful flowers, and hear the soft hum of bees and flashes of butterfly wings will make you an instant convert. Add to that, ease of maintenance and you'll want to kick your lawnmower to the curb. No one likes to see clover and dandelions in their yard, but they are great for bees and can help them get through a tough, dry summer!



Use natives to your region which do not require pesticides, fertilizers, or irrigation to grow well. And remember, our Monarch larvae thrive on the milkweed you plant so be willing to accept some plant damage on plants meant to provide habitat. There are 140 species of milkweed, and three grow particularly well in the Richmond area.

- *Asclepias syriaca* Common name: Common Milkweed
- *Asclepias tuberosa* Common name: Butterfly Weed
- *Asclepias incarnata* Common names: Rose Milkweed, Pleurisy Root, White Indian Hemp

Contact your local Cooperative Extension office for more information on growing native plants attractive to butterflies of all kinds.

Image attribution: Lmmahood, CC BY-SA 3.0

Composting

by Martha Trainum Nichols, August 23, 2021

Compost is a soil-like substance made from the controlled decomposition of organic materials. Sound complicated? It's not! It can easily be made in your own backyard and it has so many benefits! Not only is it great for your soil and your plants, it also saves money that would be spent on fertilizers and amendments for the soil. It improves soil structure, improves soil nutrient holding capacity, reduces the need for fertilizer, and increases microbial and earthworm populations in the soil. It keeps 25% or more of your household waste out of a landfill. It is also a great project to do with children.



There are many resources both locally and online where you can purchase compost bins but you don't need to spend a lot of money to get great results. Start

one for free in your yard! A good compost pile can include a variety of items including grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw, fruit and vegetable scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, and small amounts of brown cardboard. Steer away from using things like meat, grease and bones, dairy products, dog and cat manure, or diseased plants.

A good recipe for compost includes a mix of "brown" (dead plant material), and "green" (fresh plant material), water, and air. A curing period of 2 to 6 months is required to produce compost that is dark and crumbly with an earthy smell.

Resources

<https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2607>

<https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=1275>

<https://composting.ces.ncsu.edu/about-composting/>

<https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/.../48088/HORT-49-PDF.pdf...>

Image by melGreenFR from Pixabay

Aphids

by Pat Lust, August 30, 2021

I hate aphids! They ruined my milkweed crop last year, sucking the sap and leaving their famous “honeydew.” Normally ants follow and scoop up the honeydew, but my ants failed to do their job. So, sooty mold came in and took advantage of the enticing honeydew, and damaged or killed many of the milkweed plants. When the monarch butterflies showed up, they just turned away from the damaged milkweeds. This year I am guarding the milkweeds more carefully.

Aphids usually locate near the growing tips of plants, piercing the surface to get the sap and causing leaves to fold in or fruit to be malformed. They are usually wingless, but when a plant becomes overpopulated, they can sprout wings and move on to another plant.

If you have a small colony of aphids, you can crush them between your fingers. With more, you can blast them with cold water. Once they are knocked off, they have difficulty finding their way back to a plant. Aphids’ natural predators are lady beetles and lacewings. Plant coreopsis, cosmos, clover, etc. to attract these friendly insects.

The Farmer’s Almanac suggests dusting aphids with flour to cause constipation. This is not scientific advice, but it might be fun as an experiment.

Resources

Entfact-103: Aphids. University of Kentucky College of Agriculture: <https://entomology.ca.uky.edu/ef103>
Integrated Pest Management for Aphids, Clemson University Extension: <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/integrated-pest-management-i-p-m-for-aphids/>



“Aphids Spoiling Monarch Milkweeds”

The Ohio State University: Buckeye Yard & Garden onLine

Joe Boggs, OSU Extension©

Landscape Planning Tool

by Rebecca Crow, September 6, 2021

Sandy's Plants in Mechanicsville, Virginia, has a free online tool that I have found extremely helpful when planning a landscape garden bed.

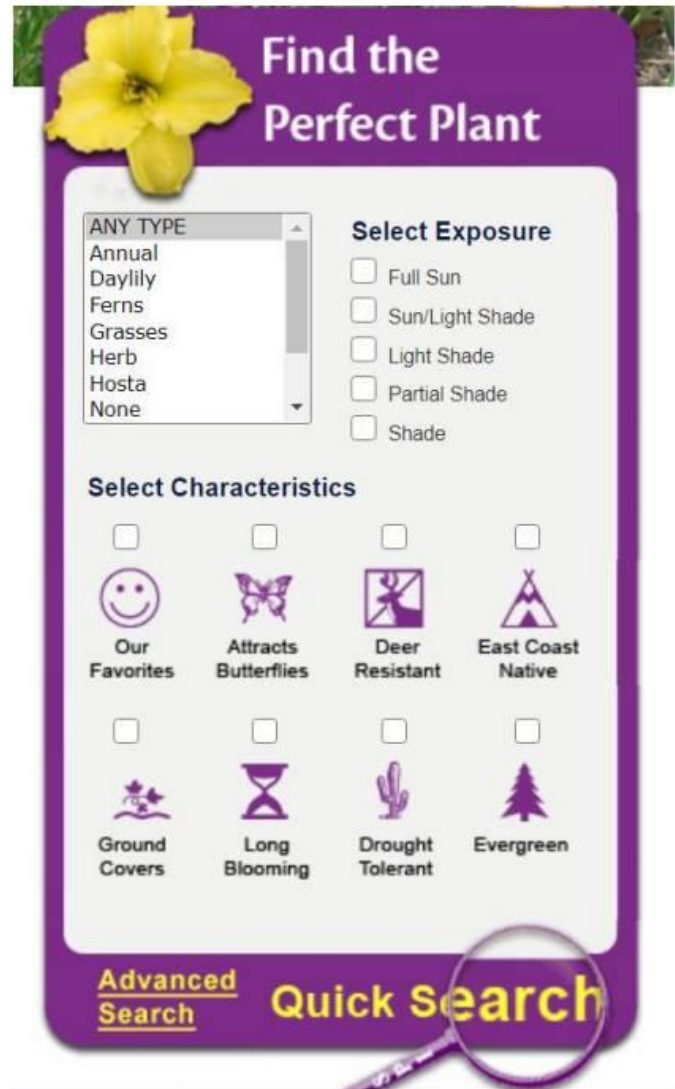
by using the Advanced Search function of their massive database, you can find perennials that meet *your* specific needs. Just to name a few of the choices: you can search for plants that are deer or rabbit resistant; by bloom color, flowering months, or foliage color; and by what type of sun exposure your planting areas provides.

For example, you have a bed that has part sun and you need deer-resistant plants with pink flowers that bloom May through June. Check all those boxes, and the search will give you a list of 59 plants with photos and information on each one.

If you are looking for shorter white plants for the front of your garden, you can change the color from pink to white and specify the height - say 8 inches - in your existing search and it narrows the results from 59 to 11 plants.

This great online tool can be found under the Advanced Search link at:

<https://www.sandysplants.com/index.cfm/>



Goldenrods

by Pat Lust, September 13, 2021

As you drive down the highway in Virginia at this time of the year, you can't help noticing the brilliant yellows and golds on the roadside and open areas. Most of this great color comes from over 30 species of goldenrods that are native in Virginia.

The photo shows three favorites:

- Rough Goldenrod (*Solidago rugosa*)
- Sweet Goldenrod (*Solidago odora*)
- Gray or Old Field Goldenrod (*Solidago nemoralis*)

Goldenrods play a major role in supporting wildlife. Their flowers provide both nectar and pollen for a variety of native bees, honey bees, butterflies and other insects. They are especially valuable to migrating butterflies and bees, and they hosts the larval stage (caterpillars) of many insects. These caterpillars provide a ready source of food for birds feeding their young, and goldenrod seeds provide food for the birds themselves.



Rough Goldenrod

Sweet Goldenrod

Old Field Goldenrod

North Carolina State University Extension

Deer are not fond of goldenrod flowers or foliage (except perhaps very young foliage) and pretty much leave them alone.

Some folks mistakenly think that goldenrods cause sneezing in the fall, but the real culprit is ragweed. Watch for information about ragweed in our next post.

Resources

"Digital Atlas of the Virginia Flora." (List of links to specific species)

<http://www.vaplantatlas.org/index.php?s=&c=goldenrod&do=search%3Aadvanced&search=Search>

"Solidago." North Carolina State University Extension (Various links on the page)

<https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/solidago/>

Ragweed Is the Bad Guy

by Pat Lust, September 20, 2021

Yes, it is the ragweed (*Ambrosia*) – not our beautiful Virginia goldenrods – that makes us sneeze in the fall. The flowers of the ragweed are not distinctive, and we often don't even notice the plants in nature. But, they are there, and they are sneaky.

Goldenrods have perfect flowers (male and female parts in the same flower) and are pollinated by insects. Their pollen is fairly heavy, and any that is not transferred by the insects just falls to the ground.

Ragweed, on the other hand, has separate male and female flowers (like your cucumbers). Pollination is achieved mostly by wind transferring pollen from the male flowers to the female flowers. That's the sneaky part. All the excess pollen flying on the wind sometimes reaches our noses. Then, Gesundheit! A single ragweed plant can produce up to a billion grains of pollen that can travel on the wind for up to two miles.



Common Ragweed
Univ. of Wisconsin Madison Extension



Giant Ragweed
The Ohio State University Extension

Ragweed is native to North America and is most common in eastern and midwestern United States. It is found in every state except Alaska.

Resources

“Common Ragweed.” University of Arkansas – <https://www.uaex.uada.edu/yard-garden/resource-library/plant-week/common-ragweed.aspx>

“Ragweed: This Foe May be a Friend, Too”. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden – <https://www.lewisginter.org/ragweed-this-foe-may-be-a-friend-too>

Vermicomposting: Another Way to Compost

by Martha Trainum Nichols, September 27, 2021

Most people have heard of using a compost pile to recycle kitchen scraps into material that is beneficial for your garden. A less well-known trend is to compost with worms.

Worms never need to be turned, as a compost pile does, and they grind the compost material which breaks it down faster than the microorganisms in a compost pile will.

The resulting material can be used as an addition to potting soil, used as a top dressing in the garden, in planting holes for transplants, and for many other uses. Worms are easy to maintain and reward you with soil-enriching compost for years to come.

The most common species used for composting is *Eisenia fetida*, more commonly known as the red wiggler, tiger worm, brandling worm, or manure worm. Red wigglers are litter dwellers, meaning they like to live in piles of leaves on or near the forest floor. This makes them excellent to use in worm bins since they do not like to burrow deep.

Setting up a worm bin can be as cheap or as expensive as you want it to be. You can create your own out of plastic tubs or buy ready-made from a variety of retailers.

Worms can be purchased online from a commercial producer or from a freshwater bait shop. Just make sure you purchase *Eisenia fetida* and **not** nightcrawlers. Some shredded newspapers and compost from your kitchen and you are all set!



Resources

[https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/48072/442-](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/48072/442-005_pdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3whkXSgDU8g5CFxWT_JK530NoO_-8C4jjlDwFJKPayMtg1Y7pvcNsHEM4)

[005_pdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3whkXSgDU8g5CFxWT_JK530NoO_-8C4jjlDwFJKPayMtg1Y7pvcNsHEM4](https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/48072/442-005_pdf.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3whkXSgDU8g5CFxWT_JK530NoO_-8C4jjlDwFJKPayMtg1Y7pvcNsHEM4)

<https://www.gloucesterva.info/DocumentCenter/View/3828/How-to-Make-a-Worm-Bin---Virginia-Cooperative-Extension-PDF>

Tatarian Aster

by Pat Lust, October 4, 2021

Looking for something that blooms at the very end of the season? Tatarian asters are a good choice. They begin blooming in late September and go on until the frost. Pollinators, especially migrating monarchs, are so happy to have this great late-season feast, and the beautiful lavender flowers will catch the eye of every passerby.

My apologies to any purists who include only native plants in your pollinator gardens. Tatarian asters are not native to Virginia but rather to the Tatarian region east of Moscow in Russia. However, according to the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation, they are not considered to be invasive in Virginia, so, it is environmentally responsible to include them in your garden.



Rutgers: New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Tatarian asters are very easy to grow. They prefer sun and good drainage and are pretty tolerant of various soil conditions. After a few years your plants will be big enough to divide and share with friends. They are resistant to most diseases, but deer do love the buds.

The stems are quite sturdy, and at six (sometimes more) feet tall, they are great for the back of the garden. You can prune them in late spring to encourage more blooms, and the blooms make great cut flowers. (Personally, this is one of my favorite non-native plants.)

Resources

Aster Tataricus: A Floral Star in the November Garden - <https://njaes.rutgers.edu/plant-of.../aster-tataricus.php>

How to Grow Tatarian Aster - <https://gardenerspath.com/plants/flowers/tatarian-aster/>

Homegrown National Parks™ (Part 1)

by Kitty Williams, October 11, 2021

Half a century ago, the crew of Apollo 17 photographed the Earth from space. The image of the “Blue Marble” alerted us to Earth’s beauty and vulnerability more effectively than had decades of scientific warnings. Laws were enacted to protect the air, water, and the health of the planet.

Views from the Skyline Drive reappeared. Rivers grew cleaner. Endangered wildlife rebounded. With success, however, the sense of urgency receded and complacency set in. We took things for granted, and now we are experiencing wildfires, floods, drought, extreme weather and smoggy air.

More critically, biodiversity, “the ecosystems that produce the oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control, carbon storage...that sustain us,” is once again in need of positive human impact.

What can gardeners do to help? Entomologist Doug Tallamy maintains that people who love our gardens can make a difference. “Small efforts by... anyone with some soil to plant in,” acting together, he says, can help preserve biodiversity.

Estimates indicate that we have nearly 600 million acres in our yards and gardens. That’s more than in our 13 largest national parks combined. Tallamy proposes that we view this private land as “a wildlife preserve,” a Homegrown National Park. Check this column next Monday to find out how your garden can contribute to the Homegrown National Park project.

If you want to read ahead, information on Homegrown National Park is at Tallamy’s website and in his books, including Nature’s Best Hope.

Resources

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/meet-ecologist-who-wants-unleash-wild-backyard-180974372>

<https://homegrownnationalpark.org/tallamys-hub-1>

<https://www.workman.com/products/natures-best-hope>



Homegrown National Parks™ (Part 2)

by Kitty Williams, October 18, 2021

A lovely lawn, attractively planted with immaculate trees and flowers, signals the property owner is a good citizen who loves her garden and cares what her neighbors think.

Unfortunately, many of those plants, though lovely, are immaculate and pest-resistant because none of our native birds or insects have evolved to use them as food. When the creatures can't use the plants, the plants grow unchecked and become invasive, smothering natives. Birds starve and insect populations plummet.

This is a problem. The atmosphere we breathe, the food we eat, and human life itself depends on the rich diversity of living things around us. Author and entomologist Doug Tallamy reminds us this is “the only known life in the universe.”

What are we to do? Tallamy believes we need to expand our focus. “Change starts in your backyard,” he writes.

He calls for a Homegrown National Park.

Individuals and corporate landowners can expand the network of existing parks and protected areas by building connections between them by planting lovely native plants. When birds and animals can migrate safely, without risking annihilation on the roadways, predators from the air, and inadequate plants and insects to eat on the way, their populations benefit. Our world does too!

In small gardens and large campuses, we can all begin. Here are just a few of Tallamy's suggestions. There are more at the links below.

- Plant an oak
- Screen with native hedges;
- Make a meadow

It's time to think outside the park!

Resources

Homegrown National Park Hub - <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/tallamys-hub-1>

10 Ways to Start Building a Garden for Wildlife - <https://www.gardendesign.com/eco-friendly/wildlife.html>



The Perfect Time for Planting Bulbs

by *Connie Sorrell, October 25, 2021*

The word 'bulb' often refers to all plants with a root system adapted to storing food reserves for months during winter weather and withstanding times of drought. The term has come to include not only true bulbs but also corms, tubers, and rhizomes.

No matter what you call them, bulbs come in practically every color, every shape, every height and every size. Some are even scented.

During late winter and early spring, crocuses, anemones, snow drops, and dwarf iris provide color. Following them are daffodils, hyacinths, bluebells, and tulips. By late spring, iris and allium arrive. Gladiola, begonias, dahlias are summer beauties. Dahlias continue into the fall with the arrival of cyclamen, crinums, and other bulbs.

Keys to success in planting bulbs include selecting a suitable site and testing the soil in the planting area. Most bulbs prefer sun and a soil pH between 6 and 7. In choosing, consider the size, color, and bloom time for each type of bulb. Good drainage is necessary for proper root development and preventing bulb rot. Especially where you have clay soil, mix in compost and amend it as needed with bulb fertilizer.

When planting the bulbs, follow the instructions related to the proper depth. Plant pointed end UP! Cover the planted bulbs with mulch.

Above all, be sure to purchase quality bulbs which are firm and free of cuts.

Resources

<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/spring-flowering-bulbs>

<https://extension.psu.edu/plant-bulbs-in-the-fall-for-a...>

<https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1220/>



Green Mulch

by Pat Lust, November 1, 2021

One definition of “green mulch” is simply short ground-cover plants that are substituted for the shredded bark that many folks put around their favorite “star” plants. It’s a great idea! It may take a little time to develop a good green mulch, but it will be worth it. Living mulch contributes to the garden in ways that shredded dead tree parts cannot.

A living green mulch will shade out weed seedlings, cutting down on the need for weeding. The plant roots prevent erosion and help retain moisture by directing water down the roots rather than allowing it to run off. Additionally, living roots help sequester carbon. Green mulch is superior to commercial mulch in supporting wildlife – providing habitat for small critters and food for beneficial insects. And best of all, a green mulch can be aesthetically beautiful.



Dwarf Crested Iris

Pussytoes

Green and Gold

North Carolina State University Extension

The plants in the photo are all great “green mulch” ground covers. Dwarf crested Iris grows about 6-10 inches tall and prefers part shade. Pussytoes form a nice slowly spreading mat of foliage with tiny white flowers popping up in the spring. It likes full sun, especially on an eastern facing slope. Green and gold likes partial or light shade.

Resources

Groundcovers. University of Maryland Extension. <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/groundcovers>

Recommended Native Ground Covers for North Carolina. Gardenia.

<https://www.gardenia.net/guide/recommended-native-groundcovers-for-north-carolina>

Witch-hazel – Last Stop for Nectar

by Pat Lust, November 8, 2021

Common Witch-hazel (*hamamelis virginiana*), a native Virginia bush, blooms in late fall when everything else has already packed it in for the winter. You can find witch-hazel blooming in the woods now.

Generally considered an understory shrub, witch-hazel can reach 30 feet in height and will thrive in part shade to full sun. It prefers moist soil but is pretty widely adaptable and pops up in nature anywhere from the edge of a stream to a wooded hillside. It is a sturdy, spreading shrub

A deciduous bush, it displays foliage color throughout the season from light green in spring to yellows and oranges in fall. The fragrant yellow flowers appear in late fall, each with four petals resembling dainty ribbons. When the fruit is ripe nearly a year after flowering, it bursts open sending the seed as far as 12' away.



Photography of Randy Harter – North Carolina State University Extension

Witch-hazel is not susceptible to serious pests or disease, but is attractive to deer. As a garden plant, it requires minimal care – perhaps a little pruning for desired shape.

Historically, folks used common witch-hazel to soothe insect bites, sunburn and poison ivy rashes. Its branches once provided divining rods used in searching for water.

Resources

Witch-hazel: The Honeybee's Last Forage: <https://blog.uvm.edu/fntrlist/2011/10/11/witch-hazel-the-honeybee's-last-forage-2/>

North Carolina State Extension - <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/hamamelis-virginiana/>

Leave it Messy

by Kitty Williams, November 15

As you prepare your garden beds for winter, remember the small creatures who need shelter from the cold. Seek a balance between tidiness and hospitality by removing diseased and invasive plants, while leaving other dead vegetation alone until early spring.

Once we were urged to bag or burn fallen leaves and get 'em off the grass fast. The smell of smoke rising from leaf piles evoked nostalgia. Today we regret such waste of nutrients and free mulch – not to mention smoke pollution.

So, keep the leaves on site, advises the VCE Master Gardener Handbook, and use the material for mulch. It “will enrich the soil and provide a sustainable food source for insects and other wildlife.”

It doesn't have to be ugly if you choose the right plants. Ornamental native grasses provide visual drama all season as well as food and shelter for birds and pollinator larvae. (Wait to cut them until just before new spring growth begins.) Coneflowers and other plants have sturdy seed heads that will last well into the winter. Birds, especially goldfinches, will entertain you as a reward for leaving the stalks for them.

A warning: “Do one final weeding,” says GPMGA's Pat Lust. “Weeds left to go to seed in the fall will present you with many, many offspring in the spring.”

Resources

“Habitat Gardening for Wildlife,” Chapter 20, Virginia Master Gardener Handbook. Carol A. Heiser, Education Section Manager and Habitat Education Coordinator, VA Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (2015)

Great Grasses for Maryland Landscapes. <https://marylandgrows.umd.edu/2020/03/13/great-grasses-for-maryland-landscapes/>

Ten Ways to Prepare Your Garden for Winter. <https://learn.eartheasy.com/articles/ten-ways-to-prepare-your-garden-for-winter/>

Photo by F.D. Richards On Flickr (CC by-Sa 2.0)



Soil Health for Vegetable Gardens

by Kaz [Mock](#), November 22, 2021

The cooler weather has finally arrived! Perhaps you still have fall greens and carrots or beets growing? Ideally, your cover crop is also going strong, to provide you with organic matter to incorporate into the soil next spring.

Cover cropping is a helpful way to follow these basic tenets of soil health:

- Always keep soil covered with life
- Engage in minimal disturbance
- Maximize living roots
- Grow diverse plants

Another important tool for your gardening success is a soil test. It will eliminate guesswork and provide specific amendment recommendations to improve YOUR soil health. Stop by your extension office or visit the link below for more information. At only \$10 for a routine test, you'll get a wealth of information to give you a head start for growing thriving plants in the spring.

If nothing is currently growing in your garden, fall is a great time to work in those amendments, as well as some compost, before covering the growing space.

The perfect way to stave off any winter blues is to plan your spring garden! These days you need to order seeds early! Establish a plan with the Extension's Virginia Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide which tells you the plant and harvest dates for each crop. Remember the soil health tenets, and prioritize crop rotation and attracting pollinators. Have fun drawing a garden map for each season and keep a journal.

Most importantly, get geared up to plant what you love to eat!

Resources

Building Healthy Soil: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=1186>

Compost: What is it and What's it to You? <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=1375>

Fertilizing the Vegetable Garden: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2472>

Home Vegetable Gardening: <https://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/home-vegetables.html>



Soil Sample Information Sheet: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=1240>

Soil Sampling for the Home Gardener: <https://resources.ext.vt.edu/contentdetail?contentid=2087>

Virginia Home Garden Vegetable Planting Guide:

<https://digitalpubs.ext.vt.edu/.../MobilePagedReplica...>

Hellebores

by Rebecca Crutchfield Crow, November 29, 2021

Hellebores, also called Christmas or Lenten Roses, are a winter joy in the home garden. Blooming from late December through the end of April, when almost everything else is dormant, their flowers can be white, pink, maroon, green, purple, almost black, speckled or veined. Their glossy green evergreen leaves remain attractive through the fall. A note: double flowering varieties, though pretty, make it hard for pollinators to get to the pollen.

Shade-loving hellebores can brighten otherwise dark and shady areas. The upright flowers gradually droop “as a survival mechanism in snow, sleet and rain,” explains Colorado State University Extension Master Gardener Margaret Wolf. Site drooping hellebores on a hill or high berm, so when you look up you can enjoy the flowers, suggests English garden designer, Rosemary Verey. Newer varieties like Pink Frost will stay upright.



Whichever variety you prefer, one way to enjoy them indoors is to cut the stems short, dip the ends quickly in boiling water and float them in a shallow dish of water.

Hellebores are deer and disease resistant and do not require any special fertilization or major maintenance. The plants grow 1½ to 2 feet tall and look best in mass plantings. When new leaves emerge, remove the old weathered leaves to showcase the flowers.

They reseed, and may take up to four years to mature and flower. That explains why they can be costly to purchase at your local nursery. Once established, though, hellebores will continue to spread winter joy in your landscape for many years.

Pruning Evergreens for Holiday Decorations

by Peggy Price, December 6, 2021

As you walk around your yard, do you notice evergreens that need pruning for shape or to manage their size? Remember to save the trimmings to make fresh arrangements for the holidays! You can cut what you need from the pruned branches.

Even if they don't need a trim right now, boxwood, magnolia, pine and holly, among others, are also lovely in an arrangement. Carefully cut small branches from different parts of the tree or shrub to keep the plant well-shaped.

For a fresh holiday arrangement on my dining room table, I start with a 9 X 13 glass casserole dish, although any shape bowl or dish will do. Pre-soak a block of florist's foam, then cut to fit the container to anchor the stems. Leave space around the edges so water can be added as needed. (Note: Select biodegradable florist's foam, which is widely available, rather than the traditional version, which is non-recyclable and contains toxic chemicals like formaldehyde.)

Remove needles or leaves from the bottom inch or two of the stems and cut them at a sharp angle just before inserting into the wet oasis.

Start in the middle of the oasis with taller branches of small-leaf evergreens and your prettiest flowers. Fill in around them with shorter branches of larger-leaf evergreens. These can be inserted horizontally into the sides of the oasis to cover the dish or bowl if you aren't using a decorative one.

Happy holiday decorating!



Gifts for Gardeners

by Martha Nichols, December 13, 2021

Are you looking for the perfect gift for your favorite gardener? Well, look no further! Here are some ideas to help you in your search. I'm sure at least one or more will be the perfect gift!

- Bulbs – amaryllis, narcissus, hyacinths – minimum care bulbs that brighten any winter day and provide a beautiful scent!
- Ergonomic garden tool set- provide extra leverage to help avoid unnecessary hand and wrist stress. A must for the more “mature” gardener!
- A variety of gardening gloves (you can never have too many gloves)- tough ones for thorny stuff, close fitting and slim ones for pulling weeds and designing arrangements.
- New clippers- like gloves, you can never have enough good, sharp clippers.
- A moisture meter- to measure humidity in the soil and to help prevent overwatering or under-watering plants.
- Bee house- for mason bees and/or other solitary bees to use to lay their eggs.
- Bird feeders or birdbaths.
- A drip irrigation system for the garden or flower borders- allows water to soak slowly into the ground right where you want it and prevents leaves from getting wet.
- Rain gauge- to keep track of when you need to turn on your drip irrigation system!
- Gift cards from local gardening centers- always the right size and color!



(Thanks to DanaDee Carragher for inspiration for this tip)

Garden Writing

by Kitty Williams, December 20, 2021

While our gardens are resting, gardeners are dreaming about growing seasons to come.

Dog-eared seed catalogs and gardening videos spark the imagination until the days lengthen and the new green shoots of spring appear. But for pure pleasure, in my opinion, nothing beats good garden writing, whether historical or modern.

Two great samplers are *American Garden Writing*, edited by Bonnie Marranca, and *The Writer in the Garden*, edited by Jane Garmey. Combined, they offer more than 100 selections by writers including George Washington, John Bartram, Frederick Law Olmstead, Wendell Berry, E.B. White, Michael Pollan and Jamaica Kinkaid. Either book would warm a gardener's heart on a cold winter day.

A more action-oriented book, *Nature's Best Hope* by Doug Tallamy, urges us to help protect our planet by the choices we make in our own gardens.

For many years, Virginia gardener and writer Nancy Ross Hugo wrote the wonderful *Earth Works* newspaper column of garden advice. A book of her essays is available from UVA press. She recently collaborated with photographer Robert Llewellyn to create a gorgeous coffee table book, *Seeing Trees*, which might change the way you see them.

Garden books are like cookbooks. One can never have too many, and I can't begin to list all those I love or look forward to reading. A few more are pictured.

Many are out of print, but don't be dismayed. Used book stores like Powell's and Thriftbooks among others are great sources of gently used books at great prices.

Resources

<https://www.powells.com/>

<https://www.thriftbooks.com/>

<https://www.amazon.com/Writer-Garden-Jane-Garmey/dp/1565121813>

<http://nancyrosshugo.com/>



Layered Gardening

by Pat Lust, December 27, 2021

A famous landscape artist said that “we should plan to plant our gardens at 130%.” This has a variety of implications, including both time and space.

First, Native Americans’ “three sisters” is the practice of planting corn, squash, and beans all in the same space. The corn grows tall, the beans climb the corn stalks, and the squash shades all the roots. As a result, they all produce abundantly in the same space.

Second, many of us overplant our gardens to have a succession of blooms to create a lush and continuous garden. Adding annuals to a well-established perennials garden is one way to achieve this.



Photo from University of Illinois Chicago Heritage Garden

Third, planting tallest in the back and shortest in the front of a border garden allows us to push the plants a little closer together. With a little pruning, this can be very satisfying.

Fourth, companion planting can add flowers to the standard veggie garden. An example may be planting nasturtiums and tansy among the cucumbers to discourage some insects. The added flowers just fit in among the crop and don’t require additional space.

Fifth, the hottest idea these days is “green mulch.” Check out our November 1st post for more information on green mulch.

Resources

Layered Gardening Ideas: <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/special/spaces/planting-garden-layers.htm>

Norris, Kelly D. *New Naturalism: Designing and Planting a Resilient, Ecologically Vibrant Home Garden*. Beverly, MA: Cool Springs Press, 2021.