

# The Colonial Master Gardener

PUBLICATION OF JCC/WBG MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION & VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

April 2008



## NOTES FROM THE EXTENSION

OFFICE LEANNE DUBOIS,  
EXTENSION AGENT

## GREENSCAPING: THE EASY WAY TO A GREENER, HEALTHIER YARD



This publication is available online through the EPA website and discusses landscaping practices that can improve the health and appearance of your lawn and garden while protecting and preserving natural resources. Topics include composting, right plant right site, a holistic approach to pest management and rain gardens. You can access the site by visiting:  
<http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/nonhw/green/owners.htm>

## Land Care Stewardship Workshop

The State Master Gardener Coordinator's office, in conjunction with the National Park Service and the Virginia Department of Forestry, will be sponsoring a one day workshop focusing on Land Care Stewardship on Saturday, May 3, 9:00am-3:00pm. The workshop will take place on the campus of Blue Ridge Community College in the Plecker Workforce Center located in Weyers Cave, Virginia. Topics to be covered include Firewise Landscaping, Exotic Invasive Plants, Wildlife Damage, Selecting the Right Plant for the Right Place, and Reducing, Reusing, and Recycling Yardwaste. For details about the topics to be covered, the speakers, and registration please visit this web site:  
<http://www.advancedmastergardener.org/>.

## INSECT OF THE MONTH: CLOVER MITES

This is the second year we've seen an increase in this tiny insect that invades home usually in the spring. They are very small, reddish-brown creatures that appear only as moving dark spots to the naked eye. Sheer numbers, plus the resulting red-brown stain left behind if they are crushed, make them unwelcome visitors. As the name implies, clover mites feed on clover and grasses. They can be especially abundant in the heavy, succulent growth of well-fertilized lawns. The red stains are not blood, they are the mite's body pigments. Clover mites are not blood feeders and will not harm people or pets, nor will they infest household products. Once inside a home or building they will soon die. Clover mites usually enter a home around windows or doors so they are usually seen crawling along sills or thresholds. Clover mites can crawl up outside walls and may enter the buildings at upper levels.

Clover mites are a temporary nuisance; they appear suddenly and then are gone. A soapy rag or wet sponge can be used to clean mites off of surfaces. Wipe carefully to avoid crushing the mites and causing stains. The crevice tool of a vacuum cleaner may also be used to pick up mites.

Registration is \$15 which covers the cost of resources, lunch, and refreshments for breaks. Registration is currently open and will be open until Friday, April 25. You can access the link for registration through the web site above.

This training is open to the general public as well as VCE MG volunteers. Please advertise this broadly and encourage homeowners in your local communities to attend, particularly if they own houses or live in the Wildland-Urban Interface. For any VCE MG volunteers attending, the workshop will be worth five hours of continuing education credit.

## Next Monthly Meeting

April 3, 9:00 am,  
Williamsburg  
Regional Library,  
Ruth Birch,  
*Attracting  
Butterflies*

## Inside this issue:

Internal Ed News	2
HelpDesk 2008	2
2008 Training Class	3
New Mass Email	3
VMGA News	3
Herbicides/ Pesticides	4
Self-Watering Veggie Containers	4
Plants Galore	5
Farmers' Market	5
Melissa's Meadow	5
MG Diagnostic Clinic	5
Crabgrass	6
Bassett Hall Tours	6

**EDITORS NOTE:** The deadline for submission of material for the Mau Newsletter is April 21. Please send to Lise Kline, newsletter editor, at [legskline@cox.net](mailto:legskline@cox.net) or call 757-259-9477. Comments and questions about the newsletter are also welcome. Thank you.

2007-2008  
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## Internal Education News Jean Winters

*"See the land, her Easter keeping,  
Rises as her Maker rose.  
Seeds, so long in darkness sleeping,  
Burst at last from winter snows.  
Earth with heaven above rejoices"*

Charles Kingsley

And so we see all new life bursting forth from the earth, to the trees and plants, which have become part of it but haven't been seen for a while. Happy Spring!

We have been busily working on the programs and trips for the next several months. Ruth Burch will come to talk about Attracting Butterflies this month, followed by Gabriella Harvey in May. Her talk will be about gardening ideas for

those who need a bit of help in achieving comfort as they work and enjoy the "fruits of their labors". Looking to June, we will hear Randy Chambers speak about research he does at William and Mary's Keck Environmental Laboratory, concerning water quality on College Creek and its buffers.

We are excited about the trips to the Busch Gardens greenhouses...a fun and educational experience. On May 29th we hope to work a plan to go to the Virginia Tech Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Virginia Beach to see the gardens and other growing areas there. This will probably be a carpool trip, more information to come!

A special invitation has been extended to our interns to come to the April meeting. This will be their first meeting since becoming interns and we look forward to welcoming them!

## HELPDESK 2008 Helen Hamilton

Massive changes this year! Last fall five eager, newly certified Master Gardeners, Class of 2007, very strongly suggested converting all the HelpDesk files to an electronic format. After checking with Leanne, who agreed because (1) Virginia Tech no longer sends paper copies to the local offices and (2) all the files in the back room are being discarded to create more office space, we set to work.

Over the winter, the paper Call Logs from 2003-2007 were reviewed and discarded (that's a LOT of paper!) The topics were entered into a temporary website along with a short answer and a URL, referencing Virginia Tech publications wherever possible.

Initially, all of us took sections of the 2007 Call Logs to write answers and research references. As the weeks went by, Jim Kavitz became our webmaster with Katherine Nice as co-worker; Denny Mehigan and John Giffin pushed ahead on writing answers and researching websites, Jane Alling culled out-of-date and duplicate publications from the library, and is adding Library of Congress reference numbers to each remaining volume. Rosemarie Brennan and Helen attacked the closet and shelves and filled large boxes with old papers which no one ever used and everyone forgot were stored there.

The goal of this effort is to make information easily and quickly accessible. Rather than

searching book indexes, Googling, or paging through last year's Call Log for a similar problem, the user will simply access the website, now on the Master Gardener Home Page, click on the letter index, then the topic of interest. For example, looking for answers to bagworm problems, the questioner will click on "B", then "Bagworms" from a list of topics beginning with "B"; another click will deliver a question with an answer and a reference, which is linked directly to the paper with information about the topic.

The HelpDesk monitor will record in a simple Call Log the necessary contact information for the caller. New topics not yet on the HelpDesk webpage will be sent to Jim for uploading.

Training for the use of the electronic HelpDesk and work in the Master Gardener office in general was March 24. The HelpDesk committee is eager for feedback. As the weeks proceed, please send comments to [helen44@earthlink.net](mailto:helen44@earthlink.net) or to [jim@kavitz.com](mailto:jim@kavitz.com).

## MG Contact Update

Judy Mays new email address:

[JuJoMays@gmail.com](mailto:JuJoMays@gmail.com)

## 2008 TRAINING CLASS MARY LIZ SADLER

The MG Training Class for 2008, which began on Jan. 7, will end on April 3, when all of the trainees will attend the monthly MG meeting and then go to lunch at the Williamsburg Lodge with their mentors and the class managers.

It has been a busy three months for the 22 people who enrolled, some with trepidation, others with confidence, all with questions—especially about the quizzes! The classroom was fairly quiet during the breaks for about a week, and then they got to know each other...

We've had 16 speakers from "the outside" who have addressed the chapters in the manual, as well as the venerable Bob Winters, who gave his ever-popular lecture on lawns and turf. Many of our lecturers were old friends, on whom we rely for their always-top-notch presentations year after year: Dr. Linda Johnson, Paul Davis. Mike Likins, Wesley Greene, Larry Griffith, Joel Koci, Laura Viancour, Larry Foster, Ken Thompson. Dr. Barbara Abraham (entomology), Charles Maloney (fruits and veggies) and Clifton Bell (water quality) and Karen Kelly (landscape design) were new. In addition, there were programs on organic gardening and the Chesapeake Bay, and a field trip with our pruning group (Carol Fryer, chair) to provide hands-on experience in that area. We visited the Mid-Atlantic Growers' nursery in Charles City for a hands-on workshop in propagation; went to the CW gardens, Matthey's Garden and Melissa's Meadow; and had a tree ID walk in the College Woods with Dr. Stewart Ware. These times outside the classroom were valuable to the learning and experience, and lots of fun as well. We are so very

fortunate to have such knowledgeable, professional people in our area who generously share their expertise with the trainees—and auditors.

During the course of the class, we have had presentations by all of the MG Project Chairs, who have had uninterrupted time at the end of many of the sessions to talk about their special areas of interest. The trainees have appreciated this format, as they have had time to ingest, question, and make notes as they decide where to spend their volunteer hours during the remainder of the year, and hopefully, for years to come. Thanks to all of the PCs who humored us with this idea; we think it worked. AND, the trainees have a good handle on many of the "venerable" MG faces and names.

The Class Managers have been invaluable to the success of the class. John Giffen, Lyn Natanski, Beth Fugate, Sandi Gauthier, Ruth Murphy, Donald Parker, Carol Fryer and Lois Enlow have teamed up and provided excellent leadership and management skills, and have made sure that each lecturer was provided with the equipment he/she needed, set up—and reset—the classroom, made coffee, graded the quizzes, etc, etc, etc. I think they had fun, too, and have a head start in getting to know the new names and faces.

Reba Hazlewood and I have enjoyed working with these trainees. We've found them interested, energetic, curious, fun, and ready to get started. I urge you to get to know them, and to welcome them generously in our work in the months and years ahead.

### JCC/W MG Mission Statement

*The purpose of the James City County/ Williamsburg Master Gardener is to learn, educate, and communicate environmentally sound horticultural practices to the community. Trained by the Virginia Cooperative Extension, Master Gardener volunteers are committed to offering information to the public through sustainable landscape management educational programs.*

## A New Mass Email System for MGs

A listserv has been set up to give all Board members the capability to generate a mass e-mail to all JCCW Master Gardeners. This will serve as a second method of distributing messages in the event Lynn Flood is unable to send the message out.

A Master Gardener who has a message to be distributed should contact a Board member who will help them post the message.

## VMGA News Anne Odle

The next VMGA meeting will be on April 12, from 10:00am to 2:00pm, in Portsmouth. We will be carpooling and have plenty of room for more. The VMGA meetings are open to all MGs and MG Interns.

Don't forget: **MG College, June 19-22, in Blacksburg.** Visit [vmga.net](http://vmga.net) for registration and information on housing, meal ticket fees, and more. We will be traveling in a VCE bus, please join us! Scholarships are available. For inquiries, contact [anneodle@cox.net](mailto:anneodle@cox.net).

## CAN WE ELIMINATE PESTICIDES/HERBICIDES?

Helen Hamilton

Well, maybe, if we do enough biodiversity. That is, a healthy mix of plants of various heights and types – trees and shrubs (evergreen and deciduous), broadleaf plants and grasses, and non-invasive groundcovers. Add a water source, perhaps a rain barrel and/or rain garden, with lots of seed and fruit-bearing plants – birds will come along with a mix of good and bad bugs. We don't want to kill off all the pests, we need enough to feed the beneficial insects and spiders.

Many insects and spiders, as well as bats and birds, eat plant pests and weeds. Providing food and shelter for these useful animals can help suppress unwelcome pest species, and benefit pollinators and other wildlife as well.

Natural enemies of pests and weeds rely on plants for growth, development, and reproduction. They may feed on pollen, nectar, seeds, sap, and other plant parts, or consume the honeydew produced by other insects. Many beneficial insects, birds and bats require specific plant habitats for nesting or overwintering, or favorable microclimates such as lower temperature or higher humidity in the summer. If critical requirements are missing at key stages in their life cycle, the pests that they eat may increase.

Insecticides can be toxic to predatory and parasitic species, and herbicides may remove critical plant resources. Natural predators include hoverflies, lady beetles, parasitic wasps, spiders, lacewings, and predaceous mites. Know your insect before attempting to eradicate a population – you may be destroying the natural enemy of an undesirable species.

### How to encourage natural predators:

- 1) Native trees such as conifers, willows, maples provide resources, travel routes and safe haven for insect-feeding birds year-round.
- 2) Native shrubs – bayberry, sweetspire, sumac – provide pollen, nectar and fruit as well as undisturbed habitat for predators and parasites.
- 3) Creating mounds and raised banks, densely planted with native bunch grasses such as switchgrass provides overwintering habitat for predatory beetles and spiders.
- 4) Sunflowers are wonderful sources of pollen and seeds and offer escape cover for insect-feeding birds.
- 5) Bats forage in the air where they feed upon the flying stages of insects, including pest species. Providing nest boxes for bats will clear your property of a great many mosquitoes.

## A Workshop on Self-watering Veggie Container Gardens

Barbara Gustafson

For successful vegetable gardening, whether in a container or directly in the ground, a film of water around each root hair is required to allow nutrients to pass from the soil to the plant. This creates a quandary for those of us who wish to grow our edibles in containers. Constant watering, a necessity with many top-watering containers in our climate, creates loss of nutrients. So, for vegetables that grow fast and produce heavily, the lack of nutrients may cause slower growth and lower yields. The logical solution for people in our area who wish to grow vegetables in containers seems to be self-watering containers. These resolve the above problems and require less fertilizing since water is taken up from the bottom. Yet effective self-watering containers tend to be rather expensive and are often difficult to find. This has made devising an inexpensive self-watering container for growing an edible container garden a constant challenge for the Incredible Edibles project.

When I was explaining this to our 2008 Master Gardener class, Dennis Wool, one of our new interns, raised his hand. He had gone through master gardener training in Georgia before moving to Williamsburg, and had devised his own effective and inexpensive self-watering container for vegetables. For the past few years he has used these containers for growing tomatoes and other vegetables as well as tall flowers such as sunflowers. Another of the new class, Jack Gross, has made a much more "structured" grow box at a slightly higher cost that he has found quite effective.

Dennis and Jack agreed to show their new fellow master gardeners how to make our own self-watering container gardens. The "Make a Self-Watering Container Garden" Workshop was held at the JCC Community Center on Friday March 28.

The workshop went very well. Over twenty master gardeners, including some of our new interns, were present. Dennis and Jack did a wonderful job planning and leading the workshop and, in the process, discovered a great deal about how we master gardeners work. Another of our new interns, John Johnson, as-

sisted. When available, photos of the workshop will be posted on our MG website.

All those present created self-watering containers of various sizes and shapes to take home and try. If any who could not make the workshop would like to create a self-watering container for vegetable container gardening, we urge you to look at the website <http://www.josho.com/gardening.htm> which gives some instructions.

Sources where you can obtain information on growing edibles in containers are in your master gardener handbook, a number of websites on vegetable growing from "ext.vt.edu/pub/envirohort/", and the books Movable Harvests by Chuck Crandall & Barbara Crandall (Chapters Publishing Ltd., 1995) and Incredible Vegetables from Self-watering Containers by Edward C. Smith (Storey Publishing, 2006).

## Plants Galore 2008 News

April 26, 2008  
12:00 noon to 4:00 pm  
Williamsburg Community  
Building  
401 N. Boundary Street

Plants Galore 2008 gives a tremendous thank you to:

- Jim and Nelda Pressly for the Hypertufa demonstration workshop at Becky Sutton's home
- MGs and interns for helping at the Plant Dig at Carol Conner's home



### MELISSA'S MEADOW GRACE RAYMOND

We will meet in the meadow on April 17 around 8:30 (come later if that is convenient) for a morning of weeding and sprucing up. You will need to bring your own tools to weed and carry away the debris to a drop off place. We usually work until 10:30 or 11. I look forward to seeing lots of new faces.

### MG DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Master Gardeners will be hosting a Diagnostic Clinic every Monday for six weeks, beginning May 5 from 9:00 am to noon at the Toano extension office. Please contact Helen Hamilton, 564-4494, if you would like to help identify plants and insects and diagnose problems.

JAMES CITY COUNTY/WILLIAMSBURG  
MASTER GARDENERS

at the  
**Farmers' Market**  
Summer/Fall, 2008

**May 3**

Mobile Master Gardeners

**May 24**

Vegetables

**June 7**

Gardening with Children

Extra: special activities for children plus the  
Enviroscape

**June 21**

Water


**July 5**

Incredible Edibles

(vegetable container gardening)

**July 19**

Flower Gardens



We're on the web at  
[www.jccwmg.org](http://www.jccwmg.org)

## CRABGRASS CONTROL IN LAWNS

Crabgrass seed lies in the soil in wait, biding its time for just the right temperature and moisture to emerge and wreak havoc in lawns for another season. Crabgrass continues to be the number one pest in lawns worldwide. No matter how much effort you've taken in previous years to control crabgrass, our soils remain a veritable seed bank of crabgrass from years past. This warm-season summer annual grass germinates from seed just prior to the first significant growth period of our lawn grasses. And as annual plants are genetically programmed to do since they live such a short time, they grow like mad under optimal temperature conditions. Hence, a warm-season crabgrass plant has an inherent competitive advantage against cool-season lawn grasses (fescues, bluegrasses, and ryegrasses) and can even slug it out with perennial warm-season grasses (things like bermudagrass and zoysiagrass)

because it gets a jump on them in early spring growth.

Mike Goatley, Extension Turfgrass Specialist and Shawn Askew, Extension Turfgrass Weed Specialist, have written an article detailing cultural and chemical (both synthetic and organic) approaches in spring crabgrass control and the appropriate application timing for the homeowner. This article, and other



important information, may be found as a podcast at Turf and Garden Tips for

timely homeowner topics in lawn management ([www.weblogs.cals.vt.edu/](http://www.weblogs.cals.vt.edu/)).

Remember that our Virginia Cooperative Extension office and the website, [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu), are invaluable resources for the latest information on best management practices in lawn and landscape management, as well as a host of other topics.

## TAKE TWO TOURS AT BASSETT HALL GARDENS THIS SPRING

Enjoy the beauty and splendor of the 1940's gardens at Bassett Hall, the Williamsburg home of Colonial Williamsburg benefactors John D. Rockefeller Jr. and his wife Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.

During a *Bassett Hall Garden Tour*, guests can enjoy a walk in the Rockefellers' garden with an interpreter at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays from March 25-April 29. The tour presents a history of the garden, the Rockefellers' involvement in developing the garden and the garden's restoration.

The house underwent a two-year renovation completed in 2003 that included the re-creation of the gardens with the addition of more than 5,000 new trees, shrubs and ground cover. The Rockefellers spent a few weeks in the spring and another few weeks in the fall each year at Bassett Hall. They therefore designed their garden to be in bloom when they visited.

*Nature, Art and Science* explores the natural world with Mark Catesby, America's first environmentalist, portrayed by Colonial Williamsburg interpreter Robb Warren. The tour takes place at 11 a.m. on Mondays beginning April 7 and going through June 9. The tour meets at the Bassett Hall reception center.

Mark Catesby, whose father had scholarly and scientific connections, studied natural history in London and then traveled to the New World. In 1712 he visited Virginia and later the Carolinas and the Bahamas, where he observed, documented and collected plant and animal specimens. He published his findings in "Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands" between 1731 and 1734. It was the first published, fully illustrated book on the flora and fauna of North America.

A two-story 18th-century frame house near Colonial Williamsburg's Capitol, Bassett Hall is set on a 585-acre tract of woodlands. In addition to the home, the property includes a teahouse and three original out-buildings: a smokehouse, kitchen and dairy. Bassett Hall is located at 522 E. Francis St. and is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except on Wednesdays. Admission is included in any Colonial Williamsburg admission ticket. Both programs will be held weather permitting.