

# The Colonial Master Gardener



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

April 2007

## President's Corner Charlie Clapper

I've heard your concerns and have thought of you these past ten days. I have been hacking away at mesquite, sagebrush and cactus on old ranch roads as part of a soil reclamation project in Big Bend National Park, Texas. Those of you who have not previously experienced the process of identifying and refining an organization's vision and goals are now encountering the frustrations and insights always part of this process. Many organizations have gone through what we are now doing and found it very useful. The back and forth discussion and the kinds of comments that you are making *are all part of this process*. Most of all this process -- like democracy

itself -- is messy but yields much better results. Let's hang in there together. (It works much better than hanging separately.) For better or for worse our visions do not come as bolts of lightning. Rather they form from sometimes tedious but usually fruitful discussions. This is not a spectator sport but a group accomplishment -- so let's get these done so we can own them and follow them together. My special thanks to all of you!

## FROM THE EXTENSION OFFICE LEANNE DUBOIS, EXTENSION AGENT, HORTICULTURE

### Building a Future Together

*Virginia Cooperative Extension enables people to improve their lives through an educational process that uses scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs.*

That is the mission statement of Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE). The educational process referred to in the mission statement is the VCE Programming process. The process includes the identification of issues and problems, the determination of how VCE might address these needs through educational programs, the design of the educational program, and the evaluation and reporting of outcomes. Setting the right measurable goals demonstrates that we are committed to this process and willing to make an impact.

This process includes the involvement of Master Gardener volunteers, targeted learners, and a host of other community resources. The first step in this process is to *develop goals* which involve deciding what results you want to achieve. We are more likely to reach an objective if we can see it and imagine steps to reach it.

The Master Gardener Board has spent valuable time listening to the membership, responding to

the community and learning about the unmet needs through educational forums. I commend them for their leadership and perseverance to set a foundation for the future. Many issues have been presented to the membership in the hopes that they would better understand the issues facing our community and understand how our programs can play a role in responding to these needs. Many problems can be addressed through proper horticultural management, skills Master Gardeners already possess, and many of our current projects are presently addressing. This has led to the commitment to define and achieve a future with a strategic vision that engages the entire organizational community. This process also seeks to facilitate better communication with our association, the organizations we partner with and the community we serve. It sets a compelling agenda for a future to unite our organization and we value your dedication and views.

Goals allow us to prioritize our resources and build our organization in alignment with our goals. Engaging both the leadership and membership in the process is fundamental to our success and a powerful way of tying values to actions.

## Next Monthly Meeting

April 5, 9:00 am at the Williamsburg Regional Library, Putting Environmental Stewardship into our MG Dialogue, a presentation by fellow Master Gardeners which will consist of short overviews focusing on specific techniques with supporting research, materials and resources that we can use when working with the public.

Topics will be varied: Tree and Water Stewardship, Encouraging Stewardship with Youth, Composting, Nutrient Management, Riparian Buffers, Drought Tolerant Plants, Garden Scapes, Effective Trees for Home Landscaping, and Stewardship in Landscape Design.

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## Internal Education News Jean Winters

*"The home gardener is part scientist, part artist, part philosopher, part plowman. He modifies the climate around his home."*

John R. Whiting

We, as Master Gardeners, work with the home gardener...we are home gardeners ourselves...and we follow the Virginia Cooperative Extension framework as described in the Mission Statement of VCE: "VCE enables people to improve their lives through an educational process that uses scientific knowledge focused on issues and needs." The wording continues: "VCE is all about Virginians working with Virginians in communities, homes and busi-

nesses." Those words express the essence of the work of our Master Gardener membership here in Williamsburg. Thus, we are trying to address that sharing of knowledge with our monthly programs, environmentally sensitive issues in particular.

Our April program, "Putting Environmental Stewardship into Our MG Dialogue," will include topics of particular concern here in Williamsburg: garden scaping, composting, riparian buffers, nutrient management, and plants and trees preferred for this growing area are several of the topics to be covered...all relevant to our neighborhoods.

"What is taught varies from place to place as local people participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of needs-driven programming"...quoting again from the VCE Master Gardener Educational Programming Guide. I trust that the membership understands that we are trying to go in a direction that includes encouraging the wise use of our precious resources, both for ourselves and the Virginians we meet in our working network. I wish you success in all that you do to further our gardening "work"...and I wish you Happy Spring, a gloriously renewing time of year!

*Ancient Chinese Proverb: All gardeners know better than other gardeners.*

The Sunshine Fund sent a remembrance this month to fellow MGs:

Max Walton  
Pat Crowe  
Charlie Clapper

**MGs at work in the Reid vegetable garden.**



## Upcoming Dates to Remember

- Apr 14 VMGA meeting in Bedford, VA, open to all MGs
- Apr 29 VNPS & JCC/W MGA Plant Sale, Williamsburg Community Building, 12-4pm
- May 3 monthly JCC/W MG meeting
- May 2-5 International Master Gardener Conference, Little Rock, Arkansas. For more information: <http://mg2007.uaex.edu> or call 501-671-2000.
- June 19-24 MG College in Blacksburg
- Oct 22-28 OPERATION REJUVENATION - Rebuilding community gardens devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Coordinated by Dave Close, State MG Coordinator. Mark your calendars, details forthcoming. Departing from and arriving in Blacksburg.

Mulch Madness HELEN HAMILTON

Are we killing the cypress forests? According to information from National Wildlife Federation and Sierra Club, particularly the Louisiana chapter, the manufacture and sale of cypress mulch is seriously reducing cypress forests in the south. Resistance in the state of Florida has driven the industry to Louisiana, where clear-cut forests were slowly recovering, due to natural reforestation and replanting and protection.

Now harvesting is reducing these embryonic forests, which are important for restoring wetlands, and serving as hurricane buffers. It has been reported that St. Bernard Parish, one of the areas that suffered the worst damage from Katrina, had previously lost nearly all of its cypress forest and was left completely vulnerable to the worst of the storm. Further, cypress forests filter pollutants and serve as reservoirs for floodwater, as well as providing irreplaceable habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife.

The bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is the state tree of Louisiana; acres are being ground up for packaging and distribution as home-garden mulch and animal bedding materials. People think cypress mulch is an effective use of lumber byproducts, when the reality is that WHOLE trees, some as small as three inches in diameter, are harvested indiscriminately. In the past, cypress mulch was a by-product of lumber mills, but now entire forests are being cut down.

There is no evidence that cypress mulch is any more resistant to weather and insects than pine bark or pine straw. In fact, pine straw can suppress weeds for up to one year, but cypress mulch and others work

only 2 or 3 months. The protective ability of cypress involves the "heartwood" – the older, nonliving central wood of a tree that usually is darker and harder than the younger sapwood. Only mature cypress trees have it, and trees harvested today are too young for this to work. Cypress trees take 75 to 100 years to grow to maturity. But some loggers harvest trees that are only 15 to 20 years old.

Wood chips are not the best choice. Mulch should contain an

*It just doesn't make any sense to cut down beautiful forests just to place the shredded remnants of trees around the plants in our backyards and gardens.*

even mix of carbon-rich and nitrogen-rich materials. Because wood chips and bark are virtually all carbon, they tie up the available nitrogen in the soil as they decompose, leaving plants without the nutrients they need to grow. The most nutritious garden mulch is something most gardeners already have on hand: yard waste.

Researchers have found that composted yard waste increased the number of flowers on rhododendron plants by 300 percent over plants grown without mulch. Wood mulch gave no such benefit. Fall leaves are a benefit, not a nuisance. Shred them and use as mulch and within a month they are full of earthworms.

It just doesn't make any sense to cut down beautiful forests just to place the shredded remnants of trees around the plants in our backyards and gardens.

Some local Williamsburg retailers are selling cypress mulch, and others are not. Know what you are buying! Any mulch may herald the destruction of living forests, cypress or otherwise.

**Gardening Without Guilt (National Wildlife Federation April / May 2006)** Here are some alternatives to cypress mulch:

**Compost:** A mix of kitchen scraps and yard trimmings, composted in your own backyard, is one of the best and cheapest mulches around. As the compost breaks down, it will also act as a fertilizer for your plants. This is the best choice for traditional landscapes, but it can be difficult for a household to produce enough compost for even a small garden.

**Fall leaves:** Composted, they make a wonderful component in fertilizer. But even when they are simply shredded and spread around the yard, leaves make an inexpensive and effective mulch. Many towns in leafy areas will give back to gardeners communally collected and shredded leaves. Leaf mulch applied in spring will last about four months if stacked three to four inches deep.

**Well-chosen bark:** Bark from plantation grown—and therefore renewable—pine or other conifer trees makes a good, long-lasting mulch, especially when applied with compost or other soil conditioners. Just be sure that you're not actually buying wood chips or bark from cypress or other environmentally threatened trees.

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EDITORS NOTE: The deadline for submission of material for the May Newsletter is April 15. Please send to Lise Kline at [legskline@cox.net](mailto:legskline@cox.net) or call 757-259-9477. Thank you.

# The Colonial Master Gardener

## MG Program Updates (and other info)

### PLANTS GALORE, JOINT PLANT SALE BECKY SUTTON, BARBARA GUSTAFSON, BECKY MORGAN, AILENE BART- LETT

Digs are underway as we get closer to Plants Galore,

### MELISSA'S MEADOW GRACE RAYMOND

It was my pleasure to meet the new class and I think I spotted some kindred souls just itching to join us April 19

### A MG MESSAGE

Fellow Master Gardeners,

On March 10, I'll be starting a new position as Chief Ranger/Education Support Specialist at Belle Isle State Park in the Northern Neck. The position is responsible for all educational programs, special events, and volunteer coordination. I'll be working extensively with schools, colleges, 4-H, scouts and other groups. Some say I took this position to avoid the crowds of 2007.

I want to thank the JCC/W Master Gardeners for all of the support that was given to the Seeds of Learning program, and all of the youth programs I helped coordinate. Thank you for the support for the America's Anniversary Garden

the joint JCC/W MG and Virginia Native Plant Society plant sale. The sale will be held on Sunday, April 29, from 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm, at the Williamsburg Community Building, located across from the Williamsburg Regional Library, on N. Boundary Street.

and see the meadow come alive while weeding. If it is raining, assume that the session has been canceled. Please bring the tools you like best for grubbing out weeds and a vessel to carry away the unloved plants

### RESTORATION OF AN AMERICA'S AN- NIVERSARY GARDEN SUBMITTED BY PAT CROWE

The America's Anniversary Garden on Jamestown Road across from the Jamestown Settlement was planted in January 2006 by Gov. Tim Kaine and volunteers including many JCC/W MGs. Following a year with periods of drought and record rainfall, the garden is being

restored to beauty and maintained by Custom Gardens, as a way of visibly supporting the America's Anniversary Garden initiative. These gardens will frame the entrance to the Anniversary Park where numerous exhibits and shows developed exclusively for the commemoration will be presented.

at York River State Park, and for coming out in such high numbers during a heat wave to tour the gardens last August. You all are wonderful.

To anyone hesitant about volunteering, chairing a program, or even becoming a board member, know that the work the MGs do are looked on very favorably by future employers. Chairing and being board members both show leadership and volunteer coordination skills. Even if you consider yourself retired, you never know when you might want to reenter the workplace.

I look forward to working with the Northern Neck Master Gardeners.

Charlene Talcott



***MGs at work in the Shields perennial garden.***