

The Colonial Master Gardener



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July 2007

NATURE'S SINGING FIELD RICH STASKIEL

Editor's Note: This article by Roger Staskiel, a New Kent County resident and Master Gardener intern, appeared in the Daily Press on June 11, 2007, in an article by Kathy Von Mullekom. Roger cares enough about bees to plant special crops for them, including an acre of buckwheat in the spring and oil-type sunflowers to follow. The field features a cover crop of clover to keep the soil happy and healthy .

There's an acre field that seems to have the perfect answer to one of life's most challenging problems – the co-inhabitation of people and wildlife. The field satisfies the wants of both with a show of nature's colorful beauty with the changing seasons and even humming a tune for the people, while providing food for the wildlife.

Its location is along Stage Road in Barhamsville, a good stones throw from Route 30.

Fall brings tilling of the soil and planting a cover crop to develop nutrients for future use. Winter brings deer and rabbits foraging for a meal. Early Spring is announced by the blooming of the crimson clover. The clover is plowed under for additional decayed organic matter, and the soil is re-tilled.

Buckwheat and oil sunflower seeds are broadcast together in early Spring. Buckwheat germinates quickly and grows faster than the sunflowers. Occasionally, a groundhog or two will slip into the field to overindulge; they pay the ultimate price.

In a few weeks, the buckwheat blooms with



beautiful white flowers. The honey bees come from at least three miles around in search of nectar to produce honey. Every year when nature's conditions are just right, thousands of honey bees arrive at one time. It looks like honey bees are on every buckwheat bloom in the field. Now, it's time for the field to sing. Standing quietly beside the field, with the buckwheat slightly waving in the breeze, you can hear the buzzing of all those honey bees in unison. Nature's field is humming a tune, truly one of life's greatest experiences.

The sunflower plants now lurk just below the blooming buckwheat. In the next few weeks the sunflower plants will rise far above the dry seeding buckwheat. The field will be visited by many varieties of birds eating the dropped buckwheat seed. The sunflowers will bloom and the field will be totally yellow, a beautiful sight for local travelers of Stage Road. The oil sunflower's multiple blooms on each stalk make it more spectacular. The field rotates from green to white; back to green, then to yellow. As the sunflowers fade and begin to dry, the cardinals, doves and flocks of yellow finches, hanging from every imaginable angle visit the field to feed on the dried sunflowers.

Now, you think the show is over until next year. It's not! Since both buckwheat and sunflowers seed heavily, a bush hogging and light disking will provide another complete blooming and feeding season for late Summer and early Fall.

No Monthly Meeting in July

Happy Fourth of July!



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EDITORS NOTE: The deadline for submission of material for the August Newsletter is July 15. Please send to Lise Kline, newsletter editor, at legskline@cox.net or call 757-259-9477. Comments and questions are also welcome. Thank you.

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Internal Education News Jean Winters

"A cauliflower is a cabbage with a college education" . . . Mark Twain

"To get the best results you must talk to your vegetables" . . . Prince Charles

We're not growing cauliflowers or cabbages, but our lonely tomato plant (the other one was done in by a vole...both from the plant sale and very healthy at first) is being nurtured as best it can by novices when it comes to vegetables. Guess we should be talking to it as the prince suggests! Those of you who enjoy fresh veggies from your own gardens are to be commended! We do have herbs and enjoy them, mostly in their pots and sometimes with our meals. However they come to your table, I hope you are enjoying fresh vegetables and fruits for good nutrition all summer and later on in the year.

Have fun gardening and remember that July will be a quiet month as far as a monthly meeting is concerned. We will enjoy a return to our regular routine in August when our own Leanne DuBois will tell us about Heirloom Seeds. In the meantime, talk to those plants...no matter whether they are vegetables or just your lovely flowers...and we won't mind if we catch you while you're chatting! Have a great summer!

Upcoming Dates to Remember

- August 2 monthly MG meeting, Leanne DuBois, Extension Agent, Heirloom Seeds
- August 18 Sixth Annual Super Turf Saturday, see page 4 of this newsletter
- Sept 6 monthly MG meeting, Carol Heiser, Habitat at Home
- Oct 4 monthly MG meeting, Charlie Staton, Robert Beverly Looks Back, 1607-1707
- Oct 22-28 OPERATION REJUVENATION - Rebuilding community gardens devastated by Hurricane Katrina. Coordinated by Dave Close, State MG Coordinator. Mark your calendars, details forthcoming.



MGs Nancy Greene and Ruth Murphy, in the photo on the right, and MG interns Richard Prosl and Denny Mehigan in the photo on the left, are hard at work in the Reid Herb Garden.

Let's Be Careful About Watering HELEN HAMILTON

While soils vary greatly in their ability to hold water, your garden and lawn should receive enough water to wet the soil to the bottom of the root zone each time you water -- generally 1 inch per week. Determine this by digging a hole 5 to 6 inches deep in the watered area the day after watering so the water has a chance to seep in. Adjust weekly watering to your soil needs.

One Inch A Week - Keeping track of rainfall helps you avoid over-watering or under watering your flower garden. The best way to do that is to mount a rain gauge someplace in or around your property. Remember to empty the gauge after each rainfall. Keep track of the rainfall on a weekly basis. If, after a few days, less than ½ inch of rain has fallen, you should think about watering, particularly the annuals or new transplants. You don't have to keep precise records on paper. Just keeping rough track in your head is all that is needed to use this easy system.

Avoid watering by hand - it often wastes water as there is excess runoff, and water does not penetrate beyond the top 1 inch of soil. This irrigation practice harms plants by forcing root growth too close to the surface. If you must water by hand, place a 5-gallon bucket with a few holes in the bottom next to the plant and fill it with water; when it is has drained, move it to the next plant and refill.

Properly used sprinkler systems can deliver a large quantity of water in a short time. They have the disadvantage, however, of excessive evaporation, both during watering and from the plant and soil surface. Early morning watering minimizes water loss.

The least effective method for watering is with a hand-held nozzle. Watering with a nozzle has all the disadvantages of watering with a sprinkler. In addition, gardeners seldom are patient enough to do a thorough job of watering with a nozzle so they do not apply enough water and do not distribute it evenly over the bed.

Trickle or drip irrigation systems and ooze hoses are very efficient, slowly applying water to vegetable and ornamental gardens. Soil moisture can be maintained at a level most suitable to plant uptake. If properly installed and maintained, little water is lost to evaporation or runoff and water use can be reduced by up to 50 percent. For many situations, the expense of installing a good trickle irrigation system will be compensated by reduced water

usage, less replacement of plant materials, and less work. These devices conserve water, prevent soil erosion, and target the water application. Overwatering wastes water, may weaken roots and lead to root decay, and encourages undesirable weed growth.

Wilting - A plant reacts very simply to too little or too much water -- it wilts. Wilting that occurs during the heat of a midsummer day is common and temporary; don't be alarmed by it. However, wilting that extends beyond the heat of the day, especially if it occurs in the morning, is a signal that the plant is suffering a serious water shortage.



Mulch (not cypress mulch!)

benefits newly planted trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals by conserving soil moisture, moderating soil temperature, and suppressing competing grass and weeds. Apply mulch immediately after watering newly installed plants. Do not over mulch! Two to three inches is adequate, less if you are using a fine material, more if it is coarse. Use either organic mulches (shredded or chunk pine bark, pine straw, shredded leaves) or inorganic mulches

(shredded tires, volcanic and river rocks). To prevent insect, disease, and rodent problems if using organic mulches, and bark abrasion if using inorganic mulches, keep mulch from touching tree trunks and shrub stems. Do not use black plastic beneath mulch around trees and shrubs because it blocks air and water exchange

Drought-tolerant annuals such as globe amaranths, blue blaze, Dahlberg daisy, gazania, gomphrena, portulaca, and creeping zinnia can tolerate lack of water. Tidewater native perennials are habituated to the vagaries of our weather and will provide dependable color year after year.

Obviously, water requirements vary from plant to plant. If you've matched plants to the environment in your garden, incorporated plenty of organic matter into your soil, and provided your plants with a moisture-retaining layer of mulch, your plants may do fine with the water naturally available from rainfall. You'll only need to water new transplants until they become established and if weekly rainfall is inadequate.

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MG Program Updates (and other info)

Carol Fryer was awarded a VMGA scholarship and will showcase our Youth Environmental Program, thru Kari Abbott's leadership, and its impact on the youth community with a display for Brag Night at the 2007 MG College.

JMG NEWS IN JULY KARI ABBOT, PROJECT CHAIRPERSON

There was a snake, a raccoon, a sassafras tree, and more! The children from the third grade had a wonderful time walking the wetlands walk at the Jamestown 4-H. They saw and heard things they will remember the rest of their lives. A raccoon really did pop his head up from his hole in his tree every time a class walked by. Pat H. and Deb McC. did a wonderful job making five sets of large wooden dice for a water cycle game we played. There were loads of children, lots of parents, the word is out, the field trips with the Master Gardeners are fun! A couple of parents had been on the first grade field trip too, and where pleased there was so much to learn. The teachers were all very appreciative. The Mas-

ter Gardeners and interns did a great job going with the flow, and deserve applause! Dan Tevlin, Anne Davis, and interns Ruth, Pembroke, Pat, Pat H., Nancy H., John G., and Roger. Thank you again to all that helped, it was a busy day, and we learned a lot.

The Brag Board for MG College is on its way. A couple of the thank you books from the third grade field trip accompanied the board, so people looking at the project could see the impact.

There will not be much to report this summer, so look for news again in September.

Sixth Annual Super Turf Saturday, August 18, 2007

8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
JCC/W Recreation Center
Longhill Road

A.M. Sessions: Virginia Tech Turf Team - 3 sessions, Participants attend all three sessions

P.M. Sessions - Virginia Tech Turf Experts Panel, Turf Industry Panel, Organic Turf Solutions, Participants attend all three discussion areas



Trade Show: Turf, Landscaping, Nutrients, Irrigation suppliers

Lunch, Prizes, Information, Volunteer and Continuing Education Opportunities...\$12.00



MGs working on the landscaping project at Apryl's House.

