

The Colonial Master Gardener



Publication of JCC/WBG Master Gardener Association & Virginia Cooperative Extension

November 2005

PRESIDENT'S CORNER CHARLIE CLAPPER, '02

Walking the Talk

*I can soon learn how to do it if you let me see it done,
I can watch your hands in action, but your tongue too fast may run,
And the lectures you deliver may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do,
For I may misunderstand you and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding in how you act and how you live.*

--Anonymous

Joel Lerner's September 10 Washington Post article "Replacing Parts of Lawn With Gardens Can Help Preserve the Chesapeake Bay" referenced a new primer *Ecoscaping Back to the Future – Restoring Chesapeake Landscapes*. I ordered a copy of this new guide whose authors Zora Lathan and Thistle A. Cone (nice name) focus on rain gardens and xeriscapes. The authors ask "Why practice conservation landscaping? What is involved and how does it look? Where does one start?" The primer provides the latest thinking on techniques for restoring, protecting, and enhancing our home landscapes including case studies of rain gardens and xeriscapes and recommended plants and not recommended invasives. How about trying a Nature's Pharmacy Garden (615 square feet) with Gray Goldenrod, Purple Coneflower, Hyssop Skullcap, Spotted Mint and Switchgrass as recommended plants? While we master gardeners consider ourselves "experts" we can all use a review. The book provides good information to start walking the talk.

The James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardeners Association Board met with David Close, Virginia Cooperative Extension State Master Gardener Coordinator and Leanne Dubois to continue "visioning" the Association's future. As I mentioned in the September newsletter our membership has now reached 168. We have new projects and the potential for even more volunteer opportunities as our community grows and we gain recognition for the services we provide. Quite helpfully Dave described the role of an Association in Extension programs and how we can best support the Extension Office. Leanne provided her areas of emphasis for the near future and the importance of the Association in supporting her. The Association needs to ensure that its volunteers are trained and available to support these needs. The Board began that process by identifying ongoing projects and how they are scheduled during the year. We meet October 19 with the project chairs to identify their volunteer needs on the different projects. As we envision our organization's future and walk the conservation talk we need our continuing dedication and talents to be successful.

EDITORS NOTE: The deadline for submission of material for the December Newsletter is November 15. Please send to Lise Kline at legskline@cox.net or call 757-259-9477. Thank you.

PRESIDENT

Charlie Clapper, '02
564-6191

HORTICULTURAL PROJECTS ASSOCIATE

Leanne DuBois, '96
JCC Coop. Extension Agent
564-2170

WEBMASTER

David Banks, '03
258-8632

NEWSLETTER

Lise Kline, '04
259-9477

The purpose of the James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener is to learn, educate, and communicate environmentally sound horticultural practices to the community.

November 3

Monthly Master Gardener Meeting,
Williamsburg
Regional Library

"Orchids", Barbara Wallace, Current President
Williamsburg Garden Club Council, Past President Tidewater Orchid Society & Peninsula Orchid Society



ADDRESSING THE DYING OAKS LEANNE DUBOIS, '96

We have had an extraordinary amount of calls about dying trees this past summer season, especially the white oaks. Many have reported it as a rapid decline and insect damage is noticed on the barks. Although the decline and death of the tree appears to be rapid decline, the trees were under stress for the past few years, consecutive droughts followed by excessively high rainfall including Hurricane Isabel in 2003. Trees are weakened by these environmental stresses. Weakened trees are then invaded and killed by insects and diseases that cannot successfully attack healthy trees. These stress factors often weaken trees so much that they succumb, sometimes suddenly, to the root killing and girdling actions of insects and diseases.

Practices to promote good tree health can reduce the potential impacts of damage by oak decline. Moisture shortages can be alleviated by watering, mulching to reduce competition from sod, and reducing or avoiding soil compaction. Nutritional deficiencies can be corrected by fertilizing. Fall is a perfect time to add nutrients and adjust pH if needed. These practices eliminate some forms of stress and promote good physiological conditions. Declining oaks are susceptible to bark beetles and boring insects. We'll keep you posted as to the best way to address these issues with scouting and monitoring in the late winter. I will be working with the Virginia Tech entomologists in the spring to monitor infestations and will advise you of suitable treatments and IPM strategies. Pruning to remove dead and dying branches is also advised. Removal of trees in advanced stages of decline is also advisable.

It's interesting to note that periodic occurrences of decline and death of oaks over widespread areas have been recorded since 1900 by the US Department of Forestry. These outbreaks, variously named oak decline, oak dieback, or oak mortality, historically have been caused by a complex interaction of environmental stresses and pests. So although our urban conditions might not be the most suitable for healthy tree growth, this is not a new problem and certainly won't be the last.

NOVEMBER TIMELY GARDENING TIPS HELEN HAMILTON, '04

Tips from "Fine Gardening", Dec 2004:

Tool tape: Wrap the handles of your gardening tools with red plastic tape. It is superior to painted handles – the tape lasts longer, it is waterproof, and protects the hands from splinters (if the handles are wood).

Rodents: Deter them with daffodils, which they don't like. Interplant daffodil bulbs with lilies and tulips, and voles, mice and pocket gophers won't touch any of them. You can also surround each tulip bulb with a sharp gravel like Pro-Mix to discourage voles.

Bees: Next year, plant borage (*Borago officinalis*) in your vegetable and flower garden. The flowers of this easily grown annual herb attract a lot of bees which pollinate and therefore improve the yield of vegetable crops like pole beans.

Check out the latest including minutes, calendars, and past newsletters on our website: <http://jccwmg.org>

Rain garden: Keep the runoff water from your roof (if it ever rains again in Williamsburg!) on your property. Attach flexible, nonperforated 4-inch diameter plastic pipe to the downspout, lay it in a trench you have dug and cover with soil. The pipe should exit in a depression in your yard, either natural, or one you have dug, where you can plant a wetland garden.

Bog garden: Want a water garden, but your soil is dry, and you can't make the above rain garden? Bury a waterproof container in an excavated hole – a pond liner, old wading pool, plastic tarp, etc.

Add a small diameter pipe flush with the bottom of the container and rising a few inches above the eventual soil level. Put a wooden dowel in the pipe – this is a dipstick to let you know when the water level is too low. Amend the excavated soil to match the requirements of the plants and fill the container to a level below that of the surrounding ground. When the dipstick shows the water level has fallen to 8 inches below the soil level, add water to the bog through a coffee can with pea-sized holes punched throughout and filled with rocks; sink this up to its rim in the wet area. Now plant your favorite bog plants!

Pachysandra: Can be propagated easily from an existing bed. Snip off the tips, down to the first leaf juncture, and place them in wide-mouthed glass jars. Fill with water and position the jars in a shady spot. In three to four weeks, the cuttings will sprout enough roots to be planted out.

Kill grass with leaves: Need an easy way to kill the grass where you want to establish a new flower bed? Layer the area with fallen leaves and thoroughly wet it down. The grass dies from lack of light and you can plant through the rotting leaves in the spring.

Poison ivy patrol: Slip a plastic bread bag over your hand to pull up poison ivy plants. When finished, peel the bag down from the top, turning it inside out, and discard.

Seed starter: A plastic sweater box flipped upside down makes a useful seed starter. Put the flats of seeds or pots on the lid, and cover with the bottom of the box.

Handle rulers: Using a wood-burning pen (or permanent marker), mark the handles of shovels, rakes and hoes in increments of 1-foot and ½-foot measures. The “ruler handles” allow more accurate spacing of shrubs and plants than just eyeballing the distance.

Plant pedestals: If there are still downed trees on your property, have the trunk cut into lengths from 1 to 3 feet tall. Place these among shrubs and perennials and top with various pots and planters filled with annuals. They will provide variety and elevational interest in your beds and borders.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ONE OF OUR OWN

Bob Winters, '01, Water Quality Program Coordinator for the Turf Love Nutrient Management Program, has successfully completed the examination entitling him to be a Certified Nutrient Management Planner. This honor, administered through the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), will further Bob's Water Quality objectives of developing environmentally sound nutrient management plans and recommendations. For the past five years Bob has been Coordinator of the Turf Love program, which is administered through the James City County Extension Office and funded locally through the County's Pride Watershed Education program. The Turf Love program visits an average of 200 homes per year with Master Gardener volunteers to dispense conservation recommendations to promote a healthy lawn and cleaner environment.

JUNIOR MASTER GARDENERS KARI ABBOTT, '04

October brings on the beginning of fall, and the Junior Master Gardener Project goes back into schools. We started this year with a nice little surprise. JMG at Matthew Whaley Elementary School was awarded a Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) minigrant of \$250!! We have used the money to buy nets, forceps, magnifying boxes, thermometers, and books to use in all the Junior Master Gardener classes. The materials will make discovering things about soil and plants

so much more interesting. The After-school class at Matthew Whaley will start the end of October. We will find out shortly who will join us in exploring the new materials we are creating for the class. We are also lining up guest speakers to come teach the children interesting things.

The children at Williamsburg Christian Academy have been learning a lot about plants, moving from herbs, to poisonous plants, to seeds and leaves. The children were absolutely thrilled when they came to school the Monday after our herb class. The parsley plants Linda Lucas had donated had baby caterpillars munching away on them. They had several discussions on what to do. The children decided to make sure the caterpillars were placed back in nature. I made sure the caterpillars ended up on the right plants to munch into their next stage of life. More exciting adventures are on the horizon.

The Your Backyard Classroom, class held October 20, 2005 was filling up nicely at the time this article was due. There will be more advance training classes offered in the spring.

If you want a chance to volunteer, the Junior Master Gardeners could use some help in finding someone who likes to write grants. There are many grants out there, and it would be nice to have a person who enjoyed searching and finding the right ones.

Meanwhile we are moving right along, and looking forward to a fun fall program. If you want to join the fun, email me at bearsbaskets@cox.net. You are always welcome in JMG!!

LEARN PowerPoint FOR FREE!!

On Wednesday, November 16 at 10:00 am, we are offering a hands-on class in using PowerPoint. The class is geared to beginners and will be taught by one of our in-house experts, Angela Cingale. It will be held at the Williamsburg Regional Library in Norge on Croaker Road and last until approximately 12:15 pm. All students will have their own computer to work with during the class for maximum effectiveness. Advanced training credit applies. Reservations are necessary because of the classroom size. Call Greg Allen at 258-5348 (allensofva@verizon.net) to enroll.

UPCOMING DATES TO REMEMBER

- October 29 “Going Natural in Your Backyard: Transitioning to Organic”, 7th Annual BayScapes Workshop in Ashland, VA, 804-537-5225.
- November 8 The Herb Society of America, Colonial Triangle of Virginia Unit’s monthly meeting, “Getting Ready For The Holidays” Sheryl Eberwine, owner of the Heirloom Botanica Garden, 1:30 p.m. at the Fellowship Hall of Our Saviour’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norge. Contact: Lillian A. Campbell, 564-9580
- December 1 Monthly Master Gardener Meeting, “10 Horticulture Malpractices”, Jim Orband, Extension Agent York County

Rapid compost is being made at the Reid Garden in preparation for Farmer’s Market. Pictured are Master Gardeners Art Gustafson, Cathy Ripley, and Janet Whiteside.

