



# The Colonial Master Gardener

September  
2021

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

## THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BY MARTIN OAKES

I would like to begin with a short joke. A child visiting the dental clinic at the Children's Hospital of Richmond asked me: "Why is the boat filled with vegetables slowly sinking into the river? Because it has too many leeks." I was very impressed that a seven year old knew what a leek was. Made me smile.

Since I was a young child, the Labor Day holiday has always been the unofficial end of summer. I still feel this way even if September is now a much warmer month. September is the universal harbinger of the Fall. It has been a very quick summer – at least for me. I have enjoyed the June – July – August timeframe even with the fires in California and the Coronavirus epidemic. Remember to make the best with what we have. If life gives you lemons . . .

I again want to thank Rick Brown, Bill Dichtel, and the Williamsburg Library staff for establishing a ZOOM presence at the library auditorium. We are planning on the same procedure for the September general membership meeting – both live attendance and Zoom attendance. Please join us as Bill has arranged a most interesting speaker. Please wear your mask/face covering.

I also want to give a "pat on the back" to Vickie Rockwell for the tremendous effort she provided on the new logo. More information to follow. Well done. Vicki has also worked at obtaining milestone pins for the members – there is a delay from VCE so please remain patient.

I thank my fellow master gardeners for the warm welcome extended to the new ANR agent – Forrest Hobbs. He is impressed with our unit and with the friendliness of our members. Mr. Hobbs is eager to become involved.

The Master Gardener BoD will be approving an Ad Hoc Nominations Committee in the near future. I know it seems early, but this process does take much effort and much time. Per our Bylaws Article V "The Nominating Committee shall be appointed by the Vice President for Administration with approval of the Board". The Chair of this committee is the VP – Administration (Vicki Rockwell). Vicki asks that you contact her with any interests – or any questions.

Thank you all – every one of the members – for your support. There is a nice little fable - a good read- with the title of "The boy, the mole, the fox, and the horse". Was on the best-seller list for several months. The mole asks the boy "What do you want to be when you grow up?" . . . "Kind," said the boy.

And I leave you with that thought.

### Next Meeting:

Thursday, September 2  
9:00am  
Auditorium at the  
Williamsburg Library

### Program:

Teaching Children to Garden

### Speaker:

David Pippin



2021  
MGA Board

*President:*  
Martin Oakes

*President Elect:*  
Deborah Bussert

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*VP Projects:*  
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*VP Internal Ed:*  
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Patsy McGrady

*VCE ANR Program  
Assistant:*  
VACANT

*Newsletter Editor:*  
Katherine Sokolowsky  
katherinesoko@gmail.  
com

The MGA board meets on the third Thursday of each month at 9:30am at the Williamsburg Regional Library, Room B, on Scotland Street, Williamsburg.

**PLEASE NOTE:**  
During the pandemic and while the library remains closed, the board meets through video conferencing.

## VMGA UPDATES

BY JOANNE SHEFFIELD, ALTERNATE UNIT REP

The VMGA Zoom meeting on 8/14 was called to order by the President, Leslie Paulson, who welcomed the participants (numbering 44 at maximum).

Loudoun County was the host and presented information on the topics of what we are, what we do, and annual events followed by a video of their demonstration garden. 1500 to 2000 pounds of food grown in the garden has been donated yearly to Loudoun Hunger Relief. The demonstration garden is located in Ida Lee Park, Leesburg.



Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy

Two Standing Committee positions need filling. Our newly own Ruth Huber has served on the Audit Committee for three years, so will be vacating. The Scholarship Committee also needs another member. Descriptions of these positions can be found on the VMGA website, <https://vmga.net/wordpress/>, under Governance, if you are interested in volunteering. Of course, you can talk to Ruth or Marilyn Riddle who is on the Scholarship Committee.

The deadline for the next newsletter, *The VMGA Report*, is August 28. Unit Representatives are encouraged to send information from their Units for publication. Jennifer Graham is the editor and her contact information is [newsletter@vmga.net](mailto:newsletter@vmga.net)

VMGA membership has 542 people on the roster. 315 are active. If you are a member, be sure your information is correct by 9/15 as a new roster will be sent out in October.

Unit Support has received no requests since June. Unit Reps should make sure Board members know this support is available.

The Education Committee is working on a presentation to be given in March, which will demonstrate how to teach.

Online Merchandise has gone live. There is a link on the webpage. The first priority is to decrease the remaining material then to add new products—in addition to clothing, there will be long leather gloves and kneeling pads with VMGA logos. Online sales are part of the Endowment Fundraising, which has reached \$551,834.00 in cash with deferred amounts of close to \$500,000. Dave Close, our VCE Representative, said a VT solicitation for the Endowment will go out in the fall.

The topic for the VMGA booth at the State Fair is Decomposers with information,

Don't forget to check out our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/VCEMasterGardeners/>. Lots of great articles, educational videos, beautiful photographs, upcoming events, and more! Marion Guthrie is doing a great job keeping us up to date, especially during this time when things are changing so frequently.

To get to our VCE James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener homepage quickly, click on <http://jccwmg.org/wordpress/>

## VMGA UPDATES — CONTINUED

videos, and posters on composting, vermicomposting, and Madagascar cockroaches. Handouts will be worksheets and the latest VCE Publications Guide. (Our Unit will be there on Thursday, September 30 and Saturday, October 2.)

Dave Close reported that as of last week the International Master Gardener College had just under 1200 people registered. In addition to the United States and Puerto Rico, the countries are Canada, United Kingdom, and South Korea.

Dave wanted people to know that although staff is very busy with IMGC at this time, a number of items are in progress. For instance, the Tree Steward Manual is almost complete and will be free to use online. Other publications, which will soon be available digitally, are the Training Manual with a new chapter on Native Plants, the Volunteer Handbook and Coordinators Manual.

Frank Reilly pointed out that it is time to appoint a Nominating Committee. Leslie mentioned that she hoped people from around the state would volunteer to serve.

A Unit Host has not stepped up for the October meeting as of now.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

## THIS MONTH'S SPEAKER

BY BILL DICHEL, VP FOR INTERNAL EDUCATION

We are delighted that David Pippin has accepted our invitation to speak at the meeting of the James City County/Williamsburg Master Gardener Meeting on Thursday, September 2 beginning at 9:00 AM. Mr. Pippin will speak on "Teaching Children to Garden." This will not only keep our members who participate in our many programs for children and youth, such as Matthey's Garden, Blayton School Garden, Seeds of Learning, and Therapeutic Gardening up to speed, but it will help all of us who have children and grandchildren to help them become involved in an interesting and fun lifelong hobby.

Mr. Pippin is a native of Louisa County. He graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in Agricultural Education in 1983. He is well-known for his creative and educational talents. He runs a floral design business that creates beautiful arrangements and he is currently the floral designer for Governor and Mrs. Northam in the Executive Mansion in Richmond. He is also an adjunct professor of Horticulture at Reynolds Community College where he teaches floral design. He is also a facilitator and consultant for Virginia Agriculture in the Classroom providing teachers with lessons to help students about crops that give us food and fiber products.

He is known for being a vibrant and dynamic speaker and you won't want to miss him either in person at the Library Auditorium or by the Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2324806347>

For those attending in person, the Library and we do request that a mask be worn inside the building. We look forward to seeing you there!



Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy



## MATTEY'S GARDEN

BY LOUANN MARTIN, CO-CHAIR

Through the dedication and hard work of the Master Gardeners, the garden is in great shape. Throughout the winter, spring and especially the summer, the Mattey's Master Garden family has been there to keep up the garden.

Although we still do not have permission to be with the children to teach educational sessions, I know that the teachers have brought the children into the garden for classes and will continue to this year. Families have also stopped by the garden during the summer to see what is growing. We planted a dedicated garden in one of the raised beds for the maintenance staff of the school where they have enjoyed "the fruits (flowers and vegetables) of our labor."



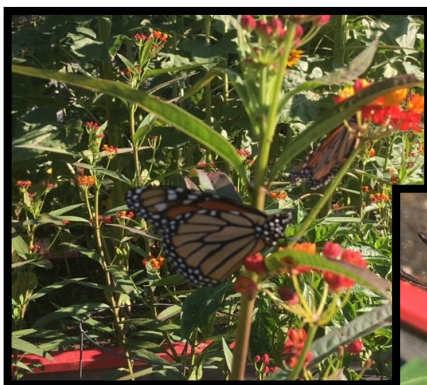
W&M Student project on Milkweed at Mattey's  
(Photo Courtesy of Louann Martin)

A schedule for continued maintenance of the garden will be set up and when we are able to meet with the children again, the educational schedule will be sent out and included in Better Impact. Continuing from last year, we will be planting all of those goodies, which the children would have done if we had in-person lessons.

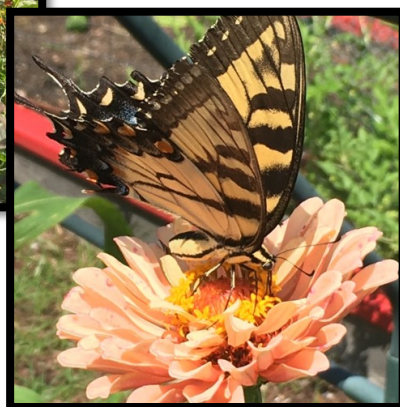
I have submitted a request to William & Mary students for a workday with us on Friday, September 10 (10am -1pm). The college has a program where their students can do volunteer projects within the community. **Please let me know if you will be able to join us.** It is a wonderful way to meet the students and share with them our project as well as sharing general knowledge of Williamsburg. In June, a W&M biology student worked on a project in the garden to observe and catalog what type of insects visited the milkweed at Mattey's above is a picture of her project.

Starting on Friday, September 10, workdays will be scheduled every other Friday. I will send out an email each month and prior to each session requesting volunteers. I hope that you can help out in the garden. If you would like me to add you to the email list, please email me ([lkmartin2011@gmail.com](mailto:lkmartin2011@gmail.com)).

**Lastly, I am actively seeking two additional co-chairs for the project.** This would be a three-year training period. So, please let me know if you may be interested and I can discuss and answer any questions. It is a very rewarding experience and helping these elementary school children experience gardening is very cool! This is a learning experience, which they will carry and pass on for their entire lives. Below are some pictures of our garden, which includes plantings and wildlife in the garden.



Swallowtails and Monarchs at Mattey's  
(Photo Courtesy of Louann Martin)



Cantaloupes growing at Mattey's  
(Photo Courtesy of Louann Martin)

## PERENNIAL PLANTS OF THE YEAR

BY DEB BUSSERT, PRESIDENT ELECT

Here is the next installment of my ongoing series of articles about the Perennial Plants of the Year and our experiences with them at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden.

### 2004: *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*

Commonly known as Japanese painted fern, this fern is, as its name suggests, native to Eastern Asia.

It has beautiful silvery fronds often accented with red or maroon mid-ribs. It grows 1 to 1.5 feet high by 1.5 to 2 feet wide and spreads slowly by rhizomes, forming dense colonies in suitable growing conditions. It should be grown in part to full shade. It can be used in rock gardens, naturalized plantings and as a small scale ground cover. This is a great plant that does well in our area. Clumps can be divided in early spring. Japanese Painted Fern has no serious insect or disease problems, and tolerates heavy shade. Deer and rabbits tend to avoid all ferns, although our fern patch at the WBG Perennial Garden has been rather heavily browsed this year for the first time. There are quite a few beautiful cultivars of this plant that display more or less silver, gray-green or red coloration.



*Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum*  
(Photo courtesy of Deb Bussert)

### 2005: *Helleborus x hybridus*

Who among us is unfamiliar with Hellebores? These evergreen perennials grow in full shade, are drought tolerant, unappealing to deer and rabbits and bloom in late winter. What more could we ask for? Often



*Helleborus x hybridus*  
(Photo courtesy of Deb Bussert)

called “Christmas Rose” or “Lenten Rose”, these common names refer to *Helleborus niger* and *Helleborus orientalis* respectively. Most of the hellebores that are now commonly grown are hybrids of various species too numerous to mention, although *Helleborus foetidus*, the “stinking” hellebore is also occasionally grown.

Hybrid hellebores have been selected for flower size and color and variegated foliage, and one of the best known growers and hybridizers is Pine Knot Farms in Clarksville, Virginia. Hellebores require good drainage and even moisture; too much moisture, heat or humidity can lead to fungal diseases of the foliage or root rot, which can cause the entire plant to suddenly collapse. Otherwise, they are low maintenance and trouble free, only requiring removal of spent foliage in late winter or early spring. We have a large, apparently healthy patch of hellebores in the WBG Perennial Garden; another large patch in the Shade Garden has mostly died out over the last year, probably due to root rot. The difference between the two areas is that the plants in the Perennial Garden are growing in a slightly raised area so the drainage is probably better.

*Continued on the next page, page 6*



## PERENNIAL PLANTS OF THE YEAR — CONTINUED

### 2006: *Dianthus* 'Firewitch'

The genus *Dianthus* includes a large number of species and hybrids commonly known as carnations or pinks.

'Firewitch' is a low growing, mat forming herbaceous perennial easily grown in average, evenly moist, well-drained soil in full sun. Excellent drainage and full sun are essential, and although pinks generally prefer cooler summer temperatures than we have to offer here in James City County/ Williamsburg, 'Firewitch' is more heat and humidity tolerant than most. The flowers are a bright magenta pink and can nearly cover the plant in May and June. After flowering, if plants are sheared back additional bloom may appear in late summer to early fall. Pinks are generally low maintenance plants but they may suffer from crown rot if grown in overly wet or poorly drained conditions. Deer and rabbits generally avoid them. We have several large patches of pinks in the WBG Perennial Garden that have done quite well over several years, blooming profusely in spring and slowly expanding.



*Dianthus* 'Firewitch'  
(Photo courtesy of Deb Bussert)

### PLANTS I LOVE ... AND DEER IGNORE BY ELIZABETH MCCOY, MG AND TREE STEWARD



(Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy)

*Gardening should be fun and bring joy to our lives. That is why I am always happy to discover a new group of plants that thrive in our climate, grow beautifully without a lot of fuss, and that don't attract the attention of hungry deer looking for the salad bar. Allow me to share another of my favorites....*

There are few plants so fragrant that a mere brush of their leaves releases a scent evocative of long forgotten memories; a plant whose leaves are far more fragrant than its flowers. Include these versatile scented geraniums in a sensory garden where their velvety leaves may be stroked, their healing aromas inhaled, and their odd geometries contemplated.

Originally native to South Africa, scented *Pelargoniums* comprise a group of species and cultivars within the larger *Pelargonium* genus, which also includes traditional favorites like ivy leaf geraniums, *Pelargonium peltatum*, and zonal geraniums, *Pelargonium × hortorum*. There are over 250 species within the *Pelargonium* genus, and many more hybrids and cultivars. While these also have a strong scent and strong resistance to grazers, they don't have the distinctive foliage and the intriguing variety of herbal fragrances of the 'scented' geranium species.

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## PLANTS I LOVE ... AND DEER IGNORE — CONTINUED

English and Dutch sailors began collecting *Pelargoniums* in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, bringing them back to Europe and 'the colonies' for propagation and sale to avid gardeners. There are varieties known to have been cultivated in Virginia during the colonial period.

You may be familiar with the heavily promoted 'Citronella' *Pelargonium citrosa*, often sold to help ward off mosquitoes. The essential oils in any of the scented species may be rubbed on the skin or clothing as an insect repellent. (Try a small patch first to make sure you don't have an unpleasant reaction to the oil on your skin.) In addition to the lemon scented plants, you may also find lime, orange and grapefruit scented geraniums of this species. Some gardeners plant these around their patio or near their door to discourage biting insects.

Rose scented geraniums, *Pelargonium graveolens* and *P. capitatum*, remain some of my favorites. They usually have pink flowers, and you will find a wide variety of leaf shapes and colors among the different cultivars. Many of these leaves are lacy and deeply cut, some are ruffled, some may be variegated with cream edges, or even slightly grey. A particularly treasured cultivar, *Pelargonium graveolens variegata* 'Lady Plymouth' has unusual, variegated leaves and pale pink flowers.

Chocolate mint scented geranium, *Pelargonium tomentosum*, is easily recognized by the dark 'chocolate' marking in the center of each leaf. Delight the chocoholic in your life with one of these unusual plants. Its fairly large, soft leaves are lovely whether the plant blooms, or not. This *Pelargonium* is softer than some species in this group and will cascade luxuriantly over the side of a pot. Some cultivars are more fragrant of mint than of chocolate.

There is an enticing variety of scented geraniums available from specialty growers, including ginger, pineapple, balsam, and many other fragrances. Check with growers that specialize in herbs locally, and find additional selections through online nurseries.

*Pelargoniums* bloom with dainty little tubular flowers in small clusters that attract hummingbirds and butterflies. Most bloom in shades of white, pink, lavender or red. Some cultivars bloom almost continuously while others bloom only occasionally. Regular feeding can produce more flowers, but too much fertilizer can also produce rampant vegetative growth. Moderation in all things, and regular pinching, produce the most attractive plants.



(Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy)



(Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy)



(Photo Courtesy of Elizabeth McCoy)



## PLANTS I LOVE ... AND DEER IGNORE — CONTINUED

Grow scented geraniums in pots or hanging baskets singly, or in mixed plantings, or in beds and borders. Most will grow to 2'-3' tall by late summer with a similar spread. They flourish in a variety of soil types, preferring neutral to slightly acidic soil. They are also reasonably drought tolerant once established. Grow them in full to partial sun, keeping the soil evenly moist when grown in full sun.

Like other *Pelargoniums*, scented geraniums will rarely be nibbled by a deer or rabbits. Their leaves have an unpleasant texture in the mouth and their leaves are too strongly scented with essential oils. Plant them with confidence that they will survive the season.

*Pelargoniums* are tender evergreen perennials. In their native areas, many grow into small, woody shrubs. Most are hardy in Zones 9-11 in their native South Africa or Australia. Here in coastal Virginia, they usually die back after a few frosts, unless brought indoors.

Whether they survive the winter depends on some combination of where their pot is overwintered, the type and size of the pot and the particular cultivar. Plants growing directly in a bed should be lifted and potted before the first frost to save them. When grown in a very sheltered spot, with good exposure, they may return if properly mulched. Give an overwintered plant plenty of time to exhibit new growth in late spring or early summer.

A potted rose scented geranium growing on my front porch, with a Southeastern exposure, continued blooming deep into the winter this past year. It overwintered in place, and a new flush of fresh leaves had grown by mid-April. It is now into its third summer. Potted geraniums may be kept as 'house plants' in a bright location. Cut back on watering and allow the plant to rest if overwintered indoors.

Most scented *Pelargoniums* are edible. Leaves or flowers may be used to decorate baked goods; dried and crumbled for tea or flavoring; or used to flavor sugar, butter, vinegar, or cooking oil. There are many recipes online to use the leaves in interesting ways. Gardeners also dry scented *Pelargonium* leaves for potpourri or to freshen closets and drawers.

Propagate *Pelargoniums* with stem cuttings. Methods vary, but most will root when a cutting is struck directly into potting soil or vermiculite. These are tough plants and forgiving plants, very easy to grow. Their beauty, fragrance and usefulness make them essential players in my summer garden.

## TALES FROM THE HELP DESK

BY PATSY MCGRADY, CO-CHAIR

Q. I have heard that Nandina is poisonous to birds. My community has planted many Nandina plants. Should we remove these plants to protect birds?

A. It is true that Nandina (*Nandina domestica*) berries contain cyanide and are, therefore, toxic to birds and other animals. However, the only documented case of birds dying from ingesting Nandina berries occurred in April 2009 when dozens of Cedar Waxwings were found dead in Thomas County, Georgia. Some of the dead birds were autopsied and found to have consumed large quantities of Nandina berries. Cedar Waxwings are known for their voracious feeding behavior. In general, birds do not like these berries and may only eat a few when no other food source is available.

There are two easy solutions if you are concerned about the toxicity of the berries. If you already have the plant, just cut off the flowers after they bloom and before they produce berries. If you would like to plant Nandina, select sterile varieties. No berries. In addition, sterile varieties do not produce water sprouts, which are a real problem with non-sterile varieties.



(Photo Courtesy of Patsy McGrady)



## THIS AND THAT

### **Reminder to the Landscape Love Volunteers:**

Training for the Fall Landscape Love program will be on Thursday, Sept. 2 in the library auditorium immediately following the business meeting of the association.

– Sherry Walker, Landscape Love, Co-Chair

### **News from the Williamsburg Botanical Garden**

The Garden is incredibly lush and full of butterflies. Thank you to all WBG volunteers who make it so beautiful!

The Butterfly Festival is back for 2021 - but in a virtual format - on September 11 and 12. There are Painted Lady Chrysalis kits available in limited quantity (1 per family and registration is required), coloring pages for download, a butterfly photo contest, and virtual sessions on butterfly topics that will be live streamed on the WBG YouTube channel. Details with all the links are in the eNews sent 8/22, which you can access at <https://conta.cc/3z4nOYS> if you did not see the email in your own inbox.

Many of our volunteers and donors enjoyed a casual party on July 31 to celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the Garden's dedication. Thank you again to all who help make the Garden wonderful!

– Judith Alberts, WBG Board Chair

## **THINKING OF OUR MEMBERS**

The organization sends cards to members with difficult medical issues or who have experienced a death in the immediate family.

We also acknowledge achievements/ milestones and donations made to the association.

This month we sent cards to:  
Frances Knight — Get Well

If you know any member who should receive a card, please contact our new secretary, Paulette Atkinson, at (757) 813-7234 or [papinehurst@gmail.com](mailto:papinehurst@gmail.com)

### **JCC/W Master Gardener 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.*

## **NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE**

**The deadline for submissions to the  
October 2021 newsletter will be  
Wednesday, September 29**

**Please send any submissions to Katherine Sokolowsky, newsletter editor, at  
[katherinesoko@gmail.com](mailto:katherinesoko@gmail.com)**

## **ABOUT THE VIRGINIA MASTER GARDENERS AND VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**

Virginia Master Gardeners are volunteer educators who work within their communities to encourage and promote environmentally sound horticulture practices through sustainable landscape management education and training. As an educational program of Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Master Gardeners bring the resources of Virginia's land-grant universities, Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, to the people of the commonwealth.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; M. Ray McKinnie, Interim Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State University, Petersburg.