

# THE COLONIAL MASTER GARDENER

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Celebrating 42 Years of Helping our  
Neighbors Grow!

*A publication of the  
James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association*

**NOV/DEC 2025**

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Our Board of Directors usually meets on the third Friday of each month at 9:30 a.m. via Zoom. If you'd like to join, here's the link: <https://zoom.us/j/98768495293?pwd=f6FfhFVSVVRFBax5QVKLnT3W7oCeAb.1>  
Meeting ID: 987 6849 5293  
Passcode: 23185

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## COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Project Leaders: Marion Guthrie & Wayne Koenig

Newsletter Editor: Marion Guthrie

Blog Director: Elizabeth McCoy

Social Media Manager: Linda Becker

Social Media Reporters:  
Crystal Skeeter-Davis, Jay Templin, Michele Garrard

Video Producer: Crystal Skeeter-Davis

Webmasters: Dave Banks & Wayne Koenig

Writers: Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Beverly Davis, Elizabeth McCoy, Michele Garrard, Janet Rochester

**The next newsletter is currently scheduled for February and is subject to change. The submission deadline for content for that publication is January 20, 2026.**



The James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association is a volunteer-driven non-profit that supports the outreach mission of the Virginia Cooperative Extension by utilizing research-based information to educate the public on the best practices in sustainable horticulture and environmental stewardship in our communities, which include Williamsburg, James City, Charles City, Upper York, and New Kent counties.



Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its 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, military status, or any other basis protected by law.





# President's Message

## Enhancements to Public-Facing Infrastructure

**DAVE KLEPPINGER '16**

### FARMER MARKET IMPROVEMENTS

In response to feedback from the 2024 Master Gardener survey, a need was identified to elevate the professionalism of our public-facing infrastructure. Recognizing the importance of this initiative, the JCCWMGA Board made it a funding priority and approved full funding for all related requests.

### NEW EQUIPMENT AND DISPLAY KITS

At the October membership meeting, Michele Garrard introduced the indoor roadshow kit, specifically designed for use at indoor Master Gardener displays. Complementing this, the outdoor setup now features a new tent, tables, chairs, tablecloths, and other supporting materials that enhance our presence at these local area markets.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

October marked the end of our first season of professionally upgraded farmers markets. Our team set up displays in Williamsburg and Toano, and we expanded our outreach by establishing our first-ever presence in New Kent. These markets serve as an effective method of face-to-face public outreach. Throughout the year, we tracked direct contacts—individuals who approached our table seeking assistance. In total, we recorded over 1,000 direct contacts. During these interactions, we referred many individuals to our home visitation programs, provided information about joining our upcoming EMG training class, and directed visitors to our learning garden locations.

### VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

Nearly 40 volunteers contributed to our success this year. Looking ahead, increasing volunteer participation in 2026 could allow us to further expand our outreach. One potential opportunity is to staff the Williamsburg Farmers Market every week and to acquire a second tent to alternate between Toano and New Kent in 2027.

**CLICK HERE TO CHECK OUT A SLIDESHOW ON YOUTUBE OF THE LATEST FARMERS MARKET SETUP!**



More about the Farmers Market booth at this link: <https://jccwmga.org/wordpress/find-expert-gardening-help-at-the-farmers-marke/>

# Where Did the Master Gardeners' Road Show Travel?

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**MICHELE JETT GARRARD '21**

If you've been wondering, "Where in the world did the Master Gardeners Road Show Resource Table land this time?" We have your answer! On October 25th, the table made a vibrant display at the Williamsburg Library Fall Plant Share and Seed Exchange, with Michele Garrard and Ellen Lee leading the charge.

Held at the Stryker Center, the event brought together enthusiastic citizens and passionate vendors to swap over 100 plants—many of them native species—and share gardening wisdom, resources, and inspiration.

Participating organizations included:

- Williamsburg Regional Library Seed Exchange
- Virginia Native Plant Society
- Historic Rivers Chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists
- Williamsburg-James City County Master Gardeners
- American Herb Society

One of the highlights was a standing-room-only presentation by Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, titled "Grow Pollinator-Friendly Native Plants (Even in an HOA!)." Her talk sparked lively discussion and prompted plenty of note-taking. The atmosphere was buzzing with curiosity and delight. Attendees rifled through free seed packets to select their top three favorites, inhaled the soothing scent of lavender sachets from the American Herb Society, and even tested their strength by cracking locally foraged hickory nuts. Some with more success than others!

A particularly touching moment came when a young brother and sister sought help relocating their great-grandmother's cherished rose bush from her recently sold home to their own yard. Armed with a photo and heartfelt memories spanning three generations, they received guidance and encouragement from our team.

Many visitors were new to the Master Gardeners' mission, but they left well-informed thanks to our QR-coded materials on home visit programs, the Help Desk, and information on how to become a Master Gardener themselves. Survey feedback was unanimously positive, with attendees praising the event's informative and welcoming spirit. Hopes are high that this will blossom into an annual tradition!

Would you like to take the "Road Show on the Road"? We invite you to take the Master Gardeners' Road Show Resource Table for your chosen journey. Help spread the word about our fantastic programs—and don't forget to come back with your own traveled story to share! Ready to go? Please contact Michele Garrard at [victoriashush@yahoo.com](mailto:victoriashush@yahoo.com), and she will help you get started.

# Enhance Your Pruning Skills

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**MARION GUTHRIE '19**

Here is a three-part video series, created by our James City County Williamsburg Master Gardeners, that describes the techniques behind proper pruning. They were produced in response to the COVID-19 crisis and offer guidance to gardeners of all skill levels. The videos cover key topics, including the importance of pruning, how to select and use suitable tools, and provide step-by-step instructions for effective pruning.

Harry Fahl led this project, and the videos were filmed at the Williamsburg Botanical Garden. Supporting graphics for the series were provided by master gardener Carol Fryer, whose drawings enhance the informative content.

## VIDEO SERIES OVERVIEW

- Why Prune: Understand why pruning is essential and how it benefits your plants. Watch now - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTu-gECnEpo>.
- Your Pruning Tools: Learn about the various tools available for pruning and how to use them safely and effectively. Watch now - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WDWxMu-Odg>.
- How to Prune: Follow straightforward instructions for making proper cuts to encourage healthy growth. Watch now - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUQW7qc\\_IQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUQW7qc_IQ).

To access the videos and improve your gardening skills, visit the Pruning Video page on our website at <https://jccwmg.org/wordpress/home-visit-programs-2/>.



# Ecology Corner

## What are Nativars?

**JUDY KINSHAW-ELLIS '15**

As we work to add more native plants to our gardens, we often come across nativars, which are cultivated varieties derived from native species but have been selectively bred or modified to highlight certain desirable traits. While they share many features with their native counterparts, nativars may vary in aspects like flower color, plant size, or resistance to environmental stress. Should we buy and plant them?

These cultivated natives have been modified to produce larger flowers, different colors, stronger stems, more compact growth, or bigger fruits, to name a few changes. For plants with manufactured tags, the plant name will be in quotation marks. For pure native plants, the botanical name will not include additional names. All of these modifications sound appealing. We all want bigger flowers that don't flop over. If we are growing Pawpaws or persimmons, larger fruit is always a plus.

So, what's the issue? Studies show that the main problem with nativars is when native plants have been altered to change leaf color. When a leaf changes to purple or red, it may lack certain chemicals found in green leaves. Native insects are less likely to feed on such plants, or if they do, they may not get the same nutrients.

Nativars planted on a small scale don't have a significant environmental impact. However, mass production by nurseries makes the effect more widespread. When adding native plants, straight species are preferred because they attract the most native insects. As we learn more about native plants, we gain a deeper understanding of their characteristics and where they will thrive best in our landscapes. It's recommended to choose nativars cautiously and prioritize straight-species natives whenever possible.

## Hot and Dry At Your House? Try These Natives

**JUDY KINSHAW-ELLIS '15**

Most of our yards have a spot that is hot and dry during much of the growing season, and those areas present challenges for homeowners. What plants will grow in those areas near the street or between you and your neighbors' driveways? Try some of these classic native favorites.

If you need something short, Pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*) is a low-growing plant with a cute fuzzy spring blossom that resembles a little kitty toe. It also spreads well, and as a bonus, it is the host plant for the American Painted Lady butterfly. Once it blooms, the blossom stems can be trimmed, and the gray-green foliage stays about two inches tall.

For something that grows to about a foot tall, Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a good choice. It features long-lasting orange blooms. Being a milkweed species, it serves as a host plant for Monarchs. The plants become larger each year and self-seed. You will probably have enough seeds to share with friends.

Threadleaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis verticillata*) grows to about eighteen inches and boasts a long bloom season with cheerful yellow flowers. The narrow leaves add a nice texture to your garden as well.

Rudbeckia is a dependable choice for any Virginia garden. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) and Orange Coneflower (*Rudbeckia fulgida*) both bloom through summer and self-seed. There are many varieties of rudbeckia, and you might choose a cultivar if you want something more compact or with smaller flowers.

For fall flowers, Aromatic Aster (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*) is a solid option. Its lavender blooms last well into fall, attracting pollinators. Asters are a pleasing native alternative to chrysanthemums, growing two to three feet tall. The plants are bushy as they develop.

Another plant that adds texture, height, and year-round interest is Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), a native grass that grows to about two feet. Early summer growth has a blue tint, while in fall, it turns a rusty red. In winter, it becomes brown but remains upright. It self-seeds and grows into a larger clump each year. It also grows well from plugs.

Fall is a great time to plant perennials. You can sow seeds, plant plugs, or install larger plants now. If you have a dry, sunny spot that needs some attention, try some of the native plants mentioned here.

# Ready for Next Year!

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**JANET ROCHESTER '05**

We may not have experienced a frost yet, but you probably have finished your garden work for the season or are close to doing so. One exception would be if you're growing hardy crops like spinach, garlic, or cool-weather cabbage family plants. They will need some attention over the winter, including possible watering and weeding, while you harvest periodically.

If you're not growing winter crops, you should remove plant debris and remaining weeds from your garden. The debris can harbor insects, pests, and fungal diseases that could infect your plants again next year. Planting a cover crop will protect the soil from runoff and provide organic matter and nutrients when it is tilled back into the soil in the spring. You can also use a layer of straw or deciduous tree leaves to shield the soil.

Ensure the source of the material is verified to avoid using contaminated mulch or yard waste that may contain herbicides or other unwanted substances. Now is also a good time to spread a layer of compost in your garden; the nutrients will be integrated into the soil, ready for your plants next year.

As you finish your garden work, make sure all your tools are stored neatly, cleaned, and in good condition. This way, they will be ready for use next year without the hassle of searching, cleaning dried soil, or fixing damage. Some damage can be repaired, blades can be sharpened, and handles can be tightened, but if a tool is too severely damaged, it should be discarded. This is because it will not perform well and could pose a safety risk or harm your plants.

Once your garden and tools are ready for winter, review your garden notes and reflect on the past season. What was most successful? Which pests caused problems? Was there an unexpected early or late frost? How much rain fell, and how was it spread out? Did you grow a vegetable your family loved, or one that nobody enjoyed? Was the season so good that you want to expand your garden next year?

Your answers to these questions will guide your planning for the upcoming season. They'll also help with one of the gardener's favorite activities—browsing through gardening catalogs. They will arrive soon and provide hours of dreaming and planning on a cold winter afternoon. Once you decide on the seeds, plants, or tools to order, do so early to ensure everything arrives in time for the next planting season. Questions? Feel free to contact me at [jrochester25@outlook.com](mailto:jrochester25@outlook.com).



# At the Governor's Garden

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**BILL DICHTEL '18**

We had another great day at the Governor's Palace Herb Garden this morning. The weather was sunny and perfect. The white oak has been doing its job, dropping acorns like crazy. The squirrels have been goofing off! So, we had plenty of acorns and quite a few leaves to pick up and sort out from the pine straw bed. It's a good thing we had a hardworking crew. The herbs are thriving, and since rain is expected, we didn't water today. The garden looked fantastic when we finished. Robin had a five-gallon bucket full of white oak acorns that she will take to the Forest Service representative for their seedling program, and Scott had a flowerpot full of double acorn caps for the holiday decorations for the Nursery. Thanks to Jayce Griffin, Robin Rose, Nancy Lia, and Scott Wolz for their help and hard work today! For more information, contact me at [bill.dichtel@gmail.com](mailto:bill.dichtel@gmail.com)



# Ways to Help Migratory Birds

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**JIM EASTON**, Writer and Photographer

More than 40 species of birds make the Williamsburg-James City County area their spring and summer home and return to warmer climes as our weather turns cooler. There are several things we can do to make their last days here in town comfortable and ensure they have plenty to eat before they leave. Here are simple actions we can all take to help reduce the danger and make their journey to their wintering grounds easier. [Read the rest here.](#)

# Café Garden Update

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**PAULINE PRICE '23**

As we approach the end of another fine year at the Jamestown Settlement Cafe Garden, we are keen to acknowledge the hard work of a core group of master gardeners who have attended week in and week out to assure a beautiful garden for the staff and visitors, many of whom stop by to compliment the results. We would be remiss if we did not point out that most of this year was supervised by Su Carlile and Mary Sipe, and they have been an excellent example to us all. We invite you to visit the site and consider joining us in the new year. Contact Pauline Price (snowdrop118@hotmail.com) with questions.

In addition to the garden, the photo shows Su Carlile flanked by Carol Fryer and Arnie Cogswell.



# A Monday in Orr

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**PAT RATHKE '02**

## **A PRODUCTIVE MONDAY IN ORR**

On a regularly scheduled Monday morning, a dedicated team of 15 master gardeners came together in Orr to complete a significant planting project. Their hard work and collaboration resulted in several notable achievements within a tight two-hour window.

## **SINGLE LATE TULIPS**

The first primary task was planting 450 single late tulips (SLTs), also known as French tulips. These tulips are celebrated for their tall, graceful stems and large, enduring blooms, adding both elegance and vibrancy to the garden.

## **WINTER ANNUALS AND SOIL PREPARATION**

Following the tulip planting, the team planted an additional 290 winter annuals. To ensure the health and longevity of the new plants, the gardeners top-dressed the area with a blend of land and sea compost. Bulb fertilizer was also added specifically where the tulips were planted. Each planting hole was carefully watered as winter annuals were set in place, providing an optimal environment for growth and establishing a strong foundation for the season.

## **TEAMWORK AND EFFICIENCY**

Thanks to the coordinated efforts of the crew, the substantial planting was completed efficiently within the allotted two-hour time frame. Their commitment and teamwork were crucial to the project's success.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

The gardening team will continue their efforts, with more bulbs and winter annuals scheduled for planting in the near future. Although the fence installation is not yet complete, it is expected to be finished soon.

## **GET INVOLVED**

If you are interested in joining future gardening projects in the CW gardens, please contact project leaders Pat Rathke at [PaceRathke@gmail.com](mailto:PaceRathke@gmail.com) or Robin Rose at [robinrose@myyahoo.com](mailto:robinrose@myyahoo.com).

# Business Notes

## HAVE YOU PAID YOUR DUES?

Our membership dues are due at the end of 2025. If you haven't paid them yet, here's what to do. Your dues are \$25.00, and payment options are online, by check, and credit card. If paying by check, make it out to JCCWMGA (James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association). Then mail it to JCCWMGA, PO Box 1951, Williamsburg, VA 23187-1951. Pay easily online at [jccwmg.org](http://jccwmg.org). Questions? Contact Linda Neilson, our Treasurer, at [lezelln@cox.net](mailto:lezelln@cox.net)

## WHY LOG YOUR HOURS?

To stay certified as a Master Gardener, you need to log at least 20 volunteer service hours and eight continuing education hours each year. We track these hours in Better Impact, which highlights our commitment to community service and enables state offices and program sponsors to monitor our efforts. Logging your volunteer hours also protects you and our association in case of any incidents while volunteering for the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association. For more details, use this link to see this article at <https://jccwmg.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/MG-Newsletter-September-2022.pdf>. Remember to log your hours after each project

## HOLIDAY MERCH! ORDER NOW.

Do you lie awake hoping for divine inspiration for the perfect gift for your Master Gardener? Relieve your angst by visiting the **LOGO GEAR tab** on the Master Gardener webpage ([jccwmg.org](http://jccwmg.org)). Have you seen the lovely red jacket that will keep your gardener toasty during pruning season? The Master Gardener in your life can certainly use a fresh T-shirt. An insulated flask would make a great stocking stuffer. Relax this holiday season and click the **LOGO GEAR tab** on [jccwmg.org](http://jccwmg.org) and avoid shipping delays. Allow three weeks for delivery. Order today!



## Your Recyclable Plastic Bags = Garden Bench!

Elizabeth Omasta will collect your recyclable plastics in the WRL parking lot before each monthly Membership Meeting. **Start Collecting!**



Recycle your household bags & wrap into Trex's Earth-friendly composite decking and railing!



# You're Invited, Class of 2025 Graduates!

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**TERRY MCLENNON '21**

2025 EMG Training Class Chair

The Extension Master Gardener (EMG) Class of 2025 will graduate on Thursday, December 4, 2025, at 9:00 AM at the Williamsburg Regional Library located at 515 Scotland Street. Family members and friends of the 2025 class are invited, as are members of the JCCWMGA. The graduation ceremony will be held in the library auditorium, followed by a reception at the Stryker Center. We are excited to welcome former Extension Agent Jim Orband as our speaker and Ed Olsen, the VCE Master Gardener Director, as an honored guest. This class features a wonderful group of individuals, and the Training Team has enjoyed working with them throughout the year. If you have had the opportunity to work with any of the interns at an EMG Project, you know what we mean. We look forward to celebrating our newest group of Extension Master Gardeners on December 4th. Come join us!

# Marion Steps Away

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**MARION GUTHRIE '19**

After serving as Vice President of Communications for three years, I am stepping down from my leadership role with the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association. It has been such a pleasure to contribute to this dedicated group and to share the stories, successes, and spirit of our gardening community. I am truly grateful for the friendships, learning experiences, and opportunities this role has given me. I am also grateful for the Communications Team and my co-project lead, Wayne Koenig. You have all been an inspiration to work with.

As I leave this role, I'm filled with excitement for the new projects I'll now have the time to explore. This next chapter will allow me to dig deeper—

literally and figuratively—into some personal garden goals and creative endeavors I've been eager to pursue. While I'll miss being part of the leadership team, I'm looking forward to staying connected and cheering on the organization's great work from the sidelines.

Thank you all for your support, collaboration, and inspiration. It's been an honor to serve alongside such passionate gardeners, and I look forward to watching our Association continue to grow and flourish.





Comprised of over 200 master gardeners, the James City County Williamsburg Master Gardener Association serves the gardening public in Williamsburg, New Kent, Charles City, Upper York, and James City Counties.

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