



The Garden Gate Newsletter

April - May, 2005

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Special Events:
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Website:
www.co.henrico.va.us/agent

Monthly Meetings

April 13



Member Plant Exchange

Please Join Us

Bring four plants to exchange with fellow Master Gardeners. Purchased plants, freshly dug or grown at home! Be prepared to share some details about your plant. Demo Kitchen.

May 11

“The Adventurous Gardener”



Scott Burrell, Horticulture Director for the Virginia Historical Society will speak about new things happening in horticulture including new plant introductions.

Demo Kitchen.

Planning Ahead

The meeting location for JUNE and NOVEMBER is changed to the Henrico Training Center.

The Henrico County Registrar has designated the Demo Kitchen as the location for election results certification (held the day after the June 7 and November 8 elections), so we have been bumped.

The Training Center is located at the intersection of Parham and Shrader Roads across from London Towne Apartments.

President's Message

A proposal to change the process for nominating officers of the Association was approved by the membership at the March monthly meeting. This conforms to the recommended practice whereby the Board of an organization is responsible for appointing the nominating committee.

Another proposal to change the by-laws is on the agenda for the April meeting. This change would add the office of a second vice-president. The Board recognized that the current duties and responsibilities are a very heavy load for one person. This will give us the opportunity to re-structure responsibilities to spread the work load.

This Newsletter is being sent to you by regular mail and E-mail. We plan to do this for several issues and would like your feedback. If we get a favorable response we will continue to send by E-mail and for those without E-mail, by regular mail. This will save the cost of printing and postage and reduce the time our editors put in to get each issue to us.

Jack Kelzer

It's Ukrop's Golden Gift Time!

The 2005 Ukrop's Golden Gift program has started! The buying period ran from January 31st through March 26th. In May, customers will be mailed a Golden Gift certificate stating the points they have earned. Customers may present their certificates to the chosen organization. We hope you will choose the Henrico Master Gardeners Association. Last year we netted \$108 for our treasury and hope we can surpass it this year. Thank you!

Chuck Bingley

Cinnamon Pudding Cake

Combine in a saucepan:

- 1 3/4 cups brown sugar, firmly packed
- 1 1/2 cups cold water
- 2 Tbs butter

Bring this to a boil and then set aside.

Mix and set aside:

- 2 cups flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 2 1/2 tsp cinnamon

In a large bowl, cream 2 Tbs butter with 1 cup sugar. Add the dry ingredients alternately with 1 cup of milk, beginning and ending with the dry ingredients. Blend well after each addition. Spread in a greased 9x9x2 pan.

Pour the brown sugar mixture slowly over the batter. Do not mix. Sprinkle with nuts if desired. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes. Serve warm with whipped topping or vanilla ice cream.

Peggy Lowry

Mark your calendars for the first annual...

Master Gardener Friendly Garden Tour

June 12, 2005 1-6 PM

The MG Friendly Garden Tour Planning Team is happy to announce the five beautiful gardens that will be on tour in June. The five tour gardens, hosts, and features are as follows:

1.	Hugh and Pat Greene 9410 Sir Barry Court	Slope and container gardening
2.	Earle and Martha Bottom 9416 Sir Barry Court	Deep-Shade Gardening Composting
3.	Carol Colby 8509 Academy Road	Perennials Turf and Lawn Care
4.	Mark and Sally Wittkofski 8507 Academy Road	Companion Gardening
5.	Dermot and Arline Murphy 1013 Foxcroft Road	Herbs Orchids

This garden tour is designed to be an educational garden experience including plant identification, literature, Q&A with MG's, and 5-minute mini-lectures. The ultimate goal of the tour is to build public interest in sound horticultural practices.

If you would like to help with the tour, please let us know! Following is a list of volunteer opportunities:

1. Pre-Tour Garden Helper:

Provide labor for homeowner during week before the tour.

2. Receptionist:

Assume role of greeter at reception table. Greet public, sell tickets, secure moneybox, and distribute handouts and other information.

3. Veteran MG / Q&A:

Be available on site to answer questions of visitors.

4. Mini-Lecturer:

Give on-site 5-minute lectures on topics relating to the specific features being highlighted. Brief Q&A follows lecture time.

5. FGT Support Team Member:

Provide logistical support for the Planning Team such as administrative jobs, artistic jobs, posting flyers in community, assisting with set-up and clean up on day of tour, etc.

If you would like to volunteer, please call Ann Dutton (740-2514) or email her at annforddutton@mindspring.com.

A Little Bit about...Vitex

By Peggy Lowry

Some plants go in and out of fashion just as clothes do. Considered an old fashion plant, *Vitex agnus-castus* is now becoming popular again. Landscape designers are finding it just as appropriate for today's garden as it was for those generations ago. It is a small deciduous tree growing to 20 or more feet in height and width. Before the days of high-tech irrigation and varieties of fertilizers, Vitex could hold its own. Soil can be acid or alkaline, sandy or clay; and once established, it requires a minimal amount of water. At one time it was widely planted in the South, and it is still included in historical gardens in Charleston and Colonial Williamsburg.

Vitex is an open "casual" tree with a fine lacy texture. If allowed to grow to full size, it has a slightly twisted, textured bark and a rather gnarled habit. Each grey-green leaf has 5 to 7 leaflets that spread like an open hand, and they release a strong sage like fragrance when touched and even stronger when wet. There are 5 to 8 inch spikes of lavender flowers that appear from June till August here in Richmond. There is also a white variety, "Alba" and a pink one, "Rosa." Since it blooms on new wood, it can be pruned in the fall or early spring.

I inherited a lavender Vitex in the corner of a lot we built a house on in the early 70's. It had been there for many years, completely neglected, but thriving. It was growing in full sun and had good drainage – the two requirements of the tree. During the twenty years that we lived there, it received no care and there was never any disease or insect damage. The lavender spikes were lovely and long lasting in flower arrangements, but I found it difficult to cut them because the tree was usually full of bumble bees. Vitex is said to be attractive to butterflies, but I never saw but one or two at any given time.



Vitex is native to West Asia and southwestern Europe. It was grown in English gardens as early as 1570 and is now growing throughout Europe. It has been known by many names including Safe Tree, Indian Spice Tree, Lavender Tree, Wild Pepper, Monk's Pepper Tree and most often, Chaste Tree. In ancient Greek festivals women wore blossoms of the tree to honor Demeter, and boughs and blossoms of the tree were strewn around her temples. Women were to remain chaste during those festivals. Demeter was the goddess of fertility, marriage and agriculture. (Her Roman name was Ceres from which we get the word cereal.) In ancient Rome the Vestal Virgins carried twigs of the Chaste Tree as their symbol of chastity. The ancients used the seeds as an aphrodisiac, but "experience does not warrant their having any such virtues" wrote Andrew Duncan in the 1789 edition of the Edinburgh Dispensatory.

Early Christians adopted the Association of the tree with chastity in some of their rituals. Novitiates entering a monastery walked on paths strewn with Chaste Tree blossoms, and this ritual is still observed today in some parts of Italy. The seeds have a pungent scent and a flavor reminiscent of black pepper; and so Monk's Pepper was eaten by the monks to keep them "chaste."

Throughout the centuries extracts from the bark, leaves and seeds have been used to treat female disorders. The seeds were found to be the most effective. In-depth studies, including clinical experience, have given positive results in some of these areas. Phytotherapy in Germany is considered a component of modern medicine and not an alternative approach. Chaste Tree Preparations there are considered a safe, effective and low cost medication.

Many nurseries carry Vitex but it can also be grown from seed. Gather the seeds when they are brown – falling easily from the tree but before a hard frost. Wrap them in a barely moist paper towel and place them in a tightly sealed jar in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 months. Then plant them in a growing mix and keep them warm and moist until germination occurs (10 days to 2 weeks). Keep them under grow lights or in a sunny window until all danger of frost has passed. Plant in four inch pots, harden off, and sink into the ground leaving ½ to 1 inch of the pot rim above soil level. Do not let the plants dry out. Keep them this way until the following spring. Then remove them from the pots and plant in a permanent locations. Vitex is a beautiful, small fast growing tree – and trouble free. What more could you ask for?

Getting to Know Mary Glen Taylor

by Peggy Lowry

Mary Glen became a master gardener in 1993. Her favorite flowers are Cleome and *Begonia grandis*, and her favorite shrubs are nandina and the fall blooming camellia. Favorite trees include American holly and Virginia cedar; she enjoys low maintenance gardening and landscape design.

Mary Glen grew up on Spring Grove Farm near the Virginia/North Carolina border but attended St. Catherine's as a boarding student. Then—on to Randolph Macon Woman's College to major in English and religion. She later studied woody plants at J. Sargent Reynolds. She and her investment banker husband have three children and three grandchildren.

Mary Glen's hobbies include reading and traveling with her golfer husband. Her favorite quote is: "If you have a garden and a library, you have all you need." (Cicero). Mary Glen is a member of Friends of Bandy Field. Bandy Field is an 18 acre park on Three Chopt Road. The Friends are working to restore the park's natural habitats and save this natural area for native plants and a healthy wildlife-friendly area. Mary Glen is also a member of Richmond's Tree Commission serving as Tree Commissioner for the First District. She is one of the moving forces behind the landscaping of 13 blocks of Monument Avenue from Roseneath to Staples Mill Road. Tree Commissioners advise the city about its trees.

For the past few years, Mary Glen has been "on a quest" to complete the Charles F. Gillette collection of landscape designs archived at the Library of Virginia. Missing are 800 plans for gardens not only in Richmond but as far away as Missouri. She was awarded the de Lacy Gray Memorial Medal for Conservation from the Garden Club of Virginia for her dedication to conservation and beautification. She has also received the 2004 Jesse Reynolds Award for Community Mobilization from the city of Richmond. In recognition of her outstanding efforts, the department of Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities has planted a tree in her honor!

In the past, Mary Glen has enjoyed needle work and sewing but has put them aside to work on her "disaster repair." She has lost two thirds of her garden to lightening, ice storms, and Isabel. Then Gaston flooded the rec room and she lost one third of her house and contents.

She says, "Thank goodness for Monument Avenue Tree Project, Bandy Field Habitat Restoration project, and the Charles F. Gillette lost landscape designs project, and – Master Gardeners. They are a real upper." As her Boxwood Garden Club said, "Mary Glen Taylor is a most unique, energetic, and effective protector of our environment." We are fortunate to have her in the master gardening program.

Hellebores – 2005 Perennial of the Year

by Debbie Wilson

Hellebores sound like a dream come true. They really do bloom when the garden looks wintry and the ground is still dotted with traces of snow. The flowers are big, bold and abundant, and they come in several colors – pinks, purples, dusky reds, white, pale green and some yellows. Hellebores are shade lovers, which is good news for maturing gardens. Perhaps most impressive of all is that the foliage of most kinds of hellebores is attractive year-round.

The flowers of hellebores can be seen from the New Year through April and May. Not only do they produce attractive flowers (most are actually sepals), but their deeply-lobed, thick leathery leaves create an attractive evergreen backdrop to spring bulbs and flowers. They are native to southern and central Europe and found primarily in mountainous areas, but also survive in a range of other habitats from light woodland shade to open alpine meadows. It is thought that the Romans first introduced to Britain the *Helleborus niger*, the Christmas rose, one of their oldest cultivated plants. The Latin name actually refers to its hidden black roots and derives from two Greek words, ‘hellin’, to kill and ‘bora’, food. Their popularity has yet to peak in the UK, and is growing in the USA. Here’s why:

Hellebore Culture

With the exception of *Helleborus lividus*, hellebores can be grown almost anywhere in the United States. Their culture is simple. They prefer moist, but not wet, rich, organic soil in full to light shade. In areas where winter is severe and there is no snow cover, a mulch of shredded hardwood bark provides a warm blanket. They are greedy feeders, and when using a timed-release fertilizer such as Osmocote, use the highest range. Soil Ph in the range of 5.5 – 7.0 is fine.

Hellebores have relatively few pest or disease problems. Like roses, they can suffer from a type of black spot that at best is unsightly and at worst can prove fatal. A systemic fungicide used once a month, drenching the whole plant, will help to prevent this disease. Any plants that are badly infected should have the worst affected leaves removed. Other than this, hellebores enjoy a fairly pest and disease-free life.

What sets hellebores above most other perennials is their striking foliage, which looks good year-round in most locations. The foliage of most kinds is leathery and a beautiful deep green. Individual leaves are deeply divided and “palmate”, which means they are shaped roughly like a very large hand spread wide. Something even better is that deer don’t seem to be attracted to them. This foliage combined with other shade-loving perennials like wild ginger, cyclamen, lungwort, or bulbs such as snowdrops or miniature daffodils make an attractive bed.

A Primer on Hellebores:

Hellebores require little care. They will grow in any reasonable garden soil; preferring those that are slightly alkaline to an acid soil, and they are long-lived. Ensure that you prepare a good planting site by incorporating compost into the soil before you plant, as hellebores enjoy a moist soil rather than one that dries out quickly. Farmyard manures are good if they are well rotted.

Plant in large holes at least 18 inches wide and 6 to 12 inches deep and at the proper depth. There should be about an inch of soil above the point where the roots break from the crown of the plant.

Removing the previous year’s leaves on *H. orientalis* hybrids in winter will allow you to see the plants more easily, and the old leaves are generally weather-battered and unsightly anyway. Fresh new

leaves will emerge to set off the lovely flowers. This can seem like a lot of work, but is truly worth it if you can manage. David Culp recommends putting removed foliage into the trash can and not composting.

Most hellebores are hardy in winter conditions. *H. lividus* should be treated as somewhat tender.

Pests and Diseases

Hellebores in warm areas are prone to fungal attack. A dressing of dolomite lime in the summer helps to prevent this.

New growth can suffer from aphids. Check the flowers and under the leaves for insects. Squashing them with your fingers is the best defense and natural predators can get the rest.

Propagation

Seed

Hellebores grow readily from seed and if you grow different hellebores close together you will find seedlings of mixed parentage.

H. orientalis seed forms during the summer, and will germinate by mid-winter. Collect the seed before it falls, taking care to store it in a cool, dry place.

Sow seed when ripe, in summer. Use a good seed raising mix and add additional grit. Water regularly from below to keep the soil moist. If you drench the pots the seeds will rot before they can germinate. Seedlings will flower after one to two years. Hellebores do grow quite readily from seed. If all else fails, the easiest way to get more plants is to move the seedlings that will begin to appear around the base of established plants.

Division



To divide *H. orientalis* lift the plant and divide into large divisions in late summer just as root growth is beginning to give the plants the optimum time re-establish. Divisions that are too small may take several years to recover, or, at worst, you may lose them. Don't chisel 'slips' from the sides of your choicest plants – eventually you will weaken the plant. These 'slips' are the fresh new growth that you are giving away and will weaken the older plant. *H. niger* is best divided in early spring when it shows new growth after the cold of winter.

Green Hellebores

H. foetidus, *argutifolius* and *lividus* are less easily divided. These all seed easily and propagation is still possible by collecting and re-seeding. Take care that the seed is from plants growing some distance from other species if you don't want hybrid plants.

H. niger, commonly called 'Christmas Rose' because it flowers in the depths of winter usually after Christmas, is one of the earliest to flower.

H. orientalis, commonly called 'Lenten Rose', are almost always hybrids, and are most familiar to us. The Lenten Rose is the easiest of all hellebores to transplant, and a single plant will spread quickly. It also self-sows readily. It is within this group that you will be seeing hybrids with unusual colors, double blooms, and other unique features.

H. foetidus and *H. argutifolius*, the green hellebores, have bold foliage, sturdy stems and quite dramatic in the garden. The unglamorously named “stinking hellebore” (*H. foetidus*) has dark green foliage that is deeply cut and nodding flowers of pale, lime-green light the garden for weeks in winter. It gets its name because crushed leaves, stems and sometimes flowers emit a strange, catlike odor. The dark green leaves have four to nine narrow leaflets. Individual stalks get about 24 inches tall and mature plants spread 3 feet across. Some judicious staking is worthwhile if you have an exposed garden. *H. argutifolius* is less hardy but can be grown in most gardens given a well-drained soil that does not dry out in summer. Removing the leaves after flowering helps to prevent black spot.

H. lividus is less hardy again, not seen often in gardens and has become rare in the wild. Often hellebores are planted in dull corners because they will not thrive in full sun. Many hellebores will grow in sunny positions as long as you can ensure that their roots are cool, and don't dry out and bake.

Have I said enough about these wonderful perennials?

Horticulture Helpline

Effective March 16th Carol O'Toole will be taking over the scheduling of the helpline. Lyn Dodge is taking a break for a while, but plans to return in the near future. Carol can be reached by: Email: cmoblue24@yahoo.com and telephone: 285-8733

The helpline currently has openings for the following dates in the months of April, May and June.

Thursday, April 21st 12:30 - 4:30
Friday, May 6th 12:30 - 4:30
Friday, May 13th 8:30 - 12:30
Friday, June 3rd 12:30 - 4:30
Thursday, June 9th 12:30 - 4:30
Thursday, June 16th 8:30 - 12:30
Friday, June 17th both shifts
Friday, June 24th 12:30 - 4:30
Thursday, June 30th 12:30 - 4:30



Please let Carol know if you are interested in helping with any of these shifts.

**Henrico's Horticulture Extension Agent
Karen Carter**
will be presenting the following programs in 2005:

To join us, please **call the Office at 501-5160 to register.**
Registration is **FREE** and **LIMITED.**

“Spring Composting Workshop”

Saturday, April 2, 2005
11 A.M. – Noon
Lavender Fields Farm
11300 Winfrey Road, Glen Allen

LAWN SEMINARS

	North Park Library (Tuesdays) <u>7-8:30 P.M.</u>	Gayton Library (Thursdays) <u>7-8:30 P.M.</u>
“Building a Healthy Lawn”	April 26, 2005	April 28, 2005
“Starting a New Lawn, Renovating an Old One”	August 2, 2005	August 4, 2005
“Winterizing Your Lawn”	September 13, 2005	September 15, 2005

SMART Lawn Field Day

Saturday, August 20, 2005
8:30 A.M. – Noon
Henrico Extension Office
8600 Dixon Powers Drive, off Parham

Visit with local vendors of lawn products and services from 8:30 A.M. – 9:30 A.M. Then from 9:30 – Noon, enjoy a seminar on “Steps to a Beautiful Lawn” and have your lawn questions answered.

Henrico Master Gardeners Association

P.O. Box 27032

Richmond, VA 23273-7032

The Henrico Master Gardeners Association, and all VCE programs, services, activities, and employment opportunities are available to all people regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age national origin, handicap, or political affiliation. VCE is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

Master Gardener Reminders

Board Meetings

April 6, 1:30 PM

May 4, 1:30 PM

Association Meetings

April 13, 1:30 PM

May 11, 1:30 PM

Please e-mail your contribution to the newsletter

By **May 20** to

Jody Taggart j.taggart@worldnet.att.net