



The Garden Gate e-Newsletter

February – March, 2007

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Joyce Carole Brannon

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Sherry Kerley

Plant Clinic
Dave & Joanie Brobst

SMART Lawns
Extension Staff

Special Events
John Simmonds, Judy Burton

Websites
www.co.henrico.va.us/agent
www.henicomga.org

Association Meetings



February 14, 1:00PM
Advanced Training
Edible Landscaping
Robyn Hartley

Learn how to mix vegetables, herbs and spices into your landscape design. This is a very popular topic in landscaping. This is also a time to catch up on the activities of your association and fellow MG volunteers.



March 14, 1:00PM
Advanced Training
Weed Identification
Karen Carter

If you can't recognize them, how can you get rid of them? Learn how to distinguish between various grassy and broadleaf weeds. Bring your own samples and use the weed keys to identify them.

Office Assistance



If you have some time and are looking for another way to earn MG hours, give Sandra Moe a call. The Extension office needs a few willing volunteers to help with office chores.
501-5160

A special **Thank-You** goes to **Debbie Wilson** for her years of hard work writing for this newsletter. Debbie has moved onto other things and I will miss her humor and help with getting out the newsletter every other month. *–Jody Taggart*

President's Message



Last Thursday I attended the Winter Short Course for the first time and was bowled over (all ten pins down) with the excellent planning and presentations. There was standing room only and that was filled. Karen and her staff and the surrounding Extension services deserve a well earned thank you for offerings of this type.

At 1:00PM each Wednesday in February and March, we will have eight opportunities to advance our education by participating in the two hour Advanced Training sessions. Teddy Martin has secured knowledgeable speakers in a wide variety of interesting fields. Please check your recertification packets and make plans to attend as many of these sessions as possible. Also call Teddy and offer your assistance in helping these programs run smoothly.

On another note, we will miss Stephanie Feaser's help and guidance with the Master Gardening program. Stephanie has left big shoes to fill but a search has begun for a new person to fill this position. Both the Extension office and your association officers will need the best efforts of each master gardener to ensure that all of our programs run smoothly.

Happy New Year and I'm looking forward to a great working year.

Mary E. Vetrovec

Cheddar Ham Soup

2 cups diced potatoes
2 cups chicken broth
½ - 1 cup sliced carrots
¼ cup chopped onion
¼ cup butter
¼ cup flour
2 cups milk
dash pepper
2 cups (8 oz) shredded sharp cheddar
1 ½ cups cubed ham, fully cooked or more
1 cup frozen peas thawed or green beans



Bring to a boil, stirring, and cook for two minutes or until thick. Stir in cheese until melted. Stir into potato mixture. Add ham and peas or snaps. Heat through.

Add pepper and salt if desired.

Note:

Do not change the amounts of cheese, white sauce or chicken stock, but more vegetables and ham can be added. Canned ham is too salty. Homemade chicken stock is best, but if using canned, do not dilute and use low sodium.

Combine potatoes, broth, carrots and onion and simmer for 10 15 minutes or until tender.

In another pan, melt the butter and stir in the flour until smooth. Gradually whisk in the milk.

-Peggy Lowry

Getting To Know Beverly Cochran



Beverly became a Master Gardener in 2003 and is now Corresponding Secretary of the Henrico Master Gardeners Association. She also enjoys working on the Horticulture Helpline.

Beverly's father taught her to love gardening when she was growing up in Bedford County. Her mother and older brother still live there. Beverly graduated from the University of South Carolina with majors in Business and Psychology. She says that living in the heat and humidity of Columbia was probably where she began to love tropical plants (She would love it if Palmetto trees grew in Richmond.)

She has begun to experiment with tropical and tropical look-a-likes that can stay in the garden all year – palms, grasses, lilies, and the like. She has a semi-walled courtyard and brick patio that provide a Zone 8 micro climate and has been planting Zone 8 or so plants to see how they fare.

Beverly's favorites: flower-daffodil, any evergreen shrub with variegated foliage, and small trees like dogwoods, serviceberry, and fringe tree. She moved to Richmond in 1990. Interests other than gardening include traveling, reading and Virginia Tech football. Her husband, Jim, is a graduate of Virginia Tech, and both of them love anything Hokie. They met at the Orange Bowl in 1996, became engaged at the Gator Bowl in 1997 and were married the next year – just in time for the football season. They have no children, but her husband has four cats.

To quote Beverly: "I've enjoyed being a master gardener so much more than I ever imagined I would. I have met such nice and fun people and have learned so much and hope to continue to learn and meet great people."

Behind the Shed

This is a section of the newsletter where members can offer plants, cuttings, seeds and other garden items to other members. You could also find a partner for a trip or maybe someone to help with a special project. Send in your contribution!

The February issue of ***Southern Living*** magazine has a nice article on 'Crepe Murder.' Here's hoping it will educate gardeners who like to give their Crepe's too much of their pruning time!



A Little Bit about...Chickweed

By Peggy Lowry

The common chickweed (*Cerastium*) that we see in our lawns is almost the same as it was in Neolithic times. It was gathered in the plains in India, and it was valued in ancient Greece and Rome as an edible green available during the colder months. It spread throughout Europe, and by the Middle Ages the stems and leaves were used in salads, cooked as greens and used as any other greens. Chickweed is particularly high in vitamin C, and among other things, it provides niacin, vitamins B1, B2 and A, magnesium, iron, calcium, potassium, zinc and phosphorus. The seeds are edible and both seeds and plant can be dried for storage.

Nature designed chickweed so that it can “sleep” in cold, wet weather; the larger lower leaves fold over the young top leaves for protection at nightfall and when a storm approaches. The tiny white flowers open in the morning and close at night. Its roots are shallow, fibrous and fragile, and it can appear in any sunny area of bare, rich moist soil, preferring cooler partly shaded places in the summer. It germinates in the fall, flowering and setting seed in early spring. It thrives in cool damp conditions but will not survive where it is dry and hot. The flowers develop into small capsule like fruits containing up to 15,000 seeds per plant and can remain viable for several years. Chickens and other birds love both the plant and its seeds – thus its name. During Elizabethan times it was fed to domestic fowl, and even today some manufacturers add chickweed seed to poultry feed to stimulate the appetites of chickens raised in confinement for mass production.

During the Middle Ages chickweed was not only eaten but was also used to soothe and heal rashes and skin eruptions. Today it is an ingredient in a number of common skin products used for soothing, moisturizing and relief from itching and other skin inflammations. Some herbalists use chickweed poultices for rheumatism. Because of its healing properties, it was called starwort by the ancients. These benefits may be the result of chickweed’s high nutritional value. Chickweed contains gamma-linolenic acid (GLA) which is recommended for different skin problems, hormone imbalances, and even some forms of arthritis. It clears congestion, helps control obesity, reduces water retention and inflammation, and acts as a tonic for the liver.



When England was blockaded during World War II, chickweed, along with other plants, was gathered for food and medicine. In her “British Herbs”, Florence Ransom’s recipe for ointment (for rashes and chilblains) was: one half pound of chickweed and one pound of lard boiled together and strained.

Wyman’s says that field chickweed is a native perennial. There are 50 to 100 species in the North Temperate regions of the world. Other sources say that chickweed is not native to the Americas, but at any rate, it was surely brought here by settlers because of its many values. It had a reputation in colonial times as a treatment for colds, scurvy and constipation. Steamed chickweed (easy on the stomach) was used to restore victims of famine or malnutrition. It was a most valued herb in colonial times, painstakingly cultivated in every garden, and was available nearly year round. It was also a favorite fodder for rabbits and was fed to ailing stock of all kinds.

As in other countries, it spread from coast to coast and throughout parts of Central and South America. It grows most densely in the central eastern states and is troublesome to commercial growers of strawberries, alfalfa and other nursery stock. One species of chickweed, *Cerastium tomentosum*, is a common garden creeper also called Snow-in-Summer, having wooly grey foliage and white flowers. Easily grown, one plant can cover nine square feet in a short time. Field chickweed and mouse eared chickweed are perennials, but common chickweed is a winter annual. All belong to the pink family (pinked or scalloped edges of the flower—not the color).

Leaves and stems are both edible. They can be boiled for a few minutes and seasoned as any other green, chopped and eaten raw in salads or even quickly sautéed in a little oil or butter. The quantity shrinks at least by half when cooked. Also they can be chopped and dried to be used like parsley but the flavor is stronger. Packed in airtight containers it keeps a long time.

To quote C. S. Houghton, “Since the days of the Druids the beneficent chickweed has fed and healed mankind. Today it thrives in millions of American lawns, its history, beauty and service ignored and unrecognized.”

Some More about Compost

By Jody Taggart

I recently read an online article that listed 163 things that can be added to the compost pile. I wouldn't dream of listing them all here for you and I suspect many of you already know most of the list anyway. So even if you are not convinced that composting everything in sight is for you, as a Master Gardener you might be asked for advice on what can be added to the compost pile. Here are some questions you can ask yourself so that you can give the correct answer.

- 1. Is it biodegradable?** If it rots then it is most likely good for the pile and good for the soil. This does NOT include meat scraps, oily products such as salad dressings, peanut butter and mayonnaise, pet litter and food, branches and other large woody materials, slick magazine pages, and waxed cardboard.
- 2. Will it help make high-quality, nutrient-rich compost?** Think about how plants naturally recycle. Those rich, dense mats of leaves that you find in the forests are providing the nutrients for the huge trees year after year. No one needs to go and throw down Miracle Gro; the trees handle it by themselves. Your compost ingredients should be rich sources of carbon and nitrogen.
- 3. Did it come from a chemical-free lawn?** I know some gardeners who will pick up neighbor's bagged leaves or grass trimmings to add to their piles. Although I am guilty of requesting grass clippings from my neighbors occasionally, you might not want to add castoffs that could contain herbicides or pesticides that will eventually be added to your vegetable or landscape beds. After all, you really don't know what your neighbor is putting on their lawns.
- 4. Is it free of disease, toxins, and other contaminants?** Your compost pile *should* heat up sufficiently (160 degrees) to kill most pathogens, but why risk it? You just can't be sure that every part of the pile heats enough to kill everything. So if you KNOW that you have diseased plants and trimmings or weeds with lots of seeds or runners, just don't add it to your pile. You don't want that headache.

Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

February 7, 1:00 PM

March 7, 1:00PM

Association Meetings

February 14, 1:00PM

March 14, 1:00PM

Please submit your contribution to the newsletter

By **March 20** to Jody Taggart

jody.taggart@comcast.net 360-2680