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www.co.henrico.va.us/agent

The Garden Gate e-Newsletter

December 2005 - January 2006

Association Meetings

December

Master Gardener Appreciation Reception

Congratulations!

You are invited to attend a reception in honor of Master Gardener volunteers on **Wednesday, December 14, 3:00PM**. If you have not sent in your RSVP, please call the extension office at 501-5160 to let us know if you are coming and if you plan to bring a guest.

Members of the class of 2005 who have completed their service commitment will receive their 50-hour certificates.

Donations will be accepted for the Henrico Christmas Mother as well.

January

No association meeting for January.

Upcoming Extension Programs

Training Classes

New training classes are scheduled to begin on Wednesday January 25, 2006. A complete schedule of dates, topics and speakers is included in your recertification packet which will be ready for pick-up at the December reception. The packet will be mailed to you otherwise. Information about the CVNLA short course will also be included.

President's Message



We are evaluating starting a new outreach program; a **Master Gardener Teaching Garden**. This would further our Mission of horticulture education in the community and provide an additional opportunity for volunteer hours.

Obviously this is a project that will require a considerable amount of MG resources. Tasks would include defining the scope and purpose of the garden which then would be followed by garden design, selection of specific plants, soil preparation and testing, planting, garden maintenance, planning garden events for the public, staffing for “showtime”, and publicity, among others.

Before we can proceed we need to determine the interest of Master Gardeners. As you can see there are many diverse areas where you can apply your interests and talents.

If you have any questions and/or want to volunteer for this project, contact me by E-mail: jbkelz@comcast.net. I believe this is a very worthwhile project for Henrico Master Gardeners to take on which will enable us to increase our opportunities to expand horticultural knowledge in the community.

Jack Kelzer

Butter Pecan Fudge

Do not substitute.

½ cup butter (salted is o.k.)
½ cup granulated sugar
½ cup packed brown sugar
½ cup whipping cream
pinch of salt
1 tsp vanilla
1 cup pecans, coarsely chopped and
toasted
2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted



Toast pecans on a baking sheet at 325° oven for 8 to 12 minutes. Set aside to cool.

In a large saucepan, mix white and brown sugars, cream and butter. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Boil for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in the vanilla. Beat in the confectioners' sugar until smooth. Stir in the nuts. Spread evenly in a lightly greased 8 inch pan.

-Peggy Lowry

A Pruning Primer

By *Debbie Wilson*



can almost hear Charlie Curry, our former Henrico County Extension Agent, saying that the perfect time to prune is when your tools are sharp! While this is certainly true, there is more to proper pruning than a sharp edge. To borrow from Douglas F. Welsh and Everett Janne, of Texas A&M, “proper pruning enhances the beauty of almost any landscape tree and shrub, while improper pruning can ruin or greatly reduce its landscape potential. In most cases, it is better not to prune than to do it incorrectly.”

Reasons for Pruning

Pruning should follow a definite plan. Consider the reasons or purpose before the cutting begins.

- To train the plant
- To maintain plant health
- To improve the quality of flowers, fruit, foliage or stems
- To restrict growth

When to Prune

In general, the best time to prune most plants is during late winter or early spring before growth begins. While pruning can actually be done at any time of the year – like when the tools are sharp – recommended times vary with different plants. Pruning at the wrong time of year does not kill plants, but continual improper pruning results in damaged or weakened plants. Prune when it results in the least damage to the plant.

The least desirable time to prune is immediately after new growth develops in the spring. Food stored in roots and stems is used in developing new growth and this food should be replaced by new foliage before it is removed. “Dwarfing” of the plant may occur as a common problem.

Late summer pruning may encourage new growth on some plants. This growth may not have sufficient time to harden off before cold weather arrives, resulting in cold damage or winter-kill.

Plants damaged by storms, vandalism or ones with dead limbs should be pruned as soon as possible – meaning anytime – to avoid additional insect and disease problems that may develop.

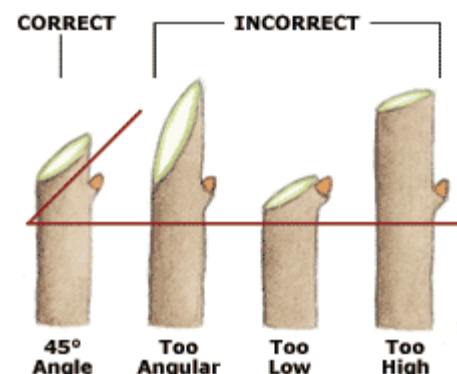
Pruning Tools

As important as the knowledge of how to prune is, using the correct tools is of equal importance. Maintaining your tools will ensure a good result. Store equipment in a dry location, keep it sharp and in good operating condition. When pruning diseased plants, disinfect all shears and saw blades after each cut to prevent spreading disease to healthy plants. Alcohol or a solution of one part bleach to nine parts water can be used. When the pruning is completed, oil the pruning equipment well to avoid rusting.

Typical tools include: pruning shears for cutting stems up to ½ inch diameter, loppers (lopping shears) for branches up to 2 inches, pole pruners for reaching up into branches/trees, hedge shears used mainly for shearing plants into hedges or formal shapes, and pruning saws for larger branches.

Making Pruning Cuts Correctly

Make all cuts clean and smooth. Clean cuts require sharp equipment and encourage rapid healing. Good techniques include: Cut back to selected buds that point to the outside of the plant. Do not leave stubs. At an intersecting branch, choose a 45 degree angle (or less) to be removed. Leave a branch that is of good size.



The branch cut back to should be at least half the diameter of the branch removed. Thick, heavy branches are best pruned using the “three-part cut” method. Refer back to MG training materials for instructions.

Pruning Shrubs

The reason for pruning deciduous and flowering shrubs is usually thinning out, gradual renewal and rejuvenation pruning.

Some examples of shrubs that bloom on last season’s growth and should be pruned after they bloom are:

Cercis canadensis - Redbud

Chaenomeles japonica - Japanese quince

Chionanthus virginicus - Fringe Tree

Forsythia spp. - All forsythia species

Lonicera spp. - Honeysuckle

Rapheolepis indica - Indian hawthorn

Rhododendron spp. - Azaleas and rhododendrons

Rosa spp. - Rambling rose species

Spiraea spp. - Early white spirea species

Viburnum spp. - Viburnum species

Some shrubs that bloom after June and should be pruned in later winter to promote vigorous shoot growth in spring include:

Abelia X. grandiflora - Glossy abelia

Buddleia davidii or *B. globosa* - Butterfly bush

Hibiscus syriacus - Shrub althea

Hypericum spp. - St. Johnsworlth

Lagerstromemia indica - Crape myrtle

Rosa spp. - Bush rose

Vitex agnus-castus - Chaste tree

There are also some other special categories:

Hydrangeas – different pruning practices are needed by different varieties. Those that bloom on new wood and should be pruned after blooming: *Hydrangea paniculata* and *Hydrangea arborescens* (‘Annabelle’) cultivars. These do not require pruning except what is needed to make a neater plant. However, pruning back hard encourages long stems on older plants, which are nice for fresh or dried flowers. *Hydrangea quercifolia* (Oak leaf) and *H. macrophylla* (‘French’ hydrangeas) – Both varieties flower on buds that were formed the previous season, thus if pruned in late fall, winter or early spring you will be cutting off that season’s flowers. If drastic pruning is required, do it immediately after flowering. The best and safest way to prune them is to remove some older stems but leave most stems so that you are removing about one-third of the growth each year.

Crape Myrtles – These are very popular trees/bushes that bloom on new growth. When the plant is dormant, prune out the small, twiggy growth to promote a more attractive trunk shape and to allow good air circulation. Wait until early spring to prune. Research shows that crape myrtles cut back in Dec., Jan. and Feb. suffer greater winter damage. Remove suckers from the base. Topping or leveling off the tops is not the fashionable thing to do anymore. Instead, natural pruning is used. Leave 4-8 of the strongest branches to shape the trunk, and prune spindly branches off to improve circulation.

Pruning Evergreens

Narrow-leaved evergreens can be pruned the first or second week of May or even in June. They produce new growth in spring and fall, not growing much in summer. Broad-leaved evergreens, like gardenias, camellias, azaleas and hollies, require very little pruning. Prune lightly in their dormant season if needed for shaping. Remove old and weak stems.

Pruning Hedges

Rounded forms, which follow nature’s tendency, require less trimming. After plants have been initially pruned to include low branching, maintain by trimming the top narrower than the bottom so that sunlight can reach all of the plant leaves. Happy Pruning!

Getting To Know Shelby & Allen Earheart

Shelby became a master gardener in 2000 and served as co-chair of the Master Gardener Training Committee for five years. She is now co-chair of the Hospitality Committee. Shelby has many favorite flowers and puts peonies high on her list. A favorite shrub is Forsythia because the bright yellow flowers are such a welcome sight at the end of winter. Her favorite trees are the Japanese maples, admired because of their graceful forms and infinite varieties.

Shelby is a native West Virginian. Before landing in Virginia she lived in Pennsylvania, California, Illinois, Iowa, Texas, Japan and Switzerland. She entered college in her late twenties but dropped out after two years when she moved to California. Twenty some years later she earned a degree in psychology – the same year that her older daughter earned her degree in biology.



Shelby likes to read (mainly murder mysteries and psychological thrillers) and to try new recipes. She also likes to play Bunco, go places with two Red Hat groups, and being a member of the Rockville Library Book Club. Shelby and Allen met while square dancing and married two years later. They each have two daughters and now have seven grandchildren.

Allen is a native Virginian having been born in Covington on the fourth of July. He graduated from Virginia Tech with a degree in business and a major in accounting. He moved to Richmond shortly after that and became a CPA in 1983. Since he has lived in Henrico and Goochland for forty years, Shelby jokes that his roots are so deep in the clay that she'll never be able to get him to move elsewhere. Allen spent over 36 years with Reynolds/Alcoa. He worked in the finance arena and became a controller at Reynolds. He retired in 2002 and became a master gardener in 2003. Currently serving as treasurer of the Association, Allen has put in many hours on the training committee, Smart Lawns, and the Speakers Bureau. He appreciates all flowers, trees and shrubs for their beauty and unique characteristics. As a handyman he is in much demand to help daughters with their projects. Allen also likes garden railroads as well as indoor model railroads.



STATE FAIR
OF VIRGINIA

Volunteers Make a Difference

Too often we do not realize the impact that our small efforts have on an entire project. Such is certainly the case when we volunteer to work a shift at the Master Gardener booth at the State Fair.

Highlights from this year's Fair:

One hundred twenty-three Master Gardeners from nineteen different counties staffed the booth for a total of 120 hours during the eleven days of the 2005 VA State Fair.

Many of the gardens and planters displayed during the fair used the materials recommended for the Jamestown Anniversary Celebration Gardens. The Master Gardener's booth was decorated in a red, white and blue theme and all MG volunteers wore pins with the Jamestown Celebration logo. The booth displayed posters and Master Gardeners distributed informational handouts on starting a Celebration Garden.

This year, the Master Gardeners participated in the State Fair Educational School Tour program by distributing fact sheets to the different age groups. When the school groups dropped by the booth, they were able to participate in small demonstrations to match the handouts. The demonstrations consisted of: the basic parts of flowers, photosynthesis, and careers in horticulture. Children and adults seemed to really enjoy our presentations. We gave out over 3,000 VA Tech pencils and logo bags (donated by VA Tech and the Fairfax Master Gardeners), and could barely stock enough handouts and Virginia Tech gardening information brochures.

A record number of 4,916 contacts were recorded for this year, a 15% increase from last year. Fair patrons really seemed interested in the displays and the handout information.

Thanks for your help in making this project successful.

Cynthia J. Seal



Gardening Gift Ideas

- A living gift: Consider a dwarf citrus tree for someone with a good indoor spot or a bonsai for a more compact gift.
- A beautiful container with the promise of new spring plants.
- Gloves, weeding tools, a squishy kneeling pad.
- Bulbs for forcing in a lined container with some pebbles.
- A bench for that special spot in the garden.
- A handmade wreath of herbs for the kitchen.
- Books, books, books!
- Wireless outdoor thermometer.
- Garden art- statues, birdbaths, unusual planting containers.
- The best gift of all..... your time, knowledge and advice.

A Little Bit about...Holiday Cactus

By Peggy Lowry

Unlike the poinsettia which is often discarded when the flowers are spent, a holiday cactus will bloom each season for years to come. The thick waxy foliage yields blossoms that are white, pink, salmon, red or gold. Most plants offered for sale are small to medium size, but they can grow to several feet wide in a large container. These plants have origins in the jungles of South America. They grow in tree crotches where they receive filtered sun or none at all. They feed on decaying mater and rain and obviously enjoy humidity.

Holiday cactus requires ordinary potting soil and good drainage. Water regularly to keep evenly moist April through September, and let the soil dry slightly October through December. If the plant wilts it should bounce back when watered. Some growers purposely let cacti dry out saying that it produces more blooms. Cacti should be fed March through September, but do not feed when in bloom. After blooming, keep on the dry side but do not let the plant wither. When in bloom, do not move the plant or turn it, because it may drop buds.

Flowering depends on day length and temperature. In spite of its name, Christmas Cactus is likely to flower at Thanksgiving; blooming time varies in the South from one region to another. They seem to flourish outside in the summer if kept in a sheltered place in bright shade. Be sure to bring them in before turning on the heat or they will drop buds. This is due to the change from the humid outdoors to dry, indoor heat. In the summer the ideal temperatures for holiday cactus should be 75° - 95°.

A mystery of growing Christmas cactus is that you may buy a white-flowered plant only to have it bloom pink the following year. A supposed-to-be yellow bloomer may turn creamy pink. The problem is in conditions – not in the plant itself. If the temperature drops below 55° after buds form, pinkish tints may develop in white or yellow varieties. If your Christmas cactus had flowered with a color different from what you thought it should be, see that prior to its next bloom time, it receives bright light and temperatures above 60°.

Christmas cactus was formally *Zygocactus*, but is now called *Shlumbergera truncata*. Easter or Whitsun Cactus is *Shlumbergera gaertneri* and blooms in the spring. Feed Easter cactus until mid November and then resume one month after flowering. Propagation is so easy, you can share your plant with family or friends. Just break off a mature leaf and bury the lower portion in moist soil. It should take root and sprout new growth in only a few weeks.

Christmas cactus is an annual delight. Like ornaments on the tree or stockings hanging on the mantel, its flowers are a sure sign that the holidays are near.



Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

December 7 1:00PM

January 4, 1:00PM

Association Meetings

December 14, 3:00PM

No Meeting

Please e-mail your contribution to the newsletter
By **January 20** to Jody Taggart
jody.taggart@comcast.net