



The Garden Gate e-Newsletter

February - March, 2008

OFFICERS

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Jody Taggart

Hospitality
Peggy Lowry & Shelby Earehart

Service and Recognition
Joyce Carole Brannon

Historian
Joyce Carole Brannon

4-H Youth / Junior Master Gardeners
Faye Derkits & Elizabeth Steele

Plant Clinic
Dave & Joanie Brobst

SMART Lawns
Teddy Martin

Special Events
John Simmonds & Judy Burton

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

Association Meetings

February 13, 1:00PM

Advanced Training: Native Perennials
Alexis Bishop, Colesville Nursery, Ashland, VA

Learn the advantages of using native plants in the landscape.

March 12, 1:00PM

Advanced Training: Beneficial Insects
Peter Warren, Albemarle County Extension Agent

Not all creepy-crawlies are bad. Most insects are good for the garden. Come and learn which ones are friendly.

Planning Ahead...

Henrico Harvest Fair October 18, 2008

We will have a "Green Elephant Sale" at the event so anyone who is willing to donate gently-used gardening books, tools, or other related items is welcome to bring them to the Extension office now. There is a box in the helpline office for storage.

New Master Gardener Training Has Begun
Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays

President's Message



2008-All Things New



A new year gives us a new start. Gardening catalogs arrive and offer new plants and seeds. New volunteer opportunities are available with the work of the master gardeners. Our Henrico Harvest Fair will be a new venture with something for everyone. And I have a new granddaughter, Stella Logan Vetrovec (b.1/22/08).

The new master gardener training classes have begun under the capable leadership of Cynthia Seal and Cheryl Bergh and their well trained committee, twenty-five men and women who bring many life skills to this educational process.

Suzanne Pericle has an exciting advanced training schedule in place. Veteran master gardeners gain knowledge and refine their expertise when attending these Wednesday sessions.

A nominating committee will soon be presenting a slate of new officers and committee leaders.

So to wrap this up---try a new seed, encourage a MG trainee, volunteer for a leadership role or at least say yes when asked to serve. And if you want to hold the new baby, get in line behind me!

Happy New Master Gardening Year!

Mary E Vetrovec mevetrovec@aol.com



Virginia Master Gardener Association Meeting—Help Wanted

The Henrico Master Gardener Association will be hosting the Virginia Master Gardener Association meeting in Richmond on February 9, 2008. This meeting will be held at Strange's Garden Center at 12111 West Broad Street from 10:00 am until approximately 2:00 pm. Since only six VMGA meetings are held each year, it is a special honor for the HMGA to be asked to be a host site. But, being the host means that we need volunteers to help with set up and clean up for the meeting as well as registration and various other duties. **This is a great opportunity for you to get some work hours to count toward your 2008 MG requirement as well as to see what the VMGA does and experience one of their meetings.**



If you would like to volunteer to help, contact Beverly Cochrane at beverly987@aol.com, or 740-1405. For more information on VMGA, go to www.vmga.net



Getting to Know LaTangela Light

LaTangela is the new office assistant behind the front desk in the Extension Office. She grew up here in Richmond and has a Bachelors degree in Business Administration. LaTangela's seven year old son keeps her very busy with sports. When she isn't working or being with her very active son, she likes reading, writing and traveling. Welcome LaTangela!

Read this before you order those Spring Seeds

Botanical Interests is a seed company that offers great vegetable, herb and flower seeds, all untreated with pesticides. These are exceptional seeds that are unconditionally guaranteed and come in beautifully illustrated packets which contain much more information than the usual seed packet. The seeds are available at many retailers (never at discounters like Wal-Mart), but I want to encourage you to order them directly from the Botanical Interests website. The folks at Botanical Interests have offered us the opportunity to earn **15%** of all seed sales made to our HMGA members (and any of your friends who use the link). There is no tax on the seeds and the shipping is a flat \$3.95 for any size order, so you may want to combine orders with your friends. To order, you simply have to go to their site through this link:

www.botanicalinterests.com/nonprofits.php

and then click on HMGA as your non-profit organization. Your order will be automatically recorded as being for HMGA.

For those of you without internet access, I will leave a paper copy of the seed inventory at the office and you can peruse the list and send me your order by March 1 and I'll add it to mine. This is a great way to get great seeds and to help the HMGA at the same time.

Another Fundraising Offer

The folks at *Fine Gardening* magazine have agreed to donate to the Virginia Master Gardener Association for new subscriptions (sorry, if you already subscribe it doesn't apply to renewals). They will donate \$10.00 for each subscription and this money will be placed in the Coordinator Endowment Fund. This offer is posted on the VMGA website (www.vmga.net) and is available to Master Gardeners statewide. If you've never seen *Fine Gardening*, it is a beautiful magazine full of great photos and wonderful articles. I have left some of my old issues in the helpline room at the extension office, if you'd like to see them.

Any questions about either of these items, contact Beverly Cochrane.



A Little Bit about Crocuses

Although we take these small blooms for granted, they have been in the U.S. for a short time compared to their origins. Homer mentions them in the Iliad (8th century B.C.) and they were found in Minoan frescoes painted over 3,500 years ago. The crocus is a native of southern Europe including the Aegean islands, North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and China. Wild crocuses still grow in the foothills of some of the Alps. In the 16th century, the spring crocus, *C. vernus*, arrived in England from the Middle East and caused a sensation at the Elizabethan court. The aristocracy hurried to grow it, and it became known as “Valentine’s Flower” because it often bloomed in February.



When the women came to Jamestown in 1619, they brought with them seeds, corms and bulbs, including the crocus, carefully packed in pockets sewn into their skirts and aprons. English women always took their gardens to all of their world wide colonies. No other nation but Rome did this. In time the crocus grew in the tidewater plantations of Virginia and Maryland and in the New England harbor towns.

The name crocus, comes from the Greek, *krokos*. It belongs to the iris family, grows from corms and is mainly a hardy perennial. Crocuses can grow in a variety of habitats including woodlands, scrubs and meadows. There are about 80 species of which 30 are cultivated. Early botanists divided them into only two species – *C. vernus*, the mother of the blue and white Dutch crocus and *C. sativas*, the saffron crocus of commerce. All crocuses typically have three stamens, some blooming in the spring and some in the fall.

The spice, saffron, is obtained from the stigmas of *C. sativas*, an autumn/fall blooming species. It was one of the most desired and expensive spices in the ancient world. Ancient Egyptians used it as an antidote to poisons and for dysentery and jaundice. The Greeks used it in powders as a nerve tonic and an opiate for hysteria and melancholy. In various places in the ancient world it was used as a sleep aid and to reduce stomach upsets and hangovers. In the Middle Ages, in Europe it was included in mixtures to treat coughs and colds, and all sorts of remedies from small pox to eye disorders. Today, clinical trials show that saffron has potential as an anticancer and as an anti-aging agent.

Although it is costly, saffron has been used as a fabric dye for centuries, especially in China and India. Being costly, the noble classes were the exclusive users of saffron dyed clothes. The dye was also used to color the robes and mantles of Hindu and Buddhist monks. It is, however, an unstable coloring agent; the strong distinctive orange/yellow color fades to a pale yellow. Increasing the amount of dye will result in a reddish shade. Saffron dye substitutes are being researched for a less expensive and more stable coloring agent. Saffron has also been used as an aromatic when combined with other ingredients. It was used to perfume the hair and sprayed to help freshen the air in Roman times.

Not only does saffron contribute a yellowish color to foods, it also adds a distinctive taste. It can be used in baked goods, cheeses, curries, confections, liquors, meat dishes and soups. It is used as a condiment in rice and in famous dishes like paella in Spain, bouillabaisse in France, Cornish Saffron Cake and too many other dishes to mention. It is also used to provide color in certain confections and alcoholic beverages. A real Arabic coffee contains saffron and cardamom. Saffron is essential in northern Italy and southern Switzerland in the preparation of risotto, and in Sweden it is traditional to bake saffron bread on St. Lucile's Day (Dec. 13).

Saffron is still the most expensive spice in the world. The only parts of the saffron crocus used for aroma and flavor are the stigmas, and extracting large numbers of these minute stigmas is done by hand. When dried, one pound takes fifty to seventy thousand flowers depending on the size of the stigmas. Also the crocus flowers last only one or two weeks, so intensive labor is required day and night for harvest. The stigmas must then be quickly dried to prevent mold. All of these factors contribute to the high cost of the spice. Today Spain, Greece, India and Iran dominate world trade in saffron. Cultivation has spread to New Zealand, Tasmania and California; Iran, however, still produces 96% of the production.

Although some true garden crocuses bloom in the fall, the name "autumn crocus" is commonly misused for Colchicum which belongs to the lily family. Sometimes it is called meadow saffron, but it has six stamens and has poisonous properties. In ancient Greece, lazy slaves were said to have eaten some to sicken themselves to avoid working. This meadow "crocus" grows wild in different spots in England and has long been a favorite garden flower known sometimes as "naked ladies" because it blooms without its leaves which appear only in the spring. The bulbs can be forced in water like hyacinths and then planted in the garden (full sun) for a repeat show every fall. The roots of this plant were used to treat gout from the time of the Pharaohs to the settlement of Jamestown. Modern research reveals that colchicum derivatives can induce duplications of chromosomes and change sterile hybrids to fertile ones resulting in new kinds of plants. The name, Colchicum, was derived from a city in ancient Greece, Colchis, where the flower grew profusely.

Crocuses are quite popular because of their early appearance in the spring, often blooming in the snow. Most should be planted in a sunny location although a few prefer shadier sites. Some are suitable for naturalization and some seed prolifically. When this type is planted in rock gardens, it can spread and become difficult to remove. Growing crocuses is almost foolproof, but be aware that the bulbs are a favorite food of squirrels.

By Peggy Lowry

Quick Cheese Soup

A mug of this with a sandwich is really good on a cold day.

3 tbs butter or margarine	2 cups chicken stock
1 small onion, chopped	2 cups half and half
4 oz pimiento, drained and chopped	2 cups (8 oz) shredded sharp cheddar
3 tbs flour	pinch of cayenne pepper (opt.)

Saute' onion in the butter until soft. Stir in the flour, pimiento and, slowly whisk in the chicken stock. Cook while stirring over medium heat until thickened. Stir in the cheese until melted. Mix in the half and half and heat through. Add cayenne, salt and pepper to taste.

Peggy Lowry



Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

February 6, 2008 1:00pm
March - To Be Determined

Association Meetings

February 13, 2008 1:00pm
March 12, 2008 1:00 pm

Please submit your contribution to the newsletter
By **March 20** to Jody Taggart
jody.taggart@comcast.net 360-2680



2009 International Master Gardener Conference

March 22-26

www.unce.unr.edu/imgc

Online registration and hotel reservations will begin in summer 2008. The Alexis Park Resort is lovely, and will be reserved exclusively for MGs
www.alexispark.com.