



The Garden Gate Newsletter



October–November, 2011

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Joyce Carole Brannon

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Faye Derkits & Pat Baskins

Plant Clinics
Joanie Brobst

SMART Lawns
Teddy Martin

Special Events
John Simmonds & Judy Burton

Scholarship
Ann Dutton

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

Upcoming Meeting Speakers

October 12 Association Meeting

Clare Terry of Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, will speak about ergonomic gardening tools.



November 9 Association Meeting

Our own Grace Harrison will present a seed propagation program.

Armour House Diagnostic Clinic

The new Diagnostic Clinic at Armour House has made the main county website! <http://co.henrico.va.us/>

If you haven't signed up for a block of time yet, please contact Linda Lang. lindalang13@gmail.com

-Lisa Sanderson

President's Message

I'm delighted to see that autumn is here. The growing season is beginning to wind down, and harvest season is well underway. Summer's heat has begun to moderate.

I've had an interesting summer. Y'all know that I have an edibly-landscaped yard, and my backyard orchard is now approaching forty trees. As if that wasn't already enough, I thought I'd try my hand(s) at actual farming!

So I took a part-time job at a small farm that grows blackberries & raspberries. I didn't know a whole lot about growing berries & thought it would be a great way to learn. Besides, how hard could it possibly be? Well...

Believe me, it's hard work! My hat's off to folks who do this full-time in order to earn a modest living.

Despite the challenge, it's been an immensely rewarding experience. Hope to do it again next year if these tired old bones will allow it.

The training I received to become a Master Gardener served me wonderfully. I have all of you to thank for that! And I continue to ruminate about the similarities & differences between what we call gardening & what we call farming.

Most of our workforce consisted of high school and college students on summer break. They'll keep you young at heart!

While I did my share of berry picking, I possessed enough knowledge to also help tend to the plants – all ten acres of them.

I was fortunate to be able to help the “kids” learn some of the basics of pruning & good sanitation & work ethic & more.

All this while I have so much to learn as well.

Here's to a lovely harvest season & a happy Thanksgiving.

All my best,

Barry barryjhayes@comcast.net 314-1998



Getting To Know Marty Vaughan

Marty became a master gardener in 2008, and today she is our 2nd vice president in charge of Advanced Training for 2012. She has worked on the Helpline, Smart Lawns, plant clinics, the Harvest Fair, Strange's pot recycling (in all that heat), and the gardens at the Montessori School.

Marty grew up in South Boston, VA and moved to Richmond in 1965. She was a biology major at Averett College in Danville and later graduated from Pan America Business School. She began her legal career as Administrative Assistant at Hunton and Williams and later moved on to spend 20 years in the Law Department at Reynolds Metals. In 2008 she became a realtor and is currently working at Zip Realty.

Marty's daughter is a Major in the Special Ops section of the Air Force and serves as a navigator on the AC-130 aircraft. Marty is currently in New Mexico with her daughter welcoming her grandson who arrived on September 19!

Marty's son is a Criminal Justice major and is currently working undercover narcotics in the Richmond area. He has one child – Marty's first granddaughter. (Marty's children must have sensed her dissatisfaction with cubicle life.)

Marty finds gardening a great reliever of stress – her favorite plants are camellias, gardenias, and roses. She also loves her pets – 2 dogs, a cat and a parrot. They make traveling difficult, but she's not complaining.



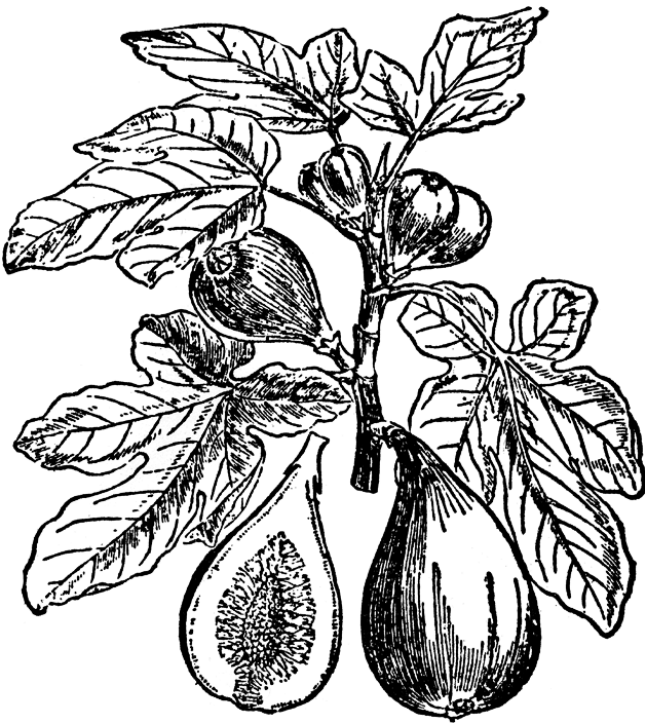
If you have joined the Association, please ask Caryn Mitchell for a year book if you don't have one.

A Little Bit about Figs

The fig has been called the oldest fruit in the world and is one of the few fruits that we, today, ever see in its natural state. Some scholars believe that it was the fig, not the apple, that was forbidden in Eden. Fossil remains of fig foliage unearthed in France and Italy show that it preceded the Stone Age, and the culture of figs by humans in the Jordan Valley and the Mediterranean area occurred at least 11,400 years ago. Fig domestication happened fully 5,000 years earlier than that of millet, wheat or any other seed plant in the Middle East. Figs probably originated in Northern Asia according to archaeological fossil records. Ancient Sumerian tablets recorded its consumption around 2500 B.C., and it is pictured on the walls of many ancient Egyptian tombs. It was regarded as a sacred food in several old cultures.

The Greek goddess, Demeter, (goddess of agriculture) gave figs to Dionysus (god of wine) when she received blessings from the gods, and figs became sacred to him. Plato recorded that figs were fed to athletes to increase their speed and strength.

To persuade Rome to begin a third Punic war, Cato the Elder held up fresh figs and said, “Know this, these were picked two days ago in Carthage; that is how near the enemy are to our walls!” He then accused the Senate of weakness and effeminacy – figs were associated with femininity.



Figs are mentioned also in the Bible.

Leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. He came upon a fig tree by the road that had no fruit – just leaves. He cursed the tree and it withered and died. The Buddha achieved enlightenment under a large and old sacred fig tree. Some settlers in the American west used a Biblical quote to encourage peace and prosperity – “Each man under his own vine and fig tree.” (First Kings 4:25)

Spanish missionaries in 1520 brought the first figs to America. One of the most well known figs in the U.S. is the Black Mission fig. It was planted in 1770 and cultivated for commercial sale, and it is still available today, fresh and dried. In 1629 a Mrs. Pearce of Jamestown recorded that she had gathered 100 bushels of figs from her garden that year. Thomas Glover recorded in his Account of Virginia, 1676, “good figs grown here on plantations.” Phillip Fithian (tutor at the Carter plantation) wrote: “1774, August, We gathered some Figs. The ladies seem fond of them; I cannot endure them.”

A most hearty plant, figs can grow without irrigation in countries where it is hot and dry, but they grow best in warm areas in deep fertile loam. They can be grown satisfactorily in soils ranging from coarse sand to heavy clay and can stand higher concentrations of salt than most fruits. They have an extensive root system near the surface but can root as deep as five feet where soils permit. A vigorous growing plant, it usually does not need fertilization unless the soil is of very low fertility or where there is competition from other plants.

Pruning an established fig tree involves removing dead wood and sucker growth, and heading back to keep the leaders within bounds. Some can live as long as a hundred years and grow to a hundred feet tall; domestic trees are pruned to about sixteen feet. They should receive full sun most of the day and be planted against the south side of a building where they need protection from the cold. Figs are harvested from June to October, and they do not sweeten after picking. Shelf life is short – about three days refrigerated, so in most world markets they are sold in the dry form. Two of varieties recommended for Virginia growers are Celeste and Brown Turkey. Fig production here is mostly in the warm coastal area. Pick figs when they are fully ripe because they do not ripen after picking.

The fig itself is not a fruit but a green globe with an opening at one end. Inside is a cluster of many flowers which, when pollinated, produce tiny bubbles of fruit material with seeds in the centers. In the past, figs needed a “fig” wasp for pollination. Certain types of wasps spend most of their lives inside figs; they are born, grow up and mate inside the fig. When the female has been impregnated, she flies out (bearing pollen on her body), and squeezes into another fig’s tiny opening, losing her wings. She pollinates the flowers inside, gives birth to her spawn, and then dies. Today there are many hybrids that do not require or receive pollination to become edible “fruits”. The fig is unique in that it can produce as many as three crops in a single season.

In ancient times fig trees were also used as shade trees, and their wood was preferred to start a quick fire. Fig leaves were, and still are, used in making perfume, having the aroma of heavy musk. The milky white latex from the tree contains a protein digesting enzyme and can be used, when dried, as a meat tenderizer and in making cheese. Figs are one of the highest plant sources of calcium and fiber, and they are rich in copper, manganese, magnesium, potassium and vitamins A and K. All figs contain antioxidants. The tiny seeds that are not digested can act as a laxative. In cooking, dry figs can be used in place of dates, prunes or dried apricots. Today, cooked figs are still used as a sweetener in some parts of Asia Minor, North Africa and the Middle East. (They contain over 50% of sugar.) Most commercial production of figs is in processed forms or dried since ripe figs do not transport or keep well after picking. Figs are as rich in history as they are in sugar, minerals and vitamins. For many centuries the fig, wild and cultivated, was considered the “people” food because it was so abundant, easily grown, and nutritious.

Fig Salad

12 fresh figs, halved and stems removed

Mix: 1 tsp chopped fresh rosemary
2 Tbs olive oil
2 Tbs honey
2 Tbs balsamic vinegar
½ tsp each – salt and pepper

Toss figs in the mixture and place them cut side down in a baking dish with the mixture. Cover with foil and bake at 400° for 15 minutes.

Serve with arugula, prosciutto or bacon and crumbled blue cheese. Drizzle with pan juices.

Peggy Lowry

From the Nature Conservancy

“Tree killing insects are creeping into the U.S. with increasing regularity, says a December report in *Bio Science*. Wood chomping bugs like the Asian long horned beetle often arrive from overseas in untreated wood products and contaminated live plants. Scientists estimate it could cost tens of billions over the next decade to keep them at bay. But, take heart: A Conservancy poll found that 8 in 10 Americans are willing to take extra measures to stop the spread of forest pests. You can help by buying only local firewood.”

Learn more at: www.nature.org/firewood

Peggy Lowry

Cookbook: Call for Recipes

The Henrico Master Gardener Association will publish a cookbook. The goal of the cookbook is threefold: to share delicious recipes; to educate the reader about produce that can be grown in Central Virginia; and to raise funds for the ongoing programs of the Association.

In order to complete the cookbook in time for publication next summer, the committee is asking for recipe submissions from the HMGGA membership. You may submit your recipe between now and November 9th, 2011 via email to Beverly Cochran (beverly987@aol.com); drop off your recipe in the Extension Office or bring it to the Association meetings between now and November 9th.

Please be sure that the recipes you submit are legible and contain your name, telephone number and your email address if you have one so that we can contact you if we have questions regarding the recipe. Only your name will be included in the cookbook. The instructions should be written so that a novice cook can understand and follow them.

You may contact Tatter Hartmann (tatter@hotmail.com) or 804-741-0276 if you have questions

Free Plants

I have Crepe Myrtles to give away to anyone who wants to come and dig them up -- call first at 266-9065.

Thanks,
Joyce Brannon

Henrico Master Gardeners Association

P.O. Box 90775

Henrico, VA 23273-0775

Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

October 5, 1:00pm

November 2, 1:00pm

Association Meetings

October 12, 1:00pm

November 9, 1:00pm

Please submit your contribution to the next newsletter
by **November 20** to Jody Taggart
Jody.Taggart@verizon.net 360-2680

