



The Garden Gate Newsletter

February – March, 2010

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Plant Clinics

Joanie Brobst

SMART Lawns

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Special Events

John Simmonds & Judy Burton

Websites

www.co.henrico.va.us/agent

www.henricomga.org

Association Meeting Dates

Wednesday, February 10, 1:00pm

Mosquito Control

Randy Buchanon from Henrico County Public Works will help us understand aspects of mosquitoes such as when they are most prominent, dangers and how to control their populations. Master Gardeners can work to communicate, educate and work with homeowners to help control the spread of mosquitoes and West Nile Virus.

Wednesday, March 17, 1:00pm

*****Change from the usual meeting day*****

Herbaceous Peonies

Plan to attend Mike Lockett's presentation on herbaceous peonies. He'll give you the information you need to know about basic herbaceous peony culture and will also cover the recent developments on single, Japanese, semi-double and double herbaceous peonies. You may have an opportunity to purchase bare root peonies as well.

Save the Date

Master Gardener College is scheduled for June 24-27, 2010.

President's Message

What keeps people involved in a volunteer organization? Surely in most cases it's the cause that motivates us to connect deeply. Ask anyone involved in "Save the Bay"! Many organizations have a strong educational component that keeps people motivated and engaged. Our Henrico County Master Gardening Association would fit into this group.

If a survey were taken of happy volunteers, friendships probably would also rank very high as to why people stay involved. There is something about working alongside other people who have a common cause or interest that can be bonding and satisfying.

A Master Gardening Association remains strong and healthy when its members have formed strong friendships with fellow members. We as HMGA members can be a part of helping this happen! Let's be honest - we all have a tendency at meetings to gather around others that we already know. It takes a conscious effort to be intentional about starting conversations with people we do not know or barely know. Yet, I am asking our HMGA membership to make a goal of doing just that this year.

We all know the wonderful feeling of being welcomed into a group. We also know the special feeling of sharing conversation with someone who is genuinely interested in getting to know us. Let's each set a goal to share conversation in this way at our MG meetings during 2010. It will greatly strengthen our association - and we may even make some great new friends along the way!



The President Responds...

Q: Is the new method for selecting Maymont volunteers working? Will it remain in place?

A: We did a lottery to select the 2010 Maymont volunteers. This chance method ensured equity and fairness. The MG Board decided at their January meeting to follow up by using a two-month sign-up period beginning in Nov. 2010. This method maintains the fairness and equity that is now in place.

Procedure: Each year the Maymont sign-up sheet will be brought to the **November** MG Association Meeting. However, only those members who did NOT get to go the prior year will be allowed to sign up in November. At our December meeting, the sign-up sheet will return, and at that time, anyone can sign up. This method also allows couples and friends more leeway to volunteer together.

Note: This popular MG volunteer event is only available to HMGA members of good standing (time sheets must be up to date and HMGA dues paid!).

-Ann Dutton

annforddutton@mindspring.com 740-2514

A Little Bit about Verbenas

by Peggy Lowry

The lovely flower, verbena, belongs to the genus, vervains; some found from Canada to southern Chile. Verbenas native to the new world are close relatives of the European vervain, a plant with a long history of mystic and religious rites. Ancient Greeks and Romans considered it a sacred herb and called it Juno's tears, herb of Venus, and Mercury's blood. It was used in casting spells and always used in cleansing the altars of Jupiter before a sacrificial feast. Virgil, Horace, and Pliny the Elder all claimed that it had mystical powers connected to the gods. The Romans sent bunches of verbena with their messages of peace to other nations and sometimes adorned the messengers with verbena and myrtle. The Romans also believed that the plant could rekindle the flame of a dying love. As was their custom, the Romans carried it to the far ends of their empire where the magic became part of the local pagan worship. Early Germanic tribes cast garlands of verbena into mid summer bonfires as a tribute to the sun and to beg its return for another season. Druids also used it in mid summer's eve festivals.



Verbena bonariensis
Common name: Brazilian Verbena

In the new world the Aztecs made tea with their lemon verbena and the Conquistadores sent home seeds for monastery gardens. The tea became very popular in the 16th and 17th century Spain. A purple verbena grew in Peru, and both Spain and Portugal claimed the scarlet verbena. Europe on the whole heard very little about verbena and many other newly discovered plants because of Spain's and Portugal's policy of interdiction. But during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, European verbena leaves were boiled in vinegar to treat rheumatism, lumbago, and pleurisy. Crusaders were told that verbena grew on Mt. Calvary where it had been used by Christ's followers to staunch His blood and cleanse His wounds. Seeds were taken back to be planted in monastery gardens, and verbena became "herb of grace" and "herb of the cross." It was widely used in medieval medicines.

By Elizabethan times, verbena was used as a cure all from gallstones, falling hair and fevers to the black plague. It was recommended so highly by the herbalists that the Puritans carried it to New England, and by the 1670's it "grew everywhere and cured everything." The colonists along the Atlantic Coast used it for "sore throats, tooth ache, stomach gripe and sword wounds." It was often used during the Revolution to staunch the blood of wounded soldiers.

In 1785, a New England clipper, returning from the Orient, stopped in Chile, collected some lemon verbena and took it home to the U.S. Other merchant ships began collecting verbena in South America, and their popularity spread throughout the eastern states. Verbenas began to be included in herbal teas and put in bath water to guard against evil. Sometimes sprigs of it were carried with yew for the same purpose. In 1825, James Tweedie, a plant hunter from Scotland, found verbenas covering mountain slopes in the Buenos Aires area. He sent seeds to botanists, and a new variety was introduced to the British Isles via botanical gardens in Glasgow, Liverpool and Dublin. It eventually reached the U.S. and became popular with Victorians along with native verbenas. William Faulkner



Verbena X hybrida
'Blue Princess'

wrote in his short story, *Odor of Verbena*, that “vervain – the only scent that can be smelled above the scent of horses and courage.”

Verbena today is grown as an ornamental, to attract butterflies, and for use in medicines and herbal teas. Lemon verbena is often used in perfumes, and the famous French green liqueur, Verveine, is flavored with it. Hybrids have the tenacity of weeds with masses of brilliantly colored flowers from June to frost. They come in shades of blue, crimson, white, solid or striped and some with a contrasting or white eye showing their dominant ancestor’s gene. There are bush verbenas growing from eight to ten inches high, dwarfs popular for the rock garden or borders, and fern leaf varieties with sprawling lavender flowers for ground covers. They are grown in gardens throughout the temperate zone and as perennials in the deep south.

Vervains have found their way to roadsides, meadows and wastelands – their services forgotten. But, the modern verbena hybrids give us flowers in a brilliant array of colors still connecting us with our colonial past in their own colorful, magical way.

HMGA Fundraiser



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 **25%** of all seed sales made to our 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 many want to combine orders with your friends.

Please note: We are awaiting specific ordering information from BI because they recently changed their website. If you check our website www.henricomga.org we will soon be able to direct you to the correct page at BI so that we get credit for the sales. We will also have the link here for you in the next edition of this newsletter. Thanks for your support!

Once you do this and place your order it will be automatically recorded and 25% will be donated to HMGA. This money will then be donated from the Henrico Master Gardeners Association into the VT Coordinator Endowment Fund.

Thanks from your Henrico Master Gardeners Association

A New Problem for Bats

by Peggy Lowry

The mysterious bat ailment, called “white nose syndrome” has already killed one-half to one million bats in the North East. Some of the affected areas are in the western part of Virginia, and the spreading ailment will probably spread to the south and west. Some caves from Vermont to North Carolina, Tennessee and Indiana have been closed in an effort to slow the spread of this ailment. It is named after a white fungus that grows on the faces of affected bats and causes them to starve to death during their winter hibernation. Ninety percent of the bats in infected caves die. The fungus is not thought to affect humans.

A large decline in bats could result in an increase of insects that damage crops and mosquitoes since bats eat 50 to 100 % of their weight in insects each night. Cave closures so far are voluntary and are just a first move to slow down the syndrome’s spread until scientists can solve the problem.

Kudzu Update

by Peggy Lowry

As you probably know, the Asian vine, Kudzu, was planted in the 1930’s in the South to halt soil erosion. In the 50’s it became apparent that it was out of control, spreading up to 60 feet a year. By now it has covered 150,000 acres a year – a total of eight million U.S. acres (a good part in Virginia).



Searching for a solution that would not require potent herbicides, scientists have found a fungus *Myrothecium verrucaria* that may help. Applied in the morning, it turns kudzu leaves and stems brown by afternoon. Repeated sprays kill the roots. Plans are to mix the fungus with certain herbicides that will be safe for the homeowner to use.

Getting to Know Barry Hayes

(Barry is our association Treasurer)

I'm new! I was a member of the 2009 class, and received my Master Gardener designation in December. Becoming a Master Gardener was something I had wanted to do for many, many years, so I can't begin to tell you how excited I am about it!

In 2009 I participated in several Plant Clinics, including the Virginia Green Industry Council "Go Green" Festival; had a ball with one of the SmartLawn teams, helped with the Henrico Harvest Festival, fielded calls to the Horticulture Helpline, and assisted the HMGA as their Treasurer. Mostly, however, I've enjoyed wonderful opportunities to become acquainted with a delightful group of interesting people.

My favorite flowers are hyacinths and oriental/Asiatic lilies. Not only are they beautifully colorful, their fragrance fills the house. As for shrubs, I have a couple of variegated winter daphnes that reliably bloom every February – just when you need some color. Naming a favorite tree is really tough. I have 15 dwarf fruit trees that are so beautiful in the Spring. Also, I've always loved the bark of a big established sycamore tree.



When I was in middle school (junior high, we used to call it), I read a short book about edible landscaping and I was hooked. Through the years, I've lived in several apartments, a house in the Fan with a small courtyard, a condo building with a tiny balcony, and now a home with a half-acre. I've always grown something edible – herbs and tomatoes in pots, citrus trees in containers, you-name-it. There's nothing better than the satisfaction of eating something that you've grown. The taste is so much better than most items at the supermarket. Plus, you know how it was grown and what chemicals might have been used. Currently here's what keeps me busy:

- Orchard

- apples, pears, peaches, plums, apricot, cherries, nectarine
- pecan, chestnut, bush cherry, persimmon
- grapes, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries

- Vegetable plot, culinary herb garden

- Perennials

- Peonies, Shrub and Rugosa roses, Daylilies, Buddleias, Hellebores, Hardy Hibiscus, Coneflowers, Garden phlox, Liatris spicata, Japanese anemone, Hostas, Mums

- Foundation plantings

- Cannon hollies, Spartan junipers, Lombardy poplars, Variegated English holly, Japanese maples, Viburnum
- Camellias, Azaleas, Crape myrtles, Rhododendrons, Contorted mulberry,

- Bulbs, Corms and Rhizomes

- o Daffodils, Tulips, Fritillaria, Dutch Iris, Hyacinth, Oriental Lilies, Bearded Iris
- o Crocus, Muscari, Colchicum, Hardy Cyclamen, Greek Anemones (wildflowers)

- Annuals, Indoor plants, potted Citrus trees (cold greenhouse)

I was born and raised in Newport News, and attended Christopher Newport University (then College). I earned my B.A. degree in Philosophy, with minors in History and French. Just after college, I moved to Richmond (1979), thinking that I'd be here a year or two and then move to Atlanta. I'm still here! Richmond is a great town.

I worked for several years at the University of Richmond managing the student commons building. Then I moved to the Science Museum of Virginia when the IMAX Theater opened in 1983. I worked my way up the ladder at SMV for more than twenty-five years until I retired in November 2008. It was a great "career number one."

My wife Keech (given name Maria) and I have no children but have three godchildren who have grown into wonderful young adults before our very eyes. We have five feline "children", most of whom have come for dinner and decided to adopt us. (We are but humble servants . . .) When we travel, we often like to take active vacations – hiking, biking, kayaking, and similar.

I am leading a project (along with Pat Greene and others) to establish a community garden at Christ Episcopal Church on Pouncey Tract Road. This Mustard Seed Garden will help community members learn to grow their own vegetables, herbs, flowers and small fruits, and will donate most of the harvest to those in need. Our first season begins in March – come join us!

Brownie Pudding Cake

1 cup flour

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup white sugar

2 tsp baking powder

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 tbs. cocoa

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk

3 tbs. melted margarine

1 tsp vanilla

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup firmly packed brown sugar

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups hot water

Combine flour, white sugar, baking powder, salt and 2 tbs. cocoa. Set aside. In a measuring cup, mix milk, margarine and vanilla. Pour this into the dry ingredients and mix until just moistened. Spoon this into a greased 8 X 8 inch baking dish.

In a small bowl, combine the brown sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cocoa. Sprinkle this evenly over the batter. Pour the hot water slowly over the entire mixture. Do not stir. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes. Serve warm.

Peggy Lowry

Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

February 10, 11:30pm
(time and date change)

March 3, 11:30pm
(time change)

Association Meetings

February 10, 1:00pm

March 17, 1:00pm
(date change)

Please submit your contribution to the newsletter

by **March 20** to Jody Taggart

Jody.Taggart@verizon.net 360-2680

Welcome!

Welcome to the 2010 class of Master Gardener Trainees!
We look forward to meeting each one of you.