



The Garden Gate Newsletter

April–May 2011

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

Hypertufa Workshop April 13, 12:30pm-3pm Armour House

Our own Mary E. Vetovec will lead a class on the construction of Hypertufa containers at Armour House. Please RSVP. Details on page 3.

Annual Luncheon & Plant Swap May 11, 11:30am

Please join us for one of the best MG events of the year. Share your plants and your recipes and see one of the most beautiful gardens in Richmond! Please RSVP. Details on page 7.

April 6 Board Meeting Note

The April Board Meeting time has been moved to 11:30am.

Looking ahead to September

Guest Speaker George Longest, author of *Genius in the Garden: Charles F. Gillette and Landscape Architecture in Virginia* will speak about Gillette gardens.

Hold the Date Wednesday, May 4th

Do you enjoy seeing real-life gardens that are for personal pleasure—not for the public or retail sales? Be sure to mark your calendars for Wednesday afternoon, May 4th, when we will tour a few Master Gardeners' home gardens. This should be an educational and fun afternoon. More information to follow.

President's Message

Hi everyone!

I'm writing this on the very first morning of Spring. An unexpected thunderstorm has just rattled the house, but now bright sunshine has broken through the clouds. My plum trees are in full bloom – brilliant white blossoms – and as beautiful this year as I can ever remember. This is a great time of year, as all of us are planning and planting for the upcoming season. There's so much potential and so much to do!

Here are several items I hope you'll give consideration:

Our 2011 sessions of intern training & advanced training are coming to a successful conclusion.

For me, I know that I can never hear some of these classes enough – engaging the subject matter again & again helps it stay in the noggin'!

I hope you'll join me in thanking everyone who had a hand in these efforts.

This is the 30th year of your Henrico Master Gardener's Association. Congratulations!

Lots of wonderful folks have participated through the years in educating and serving Henrico's citizens.

How can we best honor our three decades of fun?

It's time to convene a Nominating Committee to consider folks for next year's Board and Committee Chairs.

Interested? If so, please let me know soon.

Thanks for everything you do to make HMGA such a great group.

And thanks for your wonderful friendships!

Barry barryjhayes@comcast.net 314-1998



Book Donation

Three reference books have been added to the volunteer room. They belonged to Betty Gillelan, class of 2003:

Taylor's Master Guide to Gardening

The Southern Living Garden Book

Managing Cover Crops Profitably

Hypertufa Workshop
Wednesday, April 13, 2011
12:30 pm - 3:00 pm

Make a hypertufa planter to add a distinctive look to your garden. This lightweight, winter sturdy, cement-based mixture will ensure your planter will last many years in the garden. In the workshop you will mix the ingredients, build your planter and learn how to unmold and cure it.

RSVP no later than April 5 – to Caryn Coombs – 501-5160 or ccoombs1@vt.edu

Location: The Armour House
4001 Claredon Rd., Henrico, VA 23223

Instructor: MG Mary E. Vetovec

Cost: \$5.00 (to pay for materials)

12:30 – 1:00 Brown Bag Lunch (bring your own lunch and drink)

1:00 – 1:15 April Monthly Meeting

1:15 – 3:00 Hypertufa Workshop

Items to Bring:

Lunch & a drink

Wear old clothes

Disposable latex gloves

Garden trowel

facemask (optional)

Container form for hypertufa planter

(such as plastic bowl, dishpan, etc. no larger than

12” x 12”, 14” round or 9” x 14” oblong)



Note: You may want to arrange your own car pool from the Extension Office to Armour House

From The Smithsonian

“North America’s walnut sphinx caterpillar employs a newly discovered defense when under attack: it whistles. Researchers from Canada’s Carleton University and elsewhere found that it forces air through tiny abdominal openings called spiracles, producing high-frequency sounds barely audible to people. In laboratory tests, the alarm startled birds and made them fly away.”

Peggy Lowry

A Little Bit about Sweet Potatoes

by Peggy Lowry

Sweet potato or yam? The sweet potato, *Ipomoea batatas*, has smooth skin, orange flesh (pale or deep), and contains beta carotene, and vitamins C and B6. Yams (family Dioscoreaceae) have rough, scaly skins and white flesh. They are low in sweet potato nutrients but high in potassium and zinc. Yams are used mostly in African and Latin American cookery and grow only in the tropics. Some people believe that dark orange sweet potatoes are yams and the lighter colored ones are sweet potatoes, but they are both sweet potatoes. The darker the color the more beta carotene they contain. For many years sweet potatoes were called yams in parts of our country to distinguish them from the white potato. Today to avoid confusion, the U.S.D.A. requires that sweet potatoes labeled as “yams” must also be labeled “sweet potatoes”.

Sweet potatoes are native to the tropical regions of Central and South America and were grown there over 5000 years ago. They were also grown in Polynesia before western exploration there. The current theory is that sweet potatoes were taken there by Polynesians who had traveled to South America and back, and the plant spread to Hawaii and New Zealand. There is no evidence that seeds floated across the Pacific. Sweet potatoes are generally grown by cuttings or slips and the seeds used for breeding only. In the tropics the sweet potatoes is a hardy perennial. It eventually became popular in the Philippines and Japan.



Another theory is that the sweet potato could have been taken to Polynesia by ancient South Americans. Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian, wanted to prove that it was possible for pre-Columbian South Americans to sail across the Pacific. He had a raft built using only the materials and “know how” of ancient Peruvians. He wanted to show that rafts made from balsa wood could transport people from South America to Polynesia. No metal was used in building the raft – only balsa logs lashed together with hemp rope. He found that the sap from freshly cut balsa wood kept the raft waterproof. The raft was christened Kon Tiki, an old name from the Inca sun god, Viracocha. Provisions included water (in bamboo tubes) fruits, roots, coconuts and sweet potatoes.

In April, 1947, Thor set sail with five crew members (four Norwegians and one Swede) and sailed 4,300 miles in 101 days to run into a reef at Ravoria. They had reached Polynesia and so had the sweet potato. They wanted to prove that there was trade between Polynesia and South America. In April, 2006, another expedition used a copy of Kon Tiki and completed the voyage. A member of that crew was Olav, Thor’s grandson. Currently it is thought that about 700 A.D. the sweet potato was probably taken back home by Polynesians who had traveled to South America and back.

The first Europeans to taste sweet potatoes in 1492 were members of Columbus's crew. He took sweet potatoes to the New World from St. Thomas Island. They were called by many different names; the first time the name "sweet potato" appeared was in the Oxford English Dictionary, 1775.

When the French established settlements in Louisiana, they found the natives eating sweet potatoes, and they soon became a favorite food of the French and Spanish settlers. The root has been popular in the south for most of its history here, especially in the southeast. From the early part of the 20th century they became less popular. A Southerner, Kent Wensch, wrote, "The sweet potato became associated with hard times in the minds of our ancestors; and when they became affluent enough to change their menu, the potato was served less often." I remember as a child when we had liver and sweet potatoes, my mother called it a "poor person" meal. My great grandmother mentioned in her memoirs that sweet potatoes were sometimes the only food available after their crops had been destroyed by Yankee troops during The War Between the States.

Sweet potatoes thrive in hot weather and need at least four frost free months to grow here. They are grown from "slips" or sprouts and will continue to grow as long as the weather stays warm. One medium sweet potato contains about 118 calories, is cholesterol free, and has more fiber than oatmeal. One cup of cooked sweet potato provides more beta carotene than 23 cups of broccoli. They are low in sodium but high in calcium. The beta-carotene helps to protect the body from the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Today, China is the largest grower of sweet potatoes – 80% of the world supply; growing over 100 varieties. In the U.S.A., North Carolina leads in sweet potato production – 40%. Since 1946 a [Yambilee](#) is held in Opelousa, Louisiana to celebrate sweet potatoes, and in Calhoun County, Mississippi an annual sweet potato festival is held during the first week of November. The celebrants call it the Sweet Potato Capital. Benton, Kentucky, on the first of April every year holds a Tater Day Fest and so does Gleason, Tennessee, having a Tater Town Special on the first of September.

In the future, Con Agra Foods plans to "launch" sweet potatoes into mass production for year round enjoyment and not just for holiday tables. Con Agra has begun to breed varieties that are consistent in shape, color and sweetness to be suitable for french fries available in restaurants. So far they have developed one type that grows 15% heavier than those that are farm grown and that has some of the characteristics that Con Agra wants. There are still problems to overcome including longer storage time and more uniform shape.

Sweet potato consumption in the U.S. gradually rises each year as the nation becomes more health conscious and learns what we in the south have always known – the sweet potato is a delicious root and is highly nutritious.

Lemon Ricotta Cookies with lemon glaze

2 ½ cups flour
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking powder
1 stick unsalted butter, softened
2 cups sugar

2 eggs
15 oz. whole milk ricotta cheese
3 tbs. fresh lemon juice
grated zest from one lemon

Combine butter and sugar. Beat until fluffy. Add eggs, one at a time. Beat in ricotta, lemon juice and zest. Stir in dry ingredients.

On parchment paper or non-stick foil, spoon about 2 tbs. of dough for each cookie. Bake at 375° for about 15 minutes (slightly golden at the edges). Let rest on baking sheets 20 minutes; then put on racks to cool.

Yield 44

Glaze:

1 ½ cups powdered sugar
3 tbs. fresh lemon juice
grated zest from one lemon

Combine ingredients until smooth. Spoon about ½ tsp. on each cookie and spread over tops. Let harden about 2 hours.

Peggy Lowry



Seasonal Fish Crackers

3 packages (6.6 oz ea.) cheddar cheese fish crackers
½ to ¾ of 1oz. pk. ranch salad dressing mix
3 tsp. dill weed

¾ tsp. garlic powder
½ tsp. lemon-pepper seasoning
2/3 cup vegetable oil

Place crackers in a large bowl. Combine remaining ingredients and drizzle over crackers while stirring to coat. Spread crackers evenly on 15 x 10 x 1 inch baking sheets. Bake at 250° for 20 minutes stirring half way through. Cool completely and store in airtight containers.

If you like a spicy fish cracker, add cayenne pepper to the mix.

Peggy Lowry

Annual Luncheon and Plant Swap for HMGA Members & Interns

MAY 11, 2011 11:30 a.m.

**Pat & Hugh Greene's
9410 Sir Barry Court
Richmond VA 23229**



Bring:

- Four (4) potted plants to swap. Be sure to label plants with name, sun, shade
- Covered dish to share (salad, main dish, fruit, vegetable, dessert, or bread)
- Chair
- hat/sunscreen
- \$1.00 to help cover cost of paper products & drinks

Water and soft drinks will be provided. We will eat first, then have plant swap.

*** In case of rain, we will meet in the Demonstration Kitchen. ***

RSVP by May 6th – Caryn Coombs at 501-5160 or ccoombs1@vt.edu

First one to RSVP will be first to select plant...and so on.

Questions: Sandra Walton 360-0387

Editor's Note: The plant swap has been held at the Greene's since 1997.

Danish Almond Swirls

6 oz. cream cheese softened
½ cup powdered sugar
½ tsp. almond extract

½ tsp. vanilla extract
½ cup toasted, chopped almonds, divided
1 pack crescent rolls

Beat together the cheese, sugar, extracts and ¼ cup almonds. Make 4 rectangles out of the crescent rolls and spread mixture on them. Roll up and refrigerate at least 1 hour.

Slice each into 4 slices. Place cut side down on parchment paper or nonstick foil. Brush with egg white and sprinkle with ¼ cup almonds. Bake at 350° for 15 to 20 minutes. Cool completely on racks. When cool, drizzle with glaze:

½ cup powdered sugar, sifted
½ tsp. almond extract
3 tbs. milk

Yield 16

Peggy Lowry

Meeting Date Reminders

Board Meetings

April 6, 11:30pm (time change)

May 4, 1:00pm

Association Meetings

April 13, 12:30pm
Hypertufa class

May 11, 11:30am
Plant Swap

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